

“They Opened Up a Whole New World”: Feminine Modernity and the Feminine Imagination in Women’s Magazines, 1919-1939

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Abstract

“They opened up a whole new world”, or something like it, was a phrase I heard repeatedly when I spoke to women about their memories of magazine reading in the interwar years. How the magazine operated as an imaginative window, a frame, space or mirror for encountering, shaping, negotiating, rethinking, rejecting, mocking, enjoying, the self and others became the central question driving this thesis. The expansion of domestic ‘service’ magazines in the 1920s responded to and developed a new female readership amongst the middle classes and working-class women, preparing the way for high-selling mass-market publications. The multiple models of modern womanhood envisaged in magazines, meanwhile, from the shocking ‘lipstick girl’ of the mid-1920s to the 1930s ‘housewife heroine’, show that what being a woman and modern in the period meant was far from settled, changed over time and differed according to a magazine’s ethos and target readership. In a period that witnessed the introduction of the franchise for women, divorce legislation, birth control, the companionate marriage, cheap mortgages, a marriage bar in the workplace, growth in the number of single

women and panic over population decline, amongst other things, magazines helped resolve tensions, set new patterns of behaviour and expectations. This thesis, which examines the magazine as a material artefact produced in a specific historical context, argues that its complex 'environment' of coloured pictures, inserts, instructional photographs, escapist fiction, chatty editorial and advertising opened women up to conscious and unconscious desires to be a sports woman, a worker, a mother, a lover, or to look like their favourite film star; a 'window', that is, through which women without the benefit of £500 a year and a 'room of their own' could gaze and imagine themselves, their lives and those of their families, differently.

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Chapter One: ‘This Wonderful World’, Modernity is Different for Women

1.Introduction: Feminine Modernity and Being Independently Feminine

We are trying to blend our old world with our new. Trying to be citizens and women at the same time. Wage-earners and sweethearts. Less aggressively feminist than independently feminine. It is a difficult balance to strike...But while they work, filling a tremendous place in professional and industrial life, they are still greedy (and rightly!)

for the pleasures and responsibilities which the sweet stay-at-home, that domestic tyrant had so well in hand. (*W* 05.06.1937: 7)

...an unstable subjectivity in an unstable society. (O'Shea, 1996: 26)

In her opening editorial for the first issue of *Woman* in 1937, the journalist Margaret Lane identified a central dilemma facing women in the interwar years, one that women still struggle with today: how to balance the demands of the workplace and the home, of public and private lives? Female suffrage, women's entry into parliament, local government, the professions, increased employment in shops, offices and factories throughout the interwar years meant that a broad mass were actively engaged in society as citizens, workers, consumers and volunteers. The conventional wisdom that a woman's place was in the home, nevertheless, persisted not least in the pages of women's magazines. Technological innovation, the consolidation of a small number of large publishing houses and growing pressure from advertising as markets expanded, meant that the women's press modernised while readers' lives transformed. Changing from "a collection of amateurish productions catering for minority readerships" into targeted mass-circulation publications, magazines became tied to the interests of big business at a time when it was equally imperative to respond to readers' needs if circulations were to be increased and sustained (White, 1970: 118). Magazines provided a 'mirror' and a 'window' that reflected, shaped and responded to their audiences in a symbiotic relationship that was mutually, but not always, beneficial; an underlying tension that defined the modern magazine in the period and continues to shape popular publications today.

The long struggle for political inclusion and mass democracy, as Alan O'Shea (1996: 16) observed in his meditation on English modernity, coincided with other perhaps more potent kinds of inclusion in the form of consumption, which fired the popular imagination with its "vision of the 'good life'". The needs and desires of the expanding market among lower middle-class and working-class consumers drove the growth of women's magazines in the interwar years. Even those who could not afford to spend could window-shop and magazines, with their pages of colour advertisements, romantic fiction and up-to-date editorial, provided a vital space for picturing and imagining those aspirations and dreams.

Unapologetically commercial, frequently formulaic, targeted at women and only occasionally visually innovative, domestic women's magazines have been largely overlooked by literary historians and those studying design (Bowallius, 2007). Popular magazines, moreover, have all too often been regarded as endorsing an "uncomplicated domesticity" in which women of all classes could find fulfilment in the performance of wifely and maternal roles (Bingham, 2004:19). Cynthia White (1970: 100) characterized interwar magazines as promoting a "return to dear housewifeliness" in her foundational history of the women's press. Women's historian Deirdre Beddoe (1989: 8), meanwhile, described the housewife as the "one desirable image held up to women by all mainstream media" in the interwar years. Women's magazines, she argued were instrumental in establishing a return to order and conventional gender roles after the Great War which severely limited opportunities that opened up for women as a result of war and the Suffrage Movement.

Social historians and those writing about the feminist press (Tusan, 2005) continue to be damning about women's magazines' perceived restricted remit and undesirable effects. In his recent interwar history Martin Pugh (2009: 176-7) stated that, despite their own economic independence, editors such as Mary Grieve and Alice Head "took little or no notice of feminist issues" in their publications and only recognized women's employment as "*preparation* for

marriage". *Woman*, Grieve's publication, moreover, took "no interest in lifting its readers' aspirations to anything wider except by means of escapist stories". Juliet Gardiner (2010: 549), in her recent social history of the 1930s, argues that mass-sale magazines concentrated on the concerns of married women to the exclusion of the growing numbers who remained single in the period. A close reading informed by an expanded notion of 'feminist issues' demonstrates a more complicated picture of the debates about the rewards and responsibilities of work, domesticity, marriage and the single life that regularly appeared in magazines (see chapters 4 & 5). It suggests a dangerous tendency for historians to reproduce received views about such popular material without consulting the original sources or considering the wider contexts in which they were produced, circulated and read.

Those working on the indeterminate cultural spaces occupied by middlebrow fiction, shopping, smoking, amateur dressmaking, memory, cinema and fashion, in contrast, have identified alternative modernities, the 'non-modern modern', that privilege tensions in women's experiences and divided feminine subjectivities. Much of this work is interdisciplinary, coming from literary and film studies, art and design history, material culture and cultural history, where magazines are understood as a determinedly pluralistic, hybrid form, which involves the study of popular fiction, visual representation, consumption, reception and print culture as well as the social/economic/political/emotional circumstances of women's lives. In the 1920s and 1930s "the parlour and the suburb", as the literary historian Judy Giles (2002: 23) points out, became "the paradigmatic spaces of modernity" for millions of British women. The figure of the housewife was equally as emblematic of modern life as the female politician, the film star or the sports woman; she was certainly more ubiquitous (Hackney, 1998). Studying popular, domestic, consumer magazines shifts the focus of historical analysis away from the heroes of modern urban life, placing the 'housewife heroine' and the home at the centre of a domestic, suburban modernity.

The housewife, however, was by no means the only female persona publicised in the period. From the early 1920s women's achievements as aviators, in sports, the arts, government, or simply the latest innovations in female behaviour and dress, were the subject of fascinated discussion in the press (Bingham, 2004 & Soland, 2000). "Modernism", as Robert Graves and Alan Hodge (1940/1971: 113) observed in their perceptive history of the interwar years, "had become synonymous with lively progress" and women's activities and achievements became a visual shorthand for the excitement and novelty of modern life; an excellent means of selling newspapers and magazines, particularly those that carried photographs (*fig. 1*). 'Manly' tennis players, sexually ambiguous 'crop heads', working wives and glamour girls who smoked or indulged in the illicit pleasures of 'sex novels and films', appeared alongside depictions of the housewife in magazines, sometimes on the same page, and challenged assumptions about what a woman was or could be.

This thesis argues that the multiplicity of varied and sometimes contradictory versions of modern womanhood in magazines: the bachelor girl, career woman or sports star, for instance, as well as modernized versions of the domestic worker and wife, offered a plurality of different possibilities that encouraged readers to examine and question what being modern and a woman might mean. Rather than "dear housewifeliness" and a purely domestic role, what Lane termed being "independently feminine" ran like a thread through publications in the period which explored excitingly new possibilities and ways of living while still acknowledging the need to compromise. Being 'independently feminine' signalled a psychic formation that embraced taking risks but also valued certainty, and was open to change without disregarding its

difficulties; was modern, that is, in ways that took account of the limitations, struggles and uncertainties bound up with femininity.

The elements of plurality, contradiction and compromise that characterized feminine modernity, moreover, found a parallel in the magazine genre and were materialized in its format. Deirdre Beddoe (1989: 8) based her critique of the effects of mainstream magazines on images which she deemed either “desirable or undesirable”. This thesis, in contrast, considers how media messages operated within the hybrid environment of the magazine as a whole with its cut-up layouts where advertising, editorial, correspondence and fiction, image and text, illustration and photography, in colour and black and white, jostled together competing for readers’ attention, including the multiple ways in which magazines were experienced, used and read. A “relationship of compromise”, moreover, was integral to the modern commercial magazine as staff responded both to the needs of advertisers and readers (Aynsley, 2007: 8; see chapter 2). The complexity embedded in the genre extended to how it was consumed, a practice which, among other things, involved (and still does) looking and doing, cutting out sections, making up dress patterns, purchasing items, day-dreaming and following tips, as readers alternatively flicked through and became absorbed in their publications. Reading, moreover, cannot be divorced from the particular contexts: social, economic, cultural and psychological, in which it takes place. Many associated the appeal of magazine reading in the 1930s with a desire to be momentarily “taken out” of themselves in order to live for a time “in another world” and escape (or resist) increasingly structured regimes in the workplace and at home (see chapter 3). Simultaneously concerned with women’s lives in the domestic world and as citizens, with the constitution of ‘self’ and ‘other’ within the realms of the public and the private, magazines in the 1920s and 1930s served as a liminal space, or interface, between the individual and the world. The heightened sensory realm of visual communication (full colour ads or the dramatic illustrations that accompanied romantic fiction, for instance) and the often melodramatic tone and structure that imbued advertising copy or fiction, meant that the psychological and emotional dynamic of contemporary living could be imaginatively felt, worked through, or evaded, in the spaces of magazines (see chapters 2 & 7). Efforts to rationalise and systematise magazine layout and design, on the other hand, conveyed a sense of management and control that reproduced readers’ desires for organisation in their own lives (see chapters 3 & 4).

This period witnessed the birth of the mass-market domestic weekly. One important consequence of this was that, on a previously unprecedented scale, identities that had been understood in terms of social class, education or region were challenged by collective notions of what it meant to be, for instance, a good mother, a desirable (and desiring) woman, smart, capable, a fulfilled and successful housewife, a respectable working wife, a lover or an efficient employee, that were represented in magazines, sometimes all in the same issue.

Four representative publications were selected for detailed study due to their consistently high circulations, wide appeal, or because they demonstrate changes in format, content or design that were characteristic of the period (see chapters 1, 2 & appendix 1). The ethos, tone and readership of each are explored in detail in the second half of this chapter but the publications will be introduced here. Home Chat with Pearson’s Home Notes established the market for domestic weeklies aimed at a popular audience. It was published by the Amalgamated Press (AP) in 1895 and remained a high-selling publication throughout the period with circulations of around 200,000, ceasing publication in 1958 due to competition from television (Beetham, 1996). Woman’s Weekly (1911), a magazine that the majority of

women I interviewed read and remembered with great affection, achieved circulations of 380,000 and over in the 1920s; one of the most popular interwar women's weeklies, it remains in print today and enjoys rising circulations (Richardson, 1925: 342; REF). A tuppenny letterpress publication, the 'Weekly' was part of the AP stable of magazines and its formula of romantic fiction by high-selling authors such as Ethel Dell and Ruby M. Ayres, dress and knitting patterns (with the addition of a beauty column in the 1930s) appealed to younger romantically inclined, fashion-conscious girls and housewives.

Modern Woman (1925), a 6d domestic monthly, followed in the wake of the American Good Housekeeping magazine's success (the British edition of GH was launched in 1922) and was one of a number of magazines published by Newnes with the word 'modern' in the title. It exemplified the middle-class 'service magazine', which aimed to render the woman reader "an intimate personal service" in the form of domestic tips and consumer advice with a secondary emphasis on entertainment (White, 1970: 96). The recipe for the future mass-market women's magazine, however, was established by the 'new weeklies' that appeared in the 1930s; publications which sold the service format and ethos of a domestic monthly at a price that rivalled the popular weeklies. Odhams' Woman, launched in 1937, had circulations of three-quarters of a million by 1939 and was the most successful of these. With high quality production values, including some pages in full-colour, it was also the most visually innovative (see chapter 2).

The very nature of 'womanliness' and what it meant to be a woman was called into question at a time when, after the death of millions of men in the Great War, full-time housewifery and motherhood was not an option for large numbers who needed to work (see chapter 5). Pro-natalist policies, meanwhile, focused attention on marriage and childbearing (REF PORTER & HALL?). Tensions between, for instance, women's work and home lives, political feminism and domestic femininity, sexual pleasure and successful marriage, private relationships and public responsibilities, shaped and were embodied in the fragmented format of magazines. Indicative of what Marshall Berman (1983) describes as the 'possibilities and perils' of modernity, the particular ways in which these issues were framed for readers in women's magazines suggest the potential for differentiated subjectivities. With their composite formats, multiple models of femininity, serial nature and expanding readerships, magazines provide insight into how modern womanhood was lived, imagined, negotiated, accommodated and performed, both individually and collectively. And while editors struggled to establish an identifiable ideal womanly persona for their publications – something that is explored further in the following sections - these were never fixed and stable. Rather they were in flux and continually subject to change, modified by the 'push and pull' between the needs and interests of the various parties: the readers advertisers, illustrators, journalists, authors, publishers, retailers, printers and photographers, among others, involved in making magazines.

1.2 Working with Women's Magazines: A Methodology

Women's magazine scholarship has undergone a significant change of direction in the past decade or so. The concentration on 'positive' and 'negative' images of women and critiques of magazines as manipulative has given way to concerns with the pleasures of consumption, fantasy, readerly agency, the material culture of magazines and their context of production. Publications have become sites where the pressures and pleasures of 'being a woman' could be debated, contested and explored rather than simply reinforced; dialogical 'texts' embedded in the wider structures and conditions of women's lives and subjectivities. Magazines, as design historian Jeremy Aynsley (2007: 3) noted, are "complex entities" that hold "cultural and

economic concerns in tension”; their synthesis of image, text and 3D object the product of a division of labour between editors, advertisers, journalists, illustrators, typographers, designers and art directors. Women’s domestic consumer magazines, moreover, circulate through formal and informal networks of retailers, libraries, processes of lending and swapping, and are both ubiquitous and marginal in status; one reason why ‘high class’ fashion periodicals such as *Vogue* have received more academic attention to date. An allusive and complicated object of study, the popular woman’s magazine variously involves analyzing representation, content, mediation patterns and reading habits, as well as design and the changing conditions of women’s lives and requires an interdisciplinary approach.

Magazines written for women were the first publications targeted at a specific group. Yet, given the historical longevity and ubiquity of the form surprisingly few surveyes exist, and the majority of those are American. Cynthia White’s book, which plots the publication histories of British and American women’s magazines into the late 1960s, contextualising these within the broad social and culture changes in women’s, lives was written over 40 years ago; British histories focus on nineteenth century publications, when the women’s press grew in response to the market for branded commodities and innovations in print design (Adburgham, 1972; Beetham & Boardman, 2001; Fraser *et al*, 2003). *A Magazine of her Own*, Margaret Beetham’s (1996: 5) influential study of nineteenth century women’s periodicals, was the first historical analysis of the magazine as a place in which “meanings are contested and made”. Beetham, sensitive to the interaction between a publication, the culture that produced it and which it produces, read magazines as subtle, complex, fluid and flexible heterogeneous texts whose meanings were manifest in various, often contradictory, ways. Drawing attention to the periodicity of the genre, which is simultaneously rooted in a particular historical moment (the date is often printed on every page) and a continuum (the serial format), she foregrounded parallels between periodicals and the changes and continuities in women’s lives, arguing that magazines are fundamentally utopian and inherently attractive to those who desire change (Beetham, 1990).

A genre that is both open to the future and close to the everyday realities of women’s lives would have had particular resonance for women in the first decades of the twentieth century when improvements in housing, the introduction of electricity, access to hot running water, increased real incomes (for those in work), radio, cinema, cheap fashions and the possibility of better paid office jobs, among other things, promised change (see chapters 4-7). Beetham’s concern with the heterogeneous and contradictory nature of the periodical directed my interest in the context of magazine production (journalism, design, advertising etc.) and its relationship to reading habits which could be explored through oral history interviews (see chapters 2 & 3). The title of her book, which refers to Virginia Woolf’s classic feminist text *A Room of One’s Own*, allies periodicals with the struggle for social, material and creative independence, and the notion of the ‘publication as room’: an imaginative space in which identities could be contested and formed. My work with readers extended this, suggesting the significance of the ‘window’ as a metaphor for understanding the operation of interwar magazines. This thesis argues that for the expanding market among middle and aspirational working-class women (the ‘new reader’ of the period), the magazine’s appeal was not only that it represented a space in which to dream, alongside lots of practical advice, but also that it offered a ‘room with a view’ (see chapter 3).

Jennifer Scanlon (1995: 10), in her insightful study of the American *Ladies’ Home Journal* (*LHJ*) attributes much of its extraordinary success to its ability to voice readers’ fantasies, their

perhaps only half understood “inarticulate longings” for “personal autonomy, economic independence, intimacy, sensuality, self-worth and social recognition”. Scanlon is particularly good on the shifting relationship between editorial and advertising: the contradictions and tensions embedded in the magazine format, and the power of fiction. A ‘service’ magazine aimed at a “composite woman”: for the most part married, white, native-born and middle class, who resigned her job or career at marriage, lived a ‘his and hers’ marriage and preferred spending money to producing goods, the *LHJ*, she claimed, alternately and even simultaneously, “acknowledged and neglected, celebrated and decried, promoted and impeded social changes and their accompanying conflicts” (Scanlon, 1995: 2-8). Editorial and advertising were often at variance, editorial endorsing a more traditional message of “woman’s values” - what Scanlon (1995: 43) terms the “simple life philosophy” – while advertising advocated full participation in modern consumer culture. From 1924 advertising began to monopolize the service role of *LHJ*, providing advice and usurping editorial presence. Romantic fiction, in contrast, addressed the “mysteries” in women’s lives, offering diverse and subversive possibilities and opportunities to dream (Scanlon, 1995: 139). Britain’s less advanced consumer infrastructure and smaller population resulted in a large number of relatively small circulation publications targeting specific audiences and, rather than the *LHJ*’s ‘composite woman’, a multiplicity of femininities emerged (see chapter 2). Scanlon’s work, however, is useful not least because it demonstrates the importance of developing a methodology appropriate to the materiality of magazines as complex, inter-textual entities in which fantasy is intimately inter-twined with the everyday. This work extends these ideas by conceiving magazines as total ‘environments’ (an idea developed in chapter 2) in order to take account of how readers move through, think around and talk about their publications, as well as considering visual and textual disjunctures and continuities. It’s an approach that foregrounds readerly agency and parallels Judy Giles’ suggestive work on the internal links between magazine advertising and fiction. Whereas, social economic accounts such as Jill Greenfield’s (1998: 172) analysis of interwar *Woman’s Own*, perceive the contractions between advertisers’ “middle-class aspirations” and the economic circumstances of their lower-middle and working-class readers’ lives as a form of ‘editorial engineering’, Giles’s (2004: 126-9) read such disjunctures as “imaginary spaces” for those class fractions who, “rather than imitating middle-class culture, wished to develop their own forms”.

This study combines the methodologies of design history, cultural and literary studies, and women’s history. Its central aim is to explore what being modern and a woman might have meant in the 1920s and 1930s as this was envisaged in, and experienced through, popular women’s magazines. Conceptualising magazines as complex, fluid, hybrid, “inter-discursive” spaces in which identities can be contested and formed, the thesis adopts a tripartite approach to explore them as 1) material cultural artefacts mediating multiple sometimes contradictory messages and meanings 2) the various contexts in which those messages were produced (journalism, advertising, illustration, photography, print technology, publishing) and 3) the many ways in which magazines were consumed. The project’s title, ‘They opened up a whole new world’, is a phrase that readers used to describe their publications’ appeal. It suggests the metaphor of the ‘magazine-as-window’; an image that simultaneously captures the exciting, utopian possibilities of periodicals, while reminding us to pay attention to how their messages were framed. The ‘room with a view’, for instance, involved constraints as well as opportunities for change. Evoking a sense of being alternately private and public, both in and out of the home, (passive) onlooker and (active) participant - the object and subject of the gaze -

an individual who also belonged to an imagined community of readers, the ‘magazine-as-window’ provides a means for thinking about how womanhood in the period was represented, experienced and negotiated.

1.3 Conservative, Suburban, Domestic and Feminine Modernity

MUMMY'S pretty hair is shingled,
And her skirts are rather short;
Her desire for jazz is mingled
With a mannish love of sport.
I have even seen it hinted
(Where, of course, I won't disclose)
That her lovely lips are tinted,
And there's powder on her nose.

GRANNY says it's simply shocking:
Girls are brazen nowadays.
Fancy all that length of stocking
Flaunted in the public gaze!
Granny can be very crushing,
Wishing young mammas could know
The delightful coy and blushing
Girls of sixty years ago.

YET statistics tell us clearly
We improve in many ways.
Fewer babes are dying yearly
Than in granny's youthful days.
These are facts we cannot smother;
Mummy's manners may be wrong,
But, regarded as a mother,
She is going pretty strong!
(*HC* 20.04.1929: 174)

History, Janice Winship (1987) observed, rarely featured in the popular women's magazines she studied in the 1970s and 1980s, and when it did appear it was treated as nostalgia. History, or rather the 'past', in contrast, was a frequent presence in interwar women's magazines where it was used to demonstrate the inimitable march of progress or reassure consumers about the pace of change. A favourite strategy of advertisers was to place new products in a historical context (Ohmann, 1996). This either produced contrast, heightening a product's modernity, as in the ad for Kotex sanitary pads (fig. 2), or lent credibility by underscoring continuity, as in an ad for Vim in *Modern Woman* where the stately figure of an Edwardian aristocrat endorsed the scourer's cleaning properties (fig. 46). The *Home Chat* poem at the start of this section combines both approaches by invoking generational change to promote modern motherhood. This propensity to historicize the modern, or rather to bind it firmly to historical roots, was

integral to the feminine, domestic versions of modern life in women's magazines, and was evident in other areas of cultural practice. Design historian Jeffrey Meikle (1995) observed a tendency in the decorative arts to feminize, domesticate or incorporate modern artefacts into historical narratives, ascribing this to a desire to reassure consumers and accommodate a new aesthetic to conventional tastes. While, Paul Greenhalgh (1995), writing about an aesthetic 'compromise' in English architecture and design that drew on the past in the first decades of the twentieth century aligned this with a new national consciousness. This tendency is perhaps best summed up by Alison Light (1991: 10) who, in her study of women's interwar writing, identified what she termed a new mood of "conservative modernity", which simultaneously looked backwards and forwards, accommodating "the past in new forms of the present" when "even the most traditional of attitudes took new form". Conservative, suburban and domestic modernity are terms that have been variously used by scholars to describe the ambiguity at the heart of British life in the 1920s and 1930s. This section explains how these arguments contextualise feminine modernity and the feminine imaginary in women's magazines in the period.

The years immediately after the First World War witnessed a move away from the heroic, masculine, public rhetoric of national destiny towards an Englishness that was, "less imperial and more inward looking, more domestic, more private" and more feminine, albeit a femininity that was radically different from late Victorian and Edwardian precedents (Light, 1991: 8). In part, a response to the post-war 'crisis of masculinity', this sea change in national life coincided with the emergence of new players on the national stage: women and the expanding middle-classes (McKibbin, 1998). The old heroes of public life were being replaced by the modern heroines of middlebrow fiction; Agatha Christie's Miss Marple, or Jan Struther's Mrs. Miniver best represented Englishness both in its, "most modern and reactionary forms" (Light, 1991: 11). Conservative modernity found expression in the insistent ordinariness of middlebrow culture, and the personal and subjective spaces of domestic life.

Identifying the gendered and conflicted nature of modernity, Light's study concerns texts that were aimed at relatively defined middle-class readerships, those who used Boots and Mudie's circulating libraries, read Compton-Burnett or 'Mrs. Miniver'. The economic viability of the new breed of women's magazines, in contrast, depended on appealing to the aspirations of wider audiences through print media, visual communication and their associated cultures of consumption. Light (1991: 11) alluded to this wider readership when she wrote about the "new kinds of consensus, confidence and power" at the heart of conservative modernity, memorably remarking that the "disposable sanitary napkin was as powerful an event as increasing female education or shifts in the employment market". Such changes are sharply evident in the pages of the penny weeklies which, with their prevailing ethos of inclusivity, spelt out rules of etiquette, pronunciation and appearance, instructing lower-middle and respectable working-class readers how to write letters, behave at tea dances or train the 'little maid' (see chapters 4-7). Studying popular women's magazines suggests how the new forms of consensus, confidence and power that Light identified were imagined for women beyond the middle-classes, and sometimes lived. The models of modern womanhood recommended in penny weeklies were at times startling. "These are the good days – the great days – the free days!" the journalist Jean North declared in a 1924 article in *Home Chat*, oneHomewhich compared the security and independence of the woman who earned her own living and could "run her own little flat – and maybe a car" with the "haunting dread" that afflicted "her sisters of olden times", whose futures depended upon marriage (HC11.10.1924: 76).

Deborah Ryan (1999 & 2000) and Janice Winship (2000), in their respective studies of the Ideal Home Exhibition (IHE) and the chain store, explore the ambiguities of modern culture for lower middle-class women in the interwar years. Asking what the IHE and its audience

defined as modern, Ryan argues that it represented a “suburban modernity” in which the functional and the symbolic, “modernity and nostalgia, urban and rural, past and future, masculine and feminine, culture and nature, public and private” values came together in, for instance, the Tudorbethan semi (1995: 18). In contrast to the spectacle of the Ideal Home Exhibition, the uniform and predictable nature of chain stores led Winship (2000: 25-31) to develop her analysis of “mass British middle-brow culture” as a “culture of compromise” and “restraint”. For the first time lower middle-class consumers took prime place within the expanded commercial culture as their social needs and routines were reflected in the rationalized design, clear planning and controlled display evident in Marks & Spencers, Lyon’s and Burton’s stores or the Oscar Deutsch chain of Odeon cinemas. This new ‘chain store aesthetic’ embodied balanced and measured progress, and was made wholesome by the exclusion of excess. Best expressed in the phrase “nice and neat”, it signalled the respectable pleasures of suburbia, the new self-disciplines of hygiene, fitness and Taylorized work regimes, and signalled “class mobility and suburban tastes”.

The rationalized aesthetic and ‘realistic’ dreams materialized in chain stores derived from American business models and had much in common with service magazines; both operated a divisional structure (editorial ‘departments’, in the case of magazines) with specialized responsibilities and employed the new techniques of visual communication (Zuckerman, 1998; see chapter 2). The lower middle-class and respectable working-class consumers who visited the Ideal Home Exhibition were the new female readership for popular women’s magazines (see chapter 3). Winship’s ‘culture of restraint’, which was characterized by routine, repetition, the idea of the ‘treat’ or momentary escape from the demands of everyday life, was everywhere evident in domestic magazines with their ads promising salmon for tea or an afternoon at the pictures; small rewards for duties well done. Their easily digestible features, colour illustrations, dress patterns, recipes, household tips, short stories and easy-to-read fiction, moreover, meant that domestic magazines were as accessible and convenient as the products they sold. Like chain stores and suburban housing, service magazines represented, what O’Shea (1996: 19) terms, a “discourse of betterment” that promised security, self-improvement, respectability, better standards of living and social mobility. With their romantic serials and the ‘imaginary elsewhere’ of advertising, however, magazines also tapped into women’s fantasy lives and, like the ‘dream palaces’ of the cinema, encouraged them to imaginatively experience aggressive and recalcitrant emotions; the ‘unruly dimensions of modernity’ (see chapters 5 & 7).

The conflicted nature of the magazine is central to its appeal. Drotner (1988) and Reynolds (1990) attributed the success of the periodicals they studied to their ability to organize and resolve the contradictory experiences of childhood and youth for readers. Penny Tinkler (1995: 151), pointing out how magazines are involved in the “cultural reproduction and production of gender”, emphasizes their need both to invest in maintaining convention and to innovate. Magazines’ commercial imperative, meanwhile, forces them to focus on readers’ “interests”, “needs” and “fantasies”, and balance these with prevailing norms, assumptions and fears. Interwar working-girl magazines, for instance, equated modernity with employment but also “re-establish[ed] the dependence of girls on men and marriage” to draw out links with traditional feminine ideals in an effort to manage wider public concern about the threat her supposed new freedoms posed to marriage and motherhood (Tinkler, 1995: 146-8). The “ambiguities, contradictions and alternative possibilities” embedded in the figures of the Flapper and the Housewife, Martin Pumphrey (1987: 193) argues in his analysis of 1920s American advertising, made (and make) them meaningful. As words such as “freedom”, “femininity” and “romance” were “cleaned of historical meaning” in advertising discourse they could also be co-opted, reintegrated and redefined by networks, individuals, groups, clubs,

guilds, and I would argue the imagined and actual communities of magazine readers, in order to manage, imagine and materialize new patterns of behaviour, expectation, new selves and new ways of living.

To get a sense of how feminine modernity and the feminine imagination were framed in women's magazines the final part of this section examines two examples, one from *Home Chat* in the 1920s and one from *Woman* in the 1930s. These foreground common strategies and themes exploring, nevertheless, how each was inflected differently and changed over time in the two magazines.

The humorous poem, 'The Proof is in the Pudding', promoted a more radical message than its homely, 'common sense' title might suggest (see start of section). Published in *Home Chat* in 1929, it appeared shortly after the vote was extended to all women over the age of 21, and dealt with the 'modern woman as flapper', a contentious figure whose habits and appearance had been vigorously criticized in the popular press (Bingham, 2002). Here, however, the flapper is not 'Miss 21' but a mother, who despite her "desire for jazz", her "mannish love of sport" and use of coloured cosmetics, was depicted as a supremely domestic figure seated in an armchair darning socks (*HC* 04.1929: 174) (*fig.3*). The 1920s was a period in which family size fell in all occupational groups, provoking anxieties about motherhood among government policy makers, local authorities and voluntary bodies concerned with health and welfare. Women were choosing to have fewer children than ever before, and fears about 'race-suicide', under-population and the birth of too many babies among the poor fed the alarm (Alexander, 1996; Gittins, 1982). In this context the seemingly whimsical verse becomes surprisingly progressive as, rather than deriding young women as "brazen", the author makes a case for modern motherhood that combines a modern appearance with traditional values. Humour, a favourite technique in magazines for dealing with controversial topics, is used to subtly undercut 'granny's' old fashioned views, and the poem ends on an up-beat note. Referring to improved child mortality rates, the author reflects that, while the modern woman's "manner's may be wrong", "as a mother she is going pretty strong!".

The question of employment replaced motherhood as the controversial territory on which modern womanhood was to be assessed in *Woman* in the 1930s. "[W]e have come a long way", Margaret Lane announced in her editorial on the "woman of 1937": the "new Georgian woman" (named after the recent accession of George VI). Illustration is used to dramatic effect as, sharp-suited and immaculately accessorized, the Georgian woman strides through the text to greet the reader; a streamlined, dynamic, yet feminine figure who looks towards the future, as her Victorian and Edwardian precedents, the 'women of 1880 and 1900', retreat into the past (*fig.4*). This epitome of self-confident, modern womanhood, nevertheless, was no "fierce feminist". The beneficiary of the freedoms fought for by the suffrage generation, she sought to combine these with the "pleasures and responsibilities" of domestic life (*W* 05.06.1937: 7). A proto-post-feminist, she was a product of the possibilities and problems, opportunities and instabilities of modern life.

Whereas, *Home Chat's* modern mother balanced maternal responsibilities with pleasure in fashion and leisure, the 'woman of 1937' had a bewildering array of options to juggle as: "independent worker", "good citizen", "charmer", "sportswoman", "mother" and "housewife". These multiple personas suggest psychoanalyst Joan Rivère's (1929/1986: 36-7) "intermediate type" of capable housewives: good-looking, wives mothers and lovers who, nevertheless, "fulfil the duties of their profession at least as well as the average man". Lane considered that the "formidable minority" of working, home-loving women who "lead two parallel lives" were most "in the spirit of the nineteen-thirties and 'forties". The 1930s' return to domestic "pleasures and responsibilities", in the pages of *Woman* at least, was firmly anchored to the gains of equal suffrage and a belief in women's right to work; it foreshadows the struggle to

balance conflicting demands that remains unresolved today.

The new Georgian woman and *Home Chat*'s modern mother represent a particularly English response to the question of what being modern might mean, something that women in other countries across Europe were grappling with in these years (Roberts, 1994; Gronberg, 1998; Von Ankum, 1994; Chadwick & True Latimer, 2003). At a time of significant change at home and in the workplace, women's magazines offered space in which competing versions of modern womanhood could be imagined. The novelist Storm Jameson, writing in *Modern Woman* in 1927 about the satisfactions to be had from "a life of incredible adventure" in, as she vividly put it, the "roaring wastes of a suburb", extolled the rewards of a life of the mind and the imagination (*MW* 04.1927: 13). Alison Light (1991: 4), in her work on women's fiction of the period, considered the appeal of what she termed the "drama of the inner life" much of which was located in suburbia. Rather than a conservative modernity of 'deferral' or 'defence', this thesis argues that women's magazines encouraged readers to participate in a rich imaginary world where a variety of, often contradictory, models of modern womanhood could be considered and assessed, producing a suburban mentality that was actively engaged in modern life; the feminine and domestic equivalent of Simmel's (Frisby & Featherstone, 1997) urban personality.

1.4 Magazines: Manuals of Modernity?

The modern women's magazine consisted of a combination of informative editorial features (often written by experts) and escapist fiction, a personal and sometimes intimate editorial 'voice', and an increase in the space both allotted to advertising (which was increasingly integrated into the main body of the magazine) and pictures (illustrations and photographs in advertising and editorial, sometimes in colour). Each title addressed a carefully targeted readership, many of whom, through competitions or correspondence pages, contributed to the magazine. The modern magazine, as such, built on the format established by the new journalism of the 1890s (White, 1970; Beetham, 1996). The interwar period, however, marked the beginning of a new era of mass publishing in women's magazines. Titles that flourished in the decades after the Second World War were those that had successfully established themselves by the end of the 1930s as 'modern' and relevant. This involved a combination of factors including a publication's format, design and advertising, its editorial ethos, journalistic writing, and the many ways in which readers were addressed by and positioned in a magazine, the various models of womanhood it visualized, and the degree to which they reflected or reproduced readers' interests, needs, concerns and dreams. From the 1950s *Woman's Weekly* and *Woman* became two of the highest selling British magazines; they were frequently mentioned by readers, many of whom had subscribed since the 1930s (see chapter 3). *Home Chat* and *Modern Woman*, in contrast, ceased publication in 1958 and 1965 respectively. Understanding why some publications were successful where others failed suggests what made magazines meaningful for readers, and illuminates what being a woman, modern or otherwise, in the first decades of the twentieth century meant. The following section, which outlines each magazine's format, readership, ethos and appeal, begins to answer some of these questions.

Home Chat: a magazine with personality

Women in austere West End squares and in middle class homes were equally interested. It [*Home Chat*] became a favourite in the suburban villa and in the country cottage. Everywhere women of every age and class were to be seen immersed in its pages.

(Dilnot, 1925: 23)

The appearance of *Home Chat* in 1895 heralded a new era in women's publishing. A low cost (2d after the war), small format (6.5 x 9.25 inches), letterpress magazine, printed on cheap paper and carrying a multitude of half-tone illustrations, all subsidized by advertisements, *Home Chat* was among the first of the popular women's weeklies. It developed the 'advice & entertainment' formula created by Beeton's *English Woman's Domestic Magazine* (1852) and extended it to wider audiences, setting the template for popular women's periodicals in the twentieth century (Braithwaite, 1995; White, 1970). George Dilnot's accolade, printed in his celebratory history of the Amalgamated Press (AP), was intended to identify *Home Chat* as a publication with wide appeal. Revealing more about the publisher's ambitions than the magazine's audience, this 'imagined readership', nevertheless, demonstrates the perceived need to transcend boundaries of social class, age and geographic distance that was present at the inception of the modern magazine. Publishers and editors had somehow to extend circulations while simultaneously establishing a close connection with their readership. Personification, what Dilnot (1925: 23) termed the "personality" of the magazine, and more specifically the notion of the 'lady' became central devices in the project to unify the publication's diverse and aspirational readership.

Ladyship, the product of Alfred Harmsworth's (Lord Northcliffe) thinking as proprietor of the AP, was intended to maintain the correct note of respectability in his 'feminine papers' at the same time that they reduced in price. Initially in *Home Chat* it took two distinct forms: the "glimpse into high society" and the lady as "knowledgeable woman, a model and source of instruction" (Beetham, 1996: 193-4). Both survived into the interwar years, but in modernized form. Photographs of royalty, aristocracy and, increasingly in the 1930s, film stars (the Hollywood aristocracy) encouraged readers to imaginatively participate in the glamorous world of high society and celebrity, while editorial personae such as the aristocratic sounding 'Camilla and Lady Betty' or 'Lady Kitty Vincent' dispensed fashion and beauty advice, lending an air of aspirational respectability to the new trends. By the mid-1920s the 'knowledgeable women' in *Home Chat* were either youthful flappers like 'Mabs', the magazine's fashion editor, or reassuringly mature, professionals such as housekeeping expert Gladys Owen and Mrs. Marryat who edited the correspondence page (see chapters 2 & 3).

The Ladyship ideal must have contrasted sharply with the actual circumstances of readers' lives. Advertising executive Arthur Richardson (1925: 342) described *Home Chat's* readership as "all women, but mostly young women with limited spending power", an audience which is reflected in the cheap polishes, soaps, rejuvenating tonics and branded foods that filled the publication's advertising pages with their promises of assistance for girls and "young housewives". "Gordon's Gin is wonderful my dear – you try it!" an older woman, somewhat alarmingly, assures her youthful companion in one ad, (figs. 5 & 6). Competitions and correspondence pages, meanwhile, worked to reduce the gap between readers and the 'ideal lady' by ensuring that the 'voices' and occasionally photographs of the former appeared in the magazine (figs. 111 & 112) (see chapters 2 & 6).

Beatrice Colomina (1998: 7-9), writing about architecture as mass media in the first half of the twentieth century, describes what she terms the "publicity of the private", a new tendency in commercial culture to frame the public world for private consumption while, simultaneously, putting the home and private life on public display. Colomina's discussion of architecture is useful when thinking about the 'magazine-as-window', a metaphor but also a means of

facilitating connectivity between the home and the world outside; between female subjectivity and women's social and political lives. From 1919 an evocation of intimate discussion between like-minded friends replaced the world of public events in *Home Chat's* editorial page when aristocratic women were pictured as wives, daughters or mothers who, despite their enviable glamour, shared a common set of family values with the magazine's readership (*HC* 17.02.1934: 3 & 29). Visual communication, something that was closely associated with feminine sensibilities, gradually took precedence over text in 'They Say', the magazine's regular news column, as photographs of the latest innovations in sports, fashion and architecture signalled the magazine's modernity in a series of visual 'sound bites' (figs. 7 & 8). A number of fundamental contradictions, however, lay at the heart of *Home Chat* as editors attempted to accommodate aspirational consumption with readers' actual circumstances. This was particularly apparent in promotional features for that ubiquitous symbol of modernity, the motor car. The car offered a new sense of freedom and independence, and an automobile with a woman at the wheel often graced magazine covers in the 1920s, associating the modern woman with the excitement of speed and the glamour of gleaming machinery (Chadwick & Latimer, 2003) (figs. 9 & 10). In reality, car ownership was only affordable for those with comfortable salaries. Sean O'Connell (1998: 51), in his cultural history of motoring, calculates that £250 p.a. was necessary to run a car in 1939. In a 1924 feature titled with nonchalant insouciance, 'My Dear, Get a Car!', Isabel Graham, nevertheless, claimed that a car was "no longer an idle dream" but a "tangible reality" for the "woman of small means" (*HC* 11.10.1924: 71). Tensions between the imaginary pleasures and actual realities of car purchase emerge in the disparate messages conveyed by picture and text. While the illustration of a modish flapper in a low-slung sports car conveys the ideal of modern ladyship, tips about second-hand bargains and references to "diligent saving" and "steady perseverance" undercut this image of carefree modernity (fig. 11). Instructions about how to house, clean and care for one's motor car, moreover, feminised the automobile, representing it as an extension of women's domestic duties and housework (Jeremiah, 2007).

Ladyship, as an aspirational ideal, offered conflicting messages. Both "an image of equality and a mark of hierarchy", like the periodical itself it rooted the *Home Chat* reader in the "here-and-now and pointed her towards a potentially different future" at the end of the nineteenth century (Beetham, 1996: 195). The values it espoused proved less relevant for the magazine's expanded readership in the twentieth century, even in modernized form, and despite such innovations as the 'Mabs girl' and lively articles debating controversial issues such as the rights and wrongs of the working woman (see chapters 5 & 6), the publication was not able to bridge the gap between the world it visualized, its values, and its readers. *Home Chat's* small format and cheap paper, moreover, associated it with an era of pre-war working-class values that seemed outdated to a new generation of women in the 1950s (Hoggart, 1957).

Woman's Weekly: 'a recipe for success'

Woman's Weekly, in contrast, achieved sales of half a million in the 1930s, and became one of Britain's top-selling weeklies in the post-war years (White, 1970; Braithwaite & Barrel, 1988). Like *Home Chat* the 'Weekly' was part of the A.P. stable of women's magazines but, appearing in 1911, it represented a newer style of publication. Its success suggests that, at the very least, the versions of femininity it promoted were "desirable" for readers (Beetham, 1996: 207). When questioned, however, it was the 'Weekly's' consistent delivery of 'quality': the reliability of its knitting and dress patterns, the standard of its fiction, even its correct use of

English and grammar, that readers recalled (see chapter 3). If *Home Chat* fostered a culture of hierarchy and difference, albeit one in which readers could imaginatively engage, *Woman's Weekly*, with its closely structured (even streamlined) format and self-consciously modernizing tone, shaped a discourse of consumption that was up-to-date, dependable and inclusive. Much of the magazine's success was due to its editor, the formidable Winifred (Biddy) Johnson who, according to the journalist Mary Dilnot (1994) who worked with Johnson, controlled "everything" and was "a natural brilliant, brilliant woman" who "instinctively knew what people wanted". Editors were encouraged to "stamp an individuality on their respective journals" and Johnson was responsible for *Woman and Home*, *My Home* and *Woman's Weekly*, which she turned into three of the best selling women's publications in the period (Dilnot, 1925: 99). Rivals attributed this to the intense and enduring identification fostered between reader and magazine (Grieve, 1964; Drawbell, 1968). Mary Dilnot identified Johnson's strength of personality, meticulous attention to detail, and concern for clarity and accuracy as the fundamental factors characterising her editorial approach. "Everything had to be crystal clear so that the reader could understand it with no problem at all". She was a great believer in "trying things out"; the 'Weekly's' unimpeachable reputation for knitting patterns resulted from Johnson's dictum that staff "go and do it... follow it through and see whether it works". Additionally, she expected staff to read everything in the magazine, ensuring that those producing the publication were among its audience.

A letterpress weekly, which like *Home Chat* retailed at 2d, *Woman's Weekly* was slightly larger in size (8.5 x12 inches) and averaged around 50 pages (this reduced slightly in the early 1930s when the advertising pages shrank). Its format remained remarkably consistent and consisted of: the editorial page 'Women's Weekly Whispers', which was signed by the editorial personae 'London Girl', two complete stories, one sometimes two serials, three pages of dress patterns ('The London Girl's Dress Gossip' which included readers' questions), a knitting pattern, regular poetry inserts and a few advice features, notably the problem page edited by the ubiquitous Mrs. Marryat (the name remained for many decades irrespective of changes in personnel). The Man Who Sees', a figure billed as "A Man of Much Experience and Culture, who Understands the Difficulties that Life Presents", established an empathetic editorial tone as, pipe in hand, he dispensed edifying advice on such topics as visiting a picture gallery in his 'How to Acquire Culture' series (*WW* 07.01.1939: 10). Additions in the 1930s included a beauty feature, a childcare feature, 'What they Ask Matron' and 'Cecile's Cookery Page', which consisted mainly of cake recipes. Produced by editorial departments staffed by 'experts', such features were a gold-mine for advertising, offering attractive 'next matter' placement; they also signalled the continued importance of the magazine's advisory role for readers (see chapter 2).

Looking through its pages today, one is struck by the degree to which *Woman's Weekly* was a supremely standardized product and how, despite its often sentimental tone, this level of standardization marked the magazine out as modern; a reliable brand. The use of pseudonyms helped maintain consistency and enabled the editor to control the magazine's personality and appeal. The front cover, which from the 1920s was printed in blue (pink was added in the 1950s), was immediately recognisable with its seemingly endless procession of almost identical, stylized, swelt young women ("So tailored! So Trim!") promoting dress patterns (*fig. 12*). These were replaced by photographs of immaculately waved and lipsticked blondes, some of whom were members of staff, modelling knitted garments in the 1930s (Dilnot, 1994) (*fig. 13*). Banner headlines announcing romantic serials by popular authors such as Ethel M. Dell

or Ruby M. Ayres reinforced the reliability of the brand, while tag lines such as “Quickly Knitted” or “Easy to Make” communicated its convenience. The overall impression was of charm, simplicity and smart fashionability; Winship’s (2000) ‘nice and neat’ aesthetic that appealed to the growing number of lower middle-class consumers.

Language was consciously used to bridge the gap between editorial, written from an informed position, and the readers’ perspective. The London Girl, for instance, wrote in the tone of a metropolitan insider who, nevertheless, was a good friend addressing her audience as, “Readers dear” or “my lambs” and using such modish slang as “me thinks” or “but ‘nuff is enough”. Shopping news from London or Paris was a favourite topic and included ‘eye witness’ accounts of such novelties as twin shop assistants or a cat who took up residence in the window of a department store (*WW* 23.03.1929, 16.03.1929, 23.02.1929). The relationship between editor and reader was also mediated through design. Semi-transparent titling simulating a handwritten style communicated confidentiality, as if the editor wrote to each reader individually; a “rhetoric of intimate address” that connected editorial edicts with reader desires (Rogoff, 1996: 61) (*fig.* 14).

Like the ‘Man Who Sees’, the London Girl aimed to improve and expand readers’ knowledge and experience. Connecting them imaginatively with an exciting modern world, the ‘Weekly’ also encouraged participation, albeit in a more pragmatic form. In a March 1929 editorial, for instance, the ‘Girl’ described travel opportunities in exotic locations such as Vienna, Budapest, Transylvania and Bucharest, while a travel feature in the same issue gave tips for living cheaply in London, “on pension terms”. Readers, moreover, were encouraged to be adventurous but only to spend within their means; “Collect together every halfpenny and go out in search of adventure and gaiety” at a Chinese restaurant in Soho, a dinner and dance at Lyons in Piccadilly, window shop or view Epstein’s “notorious” sculpture in Hyde Park (*WW* 23.03.1929: 465 & 480).

One concern that united all ‘Weekly’ readers was respectability and etiquette features such as the rather primly titled ‘Come, Let Us Be Correct!’ were a staple. Advising on a range of matters from the “graceful way” to dress for travel in a motor-cycle side car to codes of conduct for the business girl these items imply a modern world fraught with anxiety, which required editorial expertise to negotiate (*figs.* 15 & 16). *Woman’s Weekly* offered a model of modern femininity that was consistently reliable, respectable and, for the most part, achievable. A standardized product, it simultaneously set standards, instructing readers in what they must, and just might, do; invaluable information at a time of rapid change.

Modern Woman: “the journal with the new spirit of the age”

Modern Woman exactly fills the modern woman’s need. It is an up-to-date, interesting and instructive magazine, published at a reasonable price. *The Lady Mayoress* (*MW* 07.1925)

Subtitled ‘The Journal with the New Spirit of the Age’, *Modern Woman* addressed “the woman of to-day” and claimed to represent a “new era both in journalism and in the lives of women” (*MW* 06.1925: 7). It targeted single professional women, housewives, homeowners and the families of the rapidly expanding middle classes. The teacher, Margery Denut was the only reader I contacted who took the magazine regularly, confirming a readership among independently-minded, educated women (see appendix 2).

Just as *Good Housekeeping* presented itself as a “forum for rational debate”, *Modern Woman* envisioned a public agenda for its readers through a home-based model of modern femininity that could accommodate, and even enhance, participation in the public world (Giles, 2004: 123). Promising to keep readers informed about, “what the Big World thinks”, the “men and women who do things” literature, art and the “newest discoveries in domestic science”, the editor represented the periodical as a bridge connecting political, cultural and domestic concerns. The “real home” became a place in which informed opinion was exchanged; a counter public sphere with the housewife at its heart (*MW* 06.1925 7; DiCenzo *et al*, 2010). Endorsements from “distinguished” public figures such as Lady Askwith, the actress Sybil Thorndike and Miss Lillian Barker, who did “wonderful work” with working women, signalled *Modern Woman*’s serious intent; a publication that, according to Barker, responded to a real “need” among women (*MW* 07.1925).

The magazine was organised into distinct sections: fiction (usually one serial and three short stories), special articles, and half a dozen or so specialist departments that were listed on the contents page as: ‘Your Home’, ‘Craft’, ‘Health and Beauty’, ‘Your Dress’, ‘For the Children’ and ‘Miscellaneous’, which included a ‘Shopping Service’, an astrology column and the problem page. The persona of the active modern woman, her life expanded and enhanced by new products and technologies, however, emerged most strongly in advertisements. Almost half the magazine’s 75 or so pages were dedicated to ads. The “modern girl” for whom “immaculate cleanliness and fastidiousness” was a “creed”, promoted washing powders and sanitary protection. Horlick’s claimed to counteract that “modern menace” sleep loss for “Modern Busy women”, while ‘Mayfair Models’ (a company that made up garments from magazine dress patterns) addressed the modern woman on a small allowance who wished to “look smart” (*fig.* 67) (*MW* 04.1927, 01.1930; 09.1932).

Established authors, among them Dorothy Black, Katherine Haviland Taylor, May Edginton, Olga Rosmanith, Richmal Crompton, Stuart Macrae and Len Chaloner, wrote stories about flappers, career women and busy mothers as well as more exotic subjects (see chapter 7).

Daring modern women such as the travel writer Rosita Forbes or actress Gertrude Lawrence contributed special features alongside regular columnists F. E. Baily, Alva Johnston (film) and the theatre critic J. Jefferson-Farjeon. Editorial covered topics from the innocuous: housekeeping and electrical gadgets, to the controversial: co-habitation, sex education, birth control and divorce (see chapter 7). Efforts were made to include up-to-the-minute news and information. When, for instance, Christine Frederick, home editor of the American *Ladies’ Home Journal* and doyen of scientific management, visited Britain in 1927 the editor commissioned a series of articles on ‘making-over’ the British home (see chapter 4). By 1939 *Modern Woman* was running a regular column, or ‘car service’, by stage and radio star Sunday Wilshin, answering readers’ motoring problems.

Correspondence pages reveal that readers came from all parts of the country, but with an emphasis on more affluent cities and suburbs, and the South East. Questions about private education, inherited incomes, committees, and domestic staff suggest a solidly middle-class readership, yet references to uncertain finances and the necessity for daughters or mothers to work indicate that many were living in straightened or difficult circumstances, particularly in the 1930s. A more conservative tone prevailed in the 1930s, reflecting the growth of owner-occupied housing and suburban estates (see chapter 4). One reader complained that she had overheard herself being called “frightfully suburban” and wanted to know what this meant; another complaining about her husband’s “hot political views” was reassured that these would

be “modified” when he came up against the “practical difficulties of arranging the world” (*MW* 09.1939: 48, 06.1939: 54). The fantasy of the “successful wife” leading a blissful existence in the home-counties emerged in several letters and, one young woman declared herself ready to marry an older man whom she did not care for in order to achieve a “fine position in this town” and avoid the fate of her maiden aunt, who earned a pittance and lived in “daily dread of being replaced by a younger woman” (*MW* 08.1935; 12.1935: 38; 08.1939: 63).

The photo-editorials ‘Names that are News’ and ‘This Wonderful World’ continued to innovate, picturing the latest personalities and events in a fast-changing modern world through an assemblage of images and snappy information ‘bites’ that referenced progressive thinking in modern design (*figs.* 17 & 18). Presenting a woman-centred view of developments in sports, politics, science, philanthropy and the arts, topics included England’s only female racehorse trainer, a Dame of the British Empire’s work for peace, the achievements of aviatrix Dorothy Spicer, pageant master Gwen Lally, actress Tallulah Bankhead wearing the designer Schiaparelli’s latest creation, and British starlet Vivien Leigh (*MW* 08.1935: 9; 07.1935: 15). An underlying conservatism, nevertheless, emerged in frequent references to Empire and English cultural superiority, and a tendency to disparage American commerce.

In 1939 the regular monthly editorial was re-titled ‘Just Talking’ in an effort to reproduce the intimacy and informality of female chat, yet the editor was careful to differentiate the publication and its readership from more ‘down-market’ magazines:

To me she [the reader] is just another woman with likes and dislikes and problems similar to my own. And I should be disgusted if an unknown editor called me “dear little wife,” referred to my offspring as “a *little* baby,” or “the dear kiddies,” and to my husband as “hubby.” (*MW* 03.1939: 11)

The magazine adopted a populist approach, offering a guinea for the most amusing stories about girls’ talk and the photograph showed group of young women engaged in animated discussion (over coffee not tea) to add an air of authenticity (*fig.* 19). With reports about the fashion for snoods, the appointment of a Russian female judge, a modern “sun-trapping” house in Chalfont, Bucks, and the latest music recordings, *Modern Woman* continued to address its audience as open-minded and eager to be informed about the curiosities, innovations and improvements of modern life well into the dark days of 1939 (*MW* 07.1939: 7-8).

Woman: “knowing women as they were, not as they were thought to be”

Prewar divisions of taste and income set a strict limit on the number of like-minded women it was possible to gather together. Habits of cooking and entertainment, uses of leisure, aesthetic preferences, standards of home-making, vocabulary and hygiene all had so many shades of acceptance that there was some excuse for the proliferation of magazines, now so uneconomic as well as redundant... Since a woman’s magazine strives to reflect the life of the reader, it is of first importance that she should see her own life reflected in the pages, not the life of some luckier, richer, cleverer creature. So when we started *Woman* we had to make a deliberate, daily and hourly effort to remember our readers’ circumstances. (Grieve, 1964: 90)

Three elements shaped *Woman*: vision, disruption and difficulty. The ‘vision’ was that of Odhams’ proprietor, Julius Elias who, after a visit to the U.S. determined to create a British mass-selling women’s magazine along American lines (Minney, 1954). Disruption resulted

from disagreements with the print union and Elias launched *Woman* as a gravure magazine to utilize the presses (Reed, 1997). And the ‘difficulty’ - perhaps the most important component of all - was identified by Mary Grieve (Editorial Assistant in 1939 and later long-time *Woman* Editor) when she noted the need for a magazine that reflected its readers’ lives; a difficult task at a time when stark differences existed in incomes, life experience and expectations (Gloversmith, 1980; Stevenson, 1984).

Strategies had to be developed to broach the gap between readers if the publication was to satisfy advertisers and reach a mass audience. This involved a fundamental rethinking of the British women’s press which, despite publishers’ efforts, still consisted of a large number of relatively small-circulation, ‘class magazines’ (Melman, 1988). Marjory Ferguson (1983: 19), herself a magazine editor, described the approach adopted at *Woman* and the other new weeklies as, what sociologists of consumption have termed a ‘trickle-down effect’ as middle-class values, habits and lifestyles were made available to working-class readers. This study, however, argues for a more nuanced reading; one that does not solely depend upon editors – Ferguson’s ‘high priestesses’ of the ‘cult’ – but rather looks at the magazine’s design and organization, active and negotiated processes of reading, and the diversity of content (see chapters 2 & 3).

Woman combined the stylish panache of American publications with the reliable ‘service’ established by British monthlies with its large format (10.5 x 14.5 inches), colour adverts and illustrations, “Council of Experts”: half a dozen specialist editors who promised “reliable advice on almost every question under the sun” and correspondence page (see chapter 2). Priority was given to beauty, fashion, manners (dubbed the ‘Art of Living’) and the household “Big Three”: furnishing, home-keeping and cooking. The publication’s subtitle, ‘The National Home Weekly’ underscored connections between women’s domestic remit and wider national concerns. ‘Sister Just’, for instance, who as a Health Visitor, founder of Baby Clubs, lecturer and Welfare Centre consultant had every qualification one could wish a modern childcare expert to possess, was billed as being eager to help with the “important work” of “bringing up the next generation” (*W* 12.06.1937: 4). Fiction dealt with the possible, albeit in heightened form; ‘secretary marries the boss rather than a mistress maid outlook’, as one reader put it (see chapter 3). Story-lines included such socially relevant topics as divorce, desertion or domestic violence, as well as the troubles of the heart, and were located in modern settings: an airport, department store, theatrical agency, tennis tournament or suburban home (see chapter 7). ‘Knowing the reader’ became a creed at *Woman*. The days of Miss Johnson, who ‘intuitively knew’ her audience, were passing and more accurate ways of ‘understanding’ and communicating with the readership had to be identified. Editors looked to the women’s press and advertising industry in America where innovations in visual communication, market research and consumer psychology suggested new means of engaging the public (Ohmann, 1996; Pease, 1976). When first launched, *Woman* ran into difficulties under Miss Stuart Macrae, the “Titan-haired”, “elegant, knowledgeable” editor who had been in charge of, among other things, *Home Notes* (Makins, 1975: 13). Peggy Makins, who was hired by Macrae, believed her to be the victim of Odhams male executives who harangued her into publishing “more intellectual or education” material “which a bossy male felt ought to be served up to women readers for their own good”. After predicting net sales of half a million copies circulations fell below 400,000 and only the combination of a high profile advertising campaign and a new editorial team saved the publication. Managing editor Iain Thompson, editor-in-chief John Gammie, and editor Mary Grieve, were brought in and moved the magazine to a

more conventional format of fashion, knitting and fiction. Advertising also had to be relevant to readers, and the type of goods promoted changed from expensive 'labour-savers' to cheaper popular consumer items, cigarettes and radios, which were associated with leisure and relaxation (see chapter 2).

Grieve (1964: 201), conscious that the editorial team were not "typical housewives", argued that their views had to be "reinforced" by regular communication with readers through their correspondence (later this was conducted through market research). The shift to a market-led model of operation was demonstrated most forcefully when Alison Settle, an acknowledged fashion expert, was sacked in 1938. Perhaps the most qualified member of staff, Settle's persona, nevertheless, did not fit with the new direction the magazine was taking and she was replaced by Anne Edwards who came from an advertising agency and had, according to Grieve (1964: 104), "the splendid gift of knowing women as they were, not as they were thought to be".

Woman was undeniably successful. When periodical sales dropped at the end of the 1930s it maintained its position as one of the highest selling women's magazines (McAleer, 1994). White (1970: 97) recorded a circulation of three-quarters of a million in 1939, while Grieve gave circulations topping the million mark by 1940, just before paper rationing; sales of three and a half million were achieved by the late 1950s. Technological innovations and in particular the introduction of colour have been given as the main reason for this success (McAleer, 1994). Comparing the publication with its nearest rival Woman's Own, which she described as Londonish, slick and superficial", Woman journalist Peggy Makins considered that it spoke to women in the provinces and across Britain. This thesis proposes a more complex story, which does not depend solely on technology or editorial prowess, but rather explores how a wide spectrum of women from diverse regions, social backgrounds and affiliations, identified with the magazine; that is, how it visualized readers' dreams while dramatising their daily lives.

1.5 Conclusion: Modern Subjects

What can women's magazines tell us about being modern and a woman in the interwar years? A glance at the energetic housewives and working girls on magazine covers engaged in embroidery, sports, shopping, cradling infants, reading, motoring, performing outdoor activities, dancing, or household repairs, indicate how they framed subjectivities for readers that were active, involved in the opportunities that modern life offered, and independently feminine (figs. 20, 21, 23, 9,10,135). The advent of Woman, at the end of the 1930s, signalled an important change that had been happening gradually throughout the period. A cropped head and shoulders, half figure or even extreme close-up, became the norm, as the full-colour cover illustrations drew the reader closer into the imaginative space, or the window, of the magazine (fig. 22). When a full figure was featured as, for example, with the dramatic image of a diver, it burst through the confines of the frame bridging the gap, metaphorical and otherwise, between the reader and her magazine (fig. 23).

This quality of 'closeness' was recalled by readers and materialized in Woman's scale, colour and design (see chapters 1 & 2). It was also communicated through the publication's name. Whereas, Home Chat positioned women within domestic space (albeit looking out at the world), and Woman's Weekly and Modern Woman foregrounded the temporality and modernity of women's lives, with Woman the reader was the magazine. No longer looking into the 'mirror-window', like Alice, she had passed through it, and was engulfed in an/other uncanny world, which was both reassuring familiar and significantly

different. The magazine world, moreover, was one in which women were centre stage and that offered readers new ways of performing a variety of, often conflicting, public and private personas and identities that could be imitated, negotiated or criticized. The following chapters explore the emergence of the modern commercial magazine through the context in which it was created and consumed by a new breed of modern women professionals in advertising and journalism, and a new female readership from the expanding middle and 'respectable' working classes.

The themes and preoccupations that structured magazines inform the second half of the thesis, which is developed from detailed reading and content analysis of the selected magazines. Chapters on the home, employment, beauty and the body, sex, fiction and desire, are shaped by the contradictory discourses within each topic, in real life and in the magazine. Modern types such as the 'housewife heroine', bachelor girls, working wives and career women shaped in magazines provide insight into the tensions between women's working lives inside and outside the home against a background of debates about, among other issues, decreasing numbers of domestic servants, new 'labour-saving' appliances, women's jobs, a declining birth rate, divorce, and the increasing number of older single women. Modernity in the interwar years is often associated with changes in female dress and behaviour. The final chapters, which focus on beauty, health, dress, sport and attitudes to sexual practice and female desire, consider how surface appearances signalled significant social and psychological change, and how this was voiced and materialized in magazine features, advertising, fiction and the agony page.

The modern woman (or women) in the interwar years was produced and sustained by a specific set of social, cultural and economic circumstances: the new consumerism, the expansion of housing and jobs available to women, the spread of psychoanalytic theory, sexology and new ideas about dress, for example. For a new generation of women she offered ways to imagine what being modern might mean, what it might feel like and how, through jobs, sports, films, books, the quality of one's cooking, dress sense, childcare or housekeeping, it might be enacted and performed. The following chapters explore how this was envisioned in women's magazines.

Chapter Two: The "Woman's Point of View": The Women's Press, Advertising and Thinking Visually

2.1 Introduction: A Common Culture, the Modern Feminine Press

Shirt-sleeved men, perspiring but never pausing, flung the papers to the waiting crowds, which never seemed to lessen. From morning to night the work continued, and ever the paper was selling, selling, selling and the great machines roaring as they flung out their streams of copies. (Dilnot 1925: 23)

This account of *Home Chat's* reception in 1895, even allowing for the partisan views of Amalgamated Press hagiographer George Dilnot and A. P. proprietor Lord Northcliffe's notorious tendency to 'boom' products, confirms the publication's status as precursor to the British mass market woman's magazine. From the start *Home Chat* was a highly commercial product and with it, and others like it, Northcliffe and his competitors put women and their magazines at the forefront of popular publishing. The Amalgamated Press published over 100 titles in the mid-1920s, over half of which catered for female audiences; combined circulations

reached 8,000,000 copies per week in 1931 (*AW* 06. 1931: 445; Curran & Seaton, 1997). In the 1930s the A.P.'s domination of the female press was inherited by Julius Elias's Odham's Press, which built on Northcliffe's entrepreneurial and structural innovations, adding the visual appeal of good quality illustrations, often in colour, to penny weeklies; qualities that previously had only been available in up-market magazines. The growing number of publications aimed at women (over 50 new titles in the period, see appendix 1) was part of a wider feminisation of publishing in the first decades of the century, as a "magazines ethos" permeated much of the popular press (Bingham, 2005). In part a response to the increased importance of advertising, these changes resulted from a reorientation of the relationship between the producers and consumers of mass culture. Far from dictating the cultural preferences of their public, as Dan LeMahieu (1988: 19) observed in his important book on the cultural media in Britain in the interwar years, producers now had to "bind themselves to the tastes of a diverse audience", signalling a significant shift in power relations between the producers and consumers of magazines. Knowing readers' tastes, views, aspirations and anxieties about topics as diverse as culture, sport and childcare became an important issue for the editors of magazines. This chapter examines women's magazines from the production side: the publishing houses, the journalists and advertisers, innovations in technology, and the debates around these. Not only were more titles produced for women, but also more women were employed on magazines as writers, on the editorial side, in advertising and in art departments, as female professionals were trained and recruited to articulate what contemporaries termed, "the woman's point of view" (Greenby, 1929: 201). Envisaged in terms of female psychology as well as a gendered perspective on life, the 'woman's point of view' represented and responded to modern women's widening sphere of interests as mothers, wives and workers: private individuals and public citizens. In the press this encouraged a new style of writing that was direct, informal *and* 'expert', a more integrated approach to editorial and advertising and an emphasis on visual communication (photographs and illustrations). It resulted in a particular magazine 'environment'; a material and imagined space created by a set of professionals, sometimes with contesting agendas and priorities, that was intended to connect and communicate with women as directly as possible, representing their interests, attitudes, emotions and needs. Hybrid entities, consisting of advertising and editorial, illustration and text, magazines brought diverse elements together in new and sometimes surprising ways that offered readers a means to identify and articulate the dreams and anxieties, hopes and fears associated with feminine modernity.

The British press had remained a relatively small-scale operation in the nineteenth century with a great many publications serving comparatively few readers. The arrival of popular national dailies, along with the evolution of advertising, resulted in rapid expansion by the early twentieth century (Lee, 1976; Symon, 1914; Smith, 1975). With new readerships amongst women and the working classes, by the 1930s the press constituted a major British industry with net output surpassing that of shipbuilding and chemicals (PEP, 1938: 44). Ownership of the mass media was concentrated in a few hands and three publishing houses owned by press barons dominated the magazine market in England: the Amalgamated Press (formerly Harmsworth Press), which after Northcliffe's death passed to his brother, Lord Rothermere, Newnes & Pearson's directed by Sir George Newnes, and Odhams, which was owned by Julius Elias (Lord Southwood) (Braithwaite & Barrel, 1988; Jeremy, 1984-5; Camrose, 1948). These large companies prospered by operating economies of scale; they could afford the latest most effective technology to create a superior product at less cost. Publishing a diverse range

of products including newspapers, periodicals, books and paper dressmaking patterns enabled them to raise more money and spread financial risk (Hackney in Burman, 1999 & Hackney, 2006). Profitability depended upon sophisticated organisational techniques and division of labour to increase both efficiency and quality. Editorial departments at the Amalgamated Press, for instance, were co-ordinated by a central editorial service that acted as a “clearing-house” for manuscripts, writers, artists, literary and art agents, publishers and photographers (Dilnot, 1925: 99). The company also used financial incentives. Sir John Hammerton (1944: 180), one of the leading editors at the A.P., claimed that Miss Perrett, who edited the high selling *Woman’s World* (circulation 350,000), received one shilling for every thousand copies sold (Reed, 1997). Northcliffe’s entrepreneurial skills and the organisational structures he put in place ensured that the Amalgamated Press would dominate magazine publishing in the 1920s. The introduction of new technology and American ideas at Odhams Press meant that it became the dominant force in the 1930s.

Northcliffe, who established his newspaper empire with the *Daily Mail* (1896) and the *Daily Mirror* (1903), never forgot his experience in women’s publishing and remained convinced that a female readership was the key to winning the battle for circulations, not least because “women were sources of strength for advertising” (Pound & Harmsworth, 1959: 200; Clarke, 1931). The introduction of wood pulp as a source for cheap paper and the half-tone block enabled the mass production of illustrated magazines (Beegan, 2008; Cranfield, 1978). Expansion was supported by a sophisticated structure for promotion and sales. Dilnot paints a picture of a massive communications network which, under the slogan the “Greatest Self-contained PUBLICITY MACHINE in Britain”, reached all quarters of the globe, distributing periodicals and gathering sales information. Survival depended on the unpredictable business of getting numbers right and direct contact with readers, newsagents and booksellers was particularly important. The firm dealt with some 800 wholesale distributing agents in Britain and abroad. Each of these had between 50 and 2,000 agents, some of whom were sub-wholesalers, but the majority were retail agents and booksellers. Distributive networks were supported by imaginative advertising campaigns. The company had its own publicity department, which developed co-ordinated campaigns to ‘boom’ publications. “Dominating spaces” and strong “selling talk”, according to Dilnot, were of central importance and the results rivalled theatre in terms of spectacle and dramatic effect as publishers created a visual landscape for consumers:

Coloured posters in infinite variety smother the hoardings... Leaflets in infinite variety are distributed from house to house in selected districts, or possibly to football crowds, children coming from school, or to other classes of the public as circumstances may dictate. Indians, clowns, cowboys, wander in crowded thoroughfares arousing curiosity... The stage and the cinema are called into requisition, ‘dummies’ are distributed for window-dressing, free shows organised at holiday times - indeed the list is endless. (Dilnot, 1925: 82)

Market targeting, a strategy developed in the 1890s, bound clusters of cheap penny weekly publications to audiences defined by common interests and expressed through a shared language, values and views, developing an ‘imagined community’ of readers (Anderson, 1983). *Comic Cuts*, for instance, was criticised for containing office-boy humour, but it was this that made it a success (Sabin, 1993). Women’s magazines, similarly, had to have “woman

appeal”, something that in practice was hard to define (Dilnot, 1925: 23). Periodicals communicated with readers through appearance as well as content. The small size, light blue binding and fragrant title of the innovative *Forget-Me-Not* (1891) (sub-titled ‘A Pictorial Journal for Ladies’), Harmsworth’s first foray into women’s publishing, embodied its audience’s aspirations for respectable femininity (White, 1970). Billie Melman (1988: 120), meanwhile, describes *Peg’s Paper* and others like it as “steadfastly working-class” in their attitude and outlook in the 1920s.

Press historian David Reed (1997: 171) identifies a shift in popular publishing in the early 1930s whereby, “the tired tradition of poor paper and gaudy competitions” that dominated the 1920s was consigned to a supporting role as a new breed of publications emerged. Change came with technical innovation. The economics of the penny weekly imposed significant limitations. Printing periodicals by letterpress was costly and these costs increased with output. While poor quality paper placed constraints on artwork, limiting advertising revenue that was badly needed to cover the production costs of higher circulations. Improvements such as the introduction of the automatic ink pump (1915), electric printing press (1920), and Hoe and Goss presses that produced cut and folded copies in the 1930s, gradually refined preparation and finishing enabling finer reproduction in cheaper publications and continuous processing. But it was the installation of rotary colour-gravure printing at Odhams’s experimental plant at Watford that led to fundamental change in women’s magazines.

Odhams’ ambitious proprietor Julius Elias, impressed by American achievements with photogravure printing, which placed magazines such as *Woman’s Home Companion* at the centre of the U.S. burgeoning consumer culture with circulations in the millions, was determined to introduce the process to Britain (Minney, 1931; Bowallius, 2007). The method enabled high quality colour reproduction at previously unattainable speeds and costs, unimaginable circulations and huge economies of scale (White, 1970). In short, it gave the industry the capacity to accommodate a mass-circulation periodical press that signalled its modernity and communicated through visual means. *Woman* was the first magazine wholly produced at Watford, followed by *Everywoman* and *Woman’s Own*.

The high circulations of American magazines, however, were due to the country’s comparatively larger population as well as sales abroad. *Woman’s Home Companion*, for instance, sold 1,215,069 copies a month in 1920 a figure that British publications would only achieve post 1945 (Bowallius, 2007; Zuckerman, 1998; White, 1970). Increased sales in Britain depended not only on technical innovation, but also a new approach to markets that involved new strategies in advertising and editorial. As Reed (1997: 189) remarked, “technology might be the spur, but the editorial still held the reigns”. Periodicals, which had targeted highly differentiated readerships in the 1920s, were succeeded by magazines designed to cut across class and regional identities, encouraging readers to see themselves as part of a national audience - *Woman* was subtitled the ‘national home-making weekly’ – and to envisage their shared responsibilities as citizens; a message that was communicated through visual as well as editorial means.

The first half of this chapter argues for the pioneering status of the women’s press, which welcomed and encouraged female journalists and advertising women to consider themselves as modern professionals at a time when the male-dominated newspaper world remained largely hostile. It examines changes in pay and conditions and a new style of writing that emerged at this time that addressed women as responsible and active citizens, and explores the sometimes fraught relationship between editorial and advertising. The final section focuses on the

significance of colour and a new mode of visual communication in magazines. The women's press put women and, more specifically, modern women on the cultural agenda in these years as active participants (producers and consumers) in a new inclusive democratic commercial culture.

2.2 'Of Course the Woman Journalist is Wanted': The Modern Woman Journalist and the Commercial Women's Press

“So I hear you want to be a journalist, a lady journalist”. There was perceptible distaste for the qualification... “it's true there are one or two lady journalists in Glasgow, who came to us during the war...But journalism is not a career for women. There won't be any more when these ladies retire...A waste of time, my dear. Unless, of course, you were to write the bits about weddings and ladies dresses.” (Grieve, 1964: 14-15)

Such was the discouraging advice that Mary Grieve received from newspaper director Neil Munro when she announced her intention of becoming a journalist in the years following the Great War. The coming decades, in fact, were to witness what Grieve later described as the entry of a, “monstrous regiment of women journalists sweeping in a purposeful, well-paid, expert tidal wave in and out of every newspaper and magazine office in the country”. The growth in advertising supported a commercial women's press staffed by women and the institution of a newspaper editorial page dedicated to women's interests created further openings. Figures such as Mrs. Peel, who ran the women's section for the *Daily Mail*, became the norm. Munro's 'lady journalist' transformed into a modern professional with a respectable career. This not only encouraged women to enter journalism, but also to regard themselves more seriously. Historian Richard Altick's (1962) study of the 1931 census returns reveal a slow but uninterrupted growth in the numbers of women who counted themselves professional writers. He concluded that whereas previously amateurs would not have listed themselves, more women worked as editors and contributed to popular periodicals in the first decade of the twentieth century at no cost to their respectability, and often with considerable financial success. This section explores and accounts for this female 'invasion', locating it within women's expanding role as active and enfranchised citizens and consumers. Journalism remained an activity that was organised along gender lines. The new women professionals, nevertheless, carved out areas of specialist knowledge that were different yet equivalent to that of their male peers. Additionally, it was a revolution that encompassed a new style of writing and a new approach to readers, as editors and proprietors looked to the woman journalist to identify and articulate the woman's 'point of view'.

As well as entering the profession in increased numbers, ever more women journalists began to rise in the ranks. Laura Alex Smith, in a series of articles in the trade journal the *Newspaper and Press Directory*, had lamented the lack of female editors of “ladies' papers” in the late 1890s, despite their presence “in the offices, directing certain departments, sub-editing and writing for them”. While it is generally accepted that “the woman-journalist is the outcome of the woman's papers”, Smith (1898: 13) reflected, the “guiding male hand” had yet to be withdrawn from the “editorial helm”. By 1919 Lillian Arnold (1919: 34), herself the editor of the upmarket periodical *Ladies' Field*, pronounced the beginning of a “‘new era' of journalism for women” as a generation of “keen young women who have been quick to see the potentialities offered... seize them and leap to a success unknown in degree to the older school”.

A glance at fashion writer Alison Settle's contacts book from the later 1930s confirms this optimism as Settle listed a dozen or so female editors at the helm of women's magazines. These included Miss Sutherland at *Argosy*, *Mother and Home*, *Women's Journal* and *Women's Pictorial*, Miss Wibberly at *Everywoman's*, Miss Jones at *Housewife*, Miss Head at *Homes and Gardens*, Miss K. Webb at *Lilliput*, Miss Grieve at *Mother*, Miss Cairns at *Weldon's Ladies Journal*, Miss Panting at *Woman and Beauty*, Miss Chaloner at *Modern Woman*, Miss Mattingly at *Home Notes*, Miss Heald at *The Lady*, Miss Smith at *Oracle* and Miss Kennedy at *Glamour* (ASA: 1942). *Times* journalist Phyllis Deakin (1984) named Mrs. Barbara Vise as assistant editor at *Modern Woman* in the '30s, while Miss Gwen Ferguson sub-edited *Home Chat* and held the post of assistant editor at *Women's Illustrated* before moving into advertising in 1939 (W.A.C.L. papers). Photographic portraits of five women editors appear in George Dilnot's 1925 history of the Amalgamated Press: Miss Winifred (Bid) Johnston at *Woman and Home*, *Woman's Weekly* and *My Home*, Miss Elsie Cooper at *Home Chat*, Miss A. S. McGlashon, Miss Maud Hughes and Miss Florence Taft as head of Bestway Patterns. The British editorial side of the American Hearst publications included Miss Reynolds (who rose to edit *Harper's Bazaar*), Miss Eleanor Town (the daughter of a Hearst executive), Mrs. James Rodney and Frances Head (niece of Alice Head) in prominent positions (Head, 1939: 246).

Unlike newspapers, where few women held positions of authority outside the woman's page, magazines even offered female journalists some hope of reaching managerial status. Julia Cairns became Editor-in-Chief of Weldon's Publications in the 1920s and was responsible for the issue of a dozen or so monthly magazines and fashion papers and the distribution of millions of paper patterns. One of the few women to hold an executive position, however, was Alice Head who became general assistant editor of the English *Good Housekeeping* magazine in 1924 with a salary of £12 a week and in the same year was offered the post of Managing Director of the National Magazine Co., earning a substantial but undisclosed sum (Head, 1939).

In 1927 Arnold Bennett, who as a young man had edited the controversial penny periodical *Woman* in 1896, confirmed the importance and influence of the "[w]omen's papers" and a female readership in an article in *Good Housekeeping*. Women's magazines, he declared were, "out of sight better than they were in the days when I sat on a throne", while the daily papers "flourish in the main by and for women" and fifty per cent of the advertisement space in the morning papers is "consecrated" to them (Bennett in Braithwaite et al, 1927/1986: 80). He attributed this to three main factors: an "exigent" and "critical" female readership that was "more conscious of themselves and their possibilities", the "quantity, quality and scope" of advertising, and competition from the "big dailies" which kept editorial "up to the mark". To what degree did a modern feminine press addressing a newly demanding and critical readership represent women's views, and to what extent did this bring feminist arguments into the mainstream? Northcliffe's eagerness to appoint women editors was firmly linked to the commercial possibilities of cultivating an authentically feminine 'point of view'. An economic remit, nevertheless, did not preclude other responses and commentators regularly associated the women's press and the new breed of female journalist with emancipation and women's widening sphere. Bennett's *Good Housekeeping* article was subtitled, 'not so much a discussion on journalism as a Thirty Years' survey of the Emancipation of Women'. Emilie Peacocke, editor of the Woman's Department of the *Daily Telegraph* and former woman's page editor of the *Daily Express*, and Myfanwy Crawshay who worked on the editorial side of

women's monthlies, encouraged female aspirants:

Of course the woman journalist is wanted. The more women's interests have widened the more important has she become. Her opportunities are not merely the result of improved conditions in journalism; they are also part and parcel of the change in the position and outlook of women in recent years. She is indispensable to editors because she can interpret the New Woman and her fuller life. (Crawshay, 1932: 7)

What a chance for the woman journalist who realised the market value of the march of the events as seen through a woman's eyes. Old-fashioned feminists may deplore this attitude, but the story as seen by a woman, let them remember, is not only wanted, it may be a fine piece of journalistic work. (Peacocke, 1936: 4)

Peacocke ascribed her male colleagues' enthusiasm to employ women to their fear of the female voter and her views. Women citizens remained an unknown and alarmingly unpredictable quantity for the male-dominated press, which felt that only women could convincingly understand and connect with these readers' views. The 'story as seen by a woman' was not only a saleable commodity but was essential if publishers were to appeal to an increasingly powerful and self-confident female readership; to give, that is, female citizens a 'voice'. The possibilities and problems of women's 'fuller lives' were endlessly debated in magazines, which covered such controversial topics as working wives, modern marriages where men kept house, the pleasures of the single life, divorce and birth control (family limitation) (see chapters 5 & 7). Women such as the novelist and broadcaster Ursula Bloom, who contributed features to *Home Chat* and many other magazines, and the socialist and feminist Leonora Eyles, who edited *Modern Woman's* advice column, wrote regularly on these themes. Significantly, both were modern women who lead unconventional lives supporting their families with their earnings from journalism (Bloom, 1960 & 1976, also see entries on Bloom and Eyles in Hammill *et al*, 2006).

Women's entry into journalism was confirmed and advanced by the foundation of two societies: the Society of Women Writers and Journalists (SWWJ) (1894) and the Women's Press Club of London (WPCL) (1943) (Hackney, 2006). Although the male-dominated Institute of Journalists was open to women, reports document that the organisation "did not engage the confidence of the ladies"; only 65 were members in 1894 and the SWWJ was founded (Livermore & Bowden, 1994: 1). The need for a club dedicated to female journalists, nevertheless, remained for despite numerous attempts women were not eligible to join the Press Club (the main society representing the profession) and by the early 1940s a female equivalent was formed. Members of the WPCL included Lady Rhondda, owner and editor of the literary magazine *Time and Tide* (Spender, 1984), Audrey Withers, May Marshall, Rebecca West, Mary Grieve, Julia Cairns, Ray Allister (agony aunt for *Modern Woman*) and *Woman's* first fashion editor, Alison Settle (Abeyuriya *et al*, 1994).

These societies established journalism as a respectable career for women and confirmed their status as modern professionals who were equal, if different, to men. They also performed an important role fostering a shared sense of female solidarity and strengthening women's collective cause, ambition and individual resolve. *Times'* journalist Phyllis Deakin (1984: 7-9, 14, 56-7), in her short history of the Women's Press Club, stated that its central aim was both to "uphold professional integrity" and "provide a meeting place for women of all sectors of the

press both in London and the provinces”, creating a “co-operative feeling” amongst women who, despite many years working “in the Street”, were often strangers. In a rousing speech to Press Club members Alison Settle, went further urging them that,

We must keep together – just notice how many ‘boys’ get the top jobs and not women, but I think we have every chance of absolute equality if we take it and insist upon it...the quality of our members is high. (Settle in Deakin, 1984: 34)

Settle’s words underline how the twin concepts of a ‘woman’s point of view’ and a ‘woman’s press’ represented a double bind for women, admitting them into journalism only to re-inscribe them as ‘different’ (Bingham, 2004; Tinkler, 1995). The concept of a gender differentiated press, however, was not an anomaly in the period when feminists argued for wages for motherhood and the need to value women’s domestic role (Kingsley Kent, 1993; Hannam, 1995; Beddoe, 1989; Bruley, 1999). The modern woman journalist was well-placed to articulate the contradictions and tensions in women’s lives at a time when they had become fully-fledged citizens, yet still held the main responsibility for the home.

‘A Very Good Job for a Woman’: training, pay and conditions

Profession, craft, a vocation, call it what name you will, journalism must be regarded by women as a business if its practice is to produce bread and butter, to say nothing of jam. (Peacocke, 1936: 90)

Attitudes to the woman journalist significantly changed in first decades of the twentieth century. Whereas, in 1902 Mrs. Belloc-Lowndes (1902: 127), writing in a somewhat consolatory tone, had addressed her article on journalism in the periodical *Leisure Hour* to those “compelled to earn their own living”, by 1936 Emilie Peacocke (1936: 50-1) struck a very different note, encouraging the woman journalist to be ambitious and expect an income that, at the very least, would cover her “essential needs and possibly those of her dependents”. A number of factors were responsible for this change including new training opportunities, better pay, improved conditions and the higher status that the modern female professional journalist enjoyed.

The pioneering University of London Diploma Course, established in 1920, was partly responsible, introducing journalism into higher education and encouraging female access. The two-year programme had initially been founded to help men back into careers after the War, but proved far more popular with women who made up more than half of its 400 graduates before it terminated in 1939 (Hunter, 1992: 689). Students were encouraged to specialise - a route adopted by many women - and the Diploma award signalled a move away from the idea of journalism as a calling that could only be learnt ‘on the job’, a situation that mitigated against women. As a member of the Course Committee, Peacocke was a firm supporter of modernisation. Qualifications, she argued, ensured that women would no longer suffer from “sex prejudice”, being demonstrably the equals of men; even she had to admit, however, that a female reporter was still unlikely to get a “big story” in preference to a man unless it happened to have a “feminine angle” (Peacocke, 1936: 90 & 113).

Many female journalists continued to be trained at private colleges and magazines advertised

correspondence courses for aspiring journalists and commercial artists (*fig. 24*). Miss Francis Low, author of many books and articles on journalism as a career for women, ran the South Molton Street school where Mary Grieve (1964: 32-3) received what she later described as a “rigorous” and “invaluable” training for six months in the principles and practice of journalism. This included instruction on the importance of style, discipline (in respect to word length), and the difference between a romantic and a mystery novel; valuable topics, no doubt, but hardly the training for a hard-nosed newspaper reporter. Graduates of the Oxbridge women’s colleges, meanwhile, counted for a small but significant number of women entering the profession (Hunter, 1992). For others, however, the costs of higher or private education would have been prohibitive and the new emphasis on training meant that those embarking on careers in journalism were for the most part middle-class (Altick, 1962). Even then, the female aspirant could encounter disapproval from fathers such as like Mary Grieve’s (1963: 15) who believed journalism an “unsuitable ambition”.

A smoother entry was afforded to those with family in the profession. Peacocke worked as a reporter at the *Northern Echo* where her father was the editor before moving to the *Daily Express*, aged 21. Sisters often went into journalism together, for example, Francis Low and her sister Florence, or Nora Heald and her three sisters (including Edith Shackleton) (Hunter, 1992: 688). Mary Stott, who edited *Woman’s Outlook* (the Co-operative Society’s women’s magazine) in the 1930s and went on to be the first woman’s page editor of the *Manchester Guardian* in 1957, came from a family of journalists who encouraged her ambitions (Hackney, interview with Stott, 1996; Stott, 1987). Mary Dilnot, who started out as a young sub on *Woman’s Weekly* in 1939 and went on to become editor, was the daughter of George Dilnot (editor of *Answers*); her uncle was a parliamentary correspondent and her sister also went into the business. Angela Wyatt, who began working on *Woman and Home* in the late 1930s, was the grand-daughter of a journalist. Even if a woman didn’t have relations in the profession, personal contacts were a distinct advantage. Of those working on *Woman’s Weekly* in the 1930s, Dilnot (1995) observed, “most, but not all, had got there by knowing somebody who knew somebody”.

Academic qualifications might provide the initial step, but a woman still had to acquire and hold down her first job and the tried and tested route of secretary - now with typing and shorthand - remained one of the most productive. Peacocke named numerous successful women journalists who began in this way and secretarial skills provided an entree for Angela Wyatt (1995), who started at 18 as the editor’s secretary’s junior, went on to become one of the subs on *Woman and Home*, and eventually rose to editor.

Once achieved, a staff position on a magazine offered opportunities for relatively well-paid and stimulating work. As a junior on *The Nursing Mirror* in 1925 Mary Grieve (1964: 42) considered her £3 5 shillings a week a “viable living wage”. Marked disparities in pay, however, existed. Odhams paid higher wages in the 1930s because it was a trade union house and the chapels had consistently pressed for rises even in the face of the economic slump. As a result it attracted ambitious female staff. Peggy Makins, who went on to become the renowned agony aunt Evelyn Home, started work at *Woman* in 1937 on a wage of £5 a week in her early twenties; a good deal more than the £1 10 shillings a week Mary Dilnot received as a sub on *Woman’s Weekly* in 1939, and a wage that compared favourably with the average male wage of between £3 to £4 a week (Gardiner, 2010: xv). When later in her career she received a salary of £250 a year, Makins (1975: 61) felt “plutocratic”. Far from an unsuitable ambition, by the 1930s journalism for the likes of Makins was proving to be an excellent career for a woman.

It was the work environment, nevertheless, as much as the wages that attracted many to women's magazines. Newspaper offices tended to be ill-equipped for feminine sensibilities. Peacocke (1936: 14-15) recounts how at the *Daily Express* anxieties over the propriety of placing a young woman in a room full of men meant that the pioneer was housed in a different office, alongside the Woman's Page Editor; her difficulties compounded by the fact that access was gained through the sports department where, "a first-class team of fine sportsmen extended a cordial welcome to the newcomer". Magazines, in contrast, generally employed a small staff and most women had to be flexible. There were three subs when Dilnot began work at *Woman's Weekly* in the late 1930s and at *Woman and Home* Wyatt was part of a team of around twenty. Both women enjoyed the variety of 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 *Women's 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 had a freedom.

The sense of freedom and opportunities for friendship that magazine work offered were also appreciated by Peggy Makins. She 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 (Makins, 1975: 35). Mary Grieve (1964: 46) found the experience of returning to her family home and domestic routine so horrific after the first excitement and independence of working as a journalist in London and earning her own wage that she experienced recurring nightmares in which she relived the anxiety of being confined within the home and having no work or, as she put it, "no real life".

Freedom, however, came at a price. "There are no 'cushy' jobs in journalism", Lilian Arnold (1919: 34) warned, characterising the profession as one that demanded "all one's energies and all one's time". Alice Head confirmed that complete dedication was expected, regardless of the aspirant's gender. She believed that young women employees could be divided into two categories, those who were filling in time until they got married and those who were ambitious, career-minded and put in overtime in order to prove their occupation "really means something to them" (Head, 1939: 194). The journalist Rhona Churchill was told that she would not have got her job on the *Daily Mail* in the 1930s had her editor known she was shortly to be engaged (Taylor, 1996: 288). There were some exceptions. Peggy Makins, following the prevailing custom, wanted to leave work on marriage but was encouraged to remain; she, however, never wanted children. Unlike teaching, nursing and the civil service where a marriage bar operated in the 1930s, an unofficial bar existed on magazines such as *Woman and Home* according to Wyatt, and the main reason women left *Woman's Weekly*, in Dilnot's view, was to start a family. In order to be taken seriously and progress in her career a woman had to remain single, even when working on predominantly domestic women's magazines. The modern ethos of professionalism did little to alleviate, and may even have exacerbated, the dilemma for women journalists forced to choose between family and career.

One partial solution was freelance work as an outside contributor on a commission and non-

commission basis, and many women took this route. In 1898 Arnold Bennett had predicted a rise in the numbers of women journalists working freelance, and Lilian Arnold (1919: 34) grouped women journalists into two main categories: 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 (Moseley, 1926). The work could be regular and of long duration; Mrs. Marryat, the agony aunt on *Woman's Weekly* was a freelance who continued for years (Dilnot, 1995). Freelancers also handled much of the correspondence on magazines. 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 outside freelancers (Wyatt, 1995). Crawshay (1932: 14) 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. If regular income was needed, however, a permanent staff job was preferable as salaries, conditions and possibilities for promotion gradually improved.

“Write as Simply as you Talk”’: expert women and a new journalistic style

Women’s papers are now “written”. And in every way women journalists are far more expert than they were ... a woman who can produce a column of mingled expertise, sense, and stylistic brilliance, with a beginning and an end, really counts on this earth – where men still have the semblance of power. (Bennett, 1927/1986: 80)

Above all, it was the modern woman journalist’s ability to write clearly and grammatically in an expert manner that was, “agreeable to read and easy to understand” that distinguished her from the ‘lady journalist’ of pre-War days, in Bennett’s opinion (1927: 79). As early as 1902 Mrs. Belloc Lowndes (1902: 122-5) had voiced similar views when she warned girls that “a pretty literary style and the power of graphic description” were no longer “sufficient equipment for the would-be woman journalist”. While, there was more than a note of hard-edged professionalism in Lillian Arnold’s (1919: 34-5) pronouncement that, “the writer who can turn out pithy paragraphs in the fewest possible words will find her salary in inverse ratio”. The “power to hustle” and be “on the spot”, Arnold argued, was “infinitely more value than a gift for euphemism or a sense of rhythm in prose”. Julia Cairns declared her most significant lesson as a freelance was to “write as simply as you talk” (Peacocke, 1936: 127). A thoroughly modern sentiment, this typified the writing style of women journalists who increasingly allied themselves with developments in commercial media: film, radio and advertising, rather than ‘high flown’ literary culture. This section will explore the characteristics of the new style of women’s journalism, arguing that it articulated a ‘voice’ for women that was informal yet informed, confident in its dealings with the outside world yet conscious of the cares of the home and which, perhaps more than either film or radio, represented a distinctly modern feminine viewpoint and vernacular in the first half of the twentieth century.

Recognisably modern in its simplicity and directness, the new journalism responded to a reconfigured relationship between journalists and their readers that was less hierarchical and more intimate; something at which those writing for magazines excelled (see chapter 3 for readers’ take on this). The concern to write clearly, informally and engagingly about everyday events was not new, but had a precedent in the ‘human interest’ story of the 1890s, which in

Britain and the U.S. had expanded readerships amongst women, immigrants and the working class (LeMahieu, 1988; MacGill Hughes, 1940; Schneirov, 1994).

Magazine journalists, however, faced new conditions: an increasingly demanding readership and competition for advertising from newspapers that were also eager to attract female readers. Mary Agnes Hamilton, the assistant editor of the periodical *Common Sense*, observed that newspaper publishers were well aware that sales returns were determined by the degree to which a publication appealed to women. Editors, Hamilton argued, should investigate the “psychology” of women’s reading (a technique used in advertising) and elide ‘human interest’ with fiction’s emotional appeal to lure them away from novels and attract them to news. Events should be made “human” and the “drama of personalities” brought out in order that readers could “escape from the unsatisfactory world of self” into the “world of public events”. Women want a world that “moves, is alive, changes and stirs”, she urged (Hamilton, 1919: 41 & 43). The new approach infused all aspects of the women’s press. Popular journalism was represented as a craft, and the aspirant assured that lightness of style did not necessarily mean low standards (Crawshay, 1932). Even gossip was modernised. The “modern gossip feature”, Peacocke wrote (1936: 28) is a “versatile, vital, stimulating, wholesome and healthy” branch of the journalist’s craft, which imparts news about “phases of modern social life” in a “chatty informative style” and “friendly spirit”. Crisp and informative, the new style could also be intimate, even emotional, getting under the skin, and entering the hearts and minds of modern individuals. Features such as the “heart-to-heart” talk giving advice on “many problems and perplexities, emotional, philosophical, psychological, domestic, aesthetic and financial” became popular, something that according to Peacocke (1936: vii) emerged from the fashion in “newspaper reader appeal” and which, due to her assumed innate ability to empathise, ideally suited the woman journalist.

Writers were told to inspire women, to understand their day-to-day problems and instruct them on how to bring value to their lives, “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). While Hamilton argued for ‘human interest’ in news stories, magazine editor Myfanwy Crawshay (1932: 27) urged journalists that “rudimentary facts about housekeeping and other feminine matters” was no longer sufficient, their writing now had to have “news value”; another idea co-opted from advertising. Everyday life had to be dramatised to appear exciting for an audience hungry for news of the latest progress (technological or otherwise) and the search for what was ‘new’ and ‘different’ took precedence in editorial that, like advertising, sought to stimulate readers’ intellectual interests and engage them emotionally. This was particularly evident in the development of the advertorial, whereby advertising and editorial were united (visually and conceptually) and the increased visual impact accorded to advertising (see following section). The reader was respected as a professional in her own field. Crawshay (1932: 28) warned journalists not to talk down to women:

...don’t tell the housewife how to manage her home and children, offering her a cross between a sermon and a lecture which suggests that she is inefficient and simple-minded. If she were she wouldn’t listen to you. You will do better to take it for granted that she knows her job and find something to tell her of fresh interest.

Mary Grieve (1964: 40) described an “evangelistic” attitude to readers at *Woman* where they were accorded the “highest respect”. While journalists aimed to reproduce the informal tone of ‘talk between friends’, this did not diminish their responsibility to be well-informed and dispense reliable advice. If the reader was a professional the specialist editor had to be even

more qualified, and the value of 'expert knowledge' increased.

The 'specialist branches' of writing for women on the home, fashion and society were well established by the turn of the century. From 1919 on, however, it on a more scientific and evidence-based tone as self-improvement became a professional rather than an ethical issue. Fashion, for instance, which Lillian Arnold (1919: 34-35) described as the most highly paid journalism that was "more or less exclusive to women", was a "science" that required knowledge of a technical and business kind. Domestic expertise dominated the 'service' monthlies that emerged in the 1920s and the comprehensive household service offered by the British Good Housekeeping Institute (1924) was particularly influential. The concept of specialist writing was formalised into a departmental structure with sections presided over by autonomous editors. The experts remit was far-reaching and her expertise could derive from a variety of sources. Mrs. Cottington Taylor, *Good Housekeeping's* cookery editor, produced books of recipes that were "thoroughly tested" in the Institute's "model kitchens", while Lillian Mattingly, the cookery editor at *Modern Home*, endorsed Stork margarine in adverts that appeared in *Woman*; her books on home cooking were free with a coupon (Braithwaite *et al*, 1988: 80). Mary Dilnot (1995) recalled that *Woman's Weekly's* beauty editor in the 1930s had been a chemist while, more creatively, the fashion editor was an ex-gaiety girl who was particularly adept at make-do-and-mend. Having specialist knowledge to offer was productive territory for the freelance. Writing on careers for girls, Florence Jack (1940: 512), who contributed to *Modern Woman* and was *Good Housekeeping's* first cookery editor, claimed that the "Special Writer" who dealt with fashion, domestic or other areas was by far the most lucrative employment for a journalist outside steady staff work.

The expert's persona in the cheaper weeklies was invariably an editorial construct that was calculated to appeal to a publication's target readership and maintain continuity, but was flexible enough to change over time. Editorship of *Home Chat's* fashion page, for instance, passed from the aristocratic sounding 'Camilla and Lady Betty' to the youthful 'Mabs' (fig. 25) in the early 1920s, reflecting the magazine's growing readership among working girls and 'young marrieds' who identified with Mabs's modernity rather than an out-moded model of ladyship. Language enhanced identification. Vanity Fayre, who edited *Home Chat's* beauty page in the 1930s, 'spoke' intimately to readers referring to them as "my dears" and claiming that her page responded to the "many thousands" of letters she received. She also took care to be as inclusive as possible when giving advice, directing her "guide to good grooming", for instance, to "every age of femininity": women in their "exciting twenties – thrilling thirties – fascinating forties"; what happened after that was left troublingly vague! (HC 15.04.1939: 181). Cookery and childcare required the reassurance of more mature, maternal figures, and childcare features were usually written by a doctor or qualified nurse (White, 1970). Illustration and photography were used in tandem both to convince and encourage readers to imaginatively project themselves into the magazine. A line drawing of Gladys Owen, *Home Chat's* Housekeeping Expert, communicated a persona with just the right blend of homeliness and efficiency, while a carefully staged photograph of Owen (her back conveniently to the camera) advising the 'ideal housewife' on the contents of her store cupboard added authenticity (fig. 26).

Rigorously departmentalised, the 'service' monthlies and new weeklies placed ever more emphasis on the quality of their advice. Expertise guaranteed a publication's reliability and determined its 'personality', ensuring a loyal readership and locating it within the marketplace. *Modern Woman* advertised itself as "the magazine that HELPS and ENTERTAINS and emphasised its experts' professional qualifications in the 1920s (MW 05.1929: 27). It listed 9

Service Departments divided into 5 areas of interest: housewifery and child craft, fashion and appearance, home decoration, 'personal' and the children's page. Editors used their own names and photographs depicting, for instance, the 'Good Looks' editor Mansel Beaufort or the agony aunt Ray Allister, as feminine, smart and respectable: the epitome of modern efficiency and reliability, were calculated to appeal to the publication's modern-minded middle-class readership (*fig. 27*). Leonora Eyles, who edited *Modern Woman's* correspondence page from 1925 as well as writing for the newspapers such as the *Daily Herald* and weekly magazines, shed her bluestocking appearance and became increasingly glamorous as she moved to the more fashion conscious pages of *Woman's Own* in the 1930s (*fig. 28*). The construction of female identity in largely male professions, as Joan Rivière's (1927) work reveals, requires a degree of acting, artifice, humour and even self-mockery to deflect the antagonism of men, and many women in journalism, advertising and related professions adopted and consciously performed a negotiated feminine yet modern appearance in these years (see chapter 5).

Photographs of *Woman's* experts, collectively termed the 'Council of Seven', appeared in the first issue alongside descriptions of their qualifications, experience and aptitudes (*W* 05.06.1937: 4). An ethos of helpful service and an aura of intimacy prevailed. "*Woman* has a mission", editorial declared referring to the publication in the first person, "she is here to help you in every way possible. Consult her in all your troubles and perplexities, no matter what they may be". The 'Council' – component parts of the ideal publication-as-woman – confirmed the brand and gave it a 'face' (*fig. 29*). Their advice was represented both as excitingly up-to-date and practically relevant. Moira Meighn, for instance, combined a career training army cooks with broadcasting, lecturing and giving the first television cookery demonstration. Kathleen Pearcy, the resident "expert on the art of living", travelled the world collecting "big ideas" about furnishing and decoration but used her "practical knowledge of the problems and possibilities of the average house" to adapt these to "small homes" (*W* 05.06.1937: 4). By the later 1930s, when advertiser Anne Edwards replaced Alison Settle as fashion editor, information about an expert's professional qualifications was perhaps less important than the perception that her persona matched the needs and requirements of the target readership. No longer a 'lady', the modern woman journalist expressed the 'woman's point of view' on developments at home and in the wider world with expert precision and in a manner that was intended to be straight-forward, empathetic and widely appealing. Whereas, the intrepid amateur had ventured into the field armed only with notebook, self-taught shorthand and the dawning realisation that she had "neither the knowledge nor the mental resource to compete with male journalists", the career professional sallied forth confident in the worth of her specialist knowledge, her ability to craft a 'pithy paragraph' that would stir her audience, and her ability to represent the 'woman's point of view'. Expecting better pay and conditions, and with her own professional networks, she was the product of an industrialised, highly capitalised press. When Neil Munro lectured Mary Grieve on the limited opportunities open to women journalists in 1919, he at least had one thing right: writing the 'bits about weddings and ladies dresses' continued to be women's work. Unlike Arnold Bennett, however, Munro failed to foresee the real significance of such matters, as the advertising industry almost doubled in the interwar years (Dunbar, 1977). By writing the bits about weddings and dresses and much more besides, women made "a major contribution to the changing habits and values of Britain", according to Grieve (1964: 15). In the 1920s and 1930s the women's papers really were, as Elizabeth Peacocke (1936: 14) pronounced them, the perfect place for ambitious

women in the “era of modern journalism”.

2.3 *Understanding the Female Consumer: Women in Advertising*

There is probably no profession in which the percentage of women holding responsible positions is so high as it is in advertising. This is, no doubt, largely due to the fact that it is of comparatively modern growth, and women have not had to overcome the prejudices, glorified by the name of ‘tradition,’ to the same extent as in some other professional walks of life. (Wood, 1925: 120)

In a series of articles exploring ‘Advertising as a career for Women’ published in the trade journal *Modern Advertising* in 1925, Ethel M. Wood, a Director of the Samson and Clark agency, enthused about the number of women entering the industry. Wood painted a picture of a modern profession liberated from gender prejudice, which offered hard-working and able women opportunities for rewarding employment and successful careers. Contemporaries such as Sir William Crawford, head of the Crawfords agency, and Viscountess Rhondda, the proprietor of the progressive literary journal *Time and Tide*, supported Wood’s view; the latter declared that, in its “higher branches” at least, advertising was “just about the one profession in which women have equal chances with men” (Nevett, 1982: 148). The important role of women in British advertising, however, has largely been ignored by historians of advertising and consumer culture until recent years. Advertising women played an important and active part in developing the industry and mediating women’s relationship with modern consumption. This section will focus on women in advertising, exploring how and why the profession opened to them in these years, and assessing how changing attitudes to female advertisers and consumers impacted on women’s magazines.

The precise number of women working in advertising in Britain in the first decades of the century is hard to assess. Most historians agree, however, that they entered the profession in sizable numbers in the 1920s, many retaining the managerial and executive positions they had gained during the First World War (Bigham, 1994; Nevett, 1982). Like journalists women advertisers tended to be highly educated, coming from high schools, universities and public schools, and many had literary ambitions. The crime writer Dorothy L. Sayers, for instance, worked as a copywriter for an advertising agency and her novel *Murder Must Advertise* (1933) drew on the experience. Advertising men continued to outnumber women yet, because female consumers were considered principally responsible for the purchasing decisions made in the home, agencies recruited women believing them to be essential for creating ‘woman appeal’. This was largely driven by the new science of behavioural psychology, which came from America (Mazur Thomson, 1996). From the turn of the century British agencies had expanded their activities from simply purchasing media space to include new skills and services such as copywriting, artwork and research about media and consumer features; understanding consumer psychology added to their portfolio of sales appeal (Turner, 1965; Dunbar, 1979; Smith, 1932; Russell, 1919). Market research, consumer profiling and the study of psychological motivation, nevertheless, was in its infancy in Britain compared with America (Schudson, 1981; Pease, 1976). The Marketing Information and Research Agency was set up in London in 1938 to introduce the new methods (Nevett, 1982: 152). In the absence of more sophisticated methodology advertising executives looked to women who, it was widely believed, had a ‘natural’ ability to comprehend the “infinite variety of the sex” that has “long been the despair of men” and pre-empt their purchasing decisions (Wood, 1927; Greenby, 1927). Just as women journalists represented the ‘woman’s point of view’ in editorial, so

women advertisers were tasked with understanding the tastes and preferences of female consumers (Wood, 1925: 120).

More significant even than their numbers was women's presence at every level and in all areas of advertising. Openings existed for women in agencies, canvassers selling space on newspapers and periodicals, as copywriters, consultants, and in the advertising departments of large businesses (Ward Basset, 1925). Women were employed in "all and any" of the stages of preparing an advertising campaign (Wood, 1925: 74). Opportunities also existed as commercial artists working in fashion studies, display and exhibition design companies or freelancing and, according to Wood (1927), women commanded high fees. Important agencies such as Crawfords, Highams and Pritchard Wood employed women as space-buyers, account executives, production managers and in their accounts departments (Higham, 1925; Saxon Mills, 1954). William Crawford was particularly eager to engage women and, like the influential J. Walter Thompson agency in America, Crawfords had a 'Women's Department', which was managed by Margaret Havinden, wife of the designer Ashley Havinden. Other women at Crawfords included Frances Jackson, an American copywriter who worked with Havinden in 1926, and Margaret's sister Florence Sangster (Bigham, 1994: 21). Florenece Sangster was profiled in *Modern Woman* in 1925 as a successful professional business woman who, nevertheless, managed to maintain her femininity (see chapter 5).

Women not only worked on campaigns directed at female consumers, they also held executive posts. "There is scarcely any occupation in which women have made a stronger mark", Advertising Executive Arthur Ward Basset (1925: 533) reflected, and "Every year increases the number of those who hold important positions such as directorships in the great advertising houses". Florence Sangster rose from the position of book keeper in 1915 to become Managing Director of Crawfords in the 1920s, going on to become Vice Chairman. Miss L. B. Reid, who entered Crawfords as a young accountant, also rose to the height of Director, while Ethel Wood, Miss J. A. Reynolds and Mrs. H. D. Wood were on the Board of Directors at Samson Clark. To what degree these women's views differed from their male colleagues is difficult to assess. Ethel Wood, who had considerable experience in political and philanthropic publicity work, however, had a keen interest in women and the opportunities available to them that extended well beyond the realm of advertising. She chaired government inquiries and research groups and worked as a design consultant with the aim of improving the organisation and management of the home throughout the interwar years. In 1943 this culminated in her polemical publication *Mainly for Men*, written on behalf of the Committee on Woman Power, which argued persuasively that, "The War crisis has simply underlined the archaic attitude towards women and the deliberate restriction of opportunities in many fields of activity." Agencies were clearly aware of the publicity value of their female employees; a Samson Clark booklet, for instance, proudly announced that their presence gave a "broader vision" and "more accuracy" to decisions at a time when, "the women's problems and the feminine viewpoint so frequently demand consideration" (Bigham, 1994: 23).

As with journalism, women's entry into advertising resulted in the foundation of professional women-only societies and clubs. The Women's Advertising Club of London (WACL) was established in 1923 and soon adopted the slogan "To widen the scope of advertising vision", suggesting advertising's equivalent of the 'woman's point of view' (Bingham, 1994: 26). The Club had a membership of between 35 and 45 women, nearly half of whom worked for agencies, while the rest were advertising managers for women's magazines, department stores and large businesses. Members included: Mrs. Alice Head (National Magazine Co.), Mrs. Beatrice Warde (Monotype), Miss Wichello (Elizabeth Arden), Miss Dougall (MacFisheries), Mrs. McAlpine (Derry and Toms), Mrs. Havinden and M. K. Pearce (Crawfords). WACL, which had been founded in association with the 1924 International Advertising Convention

organised by the Advertising Clubs of the World - the women ran a 'woman's section' of the Convention – held monthly meetings with invited speakers. A study circle evolved and the Club offered facilities for members to improve their professional knowledge and skills (Wood, 1925). Advertising woman Beatrice Bowman who, aged 16 had started work as a Fleet Street office messenger after the First World War, recalled how important joining the WACL had been for her career, enabling her to make contacts, sell space and gain the respect of male colleagues. Two thousand people attended the International Convention according to Bowman. A photograph taken at the official luncheon for women members shows a packed room in which, as the caption proudly announced, "Everyone present was actively engaged in the profession of advertising" (Oswald, 1925: 419).

Society archives demonstrate that women held important positions in the advertising departments of newspapers and periodicals. Miss Marion Jean Lyon had the coveted position of advertising manager at *Punch*. Edith Fry was advertising manager at *Everywoman*, while Betty Thatcher, WACL president from 1936-7, held the post at *Woman*. Beatrice Bowman worked as a freelance Advertising Manager for *Housewife*. Miss Dorothy Freeborn (Mrs. Metcalfe) worked her way up in the ranks. Starting out as a Junior Rep. at George Newnes, she graduated to work on *Miss Modern* in 1932. After a spell as Advertising Manager for *Dress and Beauty* (Victory Publishing Co.), by 1936 she was Chief Rep. for C. Arthur Pearson, going on to become Advertising Manager at *Modern Woman* in 1947 (WACL Archive, HAT). Photographs of the "General Office of the Advertising Dept." and "Making-up" advertisement pages for what is described as a "well-known Periodical" (most probably *Good Housekeeping*) in one of Ethel Wood's articles on women in advertising, shows a department staffed entirely by women, suggesting that, at some magazines at least, advertising was predominantly a female realm (figs. 30 & 31).

How did women advertisers envisage their role in the profession and was their attitude to female consumers distinctive? In her analysis of the Women's Dept at the American J. Walter Thompson agency, Jennifer Scanlon (1995: 183-5) highlights the "social service goals" of advertising in the period. Advertising executives encouraged employees to contemplate the social and educational importance of their work and, in Scanlon's (1995: 171) words, "a missionary spirit" permeated consumer culture. Progressive women with backgrounds in suffrage or social work adopted a 'woman-centred' viewpoint. Frances Maule, who moved from newspaper journalism to join the Thompson team, for instance, chose advertising because she believed it was better placed "to improve the position of women". While Helen Lansdowne Resor, founding Director of Thompson's Women's Department, attributed her success to her ability to supply the "feminine point of view" in words, ideas and illustrations, something that she regarded as answering a real need amongst women (Scanlon, 1995: 190). For these women advertising had an important educative role, helping to eliminate drudgery and improve standards of housing, dress and childcare by providing female consumers with knowledge of the comforts, conveniences and luxuries of domestic life, and creating a desire to participate in these. The provision of knowledge and the stimulation of desire were two elements that, according to readers, women's magazines successfully specialised in (see chapter 3).

In Britain, Ethel Wood (1925: 180) shared the concept of a "service" ethos in advertising, and the feminist, social reformer and magazine agony aunt Leonora Eyles viewed advertising as a means of improving women's lives (see chapter 7). Wood's notion of 'service', however, at least as expressed in the advertising press, was less overtly feminist than her American colleagues, and more concerned with the need to establish advertising as a "legitimate business" and a "public service". In common with Reith's vision of national broadcasting, Wood saw

advertising as a means of promoting a national culture of “social service and self-respect” (Cardiff and Scannell, in Curran *et al*, 1987). She never tired of reinforcing the value of dedication and hard work, urging women advertisers that the most important thing was “the spirit in which one serves”. This was a time when business people saw no discrepancy between good business and the public good and, along with many others, Wood was sincere in her belief that advertising, if conducted by those who “understood human nature” with “sincerity” and the “sympathy and imagination that enables one to see the other fellow’s point of view”, would be both beneficial and successful (Wood, 1925: 74, 121). “Any touch of patronage or presupposed ignorance”, moreover, was “a mistake” she warned in a later article discussing the problems of advertising to women (Wood, 1927: 214).

Wood, like Lady Rhondda, was an equalitarian feminist. Critical of her male colleagues’ “instinctive desire” to employ women “simply because they *were* women” she, nevertheless, acknowledged women advertisers’ “natural general equipment”, by which she meant their insight into their own sex which, supplemented by hard work and experience, made them better informed than men about the “needs of home and family life” as well as “keener and sterner critics” of domestic standards (Wood, 1925: 121). She advised advertising women to do everything in their power to understand consumers, including undertaking their own ‘psychological research’:

Watch your own mental processes; study and try to understand those of other people with whom you come in contact; strive to analyse waves of public opinion and see what has led to their formation, tracing back outward influences to their mental origin; watch how advertisements impress your circle of acquaintances and endeavour to satisfy yourself of the reasons; think of ‘the public’ as a complex but interesting and lovable friend, and address yourself to that friend...One never knows when a stray item of information one has picked up, a train of thought suggested by some book or play, an incident one has witnessed, or a dream that has flitted across one’s sleep-bewildered mind, may not prove invaluable in suggesting a train of ideas. (Wood 1925: 178)

Advertising, as Wood conceived it, was deeply embedded in the fabric of everyday life, which included the irrational, subconscious world that dreams revealed, and the woman advertiser in tune with her own sex had particular skills and insights to bring to the profession.

The contradictions Wood wrestled with as she struggled to resolve her views about the ‘special place’ women had been accorded in a male-dominated profession indicate the dilemma women in advertising faced. Prevailing perceptions of women advertisers also suggest the problems involved in applying scientific methodology to a sphere of activity that was increasingly perceived as ‘feminine’ and, as such, governed by ‘irrational’ impulses that were hard to quantify. These difficulties emerge in Wood’s assessment of the female consumer as someone who was responsive to advertising because she was “more adventurous”, “less conventional” and “more emotional” than men but who, at the same time, was unreliable being willing to “gamble light-heartedly with her health, her appearance, her house and her happiness”. Indeed about the only thing that the woman consumer refused to “take risks with”, she archly observed, was “her children’s food” (Wood, 1927: 215-16). Advertisers were faced with finding out what the capricious female consumer wanted and magazines, with their purportedly close relationship with readers, were ready to assist in this task.

Wood outlined a number of “selling appeals” including: ‘educative’, price, style, humour, romance and ‘confidential appeal’. While “educational copy” was largely reserved for the new,

but expensive, labour-saving appliances and was considered promote improved living standards, “romance”, which was used principally for beauty products, was deemed the most successful means of appealing to consumers. Wood knew her audience. Commenting on the “extraordinarily slow growth” in take-up of labour-saving appliances in Britain, she advocated that advertisers use “indirect economy” and “leisure” rather than “time saving” appeals (Wood 1927: 213-14); Sue Bowden and Avril Offer (1996) in their analysis of consumption patterns for electric goods confirm that items such as radios, which were associated with leisure rather than saving time, were successful with the majority of women in the period (see chapter 4). Whereas, from the 1920s research in America focused on the concept of ‘irrational’ consumption and the manipulation of unconscious desires (Schudson, 1984; Pease, 1976; Ewen, 1976), research on psychological method in Britain advocated a combination of rational and irrational appeals. In a series of articles in *Modern Advertising* Frank Watts (1925: 377), a psychology lecturer at the University of Manchester, stated that the successful advertisement would first elicit desires (for health, power, riches, beauty or wisdom) and then appeal to the ‘intellect’, producing the “conviction” that was a necessary preliminary to the decision to buy. Ethel Wood (1925: 123) reiterated this when she declared that, while intellectual appeal was needed to convince the consumer that certain goods had “value”, emotional appeal was equally essential for stimulating the “desire to possess and use them”. Magazines, with their unique combination of the ‘rational’ arguments of editorial with the emotional appeal of fiction, provided a perfect environment for the new advertising, something that editors were increasingly aware of, and ready to exploit.

In an article in the trade journal *Commercial Art*, Gwen Morton Spencer (1934: 169-70), the Fashion Editor of the ‘high class’ fashion and society monthly *The Queen*, represented the female consumer as informed and discriminating *and* subject to unconscious desires, in order to sell magazines to advertisers. Women, she declared, were “knowledgeable spenders” who studied periodical advertisements as if they were “textbooks” because shopping or buying things (she acknowledged a difference), was “an essentially feminine sport”. Nevertheless, they were also fickle and unreliable for, as Morton Spencer opined, a woman will “never forgo her feminine prerogative of changing her mind”. Women’s publications, with their specialist departments catering to ‘feminine interests’, romantic stories appealing to readers’ hopes and dreams and their intimate knowledge of, and relationship with, their readers provided the ideal solution:

The publishers of women’s papers and magazines are well versed in feminine psychology. They have worked out pretty accurately the main appeals for the sex they cater for. They know that, speaking generally, one or more of the following impulses influences women: mother love, personal vanity, the home-making instinct, acquisitiveness, with its politer manifestation of economy, art or craftsmanship, romance and amusement, intellectual hungers. (Morton Spencer, 1934: 169-70)

A collection of impulses, the woman reader, Morton Spencer argued, could be shaped and directed to suit advertisers’ requirements. Unlike the majority of contemporary commentators who highlighted magazines’ visual appeal, however, she emphasised the importance of reading for women; something that the readers I interviewed confirmed (see chapter 3) (Meehan in Maxwell, 1904; Emanuel, 1934). It was men who, in Morton Spencer’s (1934: 171) view, were “caught” by pictures. Morton Spencer represents the ‘up-market’ sector of the women’s press, which depended heavily on advertising revenue. Editors of higher circulation weekly

publications, as the following section will demonstrate, were more scrupulous in their dealings with advertisers. Her article, nevertheless, demonstrates female editors' conviction that they understood and sometimes deliberately manipulated their readers' emotional, intellectual and psychological needs.

In his history of advertising in Britain, T. R. Nevett (1982: 149) described the profession in these years as "very much a people business" in which those with flair and ability could succeed irrespective of gender. The gender of the woman advertiser, however, seems hard to ignore, despite Wood's protestations to the contrary. Women advertisers, like women journalists, were employed because of their supposedly innate abilities to understand female psychology and the 'woman's point of view'. For Jennifer Scanlon (1994: 171) this resulted in a "paradoxical position" for advertising women who, despite their 'missionary' zeal, achieved professional success and independence by encouraging other women to become dependent consumers. Scanlon's assessment, however, ignores the wider structural, social, cultural and imaginative shifts that resulted from women's entry into, and prominent position within, advertising in these years. Like her journalistic sisters, the modern woman advertiser was a professional and, as such, her opinions, values and knowledge of female consumers were listened to and taken seriously. Women such as Helen Resor in America and Ethel Wood in Britain truly believed that through advertising they could raise living standards and improve the quality of women's lives. The advertising woman, moreover, along with the woman consumer was integral to advertising's rhetoric of modernity. She confirmed and exemplified the industry's status as respectable yet, at the same time, daringly innovative and up-to-date. In magazines she became a key figure of feminine modernity that, as the heroine of romantic fiction or the subject of career features, fired the popular imagination (see chapters 7 & 5). Her presence embodied the centrality of women in a modern consumer society; a vital reminder of the necessity to pay attention to their interests and ideas and attempt to understand their conscious and unconscious needs. Modern advertising, like the modern popular press, was highly feminised.

The interests of readers and advertisers, nonetheless, were often antithetical and editors of commercial magazines were caught between their need for advertising revenue and their responsibility to their readers. The next section will explore the contested relations between editorial and advertising, assessing the extent to which mass produced magazines 'sold' readers to advertisers, validated women's interests, needs and desires, or fell somewhere between the two extremes.

2.4 Mr. Typical, Mrs. Housewife and the Needmuch Children: Selling Audiences to Advertisers

Here we are Mr. Cityman, Mr. Typical, Mrs. Housewife, and the Needmuch Children - we are a group of representative people, the people who keep the wheels of commerce moving...we are the people to whom you are anxious to sell your goods and talk about them to us through our favourite paper...we are the family of 350,000 (net sales) often more but never less. (*Everybody's Weekly*, 1931)

The interwar years have been characterised as a time when advertising was reshaping the institutional structures of the media, changing the relationship between the media and its audiences. In their analysis of advertising in the period, Leiss, Kline and Jhally (1986: 103) claim that publications were no longer regarded by advertisers as products to be sold to readers, but instead "vehicles" organising audiences into clearly identifiable target groups that could be

“sold to advertisers”. Nevertheless, while publishers and their publicity managers were clearly working hard to sell magazine space, it is by no means clear that their publications only represented advertisers’ interests. Editors of high-selling weeklies, in particular, were acutely aware of the need to maintain integrity in order to retain their readerships, something that was increasingly important as women became more sophisticated and demanding critics of the press. The journalist Peggy Makins (1975: 174) maintained that *Woman’s* editorial team viewed advertising “almost as a threat to our customers” as they endeavoured to give each subscriber “a true knowledge of market values”. Advertisers, meanwhile, depended on the reputations of the publications in which they advertised to establish their emergent profession’s ethical credentials (Wood, 1925; Bishop, 1949; Russell, 1919). The tension between advertisers’ and readers’ needs became acute as, following the American model of magazine publishing, advertising achieved a more dominant presence in the 1930s and editorial and advertising merged to form a ‘composite image’ on the page (Stein, 1981 & 1989). This section and the next explore the conditions and debates that underpinned the interaction between editorial and advertising and the emergence of new patterns and a visual language of communication in women’s magazines. In her analysis of the American *Ladies’ Home Journal*, Sally Stein (1989: 146-149) contends that the practice of anchoring the bulk of advertising to a constant editorial presence drew the reader “closer to the marketplace” in ways that represented a form of “supervised mobility and “entrapment”. Here, in contrast, the focus is on the distinctive ‘environment’ of British magazines, which are regarded as hybrid texts that brought together diverse elements (editorial and advertising, photography and illustration, readers and writers, for instance), and potentially unsettled fixed identities in productive ways. The increased interweaving of editorial and advertising, it is proposed, combined feelings of entitlement to pleasure with a sense of discontent with current circumstances, prompting the viewer to imagine and desire a better future or improved life (Petro, 1989; Lavin, 1993). The new patterns of communication, Stein (1989: 153) argues, also altered reading habits as “page flow” improved and reading moved from something done in short bursts in ‘scraps of time’ to a lengthier engagement. Readers I interviewed confirmed their close attention to magazines, recalling how they used to ‘take it all in’, something that I argue must be understood in the context of a gender-differentiated experience of modernity (see chapter 3).

Advertisers in the period considered women’s magazines as integral to their business in ways that were qualitatively different from other periodicals. Writing in the trade journal *Modern Advertising* (1904: 122), E. L. Maxwell declared that, whereas a publication aimed at male readerships simply “adds to itself a volume of extraneous advertising”, advertising was a “part and a feature” of women’s magazines. The perceived affinity between readers and advertising in women’s magazines, however, may be read in several ways. On the one hand, it suggests that women were susceptible consumers but, on the other, it confers economic power and status, acknowledging that their dreams, aspirations and needs should be materialised, at least in the dream world of advertising and magazines. Advertisers, unsurprisingly, preferred to use the media that was read by the people who bought as well as used their products and publicity managers promoted the value of the targeted readerships of women’s magazines (Redmayne & Weeks, 1931). The concept of the modern independently-minded, fashion conscious modern woman with money to spend, and the progressive modern housewife who wanted to keep up with the latest trends, became the glue binding advertisers to publications, and a visual emblem of consumption based modernity (*AW* 21.10.1927: 104-5). Tellingly, the *Daily Mirror* selected the modern woman, depicted in characteristically streamlined, modernistic style, to promote its reader research service and advertising charges (*NPD* 1934: 313) (*figs.* 32 & 33).

Much of the credibility of the modern advertising industry as it moved from a business

concerned with creating “showy dress” to one that aimed to find the “right thing to say” based on concrete, reliable information, depended on its adoption of new scientific methodologies, such as market research. Publishers who conducted surveys about the class, sex and buying habits of their readers became increasingly valuable. Of the two surveys that appeared in 1924, one was produced by a newspaper publisher and the other by the American agency J. Walter Thompson. According to Major George Harrison (1931: xix), the British pioneer of market research, a “new spirit” of co-operation between national advertisers and publishers emerged in 1931 as, due to economic depression all members of the household, not just the wage-earner, became potential targets. *Good Housekeeping* and *Home Chat* printed reader-research questionnaires in their magazines in the 1930s, and other magazines sent out postal questionnaires (White, 1970). More comprehensively the Hulton Press undertook the *Hulton Press Readership Survey* (1948) and the *Daily Mail* produced *Selling to Britain*, a survey of consumer habits. Coupons and ‘readers replies’ were another means of understanding markets, and publicity managers used these to sell their publications to advertisers (Redmayne & Weeks, 1931).

Advertisers did not, however, have it all their own way. Publishers who readily offered reader profiles were notably reluctant to divulge reliable estimates of net sale circulations, the one thing that advertisers craved (Russell, 1919; Turner, 1965; Field, 1959). Pressure from the advertising industry became intense when in 1931 the British Audit Bureau of Circulations was finally established, yet magazine publishers remained resistant (Nevett, 1982; Reed, 1997; White, 1971). In his critical analysis of the value of the press as publicity media, the advertising executive Arthur Richardson (1925: 423-4) attributed the reticence of magazine publishers to a combination of conservatism and the fear of lost advertising revenue if circulations were revealed. 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; services that were intended also to assist readers by helping to control price and improving the appearance and reliability of magazines. The Good Housekeeping Institute Seal of Approval established in 1924 led the way in consumer guarantees and Advertising Director, Philip Emanuel promoted *Woman’s* scheme, which refunded readers who suffered loss through answering advertisements for goods in its columns, with the slogan, “All round value and a square guarantee for a straight line” in the magazine from 1938 (*W* 01.01.1938: 33) (*fig.* 34). The practice, nevertheless, was not without its detractors. While, Wood (1925: 120) considered guarantees a sign that the press was taking responsibility for the character of the ads they carried and their accuracy, Richardson (1925: 514) viewed them more cynically as “window-dressing”.

Competing against the larger (audited) circulations and relatively cheaper rates of newspapers, magazine publicity managers had to develop alternative strategies (Dunbar, 1977). One highly successful method was to offer reduced advertising rates for publications with similar readerships. Chas E. Mander of the Amalgamated Press was an early innovator, promoting ‘The Reliable Four’ (*Woman’s World*, *Home Companion*, *The Family Journal* and *Woman’s Companion*) with their “100% appeal to housewives” from the mid-1920s. The practice had various benefits. Issuing joint circulation figures enabled advertising managers to keep costs down and conceal ailing journals while attracting revenue to them and increasing circulations, making them less reliant on advertising. In 1925 Richardson (1925: 342) gave an estimated combined weekly circulation of 430,000 for the ‘Reliable Four’ which, according to an A.P. press ad had increased to 730,000 by 1927 (*AW* 21.10.1927: 105).

It was the distinctive qualities of the magazine ‘environment’: the relationship of editorial to advertising, text to image, and the close relationship with their readers that, nevertheless,

distinguished magazines, something publicity managers and editors were equally anxious to maintain. Periodicals' longer lives and multiple readerships, they argued, justified higher advertising rates; read in a context associated with leisure and pleasure, even lengthy copy would be received with interest and in a sympathetic frame of mind (Dilnot, 1925; Morton Spencer, 1934; Emanuel). Advertising Director Philip Emanuel (1934: 85) claimed that a magazine's "greater intimacy of appeal" facilitated a "more intimate and detailed job of selling", suggesting that the relationship of trust built up between a publication and its readership was its most attractive feature for advertisers.

Editorial endorsement was highly controversial because it endangered the integrity of a magazine. Attitudes diverged sharply depending on the nature of the publications and its readership. As we have seen, Gwen Morton Spencer (1934: 171, 174), the fashion editor of an expensive 'high class' monthly, shamelessly promoted editorial's "selling power" to advertisers, assuring that regular clients received endorsement as a matter of course. Those working on cheaper magazines with higher circulations had different views. Angela Wyatt (1995) considered endorsement unethical, declaring that it would never have happened on *Woman and Home* where circulation figures attracted advertising. Mary Grieve (1964: 106-7) 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. From its inception *Woman* had faced a "growing body of readers highly sceptical of editorial integrity", she later recalled, and the practice of scattering brand names through editorial "reduced confidence and trust" in the magazine.

Increased expenditure on advertising from the early 1930s (Harrison, 1931; Kalder & Silverman, 1948), however, did change the appearance and structure of magazines. The new science of consumer psychology demonstrated that the placement of advertisements influenced the degree to which their messages were absorbed, and encouraged greater cross-fertilization between editorial and advertising. Ads in the front section were more likely to be seen, and the best placement for "attraction value" was immediately before and after reading matter and on the covers (Greenly, 1929; Richardson, 1925). 'Smalls' (small insertions) were integrated with editorial matter at the end of a publication, which is still referred to today as the 'graveyard'. The upper half of the page was found to be more effective than the lower, and a message repeated successively on a smaller scale (such as four quarter page ads) was considered more successful than a larger 'single splash'; research into the reception of Starch ads found a difference in attention value to the proportion of 69% and 31% (Watts, 1925: 245).

Advertisements began to be distributed more evenly through the editorial pages and the technique of creating 'turn pages', that is, breaking up fiction and features and running them through the magazine to increase advertising revenue, became standard procedure. "Next matter" became established as the most effective placement, whereby goods were positioned as near as possible to editorial that was "germane to the products themselves", encouraging the development of specialist editorial departments focusing on cookery, homecare, dress or childcare, for instance. The practice of interweaving editorial and advertising risked irritating readers but saved money, *Woman* journalist Peggy Makins (1975: 181) recalled.

By the mid-1920s the advertorial, whereby the style and content of ads and editorial were designed to replicate one another, appeared in monthly magazines, which depended on advertising revenue to supplement smaller circulations and higher production costs. The layout and organisation of image and type in a 1929 *Modern Woman* editorial on vacuum cleaners by Warwick Holmes, the magazine's housekeeping expert, for instance, mirrors a full-page advertisement for Goblin Vacuum Cleaners on the facing page (figs. 35 & 36). Editorial recommendation was associated with, and enhanced, the message of advertising and

advertising's emotional appeal enlivened editorial. In this case, anxieties about different standards of cleanliness and 'hidden dirt' that are implicit in Holmes' editorial 'What the Eye Don't See...', are made explicit in the Goblin ad's uncompromising declaration that 'The dirt you can't see is the worst'! The magazine ran a regular consumer column, 'We'll Tell You' giving details of costs and where to purchase items discussed in editorial and, like *Good Housekeeping*, had its own mail-order shopping service in the 1920s that sent out featured goods to those outside London. By the 1930s even the high-selling *Woman's Weekly* had succumbed to the advertorial for selling its own publications. An etiquette feature, 'What Can I Talk About: something for those who never know just what to say', on close inspection turns out to be a surreptitious advert for *The New Popular Educator*, an Amalgamated Press self-help series (WW 25.02.1933: 328).

In the absence of reliable circulation figures and at a time when, despite the rhetoric, the 'science' of advertising was in its infancy, a magazine's 'environment', that is the quality of its editorial and the advertising it carried, its ethos and tone of voice, was a vital indicator of its readership, and means of establishing value for advertisers. Their declared commitment to scientific methods of market research, notwithstanding, contemporary advertising theorists Redmayne & Weeks (1931: 157) instructed advertisers to gauge the class of person to which a paper circulated from the "general tone of the editorial matter" and the amount and "class" of extant advertising. And, whereas, cultural historians have tended to attribute the shift to mass consumerism of the post-war years, publications took on symbolic value in the 1930s, as "class of goods" began to replace social class in advertisers' minds (Eley, 1932: 101). Specialist interest magazines, which advertising expert H. W. Eley defined as those dealing with a trade, profession, hobby or one definite interest such as religion or housekeeping, not only enabled advertisers to target consumers more precisely, but also increased the possibility of selling products across established social groups. Women's magazines constituted a specialist interest super-category because, in the language of commerce, being a woman involved enjoying: the "pleasures of a hobby, the responsibility and status of a profession or the ultimate fulfilment of a religious vocation" (Eley, 1932: 100). Eley divided women's periodicals into five subcategories covering: 'house and garden', 'housekeeping', 'women's interests', 'fashion' and 'miscellaneous'. Those reading 'housekeeping' publications (including *Modern Woman* and *Home Chat*) were thought to define themselves through standards of household cleanliness and their ability to clothe and feed their families, often on limited budgets. The 'women's interest' group (including *Woman's Weekly*), meanwhile, dealt with the "lighter interests" of middle and lower middle-class women and girls who were concerned with details of dress, cosmetics and appearance. This analysis demonstrates the advertising profession's awareness of the new meanings that could be attached to goods, the importance of the magazine environment in establishing these, and the necessity of a co-ordinated effort on the part of advertisers, publishers and editors to manage consumption.

Whereas advertising was given greater prominence in monthly magazines in the period, the high selling *Woman's Weekly* was carefully managed to foreground editorial, while giving value to advertisers. The distribution of editorial and advertising and their related 'messages' is instructive, and close analysis of one issue from 25th February 1933 will demonstrate how this worked. This issue was typical of the early 1930s when approximately 35 per cent or around a third of the magazine was dedicated to advertising. Yet while ads made up the first 5 pages, the first half of the magazine (24 pages) after the 'Weekly Whispers' editorial was dedicated to editorial. Ads are grouped around three key editorial 'moments': the opening editorial, the main serial which is located at the publication's heart, and 'Mrs. Marryat Advises', the problem page that enlivens the last section of the magazine. Products, in the main, are everyday branded

goods: health tonics and drinks such as Ovaltine, Bourn-vita and Hall's wine; beauty products: Icilma, Ponds, Odorono, Germolene and items for making or adapting clothes (shoe dye, the singer sewing machine) and branded foods such as McDougall's flour, Oxo, Edwards' desiccated soups, Stork margarine. Improving health and alleviating pain, from 'unnecessary periodic pain' to 'sluggishness' and indigestion is a constant refrain and, where possible, adverts for other Amalgamated Press publications were inserted. Expensive full-page ads with striking illustrations (11 in all) occupy the first five pages, the back cover and the centre of the magazine, where they interweave with the gripping final pages of the serial and reinforce its narrative of difficulties and rewards. Smaller ads cluster towards the back where they occupy 14 of the last 22 pages of the magazine, presenting a more fragmented appearance, although the 3-column structure is maintained.

The brightly optimistic editorial with its endless inventive suggestions about how to live life with "dignity-and-dash" wearing a frock made from remnants or a *Woman's Weekly* pattern, contrasts with readers' worries about unemployment, "lonely evenings" or a boyfriend who "got the sack for his sauce" on Mrs. Marryat's agony page; 'agony' that was compounded by surrounding ads that promised cures for double chins, epilepsy or 'women's trouble'. The serial, Lady Troubridge's 'Wanted a Lady's Maid', meanwhile, transported the reader into the world of Mavis Deane, lady's maid to Mrs. Geraldine "one of the richest women in London" (WW25.02.33: 335 & 294). Material pleasures, which had to be earned through careful economising and application (making dresses or creating tasty sardine suppers, for instance) elsewhere in the magazine are in abundance here:

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' ..

Yet, unlike her wealthy employers, Mavis's pleasures, much like the pleasures of magazine reading, were experienced at a distance and second-hand. Honest, abstemious and hardworking, Mavis's moral authority, however, contrasts sharply with that of her so-called social superiors, in particular an over-indulged young woman called Clarissa whose drunken behaviour, the maid reflects, revealed a "pagan, materialistic soul" (WW 25.02.1933: 296). An ad for Pond's cream, in which two 'society leaders' endorse the 'Pond's Way to Beauty', is interwoven with the end of the story, along with ads for skippers sardines ("tasty for tea") and the improved digestion that accompanied Rowntree's Cocoa. The moral of 'Wanted a Lady's Maid' was that real pleasure lies beyond material things, in a personality that is hardworking, loyal, caring and good and, ultimately with the love of a man who recognised these qualities. The interaction of ads and fiction tell a different but related tale about lesser material pleasures that are not only earned but also deserved; the rightful reward of the 'Weekly's' readers who, by implication, shared Mavis's values and worth.

Cross-fertilization between editorial and advertising reflected the close relationship between the publishing and advertising industries. As the 'product' became secondary to communication expertise, those with 'insider knowledge' about publications, circulations and readers were increasingly courted by advertising agencies (Leiss *et al*, 1986; Ewen, 1976; Dunbar, 1979). Agency personnel were recruited from publishing, and a number of successful agency heads originally worked as newspaper and magazine advertisement managers (Marchand, 1985; Nevett, 1982). Opportunities opened up for women journalists with specialist knowledge in the areas of fashion, shopping and interior decoration to earn higher salaries working for agencies, or within the advertising departments of manufacturing firms. Miss Gwen Ferguson,

for example, after working as a Sub-Editor at *Home Chat* and Assistant Editor at *Woman's Illustrated* became Advertising Manager at William Hollis & Co. between 1939 and 1945, going on to become Press Relations Officer for the firm after the war, a post that she held until 1963 (WACL archive).

A commodity itself, the periodical acted as a shop window for other goods and many publishers had their own direct sales operations. *Woman's Weekly* (18.11.1939: 1007), for instance, advertised its own series of knitting leaflets (2d each) which could be purchased through wool shops, stores and retail newsagents, while Odhams and the Amalgamated Press published fiction and reference libraries. Dressmaking patterns and embroidery stencils proved particularly popular and lucrative (Hackney, 1999 & 2006). The journalist Mary Dilnot (1995) recalled that cut out dress offers were always a "fantastic come on" for readers. A form of 'inter-advertising', moreover, operated whereby periodicals promoted sister-papers to foster house loyalty. Unlike America where the relationship between advertising and retailing was more advanced, particularly with regard to the cosmetics industry (see chapter 6), marketing tie-ups with retail displays were relatively rare in Britain (Redmayne & Weeks, 1931). Magazine experts' books and advice manuals were recommended in editorial features and even on agony pages. Experts, additionally joined professionals such as doctors, health workers, celebrities, aristocrats and scientists in providing advertising testimonials, a practice that exposed them to accusations of selling products rather than serving consumers. Phyllis Panting, the Beauty Editor for the A. P.'s upmarket monthly *Woman's Journal*, for example, appears in an ad endorsing Cutex nail polish in *Woman's Weekly* (12.04.1930: 635) (fig. 37). Whereas, star endorsement enhanced a product's glamour, an editor's expert recommendation added 'rational' appeal. This was particularly useful when, due to its negative associations, a product had to be re-constructed in the popular imagination. A series of full-page colour ads in *Woman* for Stork margarine, for instance, carried testimonials from cookery editor Moira Meighan, and *Home Chat's* Gladys Owen in an effort to improve the status of a product widely associated with poverty; "ladies" as one Mass-Observer observed, would never eat margarine! (W 12.06.1937: bc & 06.11.1937: 5; M-O, 1938).

By the later 1930s the 'Weekly's' regular consumer feature, 'Spend Your Money Wisely' consisted of 'puffs' for named and priced products, many of which regularly advertised in the magazine. This consumer journalism was most highly developed in beauty features; it is no coincidence that beauty was regarded as a lucrative field of journalism for women (Peacocke, 1936). *Woman* offered coupons for lipstick or Pond's face powder on its cover, an effort to secure advantageous advertising contracts as well as attract readers, and in 1939 a *Woman's Weekly* (25.11.1939: 1033) hair care feature promoted a named product: Foaminol Shampoo, complete with Special Offer Coupon and a photograph of the film actress Brenda Joyce. Advertisers were encouraged to develop techniques similar to those used in modern journalism to create "human appeal" by presenting a story "clearly and simply" and discovering its "news" value (Allen, 1934: 43). By the end of the 1930s a series of ads for Rinso washing powder in the 'Weekly' (04.11.1939: 901) even adopted a short story format complete with gripping text, dramatic illustration, title and author (fig. 38).

The appeal of 'story-telling' ads, along with those that were "witty" or well designed, is confirmed by a survey of Mass-Observers' reactions to advertising in 1938, which concluded that it was advertising's "informative function" that consumers most appreciated (M-O, 1938: 22). Press ads were preferred above wireless, posters and circulars because they gave detailed information about prices and products that could be compared at leisure; ads that were repeated reassured because the financial outlay suggested a successful product. Like Leonora Eyles and Ethel Wood, those who approved of advertising spoke of its educative and 'civilising' role as a means of introducing new foods and products that "improved the physical condition" of the

masses, and changed the attitudes and habits of the working class. One woman remarked:

Advertising is an enormous educational force giving everybody ideas above their station. It has no doubt had more influence than free compulsory schooling on outwardly civilising the manners and appearance of the working-class. (M-O, 1938: 21)

There was also scepticism about the value of advertising; informants were more or less equally split in their belief that advertising was “useful and necessary” and “a dangerous influence”. The majority were ambivalent, seeing both the benefits and the more sinister or misleading aspects of advertising. The observation that advertising “is a communal service to inform the ignorant of something which will benefit them but much advertising takes advantage of one’s ignorance” was characteristic. Many denied being influenced by advertisements and others were “put off” by a “common” appearance or “over-extravagant price”. Magazine editors were right to worry about the intrusive aspects of advertising for the survey found that ads which cut-up articles, or took space from editorial, interrupting a “special mood”, were particularly disliked. Women in the survey, however, were more responsive than men and ads for brands such as Oxo, Bovril, Rinso, Horlicks, Colgate, Birds, Enos, Mansion Polish – the staples of magazines - were named as something they looked out for, particularly appreciating their humour, narrative and visual appeal (M-O, 1938: 22-33).

Advertisers in the 1920s used women’s magazines because their message was reinforced through editorial. By the later 1930s their message was *in* the editorial of many publications, which became highly managed products targeted at consumers and sold to, but not entirely dependent upon, advertisers. Whereas, in the early years of the century publicity had consisted of a relatively straight-forward means of information communication, by the 1930s modern advertising was a multi-layered persuasive force, involving intellectual, psychological and emotional appeals (Pease, 1976; Schudson, 1984). In an increasingly competitive commercial market magazines had to become modern commodities in order to survive and a major part of this involved attracting advertising. The degree to which magazines ‘sold’ readers to advertisers, however, depended on the nature of the magazine and its target audience. Editorial integrity had to be maintained, especially in the weeklies which depended on high circulation figures, and tensions emerged in debates about advertising ethics, the advertorial, product placement and editorial recommendation. The increasing emphasis on the visual impact of the page for generating sales gave magazine art editors additional control as techniques such as ‘next matter placement’ were enhanced by in-house ‘make-up’, and publishers expanded their advertising departments. Readers, moreover, demonstrated a healthy resistance to advertising, while appreciating its potential for promoting improved standards of health and appearance, and new habits of social behaviour. Editors had a responsibility to their readers and creating a distinct magazine environment through its tone, the controlled placement and quality of its advertising, and its fiction, helped make *Woman’s Weekly* one of the highest selling magazines of the period (see appendix 1). While the ‘Weekly’s’ ethos continued to be an important draw (see chapter 3), circulation figures for all periodicals dipped towards the end of the decade (McAler, 1992). It was the new weeklies with their concertedly modern appearance and visual appeal that most successfully made the transition to mass market magazines, largely thanks to one thing: colour.

2.5 ‘Selling the Page’: The Drama of Visual Consumption

I wanted to produce cheap magazines which would look anything but cheap, and which would provide colour, entertainment, escape (yes, escape!). (Drawbell, 1968: 45)

The strides taken by woman in every walk of life, the widening of her horizons and her interests, the breaking-down of those barriers that bound her yesterday – all these demanded a modern, virile, colourful paper in step with those new ideas and covering, not just one or two, but every interest of women in this fast-moving age. (*W* 05.06.1937: 15)

James Drawbell (1968: 37-47), editor of *Woman's Own* from 1946, identified colour, entertainment and escape as crucial factors driving the post-war revolution in women's magazines. Colour and women "went together", he declared, especially for a new generation of young women "craving colour and excitement in their lives". *Woman's Own* at this stage was engaged in a fierce circulations battle with its nearest rival *Woman's Weekly*, which was 150,000 ahead but had no colour (Drawbell, 1968: 47). Drawbell and his art director Gordon Stapley knew that in order to gain advantage they had to get their magazine "looking right". In this they built on Editor, John Gammie and Mary Grieve's achievements at *Woman* in the years before the War when the introduction of new printing technology made the magazine the first tuppenny woman's weekly with colour gravure covers and gravure artwork throughout. A "modern, virile, colourful paper" whose appearance and contents embodied the interests of the "woman of TODAY", as *Woman's* first editorial proudly put it (*W* 05.06.1937: 15).

The correlation of women with visual appeal was not new, nor was it uncontroversial. Northcliffe had developed the new illustrated journalism with a 'pictorially minded' female audience in mind at the turn of the century (Engel, 1996). The largely alarmist and extreme reactions of the male literary intelligentsia suggest the degree to which dislike of the popular pictorial press hailed from a deep-seated misogyny (Huyssen, 1986; LeMahieu, 1988). The critic Holbrook Jackson went so far as to warn that, while women "habitually" thought in pictures, when men (who normally aspired to more abstract concepts) "think pictorially they unsex themselves" (Carey, 1992: 8). In the advertising world, meanwhile, visual merit was associated with social aspiration; Eley (1932: 94) claimed that the quality of a publication's visual reproduction was the main appeal for the "social climber". This section explores the feminisation of the press through visual means, and especially colour as, in the words of one contemporary commentator, newspapers and magazines aimed to "'sell' each page and subject through eye appeal" (Herrick, 1939:175). It argues that the new visual rhetoric created a heightened sensory experience as women became absorbed in their magazines - akin to what Patrice Petro (1989), writing about cinematic melodrama in the period, terms a 'contemplative aesthetic' - that offered readers meaningful ways to imagine and articulate the dreams and anxieties associated with modernity for women, carving out a space in the private and public imagination that was distinctly feminine.

A summary of the debates surrounding visual communication in advertising and magazine design will be followed by detailed analysis of the layout and design of the first issue of *Woman*, paying particular attention to how different aspects of the magazine: editorial and advertising, for instance, or image and text, which provoked emotions and ideas were connected and communicated through visual means. While, editorial retained priority in *Woman's Weekly* and advertising was organised around it, this section that the reverse operated at *Woman*, where imagery and the visual impact of advertising took precedence; a quality that, above all, communicated the magazine's modernity.

The power of the 'image' to connect with individuals and shape audiences was a defining

aspect of modern advertising. From the 1890s, as Richard Ohmann (1996: 180) observed, American agencies restructured communication to privilege visual impressions and play down textual appeals, resulting in a “new mode of address” to consumers and a “new meaning” for material goods. Terry Smith (1993: 2), in his history of the relationship between modern art, design and industry in America in the 1920s, went further arguing that an “iconology of modernity” developed that represented a “new way of seeing”. The evolution of abstract Modernism in art and design in Europe in the 1920s was informed by a fundamental belief in the democratising value of a formal language of visual communication derived from science and geometry, which could be universally understood, irrespective of language or education (Greenhalgh, 1990). A huge upsurge in colour printing in the 1920s accompanied the burgeoning consumer culture in America.

Advertising historian Roland Marchand (1986: 153), records how art triumphed over copy by the early 1930s and the success of movies, the tabloids and the rotogravure sections of magazines demonstrated the public’s desire to “absorb new ideas and information in visual form”. The aesthetic innovations of Modernist art (diagonal lines, off-centre layouts, dissonant juxtapositions of the montage, simplicity and fragmentation) were quickly adapted by art directors eager to catch the reader’s eye and evoke the pace of modern life, while colour and art associations gave even the most prosaic product ‘added-value’. Modernisation, however, did not necessarily mean a wholesale rejection of established traditions in design. In her analysis of the *Woman’s Home Companion (WHC)*, a magazine targeted at middle-class Americans in the period, design historian Marie-Louise Bowallius (2007: 32, 33) describes how “a comfortable mix of ‘new’ and ‘familiar’” characterised the “selling recipe” for this highly successful magazine. In conjunction with the *WHC*’s established style of realistic illustrations and conventional editorial, colour became “the most important means to modernise its appearance in a specifically American context”.

Pictures were perceived to speak “the language of emotion”, connect with consumers at all levels of the population, communicate dense and complex messages affectively and “inspire belief” (Marchand, 1986: 154). Academics and advertisers alike argued that colour and visual imagery had a direct unconscious effect, especially on women, and the doyenne of scientific management Christine Frederick urged advertisers to draw on the theories of Freud, Jung and Adler in her book *Selling Mrs. Consumer* in 1929. The psychologist Alfred Poffenberger (in Marchand, 1986: 123) analysed colour preferences by sex and class determining the “feeling tone” and attention-getting power of various shades. American advertising psychologist Walter Dill Scott, meanwhile, developed his “psycho-economic technique of advertising” based on connections between imagery and unconscious consumer desires (Mazur Thomson, 1996: 254). Arguing that all knowledge is received through the senses, Dill Scott proposed that viewers’ reactions could be manipulated by combining a multitude of individual perceptions into meaningful ideas. “Association” was the “glue” that held these disparate elements together and design created interconnectedness by organising proximity in time and space; a theory that precipitated the growth of illustrated advertising and the close relationship between editorial and advertising in magazines (Mazur Thomson, 1996: 258). Dill Scott developed laws to codify this process. Pleasurable, harmonious formal arrangements, above all, were required to elicit positive emotions.

Magazines led the way in aesthetic experimentation. The development of art direction as a specialised sphere of activity, which occurred first in magazines, was a formative factor and two European émigrés: Mehemed Fehmy Agha and Alexey Brodovitch, working on *Vogue* and *Harper’s Bazaar* respectively, brought visual innovation to commercial American publishing (Jobling & Crowley, 1996). By the later 1930s a more fluid ‘magazine’ approach involving ‘plastic’ type, white space, staggered paragraphs, unjustified lines, text set at a

dynamic angle, synthesised text and image, double-page colour spreads, dramatic use of photography (such as printing pictures into the bleed-edge) and silhouettes, replaced the traditional layouts associated with book typography: columns of text clearly separated from a conventional image in a symmetrical scheme. Disparaging of Modernist theory, Agha used its novel formalistic style to enhance drama and mood effects, and heighten emotional appeal; he often worked out the design on a grid before commissioning images to create a more unified 'total' effect (Agha in Heller *et al* 1994/1930).

Like editors and advertising managers, art directors were keenly aware of the importance of 'knowing' the audience. "The publicity artist", Brodovitch (in Heller *et al*, 1994/1930: 52) declared, must be "a keen psychologist" with the ability to "perceive and preconceive the tastes, aspirations and habits of the consumer-spectator and the mob". Art direction, according to the advertising pioneer Earnest Elmo Calkins (in Heller *et al*, 1994/1936: 64-5), was a synthesis of art, type, white paper, copy headline and idea that produced emotion in the beholder: an expression of "ideas" not "things". He drew an analogy between the "brightening", "liveliness and lightness" of effect when pictures, frequently in colour, are "scattered" through a text, and the "tempo" and "spirit" of a "high-keyed, rapidly moving age".

The new ideas about visual communication spread to Britain in the 1930s. George Herrick (1939: 174-6), commenting on American designers' use of "dramatic content" and "plastic" type in an article for *Commercial Art*, noted the new dramatic lay-outs, colour, larger formats and 'attention grabbing' effect in British magazines. He connected this with competition from other mass media such as cinema and radio and, like Calkins, the faster pace of modern life. Ashley Havinden, art director at W. S. Crawford and a leading exponent of Modernism in British commercial art, stressed the importance of clarity in communication, which he described as "a kind of streamlining of the idea" (in Heller 1994/1938: 73) that made optical reception rapid and easy. Developments in magazines and advertising spread to newspapers, magazines' main competitors for advertising revenue. More "daily news magazine" than newspaper, the *Express* proclaimed itself England's "brightest paper" and employed dramatically placed high-quality photographs (using new techniques of half-tone reproduction), cut-away backgrounds and wide blank spaces to appeal to a mass readership; encouraging the belief that the masses wanted brightness (Harling, 1936: 185-6). Magazine and newspaper art directors had learnt from advertisers and were beating them at their own game (Smith, 1974). Debate raged as to whether the new display enhanced or detracted from advertising, resulting in the introduction of 'poster technique' with minimum copy, large illustrations and broader, bolder techniques, to differentiate advertising from editorial. Image became the dominant note and copy was designed to do its work after the display had seized attention.

The perceived effect of visual imagery and colour on women has already been established, but in British magazines in the later 1920s and 1930s, first the visual and then the colour visual became a predominant signifier of feminine modernity that was as much concerned with the home as the feel and pulse of urban life. In 1927, Ethel Wood aligned women's aesthetic sensibilities with their wifely and domestic duties:

Good, clean typography, good art work and well-balanced lay-outs have more influence with my sex than is realised – not because they are continually criticised, but because the appearance of her home, her children, her table, her person, is so constantly to the fore in a woman's mind that an advertisement which is "easy on the eyes" (to use a more expressive Americanism) attracts and satisfies her. (Wood, 1927: 215-16)

Philip Emanuel (1934: 85-6), publicity manager at Odhams' Press, claimed that the future of

popular publishing lay with the “modern illustrated weeklies” because they sold best to women, and Emilie Peacock (1936: 19) described the woman’s page in newspapers as ideally suited to typographic experimentation and “modern display methods of artistic presentation”. Planned to attract the “feminine eye”, the illustrated monthly, in Myfanwy Crawshay’s view, was an essential component of modern publishing.

There has been a notable increase in bright monthlies of the *Modern Home* type in recent years. Magazines with an old-fashioned appearance and falling circulation have been given a real lease of life by brighter make-up and wider choice of subject matter. (Crawshay, 1932: 8-9)

The editor of a monthly magazine herself, Crawshay like Calkins, believed that “bright” appearance and uncluttered lay-out provided an appropriate setting for the new light, yet realistic brand of modern fiction, and was essential for healthy circulations (see chapter 7). The visual qualities of typeface, moreover, were integral to establishing a publication’s tone and identity. Angela Wyatt (1995) recalled that *Woman and Home* used one family of type: Bembo Light in headings and titles to convey an instantly recognisable unified visual “personality” that was bright and modern but not outrageous; Gaudi italic was used for photograph captions. Magazines, particularly those with access to colour printing, played a key role in educating consumers in a new visual literacy. Mary Grieve (1964: 196) recalled how at *Woman* advances in colour printing fostered a policy of concentration on “visual appeal” and, while only 8 out of a total of 64 pages in the first issue in 1937 were printed in four colours, by 1963 nearly half the magazine was colour. Colour represented an “occasion” within the closely integrated design of the magazine and was used for adverts, fashion and home decoration features, and fiction (Stein, 1989: 155). It maintained an image of magazines as luxurious commodities and, once its appeal was established, enabled publicity managers to charge higher rates. Alongside the ‘pushes’ and ‘gift wars’ that characterised the 1930s, colour’s ‘eye-grabbing’ qualities proved an effective marketing device (Reed, 1997).

Of the 8 full colour pages in the first issue of *Woman* in July 1937, 5 were advertisements: for Persil washing powder, Mansion furniture polish, Stephenson’s furniture cream, Lushus jelly and the Hoover vacuum cleaner; the remaining 3 were reserved for the front cover and a double-page fashion spread at the centre of the magazine. Each colour page, whether editorial or advert, communicated visually was strategically spaced at regular intervals, leading the reader through the ‘flow’ of the magazine. Bold and bright, the Persil ad, which was located in a key position opposite the column introducing the editorial experts, was the first ‘visual event’ confronting the reader as she worked her way through her magazine (*fig. 39*). Realistic in style, the ad’s clear flat colours, cropped close-up imagery and ‘poster’ effect, nevertheless, signal its modernity. The slogan, ‘washed repeatedly yet still gay as ever’, used the fashionable language of leisured, modern society, while the picture cleverly exploited the novelty of colour printing to convey the product’s qualities and create a dramatic effect; an example of Havinden’s ‘streamlined idea’. The heightened colour, cuboid patterns and fragmented shapes of the art deco packaging in the Lushus jellies’ ad, meanwhile, endow an everyday product with fashion and even art status, producing a suitably eye-grabbing image for the magazine’s prestigious back-page slot (*fig. 40*). Visual communication shaped not only new ways of looking, but also new ways of thinking and feeling about food.

British *Vogue* published its first colour photograph in 1932. A combination of high cost and limited technology meant that colour photography did not appear in *Woman* until 1945 (White, 1970). Until then black and white photographs were hand-coloured and the colour separated

before printing, a technique used in the America *Ladies' Home Journal* until 1929 (Johnston, 2000). Illustration remained an important means of colour visualisation enabling Odhams to capitalise on the impact of colourgravure printing. Most advertisers ranked the colour and artistic possibilities of illustration above photography as a means of arresting attention, but by the early 1930s photography had begun to take hold in US publishing, and by 1932 over 50 per cent of ads in a typical issue of *Ladies' Home Journal* were photographs (Marchand, 1986: 149). Photogravure gave vastly improved reproduction qualities and 12 pages in the first issue of *Woman* were given over to full-page black and white ads, which employed illustration, photography or a combination of the two.

'Next matter' placement was also a key strategy. An ad for Yardley cosmetics, for instance, faces the beauty page, while recipes were located opposite a striking ad for gas refrigerators. Unlike *Woman's Weekly*, *Woman's* fiction was largely uninterrupted by advertising. Editorial and advertising, however, were designed to work together in a 'total' unified effect that was often reinforced by colour. Design and colour (in this case one colour: orange), for instance, connect a knitting editorial for a smart sailor-style jumper, with a soap ad facing it in which Nora, a victim of "tired skin", loses her job in a frock shop only to find employment as a mannequin thanks to the reinvigorating qualities of Knight's Castile (*fig. 41*). Advertisement and editorial together create a compelling fiction of the modern woman who leads an exciting, glamorous lifestyle which, for the price of a knitting pattern or a bar of soap, readers could realise, and achieves this largely through visual means.

Illustration and photography, nevertheless, signified differently. While illustration, with its artistic associations, imbued a product with cultural status, photography conveyed a "matter-of-fact realism" that advertisers described as "sincere" (Marchand, 1986: 150; Bogart, 1995). In the American *Woman's Home Companion* of the period, Marie-Louise Bowallius (2007) argues that photography, which was used principally for advertising, signalled the new, whereas illustration, which dominated editorial, communicated something more reassuring and familiar. No such distinction operated in *Woman* where illustration and photography were employed in editorial and advertising. Photography, however, tended to communicate information or underscore the realism of an issue or event, whereas the dramatic and suggestive possibilities of illustration, especially colour illustration, developed the fantasy scenarios of fiction and fashion, and was used to create eye-grabbing front covers (Briggs, 1939; Bogart, 1995). *Vogue* editor Elizabeth Penrose (1937: 27) believed that fashion artists should "create a convincing picture of taste", while fashion illustrator Beryl Nevanas (1934: 29) stressed the value of illustration for capturing the "atmosphere" and "general 'air'" of an ensemble. Beryl Carr's evocative line and wash drawings for Alison Settle's first *Woman* fashion editorial demonstrate the colour fashion sketch's power to convey mood and detail, maximising the garment's romantic appeal (*fig. 42*).

Photography in the hands of creative commercial artists, however, introduced a modern aesthetic with bold blacks, variant shadows, unusual angles, distortion, abstraction and microscopic detail (Tetelbaum, 1992; Lavin, 2001; Stein, 1992). The power of the advertising photograph, Marchand (1986: 152) observed, resulted from its ability to capture the relationship between "things-as-they-are and things-as-we-like-to-fantasize-them". Fashion photographer John Everard (1934: 2-3) similarly described photography as a, "pliant medium" that could express qualities of "delicacy, elegance of line, mystery and glamour, and yet retain the persistent atmosphere of reality". "Camerland", Everard reflected, is "the land of dream come true". Art historian Patricia Johnston (2000), however, writing about Edward Steichen's advertising photographs for the *Ladies' Home Journal*, argues that women recognised these images as fantasies and viewed them in similar ways to their engagement with fiction and melodrama.

Woman had its own photographic studio, giving editors additional control over the visual appearance of the magazine (Grieve, 1964). A double page spread including an ad for Celanese lingerie and a circulation-gathering editorial (titled 'We Wonder: A Soliloquy and an invitation') in the publication's first issue shows the impact that a unified design, which included advertising and editorial, illustration and photography, could make (fig. 43). The ad is daringly modern in its simplicity. Copy was reduced to an absolute minimum, while the reproduction of a black and white photograph of a young woman dressed in an elegant camisole set against an almost abstract background dominates the page. Betraying the influence of European modernists such as the Hungarian photographer Lazlo Maholy Nagy (who fled to Britain in 1933), the ad combined this with American glamour, a characteristic compromise of feminine modernity (Aynsley, 2000). The diagonal placement of three drawings of women reading *Woman* (in a train, at home and at the tennis court) in the editorial feature on the facing page echo the line of the Celanese woman's body, visually linking photography and illustration, advert and editorial. Whereas the readers are shown engrossed in their magazines in suitably modern everyday locations, the Celanese woman, like so many women in advertising, gazes dreamily through a window: the symbolic 'window of the magazine', imagining a future transformed by her elegant, yet affordable underwear. The design directs our gaze from ad to editorial, and from ideal image to imagined action as a future reader of the magazine (the feature included a subscription coupon) and, in the words of the editorial, "a 'founder-member' of that great fellowship of discerning women all over the country that this paper will exist to serve".

As in America, advertisers led the way in Britain, quickly developing the new techniques into a visual rhetoric that encoded sophisticated ideas as a series of established signs; a complex visual semiotics that Helen Wilkinson (1997: 27), writing about a British agency that sold stock photographs in the 1930s, described as a form of "heraldry". People rather than products and the consequences of consumption became the focus of advertising (Leis *et al*, 1986) and women's magazines with their editorial features and dramatic fiction provided an ideal context in which these 'types' were animated and performed. The modern housewife or, as I term her, the 'housewife heroine' was an archetypal 'type' of the period and a favourite of domestic magazines (see chapter 4). She is the subject of a full-page ad for Hoover vacuum cleaners, which appears approximately two thirds of the way through the first issue of *Woman*. The ad is important, not only because it depicts a particular idealisation of the modern housewife, but also because of how it is reproduced: a colour photogravure print, which combined photography's 'sincerity effect' with the escapist, transformative feelings associated with colour illustration.

The ad focuses on the housewife's face; the product is absent and only referred to by its brand name. Pictured in filmic close-up against a saturated blue background (a colour that is picked up in her eyes and the product logo), the housewife combines the appeals of product 'news' with direct speech when she announces, "I've just got a maid at 4d a day!" (a reference to her electronic labour-saver) into a telephone, her voice represented by a crudely montaged speech bubble (fig. 44) (*W* 05.06.1937: 37). This streamlined image of the consequences of consumption or, "a life apart from housekeeping" as copy put it, nevertheless, was not without its contractions. It sold a product that would have been beyond the means of many readers; even four pence a day hire purchase was a significant amount in 1937 when only around 30 per cent of all homes owned a vacuum cleaner. The majority of readers bought the ad and the fantasy it embodied as a component of their magazine rather than the product it advertised. Inviting the reader to imagine herself as the heroine at the centre of an everyday drama of domestic dissatisfaction and desire, however, the Hoover ad reproduced narratives rehearsed elsewhere in magazines, while teaching her to think visually in much the same way that

photographer John Everard envisaged when he declared,

Women live their lives emotionally, and their thoughts are a series of pictures, centred round themselves and those who are dear to them...she reads an advertisement of a well-known custard powder, for example. Off her mind goes on a series of pictures; she sees herself making a memorandum on her shopping list; ordering on the 'phone; directing the maid in the kitchen; helping her husband at dinner and seeing his appreciative smile-amenable for the remainder of the evening! (Everard, 1934: 2)

The ads' rhetoric drew on the modern communications media of cinema, radio and the telephone, while editorial on the facing page detailed how scientific advances were improving food hygiene. The dreams the ad inspired extended beyond vacuum cleaner ownership to the leisure, freedom, status, satisfaction, excitement, glamour and health that a 'life apart from housekeeping', and its domestic drudgery, could bring. The housewife became a central player in the drama of modern life.

Those magazines that prioritised visual communication: *Picture Post*, *John Bull*, *Radio Times*, *Everybody's* and the 'new wave' of women's magazines, survived the general depression in magazine sales at the end of the 1930s and went on to become mass circulation magazines in the post-war years (McAleer, 1992: 45). Not only success, but also survival depended upon magazines establishing a visual rhetoric that was both modern and feminine, and connected with the mass of readers' dreams in meaningful ways.

2.6 Conclusion: The Land of Dream Come True

The film version of the The Wizard of Oz, which was released in Britain 1939, astounded audiences with its "chemical cocktail of colours" (Warner, 2008: 14). Colour became a metaphor for hope, transformation and escape, as Dorothy moved from the grainy realities of economically depressed Kansas (filmed in black and white) to the explosive hues of the magical Land of Oz. The new weeklies with their highly coloured adverts and fashion features must have had a similar effect next to their smudgy and much smaller letterpress counterparts and the pulp magazines that had dominated the women's press in the 1920s. To a greater extent than ever before, meaning was not only communicated by a periodical's content, but was also by its physical properties and design, which alongside editorial tone and the quality of fiction, features and adverts, was part of its distinctive environment. With their poster-like advertisements and illustrations, episodic structure, 'cut-up' layouts and personal address, women's magazines were hybrid texts that operated in parallel with other modern media such as film, photojournalism and radio. They offered readers new forms of communication and opportunities to read their magazines in a multiplicity of ways (Hackney, 2008). The modern woman journalist and advertising professional who aimed to render readers straightforward help, 'voice' their needs and desires, explore their expanded opportunities and represent the 'woman's point of view', moreover, shared much in common with Dorothy's brand of modern femininity. Like so many heroines in magazine fiction and British films these women professionals were reassuringly familiar, optimistic and friendly; they came up with helpful practical solutions and, above all, got things done (Kuhn, 1996).. George Orwell (1970) dismissed interwar women's publications as "organs of populist Toryism": vehicles that disseminated middle-class ideas to the masses (Melman, 1988: 120). This dissertation argues, in contrast, that they were more concerned with rethinking questions of citizenship, motherhood and selfhood than with promoting established notions of class. As such, their function was closer to Elizabeth

Ewen's (1980: 63) description of Hollywood films as "manuals of desires, wishes and dreams" for immigrant women learning to be American. The 'desires, wishes and dreams' embodied in British women's magazines, however, centred on an imagined English femininity; what this meant and how it was bound up with the process of reading is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter Three: Reading the Readers: Memory, Narrative and Text

3.1 Introduction: 'They're Bright and Easy Reading, and You Can Find Out Lots of Useful Things': Reading Practices and the New Female Reader

I don't read newspapers, but I get the magazine *Woman*, and I spend about 2 hours reading that. (F 30 B)

I only read one magazine a week. (F 30 C)

Two magazines a week, about half an hour a story. (F 25 D: electrical engineer)

[Read] Not much; I read women women's magazines. (F 25 D)

I read a lot of magazines... They're bright and easy reading, and you can find out lots of useful things in them. (F 20)

The lady where I work usually gives me the magazines when she's finished with them, and I pass them on to my sister. (F 40 D)

[Buy magazines] Well, sometimes a lot, perhaps seven or eight, and sometimes not at all... I just chance it - what I happen to pick up at the newsagents. (F 30 C)

I don't have the time to do much reading. I don't read books at all, chiefly magazines that I can pick up and put down without losing the thread of the story... If I read a book I like to keep on with it. I don't want to pick it up and put it down a few moments later.

I like to settle down to it. That's why I prefer magazines. (F 35 C) (*M-O* 1944: 28, 29, 9)

Accurate information about magazine readers and reading practices is notoriously difficult to find and that which does exist tends to be sketchy and, at best, impressionistic (Altick, 1957; Mitchell, 1981; Shattock & Wolff, 1982). The small numbers of readership surveys conducted in the interwar years, nevertheless, indicate a growth in numbers of lower-middle-class and working-class readers for women's magazines. Press historian Joseph McAleer (1992: 81), who termed this group the new female readership (NFR) for magazines, described their reading as "a kind of escapism among working-class readers towards a middle-class ideal" associated with middle-class notions of respectability. This chapter argues, in contrast, that something more complicated than the simple appropriation of one class's habits and ideals by another was taking place. Drawing on contemporary readership surveys and oral history interviews with women about their memories of magazine reading in the 1930s, it proposes that, rather than escape towards middle-class ideals, the new female reader brought distinctive interests, needs and requirements to her selection, interpretation, and use of magazines. The specific conditions from which women sought to escape (even for a time) through reading: their experience of marriage, motherhood, employment or family also shaped their reading process, and the ways

in which they engaged with the ‘imaginative spaces’ of magazines. Differences of circumstance, meanwhile, intersected with a shared feminine culture centred on the home, family and personal relationships as women from a wider range of social backgrounds were reading the same magazines by the end of the 1930s.

Whether borrowing from public libraries, renting what the literary critic Q. D. Leavis (1932: 7) disparagingly referred to as, “greasy novels” at 2d or 3d a volume from “suburban side-streets” or “village shops”, or participating in complex networks for lending or swapping material, reading became increasingly popular amongst lower-middle and working-class households in the first decades of the century (Grigson, 1935). More time was being spent on leisure activities including reading and a “new leisured class” emerged composed of men and women who were compelled either by war or the depression to accept a larger amount of leisure time than normal (McAleer, 1992: 78; Dark, 1922 & 1929; Pilgrim Trust, 1938). Families on an annual budget of £330 spent 4s on smoking, 2s 6d on “entertainments” and 2s on reading matter in the mid 1930s, while those with an income of £250 per annum or less had a weekly expenditure per head on newspapers and periodicals of 1s that was spent on tuppenny magazines, newspapers and library books (Harrison & Mitchell 1936: 90; Palmer, 1941: 93-4). Contemporary readership surveys indicate a shift amongst middle lower and working-class women away from older format domestic magazines such as *Home Chat*, towards *Woman’s Weekly*: the branded ‘woman’s interest magazine’, and then the new colour weeklies, suggesting a reading community where gender took precedence over class.

	<u>General Interest</u>	<u>Woman’s Magazine</u>
1928	John Bull Answers Pearson’s Weekly	Homes Notes Home Chat Woman’s Weekly
1932	John Bull Radio Times Tit-Bits	Woman’s Weekly Woman’s World Red Letter
1947	Radio Times Picture Post Everybody’s	Woman’s Own Woman Woman’s Weekly

Table: Popularity of weekly magazines with lower middle-class and working-class readerships. (McAleer, 1992: 81)

While publishers, journalists and, in some cases, readers described women’s domestic magazines as ‘middle-class’, these surveys signal a core readership that was more diverse. Mass-Observation’s ‘Preliminary Report on Magazines and Pamphlets’ (1940), a survey of magazine sales and reading habits of 100 working-class people living in Fulham, provides qualitative insight into readers’ motivations as well as the titles they read. Magazine reading was categorised either as a “family affair”, with over half the publications taken having general or pictorial appeal (*Radio Times*, *Everybody’s Weekly*, *Picture Post*), or a female activity. Those titles targeted at women were the second most popular group and included *Woman* with twenty six readers and *Woman’s Weekly* with eighteen (M-O, 1940: 2-4). Women took

magazines relatively more than men (men and boys read more books) and those classified as 'class C', that is 'artisan, lower-middle and upper-working-classes', took them relatively more than women from the 'unskilled working class' (class D). Age and interests, however, played as much a part in title selection as social background. So, although *Woman* readers hailed mostly from 'class C', they were also predominantly younger (aged between 25 and 30) and interested in domestic and childcare information, while the readership for traditional weeklies was strongest amongst older women from the unskilled working-class who favoured sentimental or sensational fiction.

Reading 'against the grain' of the Report's middle-class and masculine bias to take women's 'escapist' reading seriously, reveals how it was integrated into the texture, the 'to and fro', of women's social, emotional and imaginative lives in ways that differed significantly from men. As one Fulham shopkeeper explained,

The girl of about 17 or 18 will start buying books every week (points to a copy of *Miracle* with love-making picture on cover). And then she goes courting and she gets saturated with it with her young man and she ceases buying them. Then after six months, when the young man's got sick of taking her out, she'll come back for two pennorth of love again. (M-O, 1940: 4)

Escape was balanced with a need for information about home, childcare, beauty, knitting and cookery; "there'll always be somebody wants knowledge about these", the shopkeeper observed. This was particularly evident among younger women. A 25 year old whose mother "always had *John Bull*" preferred *Woman's Weekly*, commenting, "I don't have them for the stories really, more or less for the patterns and the hints and that and the recipes are useful" (M-O, 1940).

Another Mass-Observation study a few years later suggests how the imaginative qualities of women's escapist reading were shaped by practical considerations in their daily lives: lack of time, privacy and family demands. Identifying a general "fear" among women of "lengthy and difficult" texts that were considered to have a "ponderable emotional effect" and a preference for magazines because they were "easier to put down and pick up again", the Report concluded that it was their willingness to be "taken out of themselves and put back at intervals during the day" in order to "live for a time in another world" that determined women's reading matter (M-O, 1944: 9-10, 28).

The "reading habit", according to Mass-Observation (1944: 10), was "fully established for the majority of the population as an ideal, if not always a reality" by 1944. Interwar surveys demonstrate that reading magazines or, as some called them "paper books", had become a customary part of many women's weekly routines, and for a growing number, irrespective of class, this meant branded women's magazines. Whereas, for the women of the Victorian and Edwardian middle-class reading was a form of consumption associated with leisure time and an ideological support for the middle-class home, the new female reader's magazine reading was shaped by the needs and constraints of her everyday life as a mother, a daughter, a girl who was courting, a worker or a wife (Flint, 1993). The particular types of engagement, escape and identification that these circumstances structured will be explored in the following sections.

"They Opened Things Up": historic readers & narratives of reading

...magazines opened up a whole new world - books and magazines. What else did we have to learn anything, these things weren't talked about or taught in schools. You had to grow up quickly, left school and straight to work.

(Kathleen Ash, 1994)

I used to read the lot. Yes, I did too. It was the only way we got to know about the outside world... we just sort of took it all in. It was somebody else's life all the time wasn't it really.....I read every word. I didn't want to waste it.

(Petts Wood Group, 1996)

LL: They opened your lives up - you learned from reading magazines - I still do.

LH: Yes, they opened things up.

(Lena Lowdell & Lillian Huff, 1995)

The 'new female reader' who read and sometimes subscribed to increasing numbers of magazines was also evident in my oral history interviews with around 50 women (see appendix 2). A number of things struck me when listening to their memories of magazine reading. Firstly, in contrast to characterisations of the women's press as prescriptive and backward-looking in these years, due to its emphasis on femininity and the home, it was its outward-looking, pleasurable and informative aspects that women recalled. A form of relaxation and escape, magazines were also a valuable source of stimulation: a means of keeping up-to-date and learning things. "It was the only way we got to know about the outside world", one reader said. Women repeatedly referred to magazines as 'opening things up' and the metaphor of the window, which offered different perspectives on what being a woman meant, as a private individual and a public citizen, for instance, became central to my thinking. A window showing aspirational images of "somebody else's life", moreover, the magazine could also be a mirror that reflected versions of readers own lives back to them.

Secondly, whereas contemporary studies represent magazine reading in the first half of the twentieth century as "scattered" or "slipshod", a superficial or ephemeral practice in contrast to 'middle-class' habits of concentrated reading that were "formed and stabilized" in the text, women recalled its absorbing aspects (Leavis, 1932: 12-13; M-O, 1942). Their enthusiasm for reading was overwhelming; the majority were and in many cases remain voracious readers, most now, however, preferring books. Again and again women described how, after turning to a favourite section (usually the problem page or the latest episode of a serial) they read their publications 'from cover to cover', savouring every word. A question of 'making-the-most-of things', the practice also suggests high levels of attention, concentration and engagement.

Whereas contemporary commentators and historians emphasise the visual impact of magazines, it was the reading experience that the women I spoke to, many of whom were the first in their family to have stayed on at school, recalled most vividly and with the greatest affection (Reed, 1997; White, 1971; Elias, 1934; see chapter 2). So, reading as well as looking, words as well as pictures; any understanding of how magazines 'opened things up' must begin with the reading process and how women spoke about reading magazines.

Systematic and reliable evidence of actual historical readers is hard to locate. Some historians of the periodical have followed literary theorists and replaced the 'empirical' reader with a 'textual' reader, produced and conscripted by the text (Brantlinger, 1998; Beetham, 1996; Flynn & Schweickart, 1986). The danger of neglecting the 'real' reader, as Hilary Fraser

(2003: 69) and others have pointed out, is that it “diminishes our sense of readerly agency, of how the person turning the pages might have resisted, or at least participated in, that positioning”. Lynne Pearce (1997), comparing the intensity of women’s reading to the act of being in love, argues that understanding the nature of this engagement may be more important than understanding the text; an observation that accords with women’s dedication to certain titles (several taking the same magazine for 60 years) and such remarks as, “I can only say that I love my weekly copy” and “it’s a case of always having it - it was like a friend”. Speaking to women about their memories of reading magazines, therefore, is valuable because it tells us about the qualitative process of reading, as well as what was read, providing insight into readerly agency and how women engaged with, resisted or negotiated the dominant (‘preferred’) messages in these texts (Hall in Turner, 1990; Hermes, 1995; Ang, 1991; Frazer, 1987).

Recent scholarship demonstrates that the oral history interview is an ‘active’ process and ‘interpretative event’ in which social memory is not simply recovered but articulated. Oral testimony becomes a text that can be opened to the methods of textual as well as content analysis, as historians pay attention not only to the respondent’s ‘story’, but also to the “how, where, and why” that story is told in order to understand how language and narrative are employed to organise and represent experience (Sandino, 2006: 278-9). Gaps and silences: what is forgotten, misremembered or repressed, become as important as what is remembered, while counter narratives (a dominant story that reveals another story) allow us to understand how stories are used to tell different things (Giles, 2002; Bamberg & Andrews, 2004). More than a means of representation, magazines are material artefacts which, read privately and collectively, provide clues to individual and shared experience. Annette Kuhn (1995: 4) writes suggestively about how film and photography function as what she terms “memory texts”: cultural productions that make it possible to explore connections between “personal memories” and “public events”. Hybrid compositions of image, text, anecdote, fact and fiction, public events and private lives, magazines would seem to be ideal memory texts. The performative nature of the oral history interview, the importance of the magazine as material artefact, and its potential for eliciting collective and individual memories, shaped the structure of interviews. Copies of original publications triggered surprisingly precise memories about what, after all, are highly ephemeral texts, and interviewing women together, in pairs or larger groups as well as individually, allowed points of connection between private memories and common feelings, thoughts or experiences to emerge.

I contacted readers in my local neighbourhood in Camberwell, South London and in Leicester, where I began the project, through clubs, groups and associations, jumble sales, friends, on train journeys, in retirement homes and through Age Exchange, a reminiscences group in Blackheath. Those interviewed ranged from Mavis Smith, who subscribed to *Woman’s Weekly* for over fifty years to others who either read intermittently or took other types of publication, such as literary journals or the sensational ‘bloods’ (story papers such as *Red Letter* and *Peg’s Paper*). Interviews were conducted with individuals, in pairs and with groups (two Women’s Co-operative Guild meetings in Essex, a group in Camberwell, and a sewing circle in suburban Petts Wood, Kent). All had read magazines in the 1930s and their memories and observations gave a broad sense of differing responses to a variety of titles (see appendix 2). A letter published in *Woman* elicited 20 replies from across the country and provided a contrasting sample; a core group of readers dedicated to one magazine, many of whom had subscribed since the first issue. Their memories suggest how one title could create a sense of

collective identity or an imagined community of readers with shared ideals, values and beliefs. Questionnaires were sent to these readers and, where possible, followed with an interview. In 1937 (the year in which *Woman* first appeared) all the women I spoke to were reading magazines. They fell into three categories differentiated by age, occupation and marital status as: schoolgirls, single working women, and married housewives, a small number of who had children (see appendix 2). All attended elementary school and the majority left school aged 14 or 15 then worked, at least until marriage. Jobs included 'white blouse' office work, which was particularly popular among the *Woman* readers, shop and factory work and employment as a nursemaid. Marjorie Denut, who became a teacher, civil servant and later social worker, and the civil servant Margaret Coupe were among the few women who entered the professions; both read *Woman* while Denut was the only reader in the group who took *Modern Woman* regularly. Education, employment and marital status were linked to reading habits. Those who stayed on longer at school and worked were more likely to read the 'new weeklies' and a wider range of magazines. This was particularly true of women such as G. J. Till, Muriel Danpure and Mabel Cunningham, who considered themselves working class but went to Grammar school, and the children of engineers or technical workers, such as Marge Coupe; McKibbin's technological middle-class. Danpure, a postman's daughter who went on to do clerical work at the Foreign Office before becoming a technical assistant at the BBC, listed *Woman*, *Woman's Weekly*, *Woman and Home* and *Home Chat* as her favourite titles, while Mable Cunningham gave an even more extensive list, including *Woman*, *Woman and Home*, *Good Housekeeping* and *People's Friend*. All the women, apart from Joy Drewett-Browne, who relished her single status working in a bank and living in a girls' hostel, wanted to marry and have families, something that was reflected in their magazine reading. R. Shoobet, Rose Wedgbury and Florence Spike all read sensational story papers as girls, but moved on to domestic titles after marriage (see appendix 2).

Interpreting oral history as 'text' involves paying attention to repeated refrains, key phrases, pronouns, the manner in which a narrator positions herself, the tone in which she speaks, as well as silences and counter-narratives. Ethnographic studies such as Janice Radway's (1987) work with romance readers and Joke Hermes (1995) research about reading magazines have used this approach to explore the unconscious impulses bound up in popular reading. While the phrase "easily put down" defined Hermes project, "They opened up a whole new world" became central to mine. It aligned magazine reading with memories of women's youthful everyday lives: first job, first boyfriend, battles with mother, or the early years of married life, and foregrounded contradictions, not least the need for careful pragmatism coupled with a longing for transformation and escape. Magazine reading was both a source of pleasure and escapist fantasy, and a means of "learning" or "doing" things. Readers referred to magazines as "pie in the sky" and "down to earth"; a realistic reflection of one's own life - "these were the things we bought and used" said one respondent pointing to the advertisements - and a "window on other people's lives"; a guide to "new", "up-to-date" and "modern" ideas or something more conventional, even old fashioned. Phrases such as, "I like a book with hints and recipes as well as fiction", "informative and light reading and cooking", they "taught me to be practical and smart, I hope", "you always got something, didn't you, in all the books", "a little treat every week", "a nice little book", "my one luxury", suggest a system of checks and balances where small pleasures rewarded resourceful management.

The performative and shared aspects of magazine reading emerged in group interviews. An advert for Kotex Sanitary Towels, for instance, prompted collective memories about the hidden

world of menstruation from the Petts Wood sewing group. Women explained how the ads had prompted them to speak to friends or older sisters (more rarely mothers) to find out about their changing bodies; a topic that otherwise was strictly taboo. Etiquette features, in contrast, caused general embarrassment suggesting that some social anxieties remain taboo; “I didn’t need to read *that* kind of thing”, one woman forcefully declared. The tone readers used could be instructive. Memories of the passions of romantic fiction sparked lively conversation, suggesting its libratory aspects as a means of imagining and vocalising desire:

It was the romance, and there was hatred, do you know what I mean, and all the agonising [the tape become confused at this point because everyone starts talking excitedly at once]. I can remember introducing my grandmother to Ruby M. Ayres. She thought she was wonderful and she joined the library for it, and she was quite an old lady then!

A dialogue between Lena Lowdell and Lillian Huff suggests how the problem page and romantic fiction were read in close proximity, as readers interpreted their coded language, learning lessons and making connections between the two.

LL: I always turned to the back, to the problem page. Why? Well you learned things.

LH: We didn’t know much about sex in them days.

LL: And you learnt it, you learnt various things. Well, someone would write about how they’d been going wi’ a lad and he’d been asking her to go with him, should I go with him or not? You know things like that. You see that’s how we learnt what to do.

LH: That’s how we educated ourselves. They didn’t mention anything like a penis, nothing like that in them days.

LL: I also liked a good love story, and if it was a good love story you couldn’t leave it alone, you just had to read it.

LL: [about the problem page] I took everything in hook line and sinker, thinking it were true.

‘I took it all in’ a claim which seems to describe an uncritical absorption of the messages in magazines was repeated by several readers. The extent to which readers ‘worked’ at their reading, nevertheless, contradicts this, suggesting an active engagement as they moved between registers (fiction and the agony page, for instance), positioned, and ‘educated’ themselves. ‘Taking it all in’, as such, may be read as a counter narrative (a dominant story that reveals another story) and an expression of the close attention women paid to magazines. A form of reception akin to the emotionally “absorbed” gaze that Emilie Altenloh identified in her 1914 study of cinema audiences, it signals a “gender-differentiated experience of modernity” (Petro, 1989).

Readers, moreover, exhibited critical faculties that suggest they actively resisted, or at least negotiated the ‘preferred messages’ in magazines. Scepticism about the veracity of agony columns was particularly common. Ivy Moylan went so far as to send in spoof letters about “secretaries being bothered by the boss, and that sort of thing”; demonstrating her knowledge of the genre, she took great pleasure in subverting it. “Sentimental stories” were particularly disliked by *Woman* readers who expressed a marked preference for fiction that dealt with

everyday heroes and heroines (see chapter 7). Kathleen Ash, the daughter of a London stevedore, pointing to a domestic monthly with embroidery stencils on its cover, observed, “this was more for the vicar’s wife”. While, Mavis Smith, a tailor’s daughter living in Leicester, rejected other seemingly similar publications preferring *Woman’s Weekly*, which she considered eminently superior due to the quality of its writing and dress patterns. Magazines, others insisted, gave them “ideas” that could be adopted, adapted or rejected rather than slavishly followed. A trained dressmaker, Flo Mansell, for instance, used magazine patterns but insisted that she always changed or personalised them (Hackney, 1999). My interviews revealed that magazine reading was (and remains) a complicated business that could involve contradictory processes of emotional engagement and critical distance, personal and collective interpretation, resistance, negotiation and transformation. In order to further explore the meaning of magazine reading for these women, and the forms of identification associated with it, I extrapolated four themes: reading as a means of ‘rebellion and realistic escape’; reading as a source of feminine knowledge (‘a good lesson in life’); reading and class identity (class and cultural values); and reading as means of materialising modern femininities (social and psychological). The first two were developed from readers’ descriptions of why and how they read magazines, while the second two concern conscious or unconscious processes of interpretation and/or transformation.

3.2 Rebellion and Realistic Escape: “A Little Treat Every Week”

The phrase “a little treat every week” was frequently employed by readers to describe their magazines. Connoting small but regular pleasures, it expressed an economy of desire shaped by respectable and moderate dreams that did not stray too far from the realms of possibility. Whereas, contemporary commentators regarded escapist reading as a temporary release from poverty and hardship, or “a drug” to “stupefy”, the women I interviewed used what I term a repertoire of ‘realistic escape’, which was grounded in the exigencies of their social and emotional lives, and connoted agency rather than stupefaction (Pilgrim Trust 1938; Leavis, 1932). ‘Escape’, Radway observed, refers to the condition left behind and its intention: the projection of a utopian, or at least improved, future. This section explores the nature of escape for magazine readers in the interwar years, and how it was shaped by the particularities of their social and emotional lives, as well as the magazines they read. It identifies two significantly different responses. The first concerns romantic fiction and sensational ‘bloods’ such as *Peg’s Paper*, demonstrating how romance reading was a rebellious activity that helped young women to escape, literally and symbolically, from the limitations of their mothers’ lives. The second involves the visual culture of consumption promoted in new weeklies such as *Woman* where escape was a less furtive and more open affair; a pleasure that could be shared with friends, work colleagues and even mothers, as girls lost themselves in colourful full-page fashion spreads, or mooned over photos of movie stars (Thumin, 1991).

Most women associated escape with romantic fiction. “Stories”, as Marge Coupe put it, “provided escapism, whilst articles provided information and ideas”. The longer serials of the period were remembered with particular affection, answering in Gretta Robinson’s words, a “deeply felt need”. Such guilty pleasures, nevertheless, were swiftly checked and qualified. Mavis Smith, who read magazines as a young housewife, recalled:

When I was younger it was always the fiction first. I tried to ration myself a bit. I

suppose romantic fiction in those days... I don't know why you go for romanticism, perhaps because you are plunged into the world of washing nappies and whatnot. I think the magazine's romanticism was sheer escapism. The expense of the recipes was a consideration, whether they are practical or what I term pie-in-the-sky.

Moving swiftly from romantic escape to pragmatic concerns, Mavis's recollections demonstrate how women were torn between personal pleasure and domestic responsibilities, even in memory, and how this structured a particular approach to reading. Her self-control as she 'rationed' her escapist reading, recalls Mass-Observation readers' fears of fiction's emotional effects and their desire "to be taken out of themselves and put back at intervals during the day" (see 3.1).

Historians studying the lives of working-class girls in the 1930s have shown how their aspirations were shaped by questions of respectability, fear of poverty, and crucially a wish to escape the hardship and domestic burden of their mothers' lives (Alexander, 1994; Todd, 2005). Mothers were a significant presence in many women's memories of magazine reading. For some, such as Kathleen Ash, whose family lived in Rotherhithe, East London, magazine reading represented a form of rebellion against a mother who complained, "You've always got your bloody nose in a book!" Kathleen's love of reading was partly driven by a wish to differentiate herself from her mother who was always, "too busy for magazines and books". Loosing oneself in a romantic story meant time off from domestic duties: time for oneself, time to dream and find out about things. Lillian Huff, a gardener's daughter, stressed the educative value of reading magazines, claiming that her mother would "only look at the pictures". Lena Lowdell, the daughter of a Sheffield collier, outlined her mother's tactics to curb her reading while, for Avis Randle, magazine reading was part of the on-going battles she had with her stepmother:

...if you were reading a book [magazine] and you got up... when you got back the book would have gone. She thought you were wasting your time. You should be polishing. She never had idle hands... even if you were reading the newspaper she'd hide it... Which was wrong, I mean reading you learn a lot with reading. (Lena Lowdell)

I were a little devil for that [*Peg's Paper*]. Me step-mother used to hide it. "Don't you dare read that!" She took it because I were too young to understand it, or so she thought. But I used to find out where she'd hide it. On me off-school holidays I used to, ohh, sit there with me knees up... I always remember reading...I don't know I just liked perhaps getting one over on my step-mother... (Avis Randle)

Many resorted to a clandestine approach. Dorothy Barton's father worked on the docks and her family lived in Charlton, South London. Her mother took *Red Letter*, and someone else in the house took *Titbits*, both of which Dorothy looked at, although she was not supposed to. When she was older her mother had *Woman's Weekly* and *Woman's Own* as her "little treat every week", which Dorothy read "unobserved".

Articulating the gap between girlish dreams and parental expectations, such accounts suggest how generational change was manifest through attitudes to reading, and how magazines provided a space in which women could imagine different lives and different ways of being.

Marriage, with the promise of children and a home of one's own, was the conventional romantic happy ending and the link between escapist fiction and editorial features forged connections between dreams and reality. Lena and her husband, encouraged by the new ideals of domestic life portrayed so vividly in magazines (see chapter 4), paid £15 down and 13s and 1d a month for their own house, despite strong opposition from parents who had always lived in rented accommodation, and viewed a mortgage as an unnecessary risk.

For others magazines offered the possibility of shared rather than hidden pleasures, and mutual interests expressed across the generations and with friends in the consumer culture, which was expressed most vividly in the visual rhetoric of the new weeklies in the 1930s. *Woman* reader Joyce Haines was introduced to the magazine when reading her mother's copy as a girl of 16 in 1939. Eunice Davies, who was employed as a shorthand typist from 1933 until she married in 1940, cut out pictures of Royalty and film stars from the magazine, and discussed the publication's colourful dress pages with her friends. Describing herself as, "young and full of fun" in those days, Eunice identified closely with *Woman* which she considered "light and bright" with a "young outlook"; a necessary escape from the "strict discipline" of home where her father "ruled the roost" and an office where, "we could hear the clock tick". Maintaining standards, however, remained essential for a middle-class girl such as Eunice, whose family owned a sheet metal business and lived in a detached house in Middlesex; conventions had to be respected, even sixty years later: "I kept to the rules", she said.

Unlike those who viewed romantic weeklies as a desirable yet illicit pleasure, readers such as Joyce Haines and the teacher Marjorie Denut characterised *Woman* as modern and respectable. It combined "good sensible articles" with fiction that "transported me from my everyday world" but showed "down to earth characters" and "homely types", according to Haines (see chapter 7). Denut described the publication as "light, bright and youthful", but respectful of conventions; unlike her mother who was "before her time and rather unconventional, the opposite of magazine advice". Anna Parkhurst's mother, a professional business woman, actively disapproved of her daughter's magazine reading, not because it exposed her to shockingly new ideas, but because she considered it commonplace and mundane; Anna read *Woman*, *Woman's Own* and film magazines (see appendix 2).

Woman's distinctive blend of novelty that didn't go *too* far was perhaps best summed up by Margaret Coupe who described the magazine as "about and for ordinary readers" but with "a further outlook" at a time when "radio and cinema visits were the only other sources of ideas and news". For women such as Coupe, Denut and Haines, the daughters of the aspiring new middle-classes, *Woman's* blend of novelty and conventionality, youthfulness and respectability, its ability to reflect their everyday lives and their aspirations for change made the magazine distinctive. "Magazines such as *Home Chat* and *Peg's Paper* were about servant girls marrying millionaires. *Woman* brought things down to earth e.g. secretary marrying the boss!", Denut reflected. The magazine offered shared pleasures in a visual culture of consumption that was youthful and modern, and appealed across differences of generation and class. Citing pleasure and relaxation as her main motivations for reading Denut, who subscribed to *Woman* and the monthly *Modern Woman*, rejected the term escape because, as she put it, she "had nothing to escape from". For others such as collier's daughter Lena Lowdell, escapist reading was tied up with rebellion against parental authority, and associated with new aspirations and generational change. All these women could be categorised among the new female readership for magazines. The degree to which they considered their reading escapist, and what that escape consisted of, however, depended as much upon the contexts in

which they were reading as on the titles they read. Their memories, however, all link escapism with lived reality and suggest that magazine reading involved complex processes of ‘seeing things for what they are’ and imagining them differently, of keeping things in perspective and letting go. The next section explores how magazine reading contributed to, what Radway termed, ‘escape’s intention’: a better or improved future, through knowledge acquisition or, as readers put it, “a good lesson in life”.

3.3 “A Good Lesson in Life”: Learning To Be a (Modern) Woman

I think these magazines helped to educate us in a way, as we left school at fourteen and there was not T.V. and only limited radio... They helped us to understand more... They were the only influence we had outside our homes. We lived very secluded lives in those days. (Joyce Haines)

...a married woman related to something entirely different to the young single girls. I did much more cooking and there were lots of things in there, little tips about the house and home that as a married person I’d relate more to...it was a way of learning things. (Kathleen Ash)

“You learn something from reading”, Lillian Huff reflected when recalling her youthful pleasure in magazines. She was not alone, readers repeatedly referred to magazines as a source of knowledge and education. Magazines of one sort or another, of course, had offered readers advice and instruction since the eighteenth century. What constitutes ‘knowledge’, however, depends upon a magazine’s ethos and target audience, is historically specific, contingent and subject to change. This section explores how magazines were read in the interwar years as a source of knowledge and a means of learning about topics as diverse as social etiquette, housekeeping, menstruation or divorce.

The most vivid recollections of learning were associated with significant moments of change in women’s lives. Mavis Smith, who read film magazines as a teenager, took *Woman’s Weekly* when she married; “It was the knitting patterns in the *Weekly*, foremost the knitting patterns”, she recalled. Helen Smith, who was a 23 year old housewife and mother in 1937, summarised succinctly, “*Woman* covered most aspects of my life at that time: new husband, new home, new baby”. For Viola Higgins, who married in 1938 and moved away from her family home, *Woman* provided the reliable information and guidance she would otherwise have received from family and friends:

...I went to live in Kent in my new married home. I immediately had the *Woman* delivered to me having purchased it at my home before marriage...It was a great friend to me when I married as moving from Bristol to Kent I did not know anyone and my husband being a traveller was away quite a lot. (Viola Higgins, letter to F. H., 1995)

Knowledge acquisition could be symbolic as well as pragmatic, marking out progressive stages in the attainment of womanhood (Alexander, 1994; Steedman, 1992). Absence, this time of a father, was bound up with magazine reading for C. C. Russell:

I began reading *Woman* from no.1. I think I was fourteen and my Dad said, your a

woman now, and he bought it for me [laughs]. I was never disappointed in the magazine it was just something I looked forward to every week. I would more or less read everything, I don't know why. I always had it in my mind that my dad had bought it for me because my mother and father separated when I was seventeen and I've always associated it with my dad, if you see what I mean. I've always said my dad bought that for me from no. 1, because he moved from Huddersfield and we didn't see him for years really but we kept in touch. Yes, I've always linked it with my dad [laughs]. I got to the point where I didn't read the stories because I didn't have time. I read them when I was younger... because I didn't have a sister, I only had a brother who was younger than I was and I suppose my mum wasn't very modern [laughs]. I used to read it alone in my bedroom. (C. C. Russell)

"*Woman*", she declared, made her feel as if she were "growing up". The publication helped her established an imaginative connection with her father that supported her through adolescence. When she married it provided domestic tips and information that helped create what she termed a "nice homely home", that was very different to the life she had experienced as a child. "My mother wasn't a very good cook so I learnt just about everything", she recalled, such "knowledge" was not readily available elsewhere, at least, not at an "affordable price". Russell loved to visit the home of an aunt who was a "bit better off" and who seemed "a perfect housewife"; "I always thought when I had a family I would knit and sew for them and make a lovely home – to better myself".

Many valued magazines because they contained ideas that were 'modern', that is that differed from those held by their mothers' generation. Mabel Cunningham, who in 1937 was working as a wages clerk in the day, with an extra job in the evening to earn spending money for herself, rejected monthlies such as *Woman and Home* and *Good Housekeeping*, which her mother bought, in favour of *Woman* because "at seventeen they were old fashioned, I considered *Woman* modern". Lena Lowdell explained that magazine recipes were "more modern" than the dishes her mother cooked; Lillian Huff added that the ingredients would have been too expensive for her mother to buy.

If the 'modern knowledge' available in magazines concerned the home, it also involved the body with fashion and beauty tips and information about health, hygiene and motherhood, amongst other things. For the single, civil servant Madge Taylor, the attraction of *Woman's Weekly's* knitting patterns was not so much their economy - shop patterns were only thruppence - but rather it was an "up-to-date thing", and because she trusted the magazine's advice. Kathleen Ash attributed her preference for *Woman's Companion* to the fact that it "told you things" that you didn't know about, for instance, periods or pregnancy; "I still didn't know anything about that, but I was curious and I loved to read about those things". Much was implicit and, more often than not, 'sex knowledge' had to be pieced together from a patchwork of information, including pamphlets, films and friends' talk, as well as magazines (see chapter 7). Adverts for sanitary towels provided clues to otherwise hidden or suppressed knowledge about menstruation.

When my period started I was fourteen and a half and I never knew about them at all, and that was general. And when it started I told me mum and she said, look this is what you've got to wear, they were the ones that you washed, and don't tell the boys and mind how you sit down and that was all. I didn't know it was coming again the next

month. I thought it was a one off thing, you didn't know, you didn't question it. But then I began to think about them things that was in *Woman's Companion*, and the only thing that you heard was from your friends, you didn't know what you were reading about...but it stayed in your mind and then you'd think, oh, that's what that was about. (Kathleen Ash)

Pointing to an ad for Kotex sanitary towels, a member of the Petts Wood sewing group remarked that it would have helped her find out about her body. This acted as a catalyst for a collective memory of the shame, silence, ignorance and embarrassment that surrounded menstruation. Familiar myths were recounted as women detailed the indignities, prohibitions, even terror that menstrual bleeding incurred. "I was absolutely terrified and I screamed for my mother", "I thought I had done something dirty", "you couldn't wash your hair", "I wasn't allowed to swim", "I felt embarrassed in front of my husband because we never talked about anything like that". "We shouldn't really be embarrassed, should we?" one woman reflected. The question hung in the air. These memories demonstrate how such advertisements, with their 'scientific' terms and images of modern women living active, energetic lives (*figs.* 93 & 152) (see chapter 6), gave a public and acceptable face to what was otherwise considered shameful and hidden.

'Knowledge' could also involve cautionary advice. Knowing how to avoid getting into 'trouble' and how to identify a 'good' husband were fundamental skills at a time when girls who 'got caught' risked abandonment, or worse, and a prudent marriage remained the chief means of avoiding poverty for many women (White, 1989; Humphries, 1988; Davies, 1992). Avis Randle, who worked as a machinist in the Boot and Shoe factory in Leicester, acknowledged the educational value of romantic fiction.

When you left school, it learnt me right from wrong because your parents didn't used to talk to you about things like that. Ohh no, you wouldn't talk about sex or anything. And I think it put me on the right road, how to behave when you went out with boys or anything like that...don't have sex or anything like that! ... that was *a good lesson in life*.. It taught you right from wrong. [my italics]. (Avis Randle)

Lena and Lillian's memories of magazine reading were also peppered with warnings about pregnancy or men's bad intentions. Just as it eased some anxieties, magazine-knowledge reinforced others, it seems.

Women's insistence on the importance of 'learning things' from magazines suggests a, conscious or unconscious, awareness that becoming a woman was not 'natural', but had to be learnt. In contrast to the notions of "slipshod", "easy" or distracted reading employed by middle-class commentators such as Jephcott, Leavis or Mass-Observation, learning 'lessons for life' required attention; meaning emerged over time, through discussion and reflection. Knowledge and escape were two sides of the same coin, as the promise of escape was wedded to instruction and the 'magazine as window' returned the reader to her daily life, informed and improved. Together the repertoires of 'realistic escape' and 'learning things' that emerged from women's talk reveal a shared consciousness of magazine reading as a transformative activity, representing dreams that just might come true. For the expanded readership of women's magazines in the interwar years, this dream of achievable desires was perhaps the most potent dream of all. The last two sections explore some of the identities and transformations (potential

or otherwise) associated with magazine reading, and how these dreams were realised.

3.4 “A Nice Little Book”: Class and Cultural Values

I liked *Woman's Weekly*, it was a popular book, really it was! I think it was the most popular book. There was something nice about that book. There were always nice cookery items, always nice knitting patterns...and it was more, now what can I say, erhm, homely [laughs]. (Kathleen Ash, 1995)

The ‘middle class’ of the interwar years was viewed as an amorphous group squeezed between Capital and labour, akin to the ‘lower middle class’ of the pre-war period but more extensive than it. (Gunn, 1999: 22)

The phrase ‘a nice little book’ was frequently used by readers to signal their approval of a publication. Along with such observations as, ‘it was rather genteel’, ‘it kept up its standards’ and the description ‘homely’, it conveyed desires for respectability, comfort and continuity; the reliably familiar rather than the shock of change. Such sentiments connote what historian Simon Gunn (1999) described as the ‘middling’ values of an amorphous and expanded middle-class, which encompassed skilled artisans, shop and clerical workers, trades and business people as well as teachers, doctors and the new professionals working in the chemical and engineering industries, as consumer culture became central to conceptions of identity. These ambiguities were reflected in the language women used to describe their magazines. ‘A nice little book’, for instance, combined the word ‘nice’, evoking the values of the suburbs: desires for “charm, sentimentality, order and control”, with ‘book’ which, when used in place of ‘magazine’, referenced the idiom of a residual working class (Oliver, 1981: 181-2; McAleer, 1992; M-O, 1940). Class identity, Richard Hoggart (1957, 121) observed, recalling the pulps and popular weeklies of his childhood in the 1930s, was materialised in the homely idiom and roughly textured newsprint of magazines that embodied a “felt sense of the texture of life” in the group they catered for. This section argues that the thoughts and feelings about social status that emerged in women’s memories of reading magazines suggest how these publications were used, often unconsciously, to perform, submerge, evade, negotiate or rethink class identity.

Historians and social commentators have used habits of newspaper reading and even library usage to explore the relationship between reading and social class yet the class constituencies of magazine readerships have tended to be more ambiguous (Jeffery & McClelland, 1987). Broadly speaking, romantic pulps have been categorised as working-class publications, while domestic monthlies appealed to the middle classes, and the more expensive fashion and society journals were read by the wealthier sections of the middle and upper class (White, 1971; Mowat, 1968). Diana Gittins (1982: 57), who associated interest in magazines with the growing “home culture” of the period, has been unusual in foregrounding women’s marital status as a major factor determining title selection, something that my work with readers supports.

Speaking to readers, it quickly became apparent that social class was elided with ‘class’ or type of publication and that magazines were an important means of articulating, understanding and performing their own, and others’, social status and identity. Dorothy Barton, whose father was a docker, recalled that monthly magazines were aimed at “a higher class of reader”, while weeklies catered for “more working class”. Holding up a copy of the romantic weekly *Peg’s*

Paper, Lena Lowdell observed

If you read these sort of books you were very low class, you weren't properly educated. The monthlies were for middle class. You'd be very low reading that wouldn't you!

Lillian Huff, who married an accountant, observed that her well to do mother-in-law took a large number of domestic weeklies and monthlies, which Lillian regarded as a visible sign of her affluence and social position. Mavis Smith, whose father was a tailor and who went to grammar school, considered monthlies "too high brow", and "too expensive". Genre and a magazine's material qualities were both factors, with expensive (1 shilling) 'high class' illustrated, fashion glossies such as *Vogue* or *Harpers* at one end of the spectrum and the 'low class' pulps with their sensational fiction at the other.

The wide variety of domestic magazines, whether weekly or monthly, letterpress or with colour illustrations, represented a central ground whose readership was ambiguous and harder to define. Editors and publishers, moreover, were only too well aware of the ubiquitous appeal of 'home' in the period, and eager to exploit this in order to increase circulations (see chapters 2 & 4). Editor Angela Wyatt (1995) described *Woman and Home*'s readership as being determined less by class than by a common interest in the home. Readers bought weeklies and monthlies that shared the same house style, weeklies for 'regular reading' and serials and monthlies for longer features and domestic information. Reader Eve Sherwood took all three best-selling AP publications: *Woman's Weekly*, *Woman and Home* and the more expensive *Woman's Journal*, explaining,

A weekly, such as *Woman's Weekly*, was easier to carry to business whereas a monthly magazine was nice to have indoors, especially at weekends, as they were larger and heavier. (Eve Sherwood, 1997)

Privately educated and living in the family owned bungalow in Solihull in 1937, Eve worked as a secretary in her father's firm when she began to subscribe; her publications' domestic emphasis confirmed her ambition to marry and have children. Eve claimed not to "consider class" when reading magazines. The members of the Essex Women's Co-operative Guild, the majority of who described themselves as staunchly working class, in contrast, believed that domestic weeklies and especially the new weeklies promoted lifestyles that were middle class. *Woman's Weekly*, nevertheless, was the title that most recalled reading in the 1930s, particularly if they were married then, and identities as wives and mothers took precedence over class affiliations.

The interwar period was one in which differences of class and social status were infinitely important and yet, due to the upheavals of modernity, economic instability and social unrest, had never been harder to define (Graves & Hodge, 1940/1995). For the middle classes, a particularly complex stratum of society that encompassed both top professionals and an emergent, upwardly mobile working class, respectability was all important (Lewis & Maude, 1949). Magazines, with their information about appearance, codes of behaviour and housekeeping standards, represented reliable guides, as women assessed themselves and others according to the titles they read. Minute differences, which to the untutored eye are indiscernible, were crucially important. Mavis Smith, a dedicated *Woman's Weekly* reader, had

initially been forced to take *Woman's Companion* until the 'Weekly' became available:

There was something gentle about it... I suppose the *Woman's Companion* was a bit more old-fashioned. It didn't register with me, I was very thankful when I could get the 'Weekly.' I couldn't tell you how it compared for price, but it was a better sort of publication...the type of articles, the type of stories, could be the quality. I'm a fanatic for good English...it was more in tune with my age group I suppose.

Fine distinctions of tone, appearance and language marked out the 'Weekly' for Mavis as an infinitely more desirable publication that was youthful, yet respectable and with which she could identify; so much so that over sixty years later she continues to subscribe.

3.5 "These Were the Things We Bought and Used": Materialising Modern Femininities

"It suited my needs" or it "served women's interests" were phrases readers regularly used, most often in conjunction with observations about how magazines were integral to their everyday lives. "These were the things we bought and used", Lena and Lillian remarked, reeling off a list of brand names: Bile Beans, Baxine powders, Amami and Snowfire shampoo, Brasso, Oxo, Mrs. Robinson's starch - "the woman that advertised it had that lovely crinkly hair" - and Coleman's mustard. This final section considers how women used magazines and how the models of modern femininity as wives, mothers, home-makers or girlfriends they contained were negotiated, materialised in everyday actions and feelings ("*Woman* made me feel I was growing up", C. C. Russell observed), conscious, and unconscious, performances and self-positionings. Examples will focus on two characteristic transformative moments in women's lives: courting and setting up home.

Avis Randle, a Leicestershire schoolgirl in the 1930s living with her unemployed father and a stepmother with whom she didn't always get along, avidly read *Peg's Paper* and consumed romance voraciously. Reading and going for long walks along the canal were important activities because they provided much-needed opportunities to think and dream; solitary practices that were abandoned when, aged 14 in 1935, she left school to work in the local Boot and Shoe Factory and started to go, as she put it, "out enjoying myself" at dances. On one such occasion she met Arthur. Avis employed the language and narrative structure of romance to describe the event:

First time I met Arthur it was St. Thomas's dancing, Saturday night... And I saw him and I said to my friend, "Coo, he's a bit of all right!" He were dancing with his girlfriend then. I just looked at him and that were it...

First time Arthur kissed me I thought boy, you are my one!...I mean, I'd had a few kisses off other lads but, as soon as Arthur kissed me that were it. Well, Mary, me friend, she was in love with him an' all and when I started going out with him she never spoke to me. She married a GI. He picked me instead.

Avis's story contains all the standard components of fictional romance: a hero, a dramatic encounter, a moment of bliss, the happy ending and even, in the person of her jealous friend Mary, the 'other' woman. Schooled in romance, Avis was immediately able to identify Arthur as 'Mr. Right' (they, in fact, went on to enjoy a long and happy marriage) and used the familiar

devices of romantic fiction: the ‘first look’, the ‘first kiss’, to structure her story and give it dramatic emphasis. She gleefully recounted how *she* had looked at and kissed Arthur, appraising him from a position of experience (she’d had “kisses off other lads”) in a manner that recalled the assertive modern heroines in 1930s magazines (see chapter 7). Anthony Giddens (1991: 53) uses the term “biography-maintenance” to describe how telling one’s story is an active and on-going process of self-definition that is continually being reconstructed and revised. A natural performer, much of the pleasure Avis took in telling her story was that it revealed a self-identity defined by satisfaction and pride in her ability to know and get her man. Courting could be a difficult, even dangerous process in the 1930s when so much depended on a woman’s choice of marriage partner. By finding and winning Arthur Avis transformed her life. She found ‘real love’ and escaped her difficult family situation; triumph over tragedy and the apogee of romance. Romantic fiction provided Avis with models of how to successfully manage courting with its associated processes of self-transformation, as well as space to dream. ‘Practical’, ‘interesting’ and ‘helpful’ articles, the flipside of romance in women’s magazines, were integral to the practicalities of making and self-creation, whether of oneself or one’s home. Readers Lena Lowdell & Lillian Huff told me how they stored up snippets of ‘knowledge’ that, while not immediately needed, “might be useful in the future”; I do it myself today. Recipes, at a time when many went without, were particularly prized and for some the need to collect was almost compulsive (Geissler & Oddy, 1993). “I’ve got a stack of recipes, some from years ago”, C. C. Russell confided, while Lena admitted, “I could never get through all the recipes I’ve got”. The activity of saving and collecting, according to Anthony Giddens (1984: 39), represents a “crucial bulwark against threatening anxieties”, and the recipes and other bits of information women culled from magazines served as talismans against unexpected eventualities that signalled better times ahead. Sewing and knitting patterns or stencils provided cost-effective and creative ways of decorating the home or acquiring the latest look (Hackney, 1999 & 2004; see chapter 4). “I still have articles I embroidered from *Woman* transfers”, Mabel Cunningham reflected. Eunice Davies, when an eighteen year old short-hand typist in 1935, made her first three quarter length coat and skirt, sending in her own drawings for “all-in-one pyjamas” to *Woman* and getting a pattern back. With little in the way of a formal dressmaking education, C. C. Russell sent off for dress and blouse patterns and made all her and her children’s clothes, finding *Woman*’s “cut-out pieces” a great help. Coupons were particularly popular. “Everyone was coupon-mad in the 1930s”, Lena Lowdell recalled. A marketing device used by advertisers and publishers to promote products and conduct research (see chapter 2), for readers such as Lena, the daughter of a Sheffield miner whose aspirations to buy her own home shocked her careful parents, coupons were an important means of acquiring special things:

You know, I’ve got a tea-set in there [points to kitchen cupboard] that my mother got with collecting the cookery coupons. I’ve got a box of the cookery coupons somewhere - that was from *Red Letter*. You had to collect them and get the full set. She got all the neighbours in the street to help her save for it. They used to be always giving something away. There was always free gifts...Silverseal margarine. I can remember me mother when I were getting married she said, “I can’t afford a wedding present for you love.” And she said “I tell you what, I’m saving Silverseal coupons for you love and I’ll get you two pair of sheets and that will do for a wedding present” [laughs]. She got me two pair of sheets with Silverseal coupons! Every week there was a coupon in *Red Letter* and it was a recipe and you cut out a little card, and you had to have the full set,

and she managed to get the full set and got this tea service. It's in my cupboard. I've got one cup broke in fifty five years! You see we'd no fancy pots. She said if I could only get a lovely tea-service. And when I got married she said, "I have no further use for it love." She didn't give it me straight away. (Lena Lowdell)

Such treasured and otherwise unaffordable items as a tea-set (only one cup was broken over fifty five years) and sheets (a wedding present) were purchased through strategies and co-ordinated action that, in one case, involved the whole street. Such activities, which the social ethnographer Sarah Pink (2004: 52) describes as being on the "improvisary edge" of everyday creative practice, are the means through which gender identities are constructed and reformed according to ethnographers who explore the social relations between people and things. Like Avis, Lena's story articulates a self-identity, but one which prioritised resourcefulness and self-reliance in the pursuit of respectability, as family and neighbourhood pulled together to acquire the appropriate items for a young couple's first home.

For Avis and Lena, and many more like them, magazine reading was not only escapist, but was also integral to the process of managing the rapid transition from childhood to adult life, and achieving the stability and respectability that a good marriage and a home of one's own represented in the 1930s. Magazines offered essential 'knowledge' about how to get a 'good' husband or the necessary items for setting up a respectable home. Equally, as these women's stories demonstrate, their magazines helped them consciously imagine and perform modern self-identities as, for example, a 'desiring' woman or a resourceful wife.

3.6 Conclusion: It 'Supplied My Needs'

...the magazine's function now is to provide reading fodder for odd moments, travelling and after-business hours, glanced through with a background of household chatter of 'the wireless'... the stories they provide should be short, 'snappy,' as crudely arresting as a poster... and easy enough for the jaded mind to take in without exertion. (Leavis, 1932: 28)

The undesirable effects of magazine reading were well established by the start of the century. By the early 1930s the situation, according to literary critic Q. D. Leavis (1932: 7-19) were still worse, the "reading habit" having become a "drug habit" that encouraged "passive" rather than "critical" reading due to the widespread commercialism of "Woolworths' literature": penny paper novels, the 'Readers Library', detective stories, and an "enormous steady stream" of magazines. The elitism of Leavis's argument notwithstanding, her description of magazine reading as a fragmented and interrupted practice, undertaken when the reader was 'out and about' or half attending to other media that came into the home, as much a visual and sensory experience as a cerebral one, and providing a ready means of relaxation and escape, is illuminating. It suggests the degree to which the modern woman's reading habits (the habits of the new female reader) differed from those of her (middle class) Victorian and Edwardian predecessors for whom reading, as Kate Flint (1993) observed, served largely as an ideological support for the home.

Whereas, Leavis dismissed such reading as "scattered" and "slipshod", I found that readers positioned themselves as active, attentive ("I took it all in"), critical (the dislike of sentimental stories), engaged ("a way of learning things"), conscious of the genre and willing to playfully subvert it by, for instance, writing spoof letters to the problem page, and generally

utilising magazines for their own needs. Eunice Davies, when asked why she read a particular title, explained it “supplied my needs”, needs that were shaped by her social circumstances and how she encountered magazines; in Eunice’s case they provided fun and much-needed release from the strictures of home and office life. The flip side of escape, whether from a scolding mother or a boring job, was ‘knowledge’ and the guidance women gained about how to manage their changing bodies, their boyfriends or their homes, was an integral part of ‘realistic escape’. Although the women I contacted represent a relatively small sample, their memories of magazine reading accord with wider patterns of change as increasing numbers of women from different social and educational backgrounds were reading the same magazines. M. Reed, the wife of an architect and mother of two who lived in the family’s detached house in West Sussex, and M. Kirkaldy, a chauffeur’s daughter who earned 30 shillings a month working as a nursemaid, for instance, both took *Woman* and *Woman’s Own* regularly and looked at *Woman’s Weekly* and *Home Chat*. Magazine reading, which is very different from the linear experience of watching a film, is both a social and a psychological activity. The expanded female readership represented an imagined community defined by new and changing ideas about childcare, housekeeping, fashion, beauty or fiction, for instance, rather than fixed notions of class identity.

Of all the women, Mabel Cunningham perhaps best expressed the possibilities and tensions that characterised women’s lives in the period and motivated their magazine reading. The eldest of six children, Mabel’s ambitions were frustrated at an early age when her engineer father’s unemployment forced her to give up grammar school and find a job as a brewer’s wages clerk. She read in the evening and “to pass the time” on the bus to work and took a large number of magazines. *Woman*, however, was the title she liked best because, while others seemed “old-fashioned”, she felt it was “modern” and offered a “window on other people’s lives”. Grammar school educated yet forced into a dead end job, the magazine helped Mabel to imaginatively identify with and participate in a world of exciting new fashions, romantic dilemmas and career opportunities. Its pragmatic tone and practical advice, moreover, suggested that her dreams were not just illusions but, with energy and application as well as a little luck, could be real possibilities.

Chapter Four: ‘The Science of Teaching People How to Live’. Housewifery, Home craft and the Housewife Heroine

4.1 Introduction: Modern Homes for Modern Women

The woman of today realizes the immense importance of the home in her life and that of her family. She knows that it is the setting for all the dramas that they will enact together. She does not neglect it, but at the same time she is not so short sighted as to make it an obsession. (*MW* 07.1925: 28)

...the interwar generation was perhaps the most family-oriented and home-centred one in history. (Burnett, 1978: 265)

A home of one’s own, one of the most compelling dreams of the period, was becoming a reality for increasing numbers of people in the interwar period. Over four million new houses,

an unprecedented expansion in the state and private sectors, coupled with cheap mortgages, easy credit and the mass manufacture of household consumer goods underpinned the domestic focus of consumer magazines (Burnett, 1978; Mowat, 1955). Imagining the modern home and how it should, or could, be constituted became a central task for a raft of individuals and organisations including architects, health experts, government departments, builders, urban planners, domestic scientists, gas and electricity companies, women's groups and interior designers, as well as the domestic editors of women's magazines. 'Home', as a place and an idea, and the practices, buildings, environments, narratives and things associated with it has been the subject of much academic enquiry in recent years (Cieraad, 1999; Attfield, 2007; Chapman & Hockey, 1999). It was also the most obvious location of women's 'space' in the interwar years, and the principal site where feminine identities were forged, something that drove the domestic remit of service magazines.

This chapter explores debates about housewifery, health, hygiene and home crafts in magazines. It argues that the housewife emerged in advertising and editorial as a modern heroine; a key figure in the modernisation of public and private life. Editors and advertisers were alert to the symbolic importance of home to the nation state as house ownership expanded, and family and home-based activities came to represent the most meaningful satisfactions in life. An early *Modern Woman* editorial warned readers not to make home an obsession, foregrounding connections with the 'outside world', while *Woman's* strapline, the 'National Home Weekly', not only announced the publication's mass market ambitions but also signalled a concern to bring domestic values to public life. To re-imagine the nation, that is, in terms of the concerns, qualities and priorities that shaped the home. This 'turn to the public' in what were principally domestic magazines responded to shifts in social and political life. Housing reform, health and hygiene became matters of acute national importance in 1918 and the responsibilities of the newly enfranchised 'housewife citizens' were a matter of debate. With responsibilities came rights and a range of new citizenship organisations, feminist and non-feminist women's groups, took up women's cause, encouraging their members to become involved in committees and campaigns to improve housing standards and equipment (Beaumont, 1996; Scott, 1998). The mood was reflected in commerce where ads for restorative pills or scouring powders drew on the discourses of housing reform as they urged women to raise standards of health and hygiene (figs. 45 & 46). Magazines, with their editorial and advertising departments dispensing fact and fantasy through text and pictures, represented a feminine 'space' in which the 'place' of home, and by implication nation, could be visualised, re-imagined and debated.

Home was at the forefront of government thinking in 1918 when fears about social unrest impelled Lloyd George's coalition government to promise radical change with its 'Homes fit for Heroes' state subsidised housing scheme (Swenarton, 1981). Between 1919 and 1939 3,998,000 houses were built of which 1,112,000 were local authority built and for rent and 2,886,000 were the result of private enterprise and were for sale (Burnett, 1978: 249). The revolution was not restricted to the moneyed middle-classes. The Tudor Walters Report (1918) provided a model for good quality state housing derived from the garden city movement, which included houses planned for levels of comfort and convenience unknown in working-class housing; the space and light provided by a wider frontage and 'through' living-room, a garden, bathroom, internal WC and scullery fitted for a gas or electric cooker. State housing distribution was improved through the 1920s with a number of Housing Acts (Addison 1919, Chamberlain 1923, Wheatley 1924), while subsidies to local authorities and private enterprise

encouraged building homes for lower-income families. The development of “mass suburbs” and the dispersal of hundreds of thousands of people from crowded inner-city areas to the new residential districts brought about a “minor revolution” in standards of working-class housing and life. In practice, a limited range of income groups benefited, including small clerks, tradesmen, artisans and better-off semi-skilled workers with average-sized families and safe jobs; just the sort of families who constituted the new readership of women’s magazines (Burnett, 1978: 234; see chapter 3).

From the mid-1920s falling building costs, easier mortgages and lower interest rates, accompanied by a boom in speculative building from 1933-8 (which accounted for 72 percent of new housing in the interwar years) led to an important expansion in owner-occupation for the lower-middle and middle classes. New houses had never been so cheap, so desirable or so widely available. For the first time, groups such as skilled manual workers, foremen, clerks, small shopkeepers and junior civil servants, whose wives and daughters constituted the new readership for women’s magazines, could afford to purchase a suburban semi or detached villa, and experience the pride and security conferred by home ownership rather than renting. The Abbey Road Building Society employed deco style lettering and a schematic image of the ideal English cottage/bungalow to sell mortgages for a £1,000 home at “a shilling a day” to *Modern Woman* readers, a message that was reinforced through editorial (figs. 47 & 48) (*MW* 12.1927: 70).

Speculative builders catered broadly for income levels from £100 to £600 per annum, covering a wide spectrum of households in the 1930s; Mrs. K. R., a *Modern Woman* reader from Shrewsbury, for instance, gave her husband’s salary as £400 a year (*MW* 08.1935: 38). In 1938 building societies advanced £137,000,000 and 1,300,000 borrowers moved into home ownership, while in 1937, the year in which *Woman* was launched, 275, 200 new homes were built. Millions of women were in a position to make important decisions about purchasing their first home and John C. Rutherford, in an article packed with detailed information about the potential pitfalls of plumbing and drains, was on hand to advise them. Unless these decisions concerned kitchen shelving - apparently an acknowledged area of female expertise – however, women were instructed to respect a “man’s little vanities” and negotiate their purchase through the intermediary of a male friend, relative or qualified expert! (*W* 21.08.1937: 36)

Magazines, with their pages of editorial advice, adverts selling branded products, romantic stories, humorous illustrations, and alluring photographs, developed a domestic narrative and imaginative context for home owners and those living in rented housing. This chapter will explore that narrative as it was visualised across editorial and advertising, image and text. It begins with the rise of a new figure, the ‘housewife heroine,’ who is considered against a background of debates about domestic service, and the changing nature of housework, and ends with the creative side of home-making: design, decoration and home crafts.

4.2 From Domestic Servant to Housewife Heroine

... there is no more honourable calling than that of the efficient homemaker, and homework supplies the best training for the future mothers of an A1 population. But what picture paper would think of publishing the photograph of Mrs. Brown’s capable little cook-general, who has been in the same situation for years, instead of that of Miss Fluffy Footlights, the film favourite? (*HC* 22.02.1919: 251)

Give a housewife an oil-burner, an electric incinerator, kitchen gadgets that make toast and squeeze orange juice automatically, a modern range and a refrigerator, and she has the time to go out in the world, join clubs, make speeches, educate her children properly and, in short, be the political equivalent of a man. Forbid these things and she is tied to the kitchen sink with apron strings. (*W* 03.07.1937: 7)

Home economics, the domestic science movement, scientific management, and the ideals of 'professional housewife' and 'efficient homemaker' they endorsed, came to prominence in the same years that domestic service began to undergo terminal decline in Britain (McBride, 1976; Horn, 2001). Through the first half of the twentieth century, the Victorian and Edwardian 'lady of the house' was gradually replaced by the housewife who, with the help of her domestic appliances and perhaps a 'daily', was responsible for all the work involved in creating and maintaining what *Woman* reader C. C. Russell termed, "a nice homely home". Cast in magazines as the heroine of domestic life, the housewife became an important signifier of modernity as editors and advertisers sought to distance housewifery from the drudgery of domestic labour performed by servants. The new commercial culture of home-making magazines' espoused offered not only private satisfactions, but also a significant role for women in national life, whether as domestic workers and mothers of an "A1 population" in 1919 or, post-franchise, as housewives freed by their labour-saving gadgets to become the "political equivalent of a man".

This domestic revolution, for the most part, was limited to those with access to improved housing and the new domestic technologies, something that due to limitations on local authority housing and the expense of vacuum cleaners, refrigerators and the like was not available to two thirds of the population until well after the Second World War (Bowden & Offer, 1996; Burnett, 1978). Women's 'service' magazines, nevertheless, played an important part in establishing the housewife, with all her attendant pleasures and responsibilities, as a modern ideal who symbolised a psychic and social economy of modernity for readers that helped them accommodate change. This section argues that, far from restricting women's ambitions, the housewife was a transitional and transformational figure who embodied the promise of modernity: improved standards of health, a comfortable efficiency managed home and increased leisure. An aspirational ideal, the housewife was also shaped by the domestic servant she replaced; the tensions and anxieties surrounding domestic service, and the degradation and drudgery of hard physical work (Giles, 2004; McBride, 1976).

The housewife ideal, moreover, was classed and changed over the decades as different versions were circulated to magazine readerships. Historians have identified two predominant types: the professional manager, the domestic equivalent of her businessman husband, who emerged in middle-class service monthlies such as *Good Housekeeping* in the 1920s, and a more glamorous figure influenced by American films who featured in weekly magazines and advertising in the 1930s (Giles, 2004; Glucksmann, 1989; Hardyment, 1988; Forty, 1986). Through a close reading of magazines, however, a more complex picture emerges whereby these 'types' overlap and combine in advertising and editorial that strove to reach wider audiences, accommodating the realities of readers' sometimes restricted lives as well as appealing to their fantasies. "Class", Alison Light (2007: 155 & 181) remarked was "always a matter of fantasy, and 'wishing to act a daydream'", and the ideal modern housewife, unencumbered by live-in servants in her "new airy kitchen overlooking the garden, with electricity and 'hot and cold' laid on", was a fantasy that appealed to many, irrespective of

class. So, while in 1929 Virginia Woolf declared a greater sense of freedom cooking her first dinners on a modern oil stove than “writing those idiotic books”, the testimonies of working-class Women’s Cooperative Guild members in Margaret Llewellyn Davies’ 1931 book, *Life As We Have Known It* (for which Woolf wrote the introduction) endorsed the promise of labour-saving goods.

Home and the housewife took centre stage on the national agenda in the years immediately following the cessation of war and magazines were quick to respond. *Home Chat* reflected the mood of optimism with demands for maternity grants for working mothers, state pensions for widows with young children, improved conditions for women workers, and welfare centres and baby clinics in each town. ‘They Say’, the publication’s chatty news editorial, called for government schools for “engaged girls with no experience of domestic work” to learn household management as a preliminary to marriage (*HC* 01.02.1919: 159). A few weeks later the column predicted “a golden age for housewives” with cheap electricity (at a farthing a unit) available even in villages

No grates to clean, no blackened saucepans, *vacuum cleaners working almost by themselves*. (And you could switch the current on to the sewing-machine so that all you would have to do would be to guide the work through.) (*HC* 22.02.1919: 255)

Proposals for a commission of ‘sensible’ mistresses and maids, mending, making and cookery classes in all girls’ schools, and domestic science training colleges with a certificate in housewifery, reflected attempts to rethink the nature of domestic work (Black, 1918).

Demands for improved comfortable, sanitary and labour-saving houses at reasonable rents for the middle classes and the poor, meanwhile, reproduced recommendations from the *Tudor Walters Report*.

Anxieties about a shortage of domestic servants together with fears about women ‘stealing men’s jobs’ prompted stringent efforts on the part of government to pressurise women into domestic work (see chapter 5). A series of commissioned reports recommended that better training conditions and higher status would make domestic service more attractive to young women. *Home Chat* tackled these problems head on in an article asking those in service to write in explaining “why you like YOUR place”. Following arguments rehearsed by government and many involved in domestic reform, the author sought to distance “homework” and the “domestic worker” – the very title ‘domestic servant’ seemed derogatory - from the drudgery of domestic service by representing it as a modern profession with a Guild of Household Service and diplomas in Housewifery. This expanded version of domestic work, however, was aligned with women’s supposed ‘natural’ duties as wives and mothers rather than their rights as enfranchised citizens. “Upon the *Home* depends the *Nation*”, editorial intoned, for

Girls naturally want to marry and have homes of their own; they want it more than ever they wanted the vote, and nothing can make up if they fail to attain this natural ambition. (*HC* 22.02.1919: 251)

Such high-blown claims suggest the profound unpopularity of domestic service and, despite the author’s efforts to represent domestic training as an ideal preparation for marriage, the Ministry of Labour only funded courses that increased the supply of servants; more general

homecraft courses were not introduced until 1921 and then only for those who made a written declaration to enter service (Lewis, 1984).

Real change in attitudes to the housewife and housewifery came with the introduction of new ideas from America where the domestic science movement taught, in its founder Ellen Richards' rousing words, "the science of teaching people how to live" (Ehrenreich & English, 1979: 153). Scientific managers such as the home economists Lillian Gilbreth and Christine Frederick developed methods based upon the ideas of the industrial efficiency expert F. W. Taylor to provide a scientific basis for childraising and, what they termed, 'rational' housework (Freeman, 2004; Sparke, 1995; Swartz-Cowan, 1976). Daily work schedules involving time-and-motion studies, 'labour saving' appliances, and kitchens modelled on laboratories were intended to free time without sacrificing standards (Frederick, 1927 & 1929). The ideas quickly spread to Britain. Frederick, then Home Editor of the American *Ladies' Home Journal*, contributed a series of articles on scientific management to *Modern Woman* when visiting the country in 1927 and by the mid 1930s a network of organisations and training colleges had been established (Whittaker, 1937). The National Council of Women organised a Household Research Sub-Committee and published the magazine *Housecraft*, while the 6th International Conference on Scientific Management was held in London in 1935 (Nolan, 1994).

Organisations such as the Electrical Association for Women (1924) and the Women's Gas Council (1935) educated women about the possibilities of new power sources, appliances and domestic consumer items (Clendinning, 2004; Worden, 1978 & 1989).

Magazine advertising and editorial was instrumental in promoting the New Housekeeping. *Good Housekeeping* even had its own Institute, which offered lectures and demonstrations at their headquarters in London and sent fully qualified staff to demonstrate to women's groups and girls' schools to give private tuition in cooking, housecraft and laundrywork (Braithwaite *et al.*, 1986). In reality, scientific management, with its rigid schedules and sometimes ludicrous ideas, did little to reduce time spent on housework. Taylorist principles were designed to rationalise large scale industry and business and any 'productivity' gains did not translate into the private home where the housewife was both manager and worker. Feminists exploring the sociology of housework have argued that the New Housekeeping's higher standards even increased the burden and isolation of domestic work (Vanek, 1974; Oakley, 1974 & 1976; Wajcman, 1995; Malos, 1986; Strasser, 1992; Jackson, 1992). One important consequence of the creed, however, was that where government schemes failed, scientific management succeeded in raising the status of housework by distancing it from the menial work performed by poorly paid servants. It recreated housework as a respectable, modern job, associating it with a very different 'psychic economy' to that of domestic service (Giles, 2004). As the educationalist and domestic scientist Ruth Whittaker (1937: 28) explained, the woman of "trained intelligence" who performed her work "efficiently" was prevented from "sinking into a household drudge".

Neat, efficient and workmanlike, the housewife as the embodiment of rational modernity was a favourite theme in *Modern Woman* in the 1920s and early 1930s. 'Frocks we work in', a dressmaking feature that displayed a selection of outfits suitable for various modes of employment, inside and outside the home, showed the home worker practically garbed in a laboratory-style overall, a household jotter signalling her managerial skills (*fig. 50*). The same basic pattern could be adapted as a smock for the "art student", "cook" or "craft worker" or, with the addition of apron, cap and cuffs, a uniform for a "domestic worker"; notably, not a 'domestic servant'. Such flexibility not only offered efficiency and economy, but also

implicitly undermined the distinction between mistress and maid. ‘Dressing to your salary,’ moreover, a fashion feature on the facing page, gave patterns for the very middle-class occupations of “office secretary, hotel hostess, woman doctor, or general manager of a large firm”, aligning domestic labour with professional careers (*fig. 51*). Hierarchies, nevertheless, were maintained. Whereas, the business woman’s clothes were described as “perfect in cut and fabric”, terms that connoted quality, words such as “charming” and “pretty” and an outfit that was “as practical as it is picturesque” associated the domestic worker with something more whimsical, nostalgic and childlike (*MW 03.1930: 36-7*).

It was advertising rather than editorial, however, that captured the housewife’s heroic potential with eye-catching visual economy. Ads for ‘Amazon’ and ‘Hercules’ (popular brands of household overalls), for instance, transformed the housewife’s prosaic ‘uniform’ into an object of distinction, attaching an air of antiquity, mythic beauty and strength to housework. A 1927 Amazon ad in *Modern Woman* even eulogised the modern housewife (and her overall) in verse:

Three overalls of stylish kind,
But built for homely places,
Three ‘Amazons,’ and well designed
For three domestic Graces;
Who each might say, if so she cared
To stress both use and beauty,
And now we’re pretty well prepared
For any household duty! (*MW 03.1927: iii*)

Combining the abilities of artist, scientist, warrior and goddess, the Amazonian housewife brought intelligence, stamina and elegance to the job. The metaphor of the three graces signalled calm, order and a higher beauty when a return to ‘classical order’ held sway in contemporary modern European art (Greenhalgh, 1990). Classical allusions, meanwhile, reassured the “masses” that they had purchased products that “exemplified their mature taste and recognition of the eternal qualities of high art” (Marchand, 1985: 127-8). The Amazons’ linear elongated limbs and oval faces, moreover, recall the stylized forms of contemporary fashion mannequins (*fig. 52*), reproducing the feminine modernity that design historian Tag Gronberg (1998 & 2003) argues defined the influential Paris international Exposition des Arts Decoratif of 1925.

The aura of modernity surrounding domestic science in the 1920s also transformed representations of domestic workers in magazines who became, if momentarily, newsworthy. Reporting on advances in domestic education in 1924 *Home Chat’s* gossip column ‘They Say’ printed a picture of a group of bob-haired modern girls, resplendent in white laboratory overalls and surrounded by a mass of gleaming equipment, at work in the “vast super-modern kitchen” of the new women’s ‘Poly’ in Regent Street (*HC 23.11.1929: 477*) (*fig. 53*). Aristocratic cookery experts and demonstrators, meanwhile, lent glamour to the occupation and Lady Bonham-Carter’s niece, Miss H. Bonham Carter appeared, “exciting admiration in her chef’s hat and apron” in another feature (*HC 31.05.1924: 400*) (*fig. 54*). Hatred of domestic work, nevertheless, continued to run deep in the psyches of working-class girls when shop, clerical, office and factory work offered more attractive alternatives (Holloway, 2005; see chapter 5). Visual media communicated meaning, often more forcefully than text. Photographs reinforced

domestic workers' modernity in stark contrast to the stylized, cartoonish, sketches that, more often than not, were used to depict domestic servants; a visual typology that distanced and objectified them in much the same way that rituals of conduct and uniforms were designed to do (Forty, 1986). These drawings, as the advertising historian Roland Marchand suggests, tell us more about the fears and anxieties of employers than they do about servants. Pointing to a discrepancy between the predominant "French maid type" in American advertising in the period and the social reality of servant keeping where domestics were chiefly older immigrants or black, Marchand (1985: 203-5) argues that the 'maid' provided "fantasy fulfilment" for employers and "psychological relief from the irritations and indignities of the 'servant problem'".

The 'French maid' was also a favourite in British monthlies in the 1930s, a glamorous figure that signalled the influence of Hollywood (*fig. 55*). Frequently bearing a striking resemblance to her mistress, she also spoke of the informalities of the modern mistress/maid relationship in households where fewer servants were kept and a more relaxed atmosphere prevailed compared with the strictures of the Edwardian home (Light, 2007). At a time when complaints about the 'servant problem' were legion in Britain, as E. M. Delafield's *Diary of a Provincial Lady* so amusingly satirised, these codified, infantilised or abbreviated 'types' must have reassured mistresses that their domestics would be compliant and manageable. The importance of humour, however, should never be underestimated when dealing with the mysteries of English manners and social etiquette. Advising readers on the difficulties of engaging domestics *Modern Woman* (12.1927: 68) cautioned that "a sense of humour", and mutual "give and take" were essential to maintaining a "happy relationship between mistress and maid"; a view that Delafield, no doubt, would have heartily endorsed. The article reproduced the prevailing middle-class belief, even amongst those aware of the need for reform, that cooperation would solve the problems experienced by mistresses and their maids (Giles, 2004). A nearby ad promoting the "quick but satisfactory work" and "long endurance" of the Ewbank sweeper, meanwhile, offered an alternative should humour and compromise fail (*fig. 56*). Tensions increased through the 1930s and the 'servant problem' refused to abate as the number of individual family homes grew creating staff shortages (Daunton, 1990; Davidoff, 1990). Rather than a question of declining servant numbers, this was a result of the growing prosperity and the rapid expansion of the middle classes, for whom employing a domestic was a visible sign of social status and respectability. The majority of new middle-class households, however, could only afford one maid; the 1931 census records 357,000 girls working under these conditions, prompting commentators to dub the 1930s the 'era of maids' (Taylor, 1979:124-5). The single servant could be required to work as a cook-general, general domestic (maid of all work) or mothers' help. Even *Good Housekeeping's* more affluent readership made economies by becoming 'two-maid' establishments (Briathwaite, Walsh & Davies, 1986: 40). Lower-middle-class families who aspired to middle-class lifestyles, but on incomes no higher than those of skilled manual workers, made especially heavy demands and young girls were often cruelly overworked, and felt lonely and isolated (Dyhouse, 1989). Whereas, *Home Chat* addressed domestics directly in 1919, albeit to persuade them of the benefits of service, by end of the 1920s and the early 1930s articles such as 'Training the *Little Maid!*' and 'Teach Your Maid' spoke to mistresses, signalling the extension of servant-keeping beyond the moneyed middle class (*HC* 12.10.1929 & 11.08.1934). 'Teach Your Maid' is particularly revealing of the fraught relations between, and strategies developed by, both parties. The illustration shows a fashionably dressed maid with a surly expression who

stands nonchalantly, hand on hip, as she opens the door to a visitor (*fig. 57*). Intended to demonstrate just the kind of ‘bad behaviour’ that required training, the illustration could equally be interpreted as admirably rebellious, especially by domestic servants reading the magazine (Hackney, 2008). The editorial equivalent of the “dense messages” that Roland Marchand (1986: 154) found in contemporary advertising (see chapter 2), the ‘surly maid’ communicated meaning that was potentially at odds with a text which instructed mistresses to be “kindly” but “not intimate”, “respectful” but “not familiar” and reproduced the polite distance cultivated by the Edwardian lady of the house, or the subtle “methods of intimidation” that naturalised the authority of one class over another, as historian Pam Taylor’s analysis (*HC 11.08.1934*: 271; Taylor, 1979: 133; Light, 2007).

Magazines were not the sole preserve of mistresses and servants’ concerns were also voiced, particularly on the correspondence pages. Jenny, a twenty-year-old ‘domestic’ from Wolverhampton, who had been in a place for three years where “only one girl is kept”, wrote to *Modern Woman* (08.1930: 39) complaining that her time off was little and irregular. By 1937 the tensions between employers and domestic servants had deteriorated to such an extent that *Woman’s* agony aunt Evelyn Home referred to the “war” between mistresses and maids. Employing a strategy that was at once dramatic and democratic, Home presented both sides of the argument. ‘Maids Have a Say’ (*W 30.10.1937*: 3) was a spirited attack on conditions and hours, compared with those of a secretary, while a few weeks later Miss T. Y., a cook-general, declared, “Up with domestic service is my battle cry!” (*W 25.11.1937*: 3-4). At no point did Home or her correspondents suggest that domestic service was so out-moded it should be eradicated, however, and the debate was framed within an implicit acceptance of the power relations that supported it. Time off and uniforms, however, were matters of particular concern for domestics, as a BBC symposium demonstrated in 1930 (Giles, 2004). Above all, as Alison Light (2007: 184) observed, they wanted what other workers had and what their mistresses had: the “personal freedom to be treated like individuals”. Debates about hours and conditions demonstrate how, alongside radio, magazines provided a public forum for a range of ‘voices’ and views.

In reality, the majority of households could not offer the appropriate graded and progressive salaries that would tempt really high class labour into domestic work (Hardyment, 1988). By the end of the 1920s the term ‘daily’ was in common usage to describe the, often older, local woman who came in to help with domestic work and replaced the live-in servant in many homes in the 1930s (Peel, 1935 & 1933). No official figures exist for the numbers of dailies, however, in 1938 middle-class expenditure on domestic help ranged from £4.8 a year for those with an annual income of between £250-£350 to £38.5 for those with an annual income of over £700, money that, given the fall in live-in servants, must have been spent on more (Massey, 1942: 159-85). The appearance of the ‘daily’ as a comic figure in magazine articles, fiction and advertising reflected this change. The ubiquitous “Mrs. J.” pops up in *Home Chat’s* (29.04.1939: 333) ‘A Housewife’s Diary’ as a figure of outmoded superstitions who was “scared of anything electric”. Given the numbers receiving shocks from vacuum cleaners, her fears were not unfounded (Hardyment, 1988). Initially sold as a means of raising the productivity of domestic staff, historians have also credited electrical appliances with easing the transition from ‘live-in’ maid to ‘daily’ and, in the process, continuing the segregation of women in low-paid, unskilled work (Bowden & Offer, 1996: 264). Mrs Rawlins, the stock character that promoted Robin Starch and Reckitt’s Blue in her reassuring vernacular, who readers Lena Lowdell and Lillian Huff remembered so fondly (see chapter 3), nevertheless,

remained 'other'; a suburban version of the romantic Scottish or Irish Romany who advertised Zebo grate black in the 1920s (*fig. 58 & fig. 59*).

'Keeping up appearances' was essential for maintaining respectability, particularly when record numbers of women were doing their own housework (Horwood, 2005; Giles, 1995). A glamorous figure emerged in the penny weeklies whose fashionable, feminine, floral overall differentiated her from the domestic servant's plainer uniform (Horwood, 2005; Hirst, 1998). Housewives in "Dainty" overalls maintained a "smart" appearance on *Woman's Weekly's* (20.09.1919) covers in the 1920s (*figs. 60 & 61*). By the late 1920s the fashionable housewife had gravitated to *Modern Woman* where, dressed in a geometric 'Paris-designed' print overall, the "modern bride" who "swapped office life for an equally exciting job in the home", replaced the Grecian heroine in Amazon ads (*fig. 62*). Largely the creation of advertising, by the 1930s she articulated narratives of consumer desire that could be subversive and weren't necessarily confined to the home. This was particularly evident in ads for such labour savers as gas cookers and washing powders, which were affordable for the majority of homes (Clendinning, 2004; Bowden & Offer, 1996). Regulo gas cookers, for instance, produced an especially memorable evocation of streamlined modernity in which, seductively slim, sophisticated and clad in a fur-trimmed coat, the housewife declares rebelliously, "Marriage won't turn me into a stay at home" (*fig. 63*) (*W* 05.06.1937: 39).

Running, more often than not, in series such ads developed narrative, drama and character in much the same way as radio, comics and film, and the introduction of colour reinforced their 'eye-grabbing appeal'. With titles such as 'Della's Dungeon' or 'Murder on Monday' (the traditional washday), a series of comic-strip style ads for Oxydol washing powder, which appeared on *Woman's* prestigious back page slot, combined 'B movie' melodrama with vivid colour. In one characteristic episode Della, the eponymous heroine, moved from household drudge to 'lady of leisure', freed to enjoy a Clark Gable matinee with a female friend thanks to her "no-scrub" powder (*W* 11.12.1937, bc) (*fig. 64*). The housewife's consumer power endowed her with the power of self-transformation; a narrative of redemption that held real meaning for readers and women advertisers alike in these years (Scanlon 1995; see chapters 2 & 3).

In 1919 *Home Chat* had predicted a brave new world where domestic diplomas would be widely available yet, in reality, training was restricted to girls from middle or, at best, lower-middle-class families (Whittaker, 1937). The majority of domestic servants, mostly working-class girls from poor backgrounds, continued to suffer long hours, restricted freedom and loss of identity compared with those in other occupations (Taylor, 1979). Such women became the focus of much well-intentioned middle-class attention from enterprising journalists who tried swapping places with domestic servants to understand the 'servant psychology' and feminists who wanted to dignify housework, raise standards and improve conditions (Banks, 1902; Perkins Gilman, 1903; Black, 1918; Mitchell, 1923). Significant contradictions existed, however, for feminists such as Vera Brittain and Virginia Woolf who argued for a better developed system, yet whose creative lives depended on domestics; the latter had a notoriously tempestuous relationship with Nellie Boxall, her live-in maid. Domestic servants, nevertheless, like women more generally, changed forever in this period. Woolf's description of the new "Georgian cook" - a sister of Margaret Lane's 'Georgian woman' - as "a creature of sunshine and fresh air; who was in and out of the day-room, now to borrow the *Daily Herald*, now to ask advice about a hat", vividly captures this change (cited in Light, 2007: 168). In women's magazines change was articulated through visual as well as textual means and as the domestic

servant receded, a sketchy figure rendered in black and white, the housewife took centre stage portrayed in full colour, and the heroine of events. Her appeal, particularly for a younger generation of women (magazines' new female readership) emerged in new attitudes to dress codes. In 1939 Miss M, a 28 year-old from Croydon told *Mass-Observation* that, while her parents hated being seen in their working clothes, "Myself I think a clean white overall is as pleasant as a frock and I do not mind who sees me. Most of my friends agree" (cited in Horwood, 2005: 61). Magazines contributed to this relaxing of attitudes, legitimising a public persona for the housewife and, while Judy Giles (2004: 99) suggests that the "real 'moderns'" were the working-class women who chose to work outside the home, I would argue that those who remained at home were equally modern.

Responsible professional, fashionable hedonist or a combination of these, the housewife heroine was a compelling fantasy of the period. Her smart, confident appearance embodied the post-war generation's hopes for improved health, leisure, comfort and efficiency, and stood in stark contrast to outmoded notions of domestic service associated with the drudgery and degradation of domestic work.

4.3 "The Beauty of the House in Order": Cleanliness and Housewifery

I enjoyed housework. My daughter thinks I must have been mad! I liked making the place look nice and, I think as well, my mother wasn't very house-proud. I'm not putting my mother down, but I wanted to make a nice homely home. It was hard work in general, but I enjoyed it because that was my life really, the children and home and my husband. The aim is always to get better really, isn't it? I felt housework was an important job. That was my aim to be a good mum and a good wife. (C. C. Russell, 1994)

Woman reader C. C. Russell enjoyed housework. Whereas, the new ideas about housekeeping increased the responsibilities of the solitary housewife creating, in Ruth Schwartz-Cowan's (1989) memorable phrase, 'more work for mother', oral testimony and autobiography reveal the pleasures and satisfactions of a comfortable, clean and well managed home (Russell, 1994; Hall, 1977; McCrindle & Rowbotham, 1977). Any assessment of housework as it was mediated through magazines, therefore, must take account of this contradiction, and pleasures as well as the responsibilities it entailed. As with the conceptions of the ideal housewife (or housewives), the meaning and significance of housework changed over time and varied according to a publication's target. This section argues that the varied - sometimes contradictory, sometimes overlapping - discourses of housewifery as a demanding professional job, a civic responsibility, a duty with its own emotional satisfactions and rewards, or any combination of these, offered readers a space in which to imagine, negotiate and perform a range of modern feminine self-identities, according to the specific contexts in which housework was performed.

Important contradictions underpinned both the new attitudes to housekeeping and the concept of housework. Perceptions of housework as unpaid work that was conducted in the home fuelled suspicions that the housewife's day was not a working day, an idea that adverts filled with happy housewives freed by labour-saving appliances did little to dispel despite evidence to the contrary. The constant pressure of housework, moreover, meant there was no escape for the housewife and limited leisure opportunities (Davidson, 1982). Claire Langhamer (2000: 36), writing about female leisure in the first half of the twentieth century, describes what she terms the "definitional ambiguity" of housework, when even such activities as knitting, sewing or cooking - and I would add magazine reading - which women themselves regarded as

relaxation, contributed to the household (Pember Reeves, 1979/1913; Roberts, 1984; Hall, 1977). These tensions inform a 1924 Persil ad (*fig. 65*) where, freed by her washing powder to listen to a radio concert without “the faintest feeling of duty neglected” (and to the horror of her maid) the housewife, nevertheless, keeps a piece of sewing ‘on the go’ (*HC 09.08.1924: 11*).

Magazines, along with a host of other organisations, were instrumental in promoting new approaches to housekeeping derived from Taylorist principles of scientific management, which had been designed to rationalise large scale industry and business. The expansion of the electric grid was one factor driving the New Housekeeping, yet the dream of the ‘all-electric’ household was a reality only for a few. Despite two thirds of new and existing housing being connected to mains supply between 1918 and 1939, a high proportion of these were for lighting only with appliances run from a socket and appliance ownership levels remained low until 1945 with the exception of the electric iron and the radio (PEP, 1945; Edwards, 1935; Hannah, 1979: 205-6). The real significance of electricity lay in its design and marketing, which introduced a new psychology of modernity that radically altered how people imagined their lives. The design historian Adrian Forty (1986: 190) termed this the “millenarian spirit” that connected electricity with progressive values of liberation, efficiency, health, comfort, economy and informality, observing that “Anything, if we imagine ourselves in middle-class shoes in 1914, looked possible” (Forty, 1975: 41).

Magazines were central to that process of imagining and the ‘magical’ and transformative effects of electricity were much discussed in *Modern Woman* and *Home Chat* in the 1920s. *Home Chat* focused on the spectacle of the Ideal Home exhibition and the ‘Electric House’, which transformed the housewife into a “hostess” serving breakfast with the minimum of “fuss and fatigue” assisted by an array of “up-to-date devices” (*HC 15.12.1924: 377*) (*fig. 66*). *Modern Woman*, took a more pragmatic position, extolling the benefits of “electrical aids for the wise housewife” and the “woman who does most of her own cooking and housework” (*MW 09.1925: 50*). In an article on small electrical appliances, Joan Verity worked hard to persuade readers that irons, kettles, boiling rings and grills that could be run off the lighting circuit would lighten the “drudgery of housework”, distancing electrically aided housework from the work performed by servants. The high running costs and slow penetration of electricity meant that those promoting electricity clearly had their work cut out and cost was clearly a factor. Verity emphasised the safety, cleanliness, adaptability and portability of these “pardonable extravagances”, while Michael Egan, in an effort to dispel “false ideas” about the “expensiveness of all things electrical”, claimed that food cooked electrically was more “wholesome and nutritious” (*MW 10.1927: 37*). Arguments about economy were soon dropped in favour of electricity’s modernity and the new forms of simpler living it permitted (Marvin, 1988). Warwick Holmes, *Modern Woman*’s housekeeping expert, urged readers to be “thoroughly modern (i.e. practical!)” and give electrical Christmas gifts at a time “when life is being shorn of affectations” (*MW 12.1929: 45*). While, the inherent portability of the small electrical device introduced such liberating innovations as ‘side-table electric cookery’, the ‘self-served dinner’ and the ‘kitchen-dining room’ into smaller, single-person dwellings and the ‘servantless house’ without sacrificing standards (*MW 07.1925: 47*; Randall Phillips, 1920). The elegant lines, lustrous finish and, frequently, cabriole legs of small electrical items, moreover, ensured their fitness for public display (Sparke, 1987). By the 1930s, largely through the efforts of the Electrical Association for Women (EAW) - whose secretary Caroline Haslett was a qualified engineer - electricity became associated with

female autonomy and independence, something that the energetic, bob-haired woman hailing *Modern Woman* readers in a 1930 EDA ad reinforced (*fig. 67*) (Worden, 1989 & 1994). Placement of the ad next to one for Mayfair Models, a dress service that made up patterns for “busy women who want to dress well on a small allowance,” underscored the appeal of electricity for modern professionals and working women (*MW* 01.1930: 61). Later that year a ‘Told in Pictures’ feature by Warwick Holmes, addressed the modern housewife as smart and technically ‘savvy’ and gave step-by-step instructions for rewiring a lamp, assuring readers that, “no sensible woman who studies this page need call in a man for simple electrical repairs” (*MW* 10.1930: 43). The visual narrative echoed the pedagogical techniques and educational ethos of the EWA, whose members toured the country giving slide lectures to demonstrate the benefits of electricity to women (*fig. 68*) (Haslett, 1934).

Like *Modern Woman*’s readership, EDA membership was predominantly middle class and ‘home counties’. It wasn’t until the 1930s that electricity was targeted at working-class women. This was reflected in a series of dramatic full and half page EDA ads in the first issues of *Woman*, which promoted the power source as an economic, healthy and efficient way to cook, heat water and keep food cool (*fig. 69*). Consumers in reality shied away from heavy-current, heat-generating appliances due to their high cost, lack of standardised voltages and the expense of use and maintenance. Leslie Hannah (1979), in his history of the electrical industry, pointed out that ready-made clothing, packaged food and such amenities as running water and lavatories on the new housing estates were more significant labour-savers than electrical services. In a move that demonstrated the publication’s responsiveness to the realities of its readers’ lives, the expensive slots occupied by EDA publicity were soon given over to cheaper utilitarian or leisure goods such as washing powders, household cleaners, cigarettes and radios. Gas and electricity companies were serious rivals for the domestic market in the 1930s and, despite the excitement whipped up around electricity, price and accessibility meant that gas remained the preferred power source for cooking in the majority of homes (Bowden & Offer, 1996: 255-9). Gas rather than electric cookers began to dominate magazine advertising even in the ‘millenarian’ *Modern Woman* as editors’ responded to changing markets and prioritised consumer over manufacturers’ interests. A striking full-page ad for a gas refrigerator in *Woman* for instance, which was commissioned by the British Commercial Gas Association (BCGA), outlined the product’s superior longevity (electrical fridges were designed for obsolescence), silent operation (electrical devices hummed), low operating costs and favourable hire purchase terms, as well as its ability not to interfere with wireless reception! (*fig. 70*).

Interesting parallels exist between women’s publishing and the gas industry in this period which, like magazines, forged a “feminine public sphere” that catered to the social and material needs of the interwar ‘housewife citizen’ (de Grazia, 1996: 281). Both have been portrayed as conservative and retrogressive, yet both retained a competitive edge through concerted efforts to address the “‘women’s point of view’” (Clendinning, 2004: 255, see chapter 1). Unlike their electrical competitors, but like the new weeklies, gas companies used colour, innovative design and the appeals of modern advertising to appeal to women across a wide class spectrum. ‘Mr. Therm’, a character that anthropomorphised the properties of the live gas flame, instructed housewives on the reliability, economy, efficiency, affordability, flexibility and fashionability of gas in the friendly yet authoritative tones of the magazine expert (*fig. 71*). Whereas, electricity’s ‘millenarian spirit’ envisaged (mainly middle-class) women as the domestic technicians of a brave new world, the gas industry with its show rooms designed as a local meeting places for women, instructive demonstrations, advertising and exhibitions, was

determinedly democratic constructing women as actively engaged citizens with interests outside as well as inside the home.

If the new power sources were the means, cleanliness was the pre-eminent end goal of domestic advertising and the New Housekeeping (Horsefield, 1998; Schwartz Cowan, 1976a & 1976b). Operating simultaneously in the realm of the symbolic and the actual, the value and meaning attached to cleanliness varied according to a publication's target audience, as did the visual language employed. A 1930 ad for Vim in *Modern Woman*, for instance, associated cleanliness with social progress when it boldly announced, this is the "age of VIM" and combined a photograph of the "modern housekeeping expert" Lady Cecil Douglas, who converted Mayfair houses to "efficient service flats", with modern layout (white space, a sans serif typeface, horizontal and vertical emphasis) (fig. 46) (Aynsley, 2001). While anxieties about social etiquette sold (non-electric) sweepers to *Home Chat's* cleanliness-conscious readership in the guise of the smartly dressed, "sagacious" housewife in a 1929 Ewbank ad who could entertained with confidence, secure in the knowledge that her sweeper would efficiently dispose of any accidental mess (*HC* 14.12.1929: 724).

The striking aesthetic that dramatised the 'Hoover Housewife's' dreams in the first issue of *Woman* was also employed in Min Cream and Mansion Polish ads where clean lines, bright colours and simple shapes aligned cleanliness with modernity (figs. 72). The distinctive Bakelite cabinet and streamlined shape of the Ekco AC64 radio, designed by modernist architect Serge Chermayeff, additionally reinforced Min Cream's modern credentials in one ad (fig. 73) (Forty, 1979). While images of smiling, fashionably attired housewives in shining modern homes visualised a radically new conception of housework. The youthful housewife in a full-colour ad for Mansion Polish in *Woman* in 1937, for instance, cut a very different figure to the maid who had promoted the product a decade before (figs. 74 & 75). Space, colour, light and simple modern furniture replaced heavy dark oak and, whereas the maid was shown hard at work, the 'Mansion Polish housewife', her face bathed in the glow emanating from the product, simply smiles in satisfaction as her home is magically transformed by its "dust germ" destroying properties. The brand name, emblazoned in red letters across the base of the page, acts as a visual 'bridge' providing access to a dream world of sparkling, hygienic rooms and modern housewifery, while a short story about an elderly domestic servant's precarious economic situation on the facing page, reminds readers of the inequities of an out-dated and implicitly redundant system.

An aesthetics of cleanliness shaped women's bodies as well as their homes. Products promising to enhance 'inner cleanliness' and eliminate wrinkles 'under the skin' aligned hygiene and aging with dirt and decay in the same way that 'hidden dirt' sold vacuum cleaners (see chapter 2). The home and its contents, moreover, were anthropomorphised as aesthetics signalled an ethics of cleanliness. Marks and splashes were horrific "blemishes" that had to be "treated" with "homely remedies", in a *Woman's Weekly* spring cleaning feature; a zinc wash board was "dull and disreputable looking", while a highly polished piano communicated shining virtue (*WW* 09.03.1929: 392-393). Furniture became "fogged" or fell prey to "Blue Bloom", an alarming condition remedied by a medicinal-looking bottle, in a full-colour ad in *Woman* for Stephenson's furniture cream. The housewife, her profile bathed in dramatic blue-green tones and reflected in the mirror of her newly polished wood, dominates the ad, transferring the promise of "hidden beauty" revealed and protected through an "impenetrable barrier of brilliance" from her furniture to her face (fig. 76) (*W* 05.06.1937: 60). Defined by and visualised 'in' her furniture, the housewife, however, is also trapped within its shiny

surfaces, recalling the parlous state of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's neurasthenic heroine in *The Yellow Wallpaper*. Bound up with contradictory sets of practices and emotions, cleanliness both offered significant social and psychological satisfactions and constituted a form of abjection (McClintock, 1995). Cleansing home and body inside and out as magazines advised both removed the horrors of dirt and acted as a means of policing boundaries, maintaining order and keeping time at bay (Kristeva, 1982).

While colour advertisements were intended to stimulate the housewife's imagination, features provided instruction. The 'Housewife's Diary', a weekly column by *Woman's* Housekeeping Expert Susan Strong, offered practical advice for young married women who had been "out at business for some years". Strong employed the language and methods of scientific management meticulously planning the week and time-tabling "special work" for each day: "Thursday, thoroughly clean bedrooms; Friday, silver and brights cleaned; Saturday, Kitchen, cupboards, shelves, specially cleaned and tidied", and so forth (*W* 03.07.1937: 42). The kitchen became a "work-room" and equipment "tools", while industrial metaphors were used to keep the housewife in order; "Trains run smoothly to schedule - see that your home does too!" (*W* 26.06.1939: 40). Strong's principal focus, however, was the emotional and implicitly ethical "satisfaction" to be had from good management and routine, something that would have been meaningful for the many women whose relatively limited earning capacity ensured that time saving was not a major concern. The column appealed to wider audiences in other ways. Strong, unlike *Modern Woman's* Warwick Homes, favoured method and tips over costly appliances recommending soap boiled into a jelly as a good economical washer and a tablespoon of ammonia to whiten clothes and kill germs, advice that reproduced traditional methods passed on by word of mouth (Tebbit, 1995). And although photographs showed the housewife in an ideal suburban home equipped with enamelled gas cooker, bathroom, garden and several bedrooms, washday involved the 'bag wash' (commercial laundry) for heavier items and a lengthy process of beating, steeping and boiling in a copper boiler; standard practice in working and lower-middle-class households (Davidoff, 1990; Zmroczek, 1994). Access to piped hot water rather than labour-saving appliances was the real significant change at a time when washing was an arduous task even in homes with some amenities, and system was the key to minimising work. Strong's emphasis on system and hard work would have appealed to working-class women who were proud of the time and labour they lavished on their laundry according to a Mass-Observation (1939: 27-8) report, which concluded that eradicating dirt was considered the equivalent of eliminating evil or, in "its modern form, 'germs'" (Hackney, 1998).

It was not *all* work for the housewife, however, the weekend was set aside as a time for rest and relaxation and Strong advised her to delegate. Strong's bright and enthusiastically workmanlike editorial never claimed that the hours spent on housework would be reduced, but rather that 'working a house to schedule' would transform the quality and experience of housework. Properly managed, turning out the bedroom became "joyous", while newly ironed linen gave a "thrill" (*W* 03.07.1937: 42). "There's something very heartening in looking at a house when it's in apple-pie order" she concluded with evident satisfaction (*W* 17.07.1937: 34). Whereas, domestic scientists and feminists prioritised raising housework's status, magazine editors understood the importance changing how it felt.

In pleasing those nearest to them many women also pleased themselves, something that emerges in oral testimony and autobiography, particularly from former domestic servants. Mrs G., who was in service before marriage, recalled the satisfaction of staying at home to cook for

her husband and providing the service and care for him that she had previously given to others;

I was always at home when my husband came home for a meal, I was always there, everything was always ready and I think that's what brought us the happiness... When he came home, there was always a meal, there was always a fire, he was always looked after. (Hall, 1977: 75)

Margaret Powell (1968: 75), with long experience as a cook and domestic, viewed marriage, a home and a family of her own an escape from the indignities of service and a cure for the "inferiority complex" she felt that she had acquired (Light, 2008; Giles, 1994). For an otherwise confident, resourceful woman such as this, staying at home reinforced a sense of self-identity that domestic service had undermined. Moreover, despite government claims that domestic service was the ideal training for housewifery, Powell (1968: 163) found herself entirely unprepared for the demands of running her own home and providing "fancy dishes" with three pounds a week, a problem that, with their economic tips and suggestions, domestic magazines were far better placed to resolve.

Readers' attitudes to housework are hard to gauge, but the topic did crop up on correspondence pages where the views expressed were equally mixed. Nan from Yorkshire wrote to *Modern Woman* (03.1931: 59) complaining that she was "tired out" doing all the work of a large house with three children and poultry unaided and with no newspaper or monthly magazine had "lost all interest in clothes or appearance or outside affairs". She received the sympathetic, if perhaps impractical advice to engage "a young country girl" and take a holiday with a friend. Evelyn Home, who edited *Woman's* agony page, told a reader whose husband and sons made no effort in the home to stop being "so anxious" for "what is a little dust compared with a cheerful atmosphere?" And, while some letters endorsed the value of domestic work if it was performed with intelligence and enthusiasm, there were limits. "I have never had a moments rest all day from six in the morning till eleven at night, and I often think it would be better to be dead than living a life like mine", wrote one desperate eighteen year old who had been doing all the work for seven people after her mother's death. Leave home, find a hostel and companionship, was Home's timely reply (*W* 04.03.1939: 53).

In reality, the productivity gains of the New Housekeeping did not translate into the private home where the housewife was both manager and worker, and its sometimes ludicrous ideas did little to reduce time spent on housework. Take up of appliances was slow particularly amongst working-class women, and by 1939 millions of homes were still without electricity. One important consequence of the creed, however, was that it recreated housework as a respectable, modern job, associating it with a very different 'psychic economy' to that of domestic service (Giles, 2004). As the educationalist and domestic scientist Ruth Whittaker (1937: 28) observed, the woman of "trained intelligence" who performed her work "efficiently" was prevented from "sinking into a household drudge". Women's magazines, with their colour advertisements and informative features, played an important part in establishing this new domestic imaginary. Sadie Scott, *Modern Woman's* "ideas scout", revealed the 'work' involved in housekeeping - a single-handed housewife with a family of four apparently washed up a minimum of 50,000 items a year - and Susan Strong adapted the discourse of scientific management for *Woman's* wider readership, attending to the emotional economy of housework (*MW* 02.1939: 49). Alluring ads for cleaning products and gas cookers, items that entered the majority of homes, visualised an aesthetic of cleanliness that "satisfied many desires" (Forty,

1986: 180). While the fantasy of the modern housewife, unencumbered by live-in servants, working in her “new airy kitchen overlooking the garden, with electricity and ‘hot and cold’ laid on” appealed across the boundaries of social class. A well-managed, clean and comfortable home signalled identities as a resourceful manager, responsible citizen, caring mother or loving wife. Ultimately, perhaps, the appeal of the glistening glass-like, sanitary surfaces in magazine advertising and the *New Housekeeping*’s routines was that they offered means of ordering and controlling one’s surroundings (and oneself), promising an end to ambiguity and uncertainty, at least for a time.

4.4 Living Rooms, Flexible Furnishings for an Unsettled Age: Interior Design, Decoration and Home Crafts

The living room! Shut your eyes for a minute and think what that means: A room to *live* in, suited to all human needs. (de Wolfe, 1913: 148)

The glint of copper on a high shelf, the cool beauty of china, the row of quaint china figures – these things make home. (*W* 31.07.1937: 30)

The simple, light, bright rooms pictured in women’s magazines promised a new future for home owners, a stark contrast to the faded interiors in the dark, cramped and depressing ‘little house’ that Leonora Eyles (1922) so memorably described. Papering and decorating, alongside such activities as tidying and chasing dirt, not only signal anxieties about hygiene and social status, they also represent a creative re-ordering of the environment; a means of relating form to function and making unity of experience (Cwerner & Metcalfe, 2003). This final section explores how magazines were resources for creativity which encouraged readers to engage in home crafts, cultivate knowledge about decoration and express their ideas through a language of space, colour and things (Post, 1930; Sparke, 2003). Design historian Penny Sparke (1995), writing about interior decorating in the early decades of the twentieth century, describes the emergence of a ‘feminine interior aesthetic’ that was expressed through colour, texture and ornament, and combined the symbolic with the functional: modern conveniences with traditional comforts. This section argues that the multiple approaches to home decoration in women’s magazines, which ranged from ‘personal decorating’ - the expression of self through environment – to modern architects’ space-saving ideas and included everything in between, created a space for actively re-imagining feminine interiors and feminine interiority. The conflicted visual rhetorics of photography and illustration in features and advertising, moreover, enhanced the imaginary space of the magazine. As Francesca Berry (2005), writing about the 1920s French monthly *Femina* observed, whereas photographs operate more in the “realm of documentation than identification”, hand-drawn illustrations provide a wider narrative context or “multifaceted approach” that promotes creative fantasy, “projecting self imaginatively into the mis-en-page of the magazines” (Berry, 2005: 66). Authoritative documents, photographs define ‘place’ as limited and enclosed making it available only to sight, while hand drawn graphics render ‘space’ as a story that readers can imaginatively engage with, and which is constantly being produced by and through the practices of living, including home-making (Aynsley, 2005; Bingaman *et al*, 2002). The competing discourses in magazines reflected real change. Housing standards converged as the space middle-class money could buy diminished and the new optimums set for council homes increased house size. Change, nonetheless, brought its own tensions and dislocations.

Constituted by “codes of use”, the internal divisions of the house were broken only under strong imperative and professionals and public disagreed about how the home should be organised (Ravetz, 1995: 149). The ‘parlour controversy’, in particular, foregrounded differing views about the value of functional spaces and symbolic places in public sector housing. Debate focused on whether to have two rooms, with one kept separate ‘for best’, or whether one was adequate, leaving space for a larger kitchen. Raymond Unwin (1902: 11), the architect whose views informed the Tudor Walters Report, believed the parlour to be “worse than folly” because it wasted space forcing occupants to cook and eat in the same room; something that he considered unhygienic and uncivilised. The majority of tenants, in contrast, preferred two day rooms plus a multi-functioning cooking and wet work kitchen (Ravetz, 1995: 155; Scott, 1998; Roberts, 1991). For them the parlour was a symbolic place that represented a triumph over poverty, while also providing space for socialising, homework, serious reading, writing and convalescence (particularly for elderly relatives) (Giles, 2004). Struggles over space and place continued in 1930s’ debates about the ‘living-room’, a term associated principally with middle-class homes (Ravetz, 1995). Whereas, the advocate of architectural modernism Anthony Bertram’s vision of an open-plan, flexible, all-purpose room - a rational response to smaller houses and more mobile populations - prioritised space, interior decorator Elsie de Wolfe’s living-room was the “very heart” of home; a cheerful, cosy, hospitable place in which to *live* that was shaped by and moulded to its occupants’ needs and emotional temperaments (de Wolfe, 1913 cited in Halttunen, 1989: 191; Bertram, 1988; Sparke, 2003). Both approaches inform the discourse of interior decorating in magazines, suggesting that home editors were conscious of a responsibility to guide readers, introducing them to new ideas, while responding to a variety of tastes and needs. *Woman’s* Kathleen Pearcey demonstrated her support for open-plan living when she declared,

We have become space conscious. Architects of vision, looking towards the future, are designing small houses with large rooms. The demand for one small compartment in which to dine and another in which to sit has waned. (*W* 05.06.1937: 45)

Her successor Edith Blair (a pseudonym for the writer Norah Schlegel) was similarly committed to the simplicity and rationality associated with architectural modernism. Schlegel saw the home editor as a broker between manufacturer and consumer who could improve standards of production and taste. According to her colleague Peggy Makins, guiding readers away from “silly frippery” and encouraging them to be critical consumers, while forcing manufacturers to create articles that were “plain, elegant and useful” was at one time “a crusade” for Schlegel (Makins, 1975: 175). Editors, nevertheless, were not ideologues. Bertram abhorred suburbia with its modernistic (a modern treatment restricted to surface decoration) and nostalgic tendencies, which he considered ‘bogus’ and an “Americanisation of British taste” (Holder, 1990: 143). The Edith Blair page, however, was eclectic and, in addition to architectural modernism, accommodated the public appetite for modern glamour and ‘Mock Tudor’s’ symbolic appeal (Oliver, 1981).

Eschewing prosaic debates about the parlour controversy in the 1920s *Home Chat* favoured fantasy reporting on spectacular events and exhibitions, or celebrities’ “fairyland homes” (*HC* 25.10.1924: 219; 08.03.1924; 25.10.1924: 199). Strategies to accommodate these ideals to readers’ circumstances, nevertheless, emerge. Mrs. Robert Noble, in her report on the 1924 British Empire Exhibition at Wembley, like Blair, saw no contradiction between the new and

the conventional when she enthused about a modern bungalow furnished with Jacobean oak furniture, which combined a “craftsman’s skill” with “modern ideas for comfort” (*HC* 20.09.1924: 551-3). Her observation that these rooms offered “mental comfort which is only possible when our eyes and minds are rested by the beauty of our surroundings” evokes the desires for health, comfort, beauty and security that inspired suburbia and parlour homes (Oliver *et al.*, 1981; Silverstone, 1997). Far from being inaccessible, the photographs of interiors that illustrate the article are show-homes created by the high street furnisher Maple & Co. with furnishings available through hire purchase schemes (Kirkham, Mace & Porter, 1987). Framed with graphic devices and arranged across the page in an informal manner that resembles a family photograph album, these photographs of spectacular exhibition ‘places’, moreover, are transformed into ‘spaces’ that readers could imaginatively occupy, encouraging them to incorporate show-home ideas with their own furnishing schemes (*fig. 78*) (Beegan, 2008).

Karen Halttunen (1989: 187-188), writing about American middle-class homes in the first decades of the century, claimed that the spatial and cultural reorganisation involved in the move from parlour to living room collapsed the distinction between public and private self, engendering a “psychic disruption” that required the “performing self” of personality” to be “always on”. This tendency was bound up with the notion that the interior of a house revealed its owner’s personality, which had been marketed at bourgeois women since the end of the nineteenth century (Tiersten, 1996). An idea that was reinvigorated in the first decades of the twentieth century through the treatment of colour, both as a component of the visual language of ‘personal decorating’ and as a means of cultivating mental and physical health in modernist designs (Wilk, 2006). Pamela Firth, exploring colour’s “healthful influence” in an article in *Modern Woman* in 1925, urged women to build their interiors around their clothes and colouring. Those who were fair and “inclined to shades of pink” were advised to avoid yellow and orange in their rooms, while brown relieved by “bright touches of green and blue” was “becoming as a background” for redheads (*MW* 10.1925: 20). The home became a stage on which health, beauty and personality were to be performed and maintained. In an article on ‘Modern Paris’ a few years later the home was no longer a background but took centre stage, determining its owner’s habits and appearance, when Yoland le Cler called for “dresses which look right in modern rooms” for,

We do not, any of us, intend to spend our days in struggling with servants who won’t dust all our gimcracks, or clean all that mass of silver on the table. Light, air, colour, cleanliness and comfort are the things we want in our homes, and our clothes must fit in with them. (*MW* 05.1929: 18)

In *Modern Woman* the innovations of architectural modernism, however, were filtered through English sensibilities and a desire for compromise. An article on the ‘Simple Modern Bedroom’ published, for instance, which opened with the very modernist dictum, “a home is a machine for living in” (a reference to the Le Corbusier’s architectural ideology) combined discussion of planning, practicality and efficiency, “space, light and simplicity”, with an illustration showing leaded windows, a striped pelmet and cornices; ornamental details that while antithetical to modernists, evoked the comforts of the English cottage or suburban home (*MW* 05.1929: 34; Peto & Lovejoy, 1999). Replacing the word ‘house’, the term used in Le Corbusier’s original,

with 'home', moreover, subtly changed the modernist maxim, distancing the 'Simple Modern Bedroom' from architectural discourse and relocating it within the dictates of personal decorating and the New Housekeeping.

Whereas, the 'lady art advisers' such as Mrs. Talbot Coke who had penned decorating columns for *Queen* and *Hearth and Home* from the 1890s catered to the upper-echelons of society, interwar home editors wrote with the straightened middle-classes, or aspirational working-class families newly arrived in the suburbs, in mind (Cohen, 2005: 40). An image of the modern housewife as creative, resourceful and energetically engaged in economic renovations was generally accepted, especially in the Depression years of the early 1930s (*fig. 77*). In an article titled, 'Be your own Decorator and save money' in *Modern Woman* Anne Verity gave detailed advice on papering, distempering and floor staining for the "home-loving" woman:

Few intelligent women will hesitate if, for financial reasons, they have to choose between living in shabby surroundings and tackling a spell of hard but satisfactory work. (*MW* 03.1935: vii)

Drawing on the language and appeals of scientific management, Verity made decorating seem a pleasurable and rewarding job. With good preparation and method the wallpaper "all but hangs itself", she assured, while the tricky work of trimming round mantelpieces suited the propensities of those skilled in the "art" of dressmaking. Humorous line drawings communicated a light-hearted, 'hands on' approach, locating home decoration as a form of pleasurable yet respectable 'serious' or 'productive' leisure that was appropriate for middle-class women (Gelber, 1999; Stebbins, 1992) (*fig. 79*). The 1930s was a period when women such as Syrie Maugham, Sybil Colefax and Betty Joel came to prominence as interior decorators and the *Modern Woman* housewife productively engaged in DIY could turn to the magazine's own "London Decorators", Wilma Blood and Jean Stewart, for up-to-date and economic planning and renovation ideas (*MW* 11 1935: 43 & 07 1939: 70-1; Massey, 2000; Glynn, Hackney & Minton, 2008). Interior decoration was also a pretext and metaphor for romance. In 'Warm Colours', a short story by Josephine Bentham, when Nina Meredith - a suitably modern young woman who wanted to "stand on her own feet" - employed dashing young Tom Burk to brighten her shabby cottage, she unexpectedly found love as he "coloured her life as well as her walls a glowing sunshine yellow" (*MW* 11.1935: 5).

A rapid increase in new homes in the 1930s combined with the rising profile of modern design provided the context for Kathleen Pearcey's series of interior design features in *Woman* in 1937. Each week focused on a different room (dining room, guest room, a room for a boy, for instance) giving guidance on furnishings, fittings and decoration that reflected the latest design thinking. The item on the dining room, for instance, included Alvar Aalto's modernist bentwood stool (9s from Heals) and was illustrated with black and white photographs provided by Heal & Son and Times Furnishings (*W* 25.09.1937: 17). The series opened with the "two-faced" or "two-way" "large living-room", a flexible, multi-functional communal living space, which confirmed with Bertram's (1938: 73) idea of a "large friendly family room" with dining area at one end and easy chairs and so on at the other (*W* 05.06.1937: 45). Colour schemes responded to natural light, and furnishings and fittings were determined by seasonal arrangements. Warning readers to avoid the sham and duplicitous, "deceitful Jekyll-and-Hyde room where every pouffe conceals coal or the reserve china", Pearcey described the living room in functionalist terms. Although, "filled with sunlight and charming possibilities", house

plan and family requirements rather than personal taste determined the design.

The article's appearance, shaped by a grid-structure, white space, photographs that combined different view-points and bled to the edge of the page, communicated design modernism just as effectively as its contents (*fig. 80*) (Jobling & Crowley, 1996; Aynsley, 2001). The photographs, however, were supplied by the Times Furnishing Co., one of the multiple chain stores that expanded into the suburbs in these years, and sold a range of styles from traditional to modern (Kirkham, Mace & Porter, 1987). The company regularly advertised in *Woman* and, while these photographs conformed to the principals of modernism in design, a Times ad the following month employed a full-page, colour illustration; a very different visual rhetoric informed by the psychology of commerce that was intended to appeal to the emotions (Aynsley, 2005) (*fig. 81*). The rational, objective depiction of place through photographic means, and the alluring evocation of space using hand-drawn illustrations, operated as complementary visual languages in magazines that simultaneously strove to educate readers about 'good design' and appeal to their emotions.

Whereas Pearcey's series promoted modernism in design at the start, the final article, 'Household Gods', concerned what Elsie de Wolfe termed "the magic power of inanimate objects" and the "art of the personal touch" (Halttunen, 1989: 188). She encouraged readers to acquire "interesting souvenirs" and "Victorian bric-a-brac", items that modernists would have dismissed as "sentiment-objects", but which suburbanites collected and admired (*W* 31.07.1937: 30; Naylor, 1992). Readers, nevertheless, were advised to select plain-surfaced, simple things and, above all, to avoid those "little tortured ornaments sold as Oriental" and "horrid arty-crafty figures who pirouette and curtsy or cluster round the brims of rose bowls" in accordance with DIA tenets of 'good design' (Carrington, 1933). As fewer objects became the norm, more power was attributed to them.

Nowhere was the magic power of objects more apparent than in home craft features, a popular part of the magazine mix that was packed with ideas about how to create, make and adapt 'things' (Hackney, 2006). Home crafts' emphasis on ingenuity, creativity and a form of consumption (of magazine patterns or stencils, for instance) that did not solely depend upon purchasing ready-made items, foregrounded a feminine modernity of expression, economy, agency and self-determination. 'I did it myself!' declared an article on how to transform a cheap white wood tea wagon into a desirable object that would astound one's "well furnished friends", with characteristic optimism, suggesting the satisfaction to be had from economic adaption *and* achieving an enviable social display (*W* 11.12.1937: 13). Home craft, additionally, was integral to the discourse of domestic science, and was widely viewed by design theorists, educators and policy makers as a means to instil the necessary values for good citizenship (Kirkham, 1989). "There are few more valuable services to be rendered to the national character than an insistence on good craftsmanship, and especially good craftsmanship in home-making", the home economist Ruth Whittaker (1930: 3 & 32) declared. The perceived therapeutic value of making original things meant that home crafts not only offered relief to the nerve-wracked housewives but also provided the 'saving' value of home as a space of comfort, security and ease; a protective barrier against the stresses and strains of modern life (*fig. 82*) (*HC* 23.11.1929: 497; *MW* 02 1930 13; Hackney, 2006).

Above all, home crafts materialised a feminine interior aesthetic that involved colour, ornament, texture and display. 'Feminine Room', a full-colour item on bedrooms by Kathleen Pearcey demonstrates how *Woman* encouraged readers to engage in processes of self-transformation through the production and performance of home craft (*fig. 83*). Whereas the

living room was deemed a public place, albeit one that could be feminised, and the kitchen was the laboratory of the home, the bedroom was gendered feminine; a space in which a woman could express, “a little of her personality and a great deal of her own handiwork” (*W* 21.08.1937: 24-5). The idea of transformation and its means are communicated through the visual rhetoric of the page. The main player: an almost-to-scale (the size enhancing identification) picture of a flowered organdie dressing table mat to embroider takes centre stage, while inset images of bedrooms in various colour schemes suggest the ‘mis en scene’ in which the transformation will take place. The dressing table with its petticoat frilling - a metaphor for the feminine body - and mirror, which in beauty editorials and advertising served as a visual short-hand for the makeover, reinforce processes of identification and change. While the transformation envisaged was within the accepted bounds of femininity, Pearcey’s warning that on no account was the ‘feminine room’ to mean, “an orgy of ruffles and profuse ornament” suggests its potential to engender illicit, subversively sexual subjectivities.

By 1939 *Woman’s* ‘Edith Blair Home Service’ was addressing wider audiences with economic tips that integrated ‘making’ into everyday life in ways that anticipated the DIY revolution of the 1950s and ‘60s, and endorsed a critical approach (Attfield, 1999 & 2007; Atkinson, 2006). Each feature ended with ‘Lets Print Your Hint’, readers’ suggestions for cheap or novel adaptations. Whether or not these ideas worked in reality, much of their appeal lay in the combination of expediency, fantasy, agency and the promise of transformation.

Kathleen Pearcey’s enthusiasm for the “large living-room” as a multi-purpose space far removed from the “cramped chill of ‘two-three receptions’” demonstrates how mass market magazines promoted progressive design far earlier than is currently thought (Keeble, 2007; Friedman, 1998). Home editors, however, unlike modernists understood readers’ needs for places of comfort, security and self-expression and, what the urban theorist Lewis Mumford termed “the collective attempt to lead a private life”; perhaps the most widely-held aspiration in the interwar years (in Burnett, 1978: 256). Whereas, Bertram (1938: 72), somewhat condescendingly, claimed that the belief that modern rooms were “inhuman” and lacked “comfort and personality” could only be countered by educating the masses, Pearcey (the ‘Expert in the Art of Living’) strove to educate *and* accommodate how people lived. These concerns shaped a feminine interior aesthetic that privileged colour, ornament and economy – albeit in ways that conformed to reformist ideas about simplicity and function - that was best expressed through hand-drawn illustrations and home crafts. Positioned between the dictates of design reform and the more eclectic preferences of popular taste, home editors drew on multifarious narratives of modernity: design, aesthetics, health, domestic science, citizenship, craft and cost-effective make-do-and-mend to create a space *and* a place in which modern life and modern feminine subjectivities could be imagined and performed.

4.5 Conclusion: Homes Fit for Heroines

A Man’s View of Home

There are enough of cogs in the machine
Called ‘Home’ to make a motor-car look silly.
Few men know this because they have not been
Compelled to take it over, willy nilly,
And have no notion of each trap that lurks
In those remarkably intricate works...

I, wiser far, admire the hand that steers
The complicated engine without crashing,
And, should the need arise for changing gears,
Can do it without any hint of clashing.
Though I may have to take a mere back seat,
My confidence in Ann is quite complete.
(C. E. B. *HC* 13.04.1929: 88)

People did not want 'a machine for living' so much as a vehicle for living out
a fantasy. (Burnett, 1986)

The motor-car, a machine much admired by interwar modernists as a model of functionality, provides a suitably modern metaphor for the complex mechanism of the home in *Home Chat's* humorous poem. Written from the perspective of the 'man of the house', it celebrates the achievements of the admirable Ann who, in the guise of housewife heroine, manages her household with enviable ease and efficiency. In magazines the modern home, however, was always more than a 'machine for living in.' The colourful appeals of advertising, in particular, shaped and responded to a widespread desire for home as a 'vehicle for living out a fantasy'. Constructions of the housewife and housework similarly recognised the feelings, emotions and experiences involved in running a home as well as the new ideals of domestic efficiency. While the housewife as professional manager, assisted by her labour and time-saving appliances, was the preferred model in *Modern Woman*, *Woman's* housewife heroine, combined a glamorous appearance with economic tips. Both took centre stage in magazines envisioning, managing, performing and materialising the home as variously a place of cleanliness, comfort, health, security, refuge and creativity in which children were nurtured and husbands fed; a microcosm of the ideal modern state.

In reality, the dream of a clean, comfortable, orderly modern home expounded in magazines was impossible for many. The cheap mortgages and hire purchase that powered the new domestic consumerism, for instance, brought gains for some and financial jeopardy for others; Jane Gardiner (2010: 314) reports a social worker's warnings about the "myth" of attractive advertising and the harsh reality of the tallyman. Economic tips and helpful advice were of limited use to those faced with poor housing and poverty, and households where the housewife worked outside the home with limited financial resources and time were particularly at risk (Spring Rice, 1939: 150). Emphasis on the housewife's responsibilities to improve standards of housekeeping and motherhood in response to fears about population decline and the apparent physical deterioration of the race, moreover, shifted the blame and masked the fact that poverty and malnutrition were responsible.

Housewifery, however, was not without its pleasures and, for those who could achieve it, the difficulties and responsibilities were tempered by the satisfaction of creating a clean, well-ordered and comfortable home. Housework, as reader C. C. Russell put it, was an "important job" and magazines recognised and reinforced the value of women's domestic work. *Woman* even encouraged readers to develop their domestic knowledge outside the home in the feature 'A Career for the Housewife', which discussed interior decoration not domestic service. The "great problem" of the age according to the modernist architect Wells Coates, whose innovative Lawn Road flats featured in *Modern Woman* in 1934 (fig. 49), was to define "the kind of place

a man and a woman and a family should live in". The problem of the 'place' of home was intimately bound up with and responded to the performance of everyday life or, the "theatre of ordinary daily life, the theatre of modern living" as Coates put it (cited in Darling, 2007: 89). The 'space' of the magazine produced across editorial, advertising, fiction, text and image, and through the dialogue between editors and readers, provided a flexible means of imagining how that place, and the woman who occupied it, might be constituted and what that might mean.

Chapter Five: Bachelor Girls, Career Women and Working Wives: Jobs for Modern Women

5.1 Introduction: The Field of Feminine Industry

Every day sees the number of women in business control increasing. Cinemas, restaurants, theatres, bookshops, and the journals run by women - a few of their activities - are springing up around us. Indeed the field of feminine industry seems almost boundless. (*HC* 17.50.1924: 337)

The magic of a crystal-set fixed to the bedpost in some modest bed-sitting room, and a tired business girl, on her feet all day, may loll in her own easy chair and hear some famous comedian talk, or Clara Butt, with her wondrous voice of golden tears, singing *The Little Silver Ring*. There are tennis, the swimming baths, the bright dance halls, the cinemas, week-end rambling, and the cheap seats of the theatre, where a play like *Saint Joan* will provide enough precious thoughts to last you for a month of Sundays.

Playtime that means rich, exhilarating health. Playtime that means a rich, growing mind. (*MW* 08.1929: 25)

Enthusiasm for the expanded life, freedoms and opportunities that seemed suddenly available to the young woman or, as *Modern Woman* described her, the girl with alert, adaptable brains who "carries her banking account under her shingle" was high in the 1920s. In films, magazines and popular literature, the young, fashionably dressed employee became a symbol of the freedoms, real or imagined that modern life had to offer. In what were otherwise predominantly domestic women's magazines, she appeared in employment columns, on the

problem page and was the heroine of romantic fiction; features celebrated the successes of pioneering career women, while dress patterns were created for the slim, crop-headed business girl (*fig. 83*). With the census showing over half a million women in the labour force, a figure which omitted the large numbers of uninsured workers in, for instance, domestic service, the presence of the working woman in magazines reflected and reinforced real social and economic change.

Continuing pre-war trends, female workers in the interwar years were predominantly young and single. Between 1901 and 1931 more than two-thirds of working women were under 30 and more than three-quarters of them were single (Hakim, 1979). While ever increasing numbers of younger women (between 14 and 17) were working, the highest participation (79 per cent) was amongst 18 to 20 year olds, the rate falling dramatically after the age of 24 (Glucksmann, 1990: 41). A large number of women in the over-35 age group, however, also worked and trends began to reverse after 1931 when single women comprised 51 per cent of the workforce aged over 35 (Holloway, 2005: 150). With between one and two million single or 'surplus' women in the population by 1921 who were unable to marry because of lack of men marriage, though desirable for a generation depleted by the First World War, was most certainly "not the norm" (Holden, 2007: 29). If older, these single women were unlikely to marry and therefore more likely to work until retirement (Lewis, 1984: 149). Throughout the period there was a marked tendency for single women of all ages and classes to work and their degree of disposable income made them an important target audience for consumer magazines that wished to increase circulations and attract advertising. Representing the possibilities and perils of modern life, the business, 'bachelor girl' or youthful secretary became a familiar figure in magazine advertising in the 1920s (*figs. 94 & 97*), while the mature female 'bachelor' was established in the magazine imaginary by the 1930s (*fig. 99 & 104*).

Perhaps the central dilemma and defining experience of modernity for women in the period, however, was the tension between employment, marriage and motherhood; between women's, "reproductive and productive roles" (Lewis, 1984: 145). Although, the majority gave up work on marriage, the 1931 census states that 10 per cent of married women worked. The true figure was higher because official statistics did not include the vast number who worked seasonally, in their homes or in the black economy, especially in cleaning and laundry work (Pennington & Westover, 1989). 'Home working' surfaced in homecraft features, problem pages and adverts in *Modern Woman* and *Home Chat* suggesting the real but hidden need for women to earn or supplement their own, or their family's incomes (Hackney, 2006). While there was little overall change in the number of married women involved in the labor force, between 1921 and 1931 there was a small (5 per cent) increase in numbers of younger married women (under 24) in paid employment, and a substantial number of married women continued to work until the birth of their first child (Glucksmann, 1990).

The issue of married women's employment, nevertheless, stirred up strong emotions and had political, economic and social dimensions at a time of long-term male unemployment when many married women were forced to work to feed and clothe their families (Roberts, 1995). It split feminist groups. While new feminists argued for family allowances to provide a wage for mothers, the Fabian Women's Group was active in its opposition to restrictions on married women's work, and the Open Door Council (1926) campaigned for women's right to paid work irrespective of marriage or childbirth (Lewis, 1984; Dyhouse, 1989). Married women, moreover, were discouraged from working for ideological as well as economic reasons. Patriarchal assumptions that all men were breadwinners and, conversely that all

married women were dependents (despite evidence to the contrary) justified the concept of the 'family wage' and supported the marriage bar in local government, the civil service, nursing and teaching (Anderson, 1988). An informal bar operated in the private sector and resignation on marriage was a sort of 'unwritten rule' (Davy, 1986). All of which informed the complex and changing attitudes to married workers in women's magazines, which at times celebrated the working wife as a model of progressive modernity, and at others vilified her.

The most dramatic change in the period, however, was in the occupational distribution of women away from traditional late nineteenth century areas such as domestic service and the textile industries to 'white-blouse' office and secretarial work. Clerical jobs for women increased during and after the First World War, and by 1931 women accounted for 42 per cent of the clerical workforce. (Todd, 2004: 122). By the mid-1930s, clerical work was redefined as a relatively well-paid and secure mode of employment suitable for respectable working-class and middle-class women prior to marriage (Zimmick, 1984). Although personal and domestic service grew between 1921 and 1931, encouraged by government policy, it was in sharp decline after the Second World War (Beddoe, 1989). "Office cleaners, packers, shop assistants, typists became the unlikely and suddenly visible shock troops of industrial restructuring" opening up channels of social mobility to working-class girls, at least to some extent (Alexander, 1994: 206). This was reflected in weekly and monthly magazines where jobs in clerical and retail work populated career columns and secretaries featured as romantic heroines. The majority of women I interviewed, moreover, worked in some form of clerical or retail employment, something that was particularly evident amongst the Woman readers (see appendix 2 & chapter 3).

Those entering the professions increased from 350,000 in 1921 to 390,000 in 1931 (Mackinnon, 1997). The Eligibility of Women Act (1918) allowed women to stand as MPs and, in theory at least, the 1919 Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act removed barriers to women's entry into the professions, opening the possibility of highly paid work on an equal footing with men, something that proved to be a bitter disappointment (Holloway 2005: 149). The career woman and successful professional was central to the ethos of Modern Woman and the significant yet relatively small increase in professional women in the period no doubt accounts both for the inception and limited circulations (75,000) of the magazine.

For large numbers of single and some married women finding a job became an accepted part of the process of growing up and becoming a woman in the interwar years (Alexander, 1994). Oral testimony suggests that having a job was an important aspirational fantasy for young women at this time (Tinkler, 1994; Langhamer, 2000). Selina Todd (2004: 140) observes that "self-sufficiency, gained through secure employment" was a central theme running through the narratives of the working-class women she interviewed. All but a few of the fifty or so magazine readers I contacted worked, at least before marriage, many of them in offices, and the working girl heroine was remembered with enthusiasm and affection (see chapter 3). Magazines' value as a space for readers to consider, debate, critique and dream about working girl identities should not be overlooked. The ideal of the successful, independent working woman, however, was not unproblematic at a time when the reality of female employment more often meant poor pay, low status and job insecurity (Lewis, 1986). Whatever their age or marital status few women received equal treatment with men; their work was segregated, they were paid less than their male counterparts and were often denied promotion to better paid work.

This chapter will focus on editorial and advertising, considering the differing and related ways in which women workers were portrayed there. The first section examines career columns and

how editors attempted to expand and define the workplace for women, raising the status of established female occupations and feminizing new areas of employment, particularly at times of economic crisis. The second part examines the modern tropes of 'bachelor girl' and 'career woman', contrasting these with the 'nervous woman' who was the product of the debilitating effects of new work processes, long hours and poor diet. It explores the relationship between work and marriage, the work place and the home and proposes that marriage not only shaped attitudes to women in the workplace, but also that the domesticated bachelor girl of the 1930s provided a means of accommodating and 'normalizing' the older single working woman. That most controversial of figures the working wife and the tensions and contradictions she embodied is the subject of the final section, which argues that the multiple models of modern working womanhood in magazines contributed to the modernization of marriage. Many factors from insurance acts and the operation of dole offices to marriage bars militated against female employment in the period, pushing women back into the home. In magazines, however, the working woman was always defined as a figure of modernity, the equivalent and equal of the housewife heroine and, as such, offered readers alternative ways to imagine, negotiate and accommodate being modern, and the possibilities and problems of modern life.

5.2 "A Room of Her Own With a Nice Desk and Many Advantages as Regards Comfort": Jobs for Women

The immediate post-war period was a confusing time for women. Whereas, legislation brought partial but significant recognition of their civil rights, the process of dismissal from war time jobs was swift. The Restoration of the Pre-War Practices Act (1918) restored jobs to the 4 million men wanting to return to homes and work and although women had accounted for 37.7 per cent of the total workforce at the end of the war three-quarters of a million had left their wartime work by the end of 1919; it is impossible to know how many did this willingly (Holloway, 2005: 145-7). The hundreds of thousands registering for 'out of work donation' suggest that a significant number still regarded themselves as workers (Braybon and Summerfield, 1987: 121). Those in the clerical sectors who had been appointed to positions that they would never have achieved in peacetime, in particular, were unprepared to return to pre-war conditions (Zimmick, 1988; Anderson, 1988). Single women, many of whom were supporting relatives, moreover, had little choice but to work. Lady Rhondda, the business woman, editor and owner of the feminist and literary journal *Time and Tide*, led a deputation from the Association of Women Clerks to Lloyd George in support of what she memorably termed this 'great army of efficient women workers' (Pugh, 1992, 80; Spender, 1984). The government, however, was content to encourage women back into hated domestic service through coercion, insurance legislation and the operations of labor exchanges (Thom, 1998: 193). Those refusing domestic work had their benefits withdrawn and were taken off the register, women were expected to re-enter traditional women's employment or return to the home (Holloway, 2005). The system was one of "compulsory domestic service" (Beddoe, 1989: 52). This section examines how career columns and editorial features responded to, represented and re-imagined female employment at a time of massive change when women's position as wives, mothers and domestic workers was being pitted against their need (and desire) for work.

That terrible mishap the untrained woman: woman's weekly 1919

From March until December 1919 *Woman's Weekly* responded to the crisis in female employment with a weekly employment column under the rather genteel heading, 'Chats on

Careers'. When unemployed women were being labelled parasites and scroungers in the national press and public opinion turned against the working woman, the 'Weekly' recognized their readers' need to work and provided advice on a diverse and sometimes surprising range of occupations (Braybon, 1981). From horticulture to hairdressing, 'sewing maid' to commercial traveller, each column carried details of opportunities, training and salaries as the editor attempted the difficult task of defining where openings for women would come; "the future will give evidence of scope at which at present it is only possible to hint", she conceded (*WW* 15.10.19: 376). And while working in a Turkish bath or as a stage door hand, seem somewhat speculative ways of earning a living, predictions of jobs in hairdressing, as photographers, fashion artists, mannequins or in shop and theatre work anticipated the growth of women's employment in retail, commerce and the arts. The black and white silhouette that illustrated each article helped to establish the 'Lady Commercial' or the 'Woman Photographer' as feminine occupations; a conventional aesthetic to accommodate change (Saler, 1999) (*fig.* 84).

Addressed to a range of women from elementary and secondary school leavers starting out on jobs to older women who, due to deteriorating finances were "forced to come into the money-earning world", the 'Chats' suggest the precarious financial circumstances many faced (*WW* 18.10.1919: 316). A column on hairdressing gave training ideas for the girl with "little money to spend", while information about running a boarding house was addressed to couples where physical disability made it impossible for ex-servicemen to work (*WW* 03.04.1919, 31.05.1919: 428). Teaching, a career that in elementary schools at least was well established for women, did not feature apart from specialized spheres such as swimming instructress or dance mistress, possibly due to the costly and long training required (Widdowson, 1986). Tellingly, one article tackled the problems of, "that terrible mishap 'the untrained woman'" who without benefit of skills or experience had to support herself, and often dependents, as war widows swelled the numbers of single women already in precarious circumstances (*WW* 18.10.1919: 316; Braybon & Summerfield, 1987).

Unlike government, whose solution was to force women back into the home or hated domestic service, the 'Weekly' envisaged new work opportunities for women. The expanding worlds of retail, fashion, advertising and entertainment were predicted to be areas in which "feminine influence" would be increasingly required. Editorial was relentlessly upbeat. Fashion and commercial illustration was declared as "lasting" a profession as shorthand writing and typing and "as necessary as bread to modern life" (*WW* 14.06.1919: 470). While innovations such as the "modern craze for dancing" or dress parades in suburban stores would increase opportunities for female dance instructors and mannequins (*WW* 29.11.1919: 452 & 10.05.1919: 376). Women's abilities as modern consumers (skills the magazine itself taught) rather than conventional nurturing capacities would secure their place in the workforce for, while the ability to care for the young and the sick belonged only to those with domestic temperaments, *all* women could keep pace with changing fashion trends (*WW* 13.12. 1919: 490). Editorial outlined strategies for navigating masculine preserves. The new fashion for Marcel waving, for instance, would provide a route into hairdressing, a career otherwise guarded by male professionals who were "jealous of their art" (*WW* 03.05.1919: 351). Rather than a decline in the numbers of women seeking employment, the magazine predicted they would rise as those working created jobs for others running boarding houses or in council crèches (*WW* 31.5.1919, 26.4.1919). This radical view of working women's contribution to the economy was developed by feminists such as Leonora Eyles, Winifred Holtby and Ellen

Wilkinson in the 1930s (Holtby, 1934 and see following sections for a discussion of Eyles' and Wilkinson's views). In the pages of *Woman's Weekly* in 1919 the future for the working woman looked bright.

Like many in the women's movement 'Chats on Careers' advocated up-grading and professionalizing domestic work and job titles included the 'under nurse in a day nursery' and the 'professional cook' (Mitchell, 1923; Perkins Gilman, 1903). The term domestic servant was avoided and replaced with 'home-help', suggesting reader-sensitivity on the issue, and the apparently high salaries and teaching opportunities available to trained professional cooks, working in large supply establishments rather than family homes, were emphasized (*WW* 07.06.1919). While significant numbers of women did take up positions as cleaners, cooks and in laundries in larger institutions in the interwar period, payment and conditions remained poor compared with the new industries (Beauchamp, 1937). The somewhat forced tone of several articles indicates the difficulties in redirecting women into domestic work. "Why", the column the 'Sewing Maid' opined, "should not the many V. A. D.'s, ex-Waccs, and Wrafs who will come forward for home-help schemes try their luck as well at the craft of sewing, one which thoroughly belongs to a woman's kingdom?" (*WW* 15.11.1919: 401). Nursing alone was considered a vocation. Newer careers such as telephony, nevertheless, were represented as personally fulfilling and socially productive; the aspirant urged to, "thrill at the service she renders in the world of whispering wires"! (*WW* 30.08.1919: 166).

Surprisingly, secretarial work "one of the widest fields for women", in the *Weekly's* words, was not given fuller treatment, only appearing towards the end of the series (*WW* 08.11.1919: 374). This, and the article's undeniably defensive tone, may be explained by the debacle surrounding clerical work at a time when government strategies were directed towards replacing women with returning servicemen. Women civil servants in particular took action, building on war time gains, and demanded equal pay and treatment (Anderson, 1988). The magazine promoted the government line, warning those with Whitehall war experience that their skills would be unsuitable for commercial office work. 'The girl secretary' was advised instead to "restart" office life and cultivate feminine rather than professional skills of "personality", "active courtesy", "initiative", "dependency and business secrecy" and to ensure that her "personal appearance" came up to the mark! (*WW* 08.11.1919: 374).

Picturing an exciting post-war world of employment opportunities for its readers, 'Chats on Careers' made no attempt to address the anomalies of women's employment, such as the thorny issue of equal pay that feminists and reformers campaigned to change (Kingsley Kent, 1993; Purvis, 1995). Rather than challenging gendered assumptions about 'women's work' it built on and adapted them. Careers in nursing, catering, sewing, embroidery, upholstery and the nursery profession reinforced traditional female occupations supported by government training schemes (Thom, 1998). While seacriptions of working in an "antique shop" or "a tea shop" conjur up "genteel copper kettle establishments" that in reality were equally as exploitative as Lyon's Corner Houses and transport cafes (Beddoe, 1989: 72). Readers received mixed messages about the value of ambition. While the girl "who is ambitious and who means to make good in business life" was encouraged to try shop work, the London telephone service was described as reliable "secure, well-paid" employment for those preferring the "comfortable security" that permitted the bachelor girl to retain her "vivacity and stimulative powers" in the years between school and marriage (*WW* 27.09.1919: 254; 30.08.1919: 166). The preoccupation with separate feminine spheres of activity and constant admonitions to be patient and hardworking reinforced conventional notions of difference and ideas about

women's 'natural' temperament and abilities. Success, the aspiring shampooer in a Turkish bath was informed, depended upon "personality, deftness, tact and knack", while the secretary was expected to demonstrate "active courtesy", and the nurse's "first duty" was to be cheerful (*WW* 13.9.1919: 216; 16.08.1919: 140). This was particularly true of the 'untrained woman' who, with no experience or qualifications to depend on, was advised to develop her innate feminine skills for the burgeoning world of domestic commerce and sales; whether selling canned fruit or a vacuum cleaner a "soft" voice and "pleasant and persuasive" manner were ideal qualifications for demonstrating work (*WW* 2709.1919: 254). This and advice to the "premium-less girl" to be "sharp" and always "keenly on the look-out for hints and useful knowledge" tacitly acknowledged the lack of training opportunities available to women and the inferior educational opportunities girls continued to receive (*WW* 03.05.1919: 351; Dyehouse, 1977; Hunt, 1987).

Published in the year immediately following the cessation of war, this series pictured a modern world of expanding and exciting employment opportunities for women in the service industries, office work, retail and commerce, while alluding to some of the very real problems. By November 1919 of the 90,000 women registered as available for work, only 30,000 were eligible for benefits, and a consciousness of the desperate financial circumstances many readers faced underpinned the 'Chats' sometimes prim Edwardian phraseology. The promotion of an, albeit professionalized, form of domestic work and advice to clerks to abandon Whitehall skills, however, demonstrate compliance with governmental norms, evidence that magazines had to satisfy a range of constituencies. The end of this brief period of experimentation and optimism and a narrowing of the employment opportunities for women was heralded by a feature, purportedly written by a man, in the magazine in October 1919, which argued that marriage was a girl's best career (*WW* 25.10.1919). The photograph of a fashionably dressed young woman sullenly performing a domestic task on the magazine's front cover, accompanied by the strap-line 'A Man is Responsible', suggests that the new message received a less than enthusiastic response from magazine staff and readers alike (*fig.* 85).

Careers for girls and modern women

No longer now is every girl forced to live dependent on her parents or a husband, or become a teacher, dressmaker, nurse, shop-assistant, or domestic worker. (Eyles, 1930: 9)

"Nowadays, far from being a disgrace to work, it is a disgrace not to" the columnist Leonora Eyles defiantly declared in *Modern Woman* in 1925 (10.1925: 72). For Eyles, a committed socialist and feminist, employment was an important route to economic, social *and* emotional independence for women, and questions about jobs far outweighed romantic dilemmas on her correspondence page. Like the author of 'Chats on Careers', Eyles was committed to expanding the parameters of 'women's work', but more than this she encouraged readers to professionalise their training. Her efforts reflected a real need. A journalist on several women's papers, Eyles (1930: 6) remarked that perhaps half the correspondence she received asked the question, "How shall I get my living?" and in 1930 she published *Careers for Women* in response to the many letters she received.

Modern Woman, to some extent, dealt with issues and reiterated themes that emerged in *Woman's Weekly* in 1919. The dilemma of the untrained woman, for instance, remained a

pressing problem and Eyles was optimistic about the future for professionalized forms of domestic work, predicting that domestic service “bids fair to be the sort of job a High School or Secondary School girl will like to take up” (*MW* 05.1929: 96). Addressing a modern-minded middle-class readership, however, the magazine gave greater attention to women’s rights, independence and desire for job satisfaction. Eyles promoted new teacher training methods such as Froebel and Montessori, which were stimulated by the growth of crèches and nursery schools, and considered small businesses and self-employment particularly fruitful fields for women (Eyles, 1930). Her approach was to respect, but extend, up-date and professionalize the careers open to women, and her page explored, among other jobs, opportunities in secretarial and office work, hairdressing, beauty culture, child-care (governess and children’s nurse), cookery, librarianship, as a female poultry farmer (she herself kept poultry commercially), and religious and voluntary work.

Readers’ letters voiced their hopes and fears with startling and sometimes poignant immediacy. The plight of many middle-class households facing financial constraints, their urgent need for information about employment, and the educational shortcomings and lack of available training for women emerge in numerous requests about how to earn “a living” from ‘feminine’ accomplishments such as music or art (*MW* 11.1925: 68, 07.1929). “Hundreds of girls”, Eyles maintained, wanted information about how to “commercialize” their training. ‘Maidie’, for instance, who had two musical children but could not afford to support them through a long training, enquired which instrument was best from the “money-earning point of view”, while ‘Kit’ in Devon asked how to turn “a good art training into money” (*MW* 08.1927: 80 & 02.1929: 92; 04.1929: 100). Young women in provincial areas, meanwhile, wrote for advice about how to get started in the glamorous fields of journalism, fashion and films, confirming the romantic appeal of the career-girl heroines in magazine fiction and cinema (*MW* 04.1929, 08.1925: 72; see chapter 7).

Eyles’ supportive yet unsentimental replies struck a pragmatic note. A seventeen year old “country girl” who wished to write was advised to avoid London and work on a local paper, whilst sending stories and articles to publishers using the *Writers’ and Artists’ Yearbook* (*MW* 08.1925: 72). ‘J. B. B.’ from Paignton wanted to be a fashion artist. Counselling against a postal course in fashion drawing, despite the ads for correspondence courses in art and writing that regularly appeared in the magazine (see chapter 2), Eyles told J. J. B. to “slog on and on” and “never let oneself despair”; tangible evidence of the up-hill struggle women faced in this field. The problems of the untrained woman, meanwhile, surfaced in numerous “pathetic letters”, as Eyles described them, from married or elderly women living on diminished investments, “begging” for information about how to make money from handicrafts and ‘home work’ (see chapter 4; Hackney, 2006; Pennington and Westover, 1989). Still worse was the plight of women in their forties who were left destitute and without qualifications after giving up their lives to care for relatives. “[T]he next generation will not suffer as they have done”, Eyles (1930: 5) vowed.

Passionate about the benefits of specialized training in helping women gain control over their lives and get “out of the rut”, Eyles believed that matching a girl’s training to her aptitude for work would go some way to redressing inequalities in the workplace (*MW* 10.1925: 72). Readers were encouraged to be ambitious and improve their prospects. Violet who from the age of sixteen had been “sent” to work in an office, was reassured that she was “obviously superior to the job” and should attend evening classes, learn languages and shorthand (*MW* 06.1929: 100). Detailed information about training schemes in, for instance, the recently professionalized career of midwifery, or beauty culture and hairdressing apprenticeships frequently appeared. Most, however, were relatively lengthy and expensive. Money and time were essential prerequisites if women were to tackle job market inequalities in this way.

Eyles' column aside, employment was not a central theme in *Modern Woman* in the 1920s. Occasional features focused on unusual or glamorous jobs such as 'A Woman Shipping Agent', 'The Sea as a Career for Women' or 'A Hotel Hostess' (*MW* 06.1927: 36; 08.1927: 71, 07.1927: 26). In the economically turbulent years of the early 1930s, however, Eyles' feminist discourse was recast in a series of features by Elidor M. Briggs, which gave detailed information about a wide range of careers that were grouped thematically to appeal to readers' perceived needs and concerns. 'Careers with little or no training costs' came first, followed by careers with an 'active or outdoor interest', teaching, nursing, and 'careers of Service'. Addressing her first article to parents, Briggs argued persuasively for the importance of education, training and careers for girls for, "In this uncertain world all parents, whatever their present circumstances, should face the possibility of their daughter earning her living for most of her life!" (*MW* 08.1932: 30). If a girl could not depend on her family for security, neither could she "fall back on marriage", she warned, urging "every girl and woman" to consider her prospects if she did not marry and even if she did, "the value of having a training that, should need arise, will give her an added income and an interest outside her home". Ambition, additionally, was a factor. Career choice should not simply "help the family exchequer" but, being based on a girl's abilities would provide "prospects" and "interest". Briggs outlined a dozen possible careers in her first article. These included Advertising, Laundry Manager, Journalism, Tracer, Tea Room Manager, Saleswoman, Commercial Traveller, Window Dresser, Dressmaker, Radiographer, Clerical and Secretarial work, and combined the established areas of 'domestic and personal service' with newer careers such as radiography; a promising field for women in the period (Beddoe, 1989: 75-85). Advertising, meanwhile, was billed as a career that offered "unlimited opportunities", where "practical domestic knowledge" was as important as a College degree; advice that echoed the views of industry professionals such as Ethel Wood (see chapter 2). Teaching represented the best possibilities for professional employment, promotion and pay, even though women teachers with the same training still earned four fifths of the male rates for the same job (Edwards, 2001), and Briggs gave details of teacher training for work in elementary and secondary school. She described 11 specialist branches of nursing in addition to general nursing that ranged from mental nurse to midwifery, and identified new opportunities in Dentistry, Chiropody and Optical work for those with a good education up to matriculation standard, "neat fingers and sound health"! (*MW* 10.1932: 79).

Whereas *Woman's Weekly* dealt with jobs under the guise of careers, *Modern Woman*, whether through Eyles' ideologically informed views in the 1920s or Briggs' economic pragmatism in the 1930s, consistently foregrounded the importance of training and the satisfactions to be had from a professional career. Although there were gains in terms of pay and conditions in some areas during the period, notably by teachers, and access improved slightly to the white-collar and professional sectors, entry into the professions was slow. Beddoe (1989: 78), citing Haldane's 1928 survey of women in professional associations, gives a total of 3,622 women out of 107,705 men. Equal pay and promotional prospects, moreover, proved elusive, foundering on the "brick wall of the family wage argument", which maintained the marriage bar (Oram, 1996; Holloway, 2007:157). Eyles (1930: 9), and other feminists, countered this with the Keynesian economic argument that, "the entry of any individual into the labour market is not 'taking the bread out of the mouths' of anyone at all. Work means wages and creates spending power which in its turn creates a demand for further service or commodities". It was an argument that underpinned Labour M. P. Ellen Wilkinson's Equal

Pay Bill and made its way onto the pages of *Woman* in the 1930s (Holloway, 1997: 158).

Woman must work

Wilkinson, like Eyles, believed in the power of the commercial women's press to communicate a serious message affectively. Her article 'Women *must* Work', which was published in *Woman* in 1937, took the debates about women's employment directly to female audiences outside Westminster. Polemical from the outset, Wilkinson told women to stop apologizing for their existence and let the country know their true economic value. Her radical position was matched by the modern, documentary style of the article which, with its large black and white photograph of men and women marching to work evoked Lady Rhondda's 'great army of efficient workers', and anticipated the "social eye" of *Picture Post*, published for the first time the following year (*fig.* 86) (Hall, 1972: 90).

Arguing vigorously against the notion that women were taking 'men's jobs, Wilkinson exposed the fallacy of the 'family wage' and assumptions that women had no dependents. She proposed instead that female employment benefited both the economy *and* the home, lifting the latter "into a higher category of comfort":

The wages of men are not all that much greater considering the rise in prices. It is the higher wages, and more of them, of the women that have called into being whole new trades to meet their spending power. (*W* 12.07.1937: 11)

Employment, Wilkinson continued, drawing on psychoanalysis and feminism to support an argument for the working wife, removed a woman from a state of dependency and parasitism to a far "healthier and saner" condition that offered opportunities for self-development and enhanced married life.

Such forthright feminist views were unusual in a relatively inexpensive women's weekly magazine. A product of the progressive aspirations of *Woman's* early phase, controversial features such as this were soon to be replaced by a more conventional emphasis on dress patterns and romantic fiction (see chapter 1). The publication did, however, run regular employment columns in 1937 and 1939. The first of these, written by Vyrnwy Biscoe (author of *300 Careers for Women*) and addressed to the girl who "has not found life a bed of roses", was mindful of the magazine's far from affluent audience. Whereas, Eyles and Briggs assumed that at least some time and money was available for professional training, Biscoe told her readers to learn "on the job", emphasizing "the 3 A's: ambition, application and ardour" (*W* 12.06.1937: 26). And, while an early article supported work that lead "into and not away from home-making", Biscoe soon adopted a more expansive tone, urging readers to plan ahead because "big jobs and big futures are waiting". "The sky's the limit, as Yankees say", she declared with a note of American optimism, assuring readers that armed with her advice they would score over their [middle class] "pin-money rivals" (*W* 05.06.1937: 20 & 12.06.1937: 26).

Biscoe's advice to "earn while you learn" and study through correspondence and evening classes to up-grade one's job was a route taken by some working-class women in the period (*W* 31.07.1937). The careers she featured: as a librarian or in secretarial, shop and office work, moreover, were not unrealistic for ambitious working-class and lower middle-class women in the 1930s. It was not so much the nature of the jobs, however, but the way in which they were promoted that distinguished Biscoe's series from those in other magazines.

Glamorous photographs made these jobs seem modern and desirable. The salesgirl, for instance, was encouraged to train to be a buyer rather than linger on the shop floor. A black and white photograph, which shows the fashionable buyer gazing into a mirror (a symbol of transformation in magazines) while the dowdy shop girl stands in the wings, recalls the images of film stars in cosmetics advertising (see chapter 6) (*fig. 87*). 'Jobs Round the World' advised the girl without money who yearned for, "jaunts on the Continent" to work on a cruise as a nursery maid or hairdresser, depending upon whether she had a "way with children" or a "pleasing tone and good accent" (*W* 31.07.1937: 4). 'A Career for the Home-Maker', meanwhile, encouraged women to professionalize their domestic skills (through City & Guilds qualifications) and follow a career in interior decoration (*W* 03.07.1937: 26). Biscoe's arguments could be unconvincing. Her account of the easy passage from receptionist to management left the details of transition troublingly vague, while achieving the 'right' accent for hairdressing on a cruise liner would have meant costly elocution lessons, and advice to contact the Society for Overseas Settlement of British Women in an article on overseas jobs tap into fears about 'surplus' women. The column, nevertheless, depicted employment as both compelling and achievable; an intrinsic and desirable part of women's lives.

The interwar period, paradoxically, was both a time of "high unemployment and economic growth" when the employment market experienced short booms and slumps, and magazine career columns mirrored these changes (Beddoe, 1989: 54). The jobs deemed appropriate for women varied according to the date when an article was published and its target audience. A career as a teacher or advertising professional, for instance, was deemed appropriate for the daughters of *Modern Woman's* middle-class readers during the economically troubled early 1930s, while the glamorous possibilities of work as a buyer or secretary was considered suitable for *Woman's* audience of ambitious, young working-class and lower-middle-class girls in 1937. After the experimentalism of *Woman's Weekly's* 'Chats on Careers' in the year immediately after the war, employment columns established categories of 'women's work' in the 'white blouse' sectors of secretarial, sales, the caring professions, teaching and nursing. These were areas of real expansion for women, which to some extent "opened channels of mobility to working class girls" (Lewis, 1984: 158). The twin strategies of feminizing new areas, whilst raising the status of established forms of 'women's work', remained consistent in career columns throughout the period, and although magazines did not overtly challenge assumptions about gendered work, they did extend and modify these, as well as disseminating much needed information about training and pay. Whether *Modern Woman's* trained professional or the glamorous dress buyer in *Woman*, the working woman was consistently associated with the exciting possibilities of modern life in magazines, which encouraged women to imagine an exciting future of social and financial independence, even if the reality, more often than not, was poorly paid office work.

5.3 Bachelor Girls, Career Professionals and Nervous Women: Single Working Women

Young, single and generally employed in an office, the bachelor or business girl became an established figure within the lexicon of advertising imagery and a staple of magazine features from 1924 when the country entered a period of economic recovery (*fig. 88*) (Glynn & Oxborrow, 1976). Attitudes to single women were divided in popular novels and journalism. While the flapper was subjected to "a welter of misogyny" in the daily papers, the bachelor girl who was defined by her desire to marry - employment being a preparation for her 'real career' in married life - received sympathetic treatment in the women's press (Melman, 1988: 17; Cole,

1938). Penny Tinkler (1994: 95, 135-6), writing about girls' magazines in the period, argues that the bachelor girl represented editorial attempts to redefine paid work in ways that "re-established female dependence on men and marriage". Although, to some extent, this could also be said of the women's press, a more complex picture emerges in magazines that addressed older, as well as younger women, for many of whom marriage was not an option. The independent bachelor girl or woman (for magazines this meant women over thirty) could be glamorous, worldly, domestic, neurotic, representing a celebration of single living or offering a critique of married life. 'Why We Don't Want To Marry!', "The Bachelor Girl Speaks Her Mind to Husbands and Wives", for instance, saw her admonishing couples who took each other for granted in *Home Chat* (26.10.1929: 209). Shirley Bell's lively illustration, which shows a feminized 'modern man' dressed in an abstract patterned dressing gown – similar garments were created by the avant-garde artist Sonia Delaunay and worn by Rudolf Valentino - underscored the novelty of a situation where men and marriage were being rethought from a single woman's point of view (fig. 89) (Gronberg, 2003). This section examines the varied representations of the single working woman mediated through magazine advertising and editorial, pictures and text. A contradictory figure located somewhere between the public world of employment and the domestic realm that, at any one time, could include the career professional and the 'nerve starved' neurasthenic, bachelor girls (and women) offered readers a means of imagining, negotiating and reconsidering the changing boundaries of modern womanhood in the workplace and the home.

Common elements in a shared discourse of bachelorhood ran throughout magazines in the period. Debates, nevertheless, were framed according to a publication's ethos and audience, reflecting how, for example, the experience of secretarial and office work was differentiated by education and class (Tinkler, 1994; McKibbin, 1998). Two features published in 1929, 'That Job You Don't Like' in *Woman's Weekly* and 'Life is Sweet, Sister!' by Jane Doe in *Modern Woman*, represent characteristically different perspectives (*WW* 03.1929: 372; *MW* 08.1929: 25). Both deal with the modern working girl who was tired, bored or, in Doe's words, "out of love with life". Yet, whereas Doe, addressing *Modern Woman's* middle-class audience, is optimistic declaring, "There's nothing like a good job and your own regular income to keep your mind happy, care-free and self-respecting", the 'Weekly' was altogether more ambivalent. It examined the plight of Doris, a short-hand typist in a shipping office who, despite a reputedly "good salary" was continually "grumbling and grouching about her rotten job". Doris's dilemma resulted from the boring, repetitive and undemanding nature of the work, a situation many of the magazine's working-girl readers must have recognized. Complaint, however, was censured and conventional feminine qualities of patience, endurance and deferred gratification reinforced. Those who "whine" mark themselves out as a "nuisance with a slack mind and an undisciplined brain", editorial reproved, for girls should learn from every job no matter how loathsome or mundane, preparing themselves for "something better"; a euphemism for marriage.

There is, nevertheless, something refreshingly subversive about Doris. The illustration, which shows a modern girl (presumably Doris) lounging across a colleague's desk instead of attending to her typewriter, suggests feminine fashionability and sociability rather than conscientious application (fig. 90). This version of working life undercut the author's hectoring tone, recalling instead Michel de Certeau's notion of La perruque (the wig) – the disguise, ruse or tricky strategy – and the tactics of *Home Chat's* 'sullen maid' (fig. 57) (see chapter 4). Editorial could reprimand but there was no guarantee that readers would hear, and

the pleasures of workplace sociability and wearing smart clothes was central to many women's memories of working life in the 1930s (Alexander, 1994). In reality, marriage was "more inevitable" for the shop and factory girl and jobs could provide the means to find a more advantageous match (Jephcott, 1942: 135; Todd, 2004). Acknowledging this the 'Weekly', nevertheless, was no less sentimental about marriage than it was about work, warning readers that,

Even when you are married and safely through the magic gateway, you will find these tiresome jobs cropping up. When it rains and the clothes simply won't dry. When Jack comes home early with a bad cold. When you have a wretched headache, and the sweep is due at ten o'clock, and the 'char' doesn't turn up (WW 15.03.1929: 372).

For working-girls like Doris a job instilled self-discipline in preparation for the demands and, implicitly, the disappointments of married life.

"I doubt whether any other period of woman's history could show a time when it was so wonderful to be alive", Jane Doe reflected in her altogether more up-beat article in *Modern Woman*. Addressing readers who would become professionals, teachers or secretaries rather than occupy lowly office jobs, she underscored the importance of employment for independence; "what sweeter money is there than the money you earn yourself?", she enquired. Doe, nevertheless, was also exercised by the interconnections between work and married life.

And if you have ambition, which every girl should have, you won't be content with second-best in anything...A girl who has been a self-supporting unit, and who knows not only how to make a good job of her work, but a good job of herself, is far more likely to make a tremendous success of her married life than the spiritless ninny who drifts into a job merely to mark time until some short-seeing young man shall rescue her from it. (*MW* 08.1929: 25)

Women's experience in the workforce helped transform the modern marriage into a "fifty-fifty" affair, a partnership of equals; one response to contemporary anxieties surrounding the legislation extending divorce (see chapter 7). Doe's article paints an optimistic picture of the working woman as a happier more rounded individual who, in the year following enfranchisement on equal terms with men, was a better citizen.

References to "typing a simple business letter", "the cheerful selling of penny articles across the counter" and Doe's assertion that the girl "who can be relied on for thoughtful industry need never be out of a job", nevertheless, suggest an awareness that employment for the majority meant relatively menial shop and office work, not dissimilar to Doris's 'rotten job'. Rather than simply reaffirming female dependency on marriage (and men), however, both magazines endorsed employment as an integral part of young women's lives and explored the connections between work and marriage, suggesting the benefits and dilemmas of the working life in ways that were calculated to appeal to their differing readerships.

Doe's article discussed ordinary working girls and the achievements of what she called, the "brilliant minority": a select band of successful individuals. The 1920s witnessed the entry of pioneer women into business and professions that had never been open to women before,

although the numbers of those in the top jobs remained small (Berry & Bishop, 1985; Nicholson, 2007). High profile career professionals, including women in business, the arts and the seemingly legion number of sportswomen winning medals and breaking records in these years, were the darlings of the popular press where they came to represent the excitement of modern life and progressive modernity (Bingham, 2002). In 1929 *Modern Woman* made its own contribution, a series of articles titled 'The Women Who Succeed', which explored the careers of, among others, the beautician Helena Rubinstein, the educationalist Margaret McMillan, the advertising executive Florence Sangster and the actress Gracie Fields (*MW* 04.1929, 11.1929, 10.1929).

Celebrating these women's success, the magazine was also eager to emphasize that it was not achieved at the expense of their femininity, but was rather integral to it. Sangster, for instance, who had reached the heights of Managing Director at the Crawford agency, was described as, "gracious, gentle of voice, tactful, charmingly dressed - and as pretty as paint!"; the epitome of modern femininity. A photograph showing her soft bob, calm demeanour and careful make-up evidenced this assessment (*fig.* 91). Women such as this, the author argued with more than a little force, exposed ideas that the successful business woman was "mannish", "deficient in the social graces, unattractive and hard as nails" as "old-fashioned nonsense" and the "unthinking malicious comment that fogginess makes on all women who have dared to succeed in life *outside* the home" (*MW* 09.1929: 40). Whereas, Doris's tendency to gossip and complain signalled a potentially subversive femininity in *Woman's Weekly*, Sangster's modern feminine appearance was represented as a form of masquerade, or a management strategy in *Modern Woman*. It enabled career women to transcend out-moded assumptions and enjoy, "the best of the old world and the best of the new", as the magazine put it; to succeed, that is, in the business world *and* at the business of womanhood (Rivière, 1929/1986).

In reality the feminine business woman remained at odds with a patriarchal workplace culture where the typing pool was staffed by women and managers were mostly male (Beddoe, 1989). Tensions between feminine aspirations and masculine norms sometimes surfaced in magazines. A *Home Chat* feature titled 'Are You Self-Assertive?' urged readers to cultivate ambition and self-confidence in order to "get on" (*HC* 15.11.1924: 380). The 'self-assertive woman', nevertheless, had to compromise and choose between being, "a good wife or mother", "a good business woman", successful at art or sport, or decide simply to have "a good time".

Ambition, it transpires, was yet another form of feminine "duty", as *Home Chat's* readers were exhorted to "cultivate the feeling that you 'won't be done!' - that you *will* conquer something - however little". These contradictions are played out visually in the accompanying illustration that shows the business woman, slender and petite, perched precariously on a swivel chair, swamped by the roll-top desk at which she is seated; a position that in advertising was generally reserved for men and connoted masculine power (Marchand, 1985) (*fig.* 92). While her fashionability (she wears a cloche hat and tubular skirt) and domesticity, signalled by a prominently placed teapot, were intended to feminize her surroundings, the vulnerability of the business woman's stick-thin body serves as a metaphor for the precarious position of the female workforce. Rather than ambition, she suggests an alternative version of the woman worker that appeared in magazines as unhealthily thin and neurasthenic; the victim of new work processes, poor pay and long hours.

'Feed your Nerves and Forget them': nerve starvation and the domesticated working woman.

Advertisers for modern leisure and convenience products such as cigarettes, sanitary towels and packaged soups were quick to employ images of independent bachelor girls to encourage young working women to express desires for liberty, novelty and change through their purchasing power (*fig.* 93). So closely allied were women with modernity that Player's ditched men in favor of girls to sell their 'Bachelor' brand in the 1930s (Hilton, 2000; Tinkler, 2006) (*fig.* 94). A symbol of new social and personal freedoms and the heroine of consumer-oriented modern life, the bachelor girl, nevertheless, could also be its victim. Women workers were considered peculiarly vulnerable to the stresses and strains of industrialized, urban living and single women were often portrayed as helpless, morally susceptible, emotional and physically weak in novels and films of the period (Beauman, 1983; Fink & Holden, 1999). This section explores representations of, and debates about, the single working woman as unhealthy, aberrant or deviant in advertising and editorial in the 1920s and early '30s; the flipside of the glamorous 'bachelor'. It argues that fears about the effects of new freedoms and the new consumerism on girls' moral welfare that dominated magazine editorial in the early 1920s were gradually replaced by a focus on her physical and psychological well-being, most dramatically in advertising. As a result, the very real hardships of working women's lives were foregrounded at the same time that they were pathologised.

Feature writers struggled to establish new modes of etiquette to accommodate the working girl's changing social circumstances. The domestic arrangements of those living in hostels were a particular concern and 'Community Manners!' spelt out some important "unwritten rules" for *Home Chat* readers in 1924. The author, adopting a brisk, commonsense tone, endeavoured to instil masculine habits and modes of behaviour. Girls were told to forego the manners of the "drawing room" in favor of those of the "public schoolboy". "[M]ilitary tidiness", the use of surnames, limited time before the mirror and not "prying into each other's affairs" were also advised (*HC* 11.10.1924: 85). The "advances" of the girl who pressed chocolates on her companions were regarded with particular suspicion; an undertow of lesbianism that reproduced pioneer doctor Mary Scharlieb's (1924) concerns about unchecked female desires. This message of feminine renunciation, nevertheless, was undercut by the decorative and somewhat fanciful illustration of the hostel-dweller (*fig.* 95). Another article explored bachelor girl parties where everyone mucked in making "picnic meals" in a relaxed, bohemian atmosphere (*HC* 10.05.1924: 286). A feature on suffragist Millicent Fawcett's Woman's Service House in Westminster, meanwhile, offered a progressive model of modern living with "daintily served wholesome meals at modest charges" for women workers as well as employment and training advice suitable for the "New Era for women's work" (*HC* 08.11.1924).

The sensitive issue of entertainment-etiquette for the single girl living and sleeping in one room was taken up by advertisers a couple of years later in *Modern Woman*. 'Sunshine for the Bachelor Girl', an ad for Bevis Fabrics, invoked the constraints of single-room living to sell the company's brightly coloured and boldly patterned modern textiles. Adopting the instructional style of editorial, copy proposed that the girl select colours for her "setting" in the same way that she chose her clothes in order to perform her personality through the distinctive qualities of her environment (see chapters 4 & 6). A bed could be transformed into a "luxurious couch" by draping fabric and a corner could be curtained off for clothes, reworking the boundaries of public and private space to avoid any impropriety when the 'girl' received visitors (*MW* 11.1927: 83). The eye-catching, black and white illustration reinforced the working-girl's status as feminine and modern through a stylized floral aesthetic and bold decorative effect (*fig.*

96). 'Sunshine for the Bachelor Girl' mined anxieties about the morality of girls who lived alone to create an appealing fantasy of modern living. Compared with the rather dreary photographs that illustrated a *Home Chat* feature about cheap and customized furniture for 'bed-sit living', the Bevis Fabrics ad suggests how commercial art romanticized the prosaic realities of bachelor girl establishments.

Anxieties about the working woman's physical and mental health gradually replaced moral welfare and etiquette in magazine features and advertising. The problem of 'nerves' had been used to sell health tonics and pills in the immediate post-war period. An ad for Phospherine, for instance, carried a testimonial from "a lady secretary" Miss D. Hammersly who, pictured at her typewriter, attested to the tonic's restorative powers as a cure for nerves caused by over-strain and late hours (*WW* 25.10.1919). Low wages, moreover, lead to scratch lunches in the 1920s. Mary Grieve remembered being "slightly hungry all the time" when earning £2 15s a week as a trainee journalist on the *Nursing Mirror* in 1925, while the writer Ethel Mannin, who was "always ravenous" and always "watching her purse", made up for inadequate cheap lunches with sweets and chocolates at her desk when she earned 23 shillings a week as a typist in a big advertising firm (Nicholson, 2007: 114-115). These concerns were reflected in magazines. Maud Royden, the preacher and campaigner for working women's rights, condemned the "'bun lunch' habit" of business girls as the result of insufficiently long lunch breaks in *Woman's Weekly* in 1919 (*WW* 15.11.1919: 303). While a *Home Chat* 'Business Girl Special' compared British girls' meager diets unfavorably with the futuristic advances of mechanized lunches supplied quickly, cleanly and conveniently in American self-service cafeterias (*HC* 31.05.1924).

The figure of the 'nervous' working woman was increasingly shaped by a popular fascination with science and psychoanalysis. J. Ellis Barker, writing about anaemia in urban women workers in 1929, for instance, attributed the condition to excessive loss of blood, insufficient sleep and smoking, prescribing rest and diet; a remedy that recalled the notorious rest cure for anorexics, hysterics and neurasthenics. By the end of the early 1930s neurasthenia had become nerve starvation, as the language of advertising registered the condition in the popular imagination as *the* modern disease. "Feed your nerves and forget them", announced an Ovaltine ad in *Woman's Weekly* that featured the image of a distraught young secretary slumped over her type writing machine succumbing, in the words of the copy, to "worn and ragged nerves", (*WW* 01.02.1930: 171) (*fig.* 97). Promoted as the product of a "unique and highly scientific process", Ovaltine was sold to the magazine's working-girl readers as if it were a medicine; a modernized rest cure rather than a milk drink. Yet, whereas rest cures necessitated the neurasthenic's complete withdrawal from public life, Ovaltine promised to help women better withstand the stresses and strains of modern life so that they could remain in the workplace, whatever the circumstances.

The 'nervous' or anaemic business girl may or may not have benefitted from milk drinks. One thing is certain, however, she was likely to have earned around half the wage of her male colleagues, with the same training and for the same job (Lewis, 1984: 162-9). "Women as individuals and as a sex are poor" and poverty breeds "insecurity", "servility" and "strangles initiative, vigor and imaginative enterprise", Winifred Holtby (1934: 88) reflected in 1934, the year in which the Nutrition Board of the British Medical Association recorded that a large percentage of the population were living below the poverty line. The trauma of poverty shaped the visual grammar of the Ovaltine ad. Whereas, copy offered 'scientific' 'miracle' cures, the picture drew on film and theatrical melodrama to create a highly charged, emotional image that,

for those who could identify, communicated working girls' plight (Petro, 1989). The symmetrical layout, dramatic lighting and decorative border (suggesting a proscenium arch) heighten the melodramatic tension, framing the figures as if they were actors on a stage, while the looming shadow and white space surrounding the exhausted girl emphasize her isolation (fig. 97). The Ovaltine campaign did not confine itself to the 'nervous woman' to the workplace, but also included the exhausted mother and wife in the home who was considered equally vulnerable to the stresses and strains of modern living (fig. 98).

Scientific management, with its work schedules and labour-saving devices, not only promised to improve the housewife's lot, freeing time for other activities (see chapter 4), but from the 1930s also aimed to domesticate bachelors. *Modern Woman's* consumer pages targeted ingenious gadgets, such as a clock lamp or electric heater-cooker, at single people living in rooms, while a cookery feature by Arminel Barton promised that, with "clever planning", bachelors of both sexes could produce "perfect little meals" on an electric or gas table-cooker (*MW* 02.1935 & 11.1935: 44). As numbers of older single women rose in the 1930s the bachelor girl became increasingly mature and sophisticated. Boyish 'Joan', who advertised quick and convenient packaged soups in the 1920s, was replaced by the 'Regulo Girl', whose film-star looks sold New World Gas Cookers in the 1930s (fig. 99). A cinematic-style close-up and silvery tones (achieved by scraperboard, a popular illustrative style) evoke the drama of the silver screen, while 'fashion' style lettering enhances the glamorous effect (Dyhouse, 2010; Aynsley, 2007). Very much 'in control', and assisted by her new technology, the Regulo Girl addressed her audience from a position of authority, confident in her ability to produce a "perfectly" cooked meal to complement her perfect looks; an ideal that was very different to the docile "Five Pound look" of the "creature content to remain in an ancillary position" (Holtby, 1934: 86). "People you know use the Regulo!", she assured consumers, dashing any lingering doubts as to the respectability and desirability of the working girl life (*WW* 14.03.1936: 513). Domesticated, self-possessed and glamorous, the bachelor girl, nevertheless, did not sacrifice her radical edge and her power as a signifier of social, political and economic equality was developed in editorial towards the end of the 1930s. In 'A Bachelor Girl Wonders', an insert feature in *Woman*, the girl's domestic virtues provided a platform from which to argue against unequal pay, preferential treatment for men and the hypocrisy of married women (*W* 01.01.1938: 20). Why was she considered well-paid earning £3 5s when her unmarried male friends on the same salary were said to be underpaid, the girl demanded, a point that Ellen Wilkinson had raised in her article in *Woman* the previous year. Greta Lamb, meanwhile, in an article titled 'It's Your Life, After All!', urged young working women living at home to stop being "humble" and "self-sacrificing" and assert their needs over those of their families (*HC* 8.4.1939: 98). "Get on – get out" and "live life proudly", Lamb declared arguing, in words that echo Virginia Woolf's famous dictum, that girls needed the privacy and independence conferred by a "sitting-room of their own" to enjoy life and fulfill their potential. Feminist proposals for communal households additionally informed Lamb's vision of an ideal home restructured so that "complete independence could be enjoyed by all" (Wilson, 1991; Mallos, 1980; Pearson, 1988).

The flapper and the neurasthenic, according to Alison Light (1991: 8), represented "shocking reversals" of earlier expectations of what women, or rather ladies, might be at a time of "continual alarm" over the merging of gender differences. These were only two of the many representations of the single working woman as successful professional, sophisticated glamour girl or independent feminist that appeared in magazines. Operating, moreover, in the workplace

and home, the bachelor girl developed masculine and feminine traits. ‘Sweet & Twenty, Bachelor Girl’, an ad for Player’s cigarettes, for instance, shows a young woman whose fine features, scraped-back blond hair and pale face communicate a subtly androgynous appeal that is at once independent, charming, boyish and delicately feminine (*fig. 100*) (Tinkler, 2006). The bachelor girl in women’s magazines was addressed to readers whose experience of work was likely, at one time or another, to include paid employment outside *and* unpaid work in the home, whether or not they married or remained single. While she has been read as a deferral of modernity, slowing down the cause of equality in the workplace, the varied and changing representations of the bachelor girl in magazines suggest a more positive role, as a figure that encouraged women to rethink their expectations, not only of work but also of domestic life.

5.4 ‘Career into Marriage’?: The Working Wife and the Bachelor Woman

When Henry offered her his heart and hand,
Ann turned him down, though feeling rather flattered.
Marriage would mar the future she had planned.
And sentiment was not the thing that mattered.
She had to think about her own career,
And love with such a scheme could scarcely mingle.
To scale the heights a woman, it was clear,
Must needs be single. (HC 28.06.1924: 665)

The choice between marriage and motherhood or a career (or more likely a job), perhaps the central dilemma of modernity for women, was given a humorous treatment in ‘Ann’s Career’, a poem published in *Home Chat* in 1924. A modern young woman with career ambitions who rebutted marriage proposals with “scornful laughter” Ann, nevertheless, capitulated to motherhood when, after the birth of baby George, she began to experience “shockingly conventional emotions”; the career “queen”, unable to resist her ‘nature’, was reduced to a domestic “slave”. The inevitability of Ann’s position, where her body was in revolt against her brain, was shaped by the same assumptions that justified the marriage bar and the family wage. While there is not much evidence that single women felt the need to return to the home in the interwar years, for married women the picture was more complicated (Walby, 1986).

This section explores the fraught and contested relationship between work and marriage as it was developed in women’s magazines, arguing that attitudes to the working wife were bound up in ideas about marriage and single working women, and such external factors as economic depression and the changing job market. Magazines, moreover, developed positions that responded to their readerships, reflecting a situation where opportunities were open to a small number of well-paid professionals, while low-paid industrial work added to the burdens of the majority of wives (Strachey in Jones, 2000). The ‘middle-class’ monthlies were generally in support of the woman who could “run two jobs”, at least in the 1920s (*MW* 05.1927: 16). Rebecca West soundly criticized A. S. M. Hutchinson’s novel *This Freedom*, a sensational exposé of the unpleasant consequences when a married woman went out to work, in an article in *Good Housekeeping* in 1922 while, writing in *Modern Woman* five years later, Storm Jameson remarked on the book’s “very odd old-fashioned sound” (*MW* 04.1927: 13). A more uneven response was evident in popular weeklies. Qualified acceptance in *Woman’s Weekly* in the months immediately after the War quickly turned to criticism, while features in

Home Chat and *Home Notes* in the 1930s argued for and against married women's employment. The working wife, nevertheless, was a significant, if intermittent, presence in women's magazines throughout the period and arguments about the rights and wrongs of her situation were central to the feminine modernity shaped there.

A wife who is a worker or a worker who is a wife?

Married women in business! Everywhere you meet them, whereas a few years ago the married woman in an office or shop was rather a rarity. (*WW* 18.01.1919: 37)

Dubbed the "burning question of today" in a *Woman's Weekly* editorial in 1919, the working wife was a controversial figure for those who wished to restore "the pre-war status quo", and wives were accused of working for 'pin' money' and taking men's and single women's jobs (Holloway, 2005: 156). The 'Weekly', in contrast, represented the working wife in a comparatively positive light in a series of occasional articles that explored women who "like their business life and their married life as well" (*WW* 18.01.1919) in 1919.

"Married women in business! Everywhere you meet them", the first article observed. It explored the case of the magazine's archetypal married businesswoman, Mrs. Pamela Penn Jones who, smart, savvy and beautifully turned out, was the envy of the typing pool:

She comes down to the office in a neat gray costume, wears gray stockings and shoes, has some nice gray furs, and sometimes dons a dainty little toque with one of those soft hanging veils. (*WW* 18.01.1919: 37)

Both sides of the argument were examined. Should the married woman, "jeopardize the comfort and well-being of others", or should she "consolidate women's position in the business world?", the 'Weekly' enquired. Arguments in favour included Mrs. P. J.'s proven ability and excellent work record; "I can understand that a smart girl like that doesn't want to stay at home always making puddings and pies", the chief clerk remarked. And her domestic responsibilities, which at times could be overwhelming, prompted Mrs. Pamela to argue for manageable work-loads. The 'second typist', a single woman, however, felt aggrieved when Mrs. P. J. did not support the workforce's request for a raise, complaining, "she's got her own and her husband's salary too! Don't know that she ought to cut us out". A position that voiced what Gerry Holloway termed the "collusion" between employers, male-dominated trade unions and single women workers to keep married women out of 'white blouse' occupations and some factory work. Knowing, no doubt, that many married readers would want, or need, to work, the magazine concluded that the "married girl in business" could be "at times a frail reed and at others a very strong support". It ended with a word about priorities and the necessity for the married worker to remember that she is, "not a wife who is a worker, but a worker who is a wife". This division of loyalties between husband (and home) and workmates (and employers) would dominate, and dog, future debates about the working wife in magazines and elsewhere, and was used as an argument for the introduction (or resurrection) of the marriage bar (Lewis, 1984; Purvis, 1995).

Tensions emerged six months later in two features exploring the working wife from the contrasting perspectives of a husband and wife. No longer concerned with women's conduct in the workplace, the debate shifted to her role in the home. And, whereas, the wife rehearsed the arguments of equal rights feminism: the economic benefits of a second wage and the

importance of stimulating work in order to maintain a sense of independence and self-respect, the husband expressed altogether more conservative views (*WW* 27.09.1919: 263). No woman, he declared, could adequately care for a home and work outside it. The wife's proposals for reasonably priced restaurant food, small easy-to-care-for flats and daily domestic help, ideas developed by those campaigning for domestic reform and women's rights, were brushed aside and her desire to work represented as "selfish", negligent and frivolous (Gilman, 1896/1966). Co-opting the rationale of the domestic science movement to keep women in the home rather than enable them to work outside it, the husband argued that a real home required the presence of a full-time wife and mother who made her household duties "interesting" and earned money "indirectly" by studying housework in an "'intellectual' way":

...your home [should] be a sacred place to you, consecrated by the love that has made it and by the sorrows that have sanctified it. Let it be the centre of the world to you, no matter how small and poor it is, and that extra money you thought of earning by keeping on your pre-marriage work will fade away like a dream, and you will wonder how you ever let such dross weigh in the balance with the pure gold of real home blessings. (*WW* 04.10.1919: 277)

The wife's surrender of wage and independence became a libation, sanctifying the home in a form of female sacrifice; the domestic equivalent of the sacrifice of men at war. Immediate material pleasures were set against ethical responsibilities that promised greater future reward. As her economic value in paid employment was undermined, so the wife's ethical value in the home increased. The husband's argument, meanwhile, was bolstered by anxieties about motherhood, reflecting fears about the decline in the birth rate and standards of mothering that continued into the post-war years; "Many a girl" has "gone from the straight path" due to lack of maternal guidance, editorial warned (Lewis, 1986).

The terms of the debate and the vehemence of the husband's response suggest that the idea of the 'working wife' had achieved at least some degree of popular acceptance. 'Love and the Business Girl', an article published earlier that year, which approvingly described how an engaged girl was sacked because "love and business do not blend", indicates however that opposition to the working wife was growing, and she was rarely mentioned in *Woman's Weekly* after 1919 (*WW* 10.05.1919: 368).

With their readerships of relatively well-paid professional women and housewives, monthlies such as *Modern Woman* and *Good Housekeeping* were generally in support of married women's employment in the 1920s. Even here, however, debates were carefully framed so as not to undermine the home and wives' domestic responsibilities. In an interview published in *Modern Woman* in 1927, the doyen of domestic science Christine Frederick, herself a successful career woman and mother, claimed that business and professional women would revolutionize the home because,

The woman who has an outside job is forced to realize that she cannot – married or single – successfully run a home and a career *unless she applies business methods to her housekeeping*. (*MW* 05.1927: 16).

Frederick, a woman who led by example, converted her home into a working laboratory: the aptly named Applecroft Home Experiment Centre. A photograph, which showed a smiling

Frederick, perfectly groomed and surrounded by three of her many children outside the Centre, was designed to demonstrate that, like her work-station-home, the working wife could be a “miracle of domestic perfection” (fig. 101).

The challenge of ‘running two jobs’, nevertheless, was not envisaged as entirely unproblematic, even in *Modern Woman*. Indeed, difficulties experienced by working wives often cropped up on the magazine’s correspondence pages, suggesting the strains that combining work and marriage provoked. Fears that the working wife would undermine marriage, moreover, intensified with the introduction of legislation to equalize divorce between men and women in the 1920s, alongside continued concerns about the falling birth-rate (Lewis 1984: 78; Gittins, 1982). When Mrs. A, who had kept on her job after marriage, complained that she was “bored stiff” with her home and her husband and would rather “be going out with another man”, Leonora Eyles responded with a resounding defence of marriage (*MW* 06.1929: 100). A strong supporter of women’s right to work Eyles, nevertheless, reproved Mrs. A for, “taking marriage on the surface”, advising her to leave work, stay at home, run the house and have a baby as soon as possible, “then you will see what marriage means”. If a wife disliked housework, however, and had other skills the message was very different. Eileen, who had worked as a dressmaker before marriage and hated housework was told that she would be much happier with a job that she could “do well rather than one she does badly”. Eyles firmly rejected the concept of the male breadwinner as, “old-fashioned” and “out-of-date”, flying in the face of contemporary arguments for the ‘family wage’ (*MW* 07.1927: 88).

Hostility to the working wife increased in the early 1930s as prolonged economic depression engendered a “defensive mood” in men and single women (Holloway, 2005: 157; Alexander, 2000). Whereas, *Modern Woman* encouraged those with stable marriages to work, ‘Most Marriages are Worth Saving’, an article by Kathleen Norris published in *Woman* in 1937, presented work and marriage as un-reconcilable alternatives. Along with divorce, contraception, the vote, separate income and alimony, female employment, Norris argued, was responsible for the falling birth-rate, marriage failure and divorce. “A million women whose only happiness lies in motherhood will refuse it this year. A million more will hurry angrily towards divorce”, she announced, adopting an alarmist tone (*W* 12.06.1937:12). The pleasures of marriage, meanwhile, were richly evoked as the “living vital drama of the home”, in sharp contrast to the “coldness, dullness, waste, the complete lack of necessity of office days”. Norris justified this damning assessment of women’s social and political gains on the grounds of their supposed immaturity, which made them untrustworthy recipients of the freedoms of citizenship. The article ended on a suitably melodramatic note as, comparing modern women to babies in a chemist’s shop, “tasting pills and spilling poisons in every direction, gulping down the little white pills before going on to the delicious pink syrup”, Norris protested that their inability to control their primal urges would, “threaten life itself”! A companion piece to ‘Women Must Work’, Ellen Wilkinson’s unequivocal endorsement of female employment for married and single women, Norris’s invective was doubtless intended to be provocative, and to restore editorial equilibrium by presenting an alternative ‘point of view’. These wildly divergent pieces demonstrate how, rather than directing readers, magazines opened a space for them to consider alternatives, question or conform to prevailing ideas.

Norris advised women to have “two, three, five, seven splendid little firm, upspringing creatures”, advice that contradicted contemporary trends towards smaller families that were supported on magazine mothercraft pages. Written in 1937, when state sponsored motherhood schemes in Italy and Germany were increasing family size, the article suggests how attitudes to

female employment continued to be shaped by ideas about women's role as mothers, particularly when the latter became a matter of urgent national concern (de Grazia, 1992; Holtby, 1934). A similar hardening of attitudes to the working wife appeared in *Home Chat* in 1939 when fears about the declining birth rate combined with impending war and the threat to Empire. 'Career into Marriage', a feature addressed to the "young and modern career girl", advised her turn her career into marriage, even if the "love that comes knocking" comes with a "financial sacrifice" (*HC* 29.04.1939: 337). 'Her Job Didn't Pay!' developed similar arguments. It concerned Sylvia who, having returned to work to compensate for her husband's salary cut, was forced to abandon it, exhausted by the "double shift" of employment and household tasks (*HC* 22.04.1939: 263). The illustration shows Sylvie cut in two in a literal depiction of the problem of leading two 'parallel lives' (*fig.* 102). The proffered solution, to "live on a lesser income to ensure there was perfect happiness and unity in the home. For happiness is more important than all the money in the world", meanwhile, reprised the 'husband's' arguments in *Woman's Weekly* twenty years before.

In the world beyond magazines, the idea that a 'respectable wife' did not engage in paid employment, but put her home and children first, dominated the interwar period and government was wedded to the belief that women's place was in the home. Many factors including marriage bars, protective legislation, unequal pay, accusations that they were taking men's and single women's jobs, and anxieties about the falling birth rate mitigated against married women's employment (Bruley, 1999). The varied viewpoints and different models of modern women workers that emerged in magazines, nevertheless, demonstrate that this was by no means a given, and that attitudes were in flux, shifted and changed in response to economic, social and political conditions and the circumstances of a magazine's target audience (Lewis, 1984: 153).

The 'fifty fifty' marriage and the bachelor woman

In *The Shadow of Marriage*, Katherine Holden (2007) explores how attitudes to marriage shaped single women's lives in the first half of the Twentieth Century. A close reading of 1930s women's magazines, in contrast, shows how changing ideas about female employment contributed to a re-imagining of marital relations and increased acceptance of older single, or bachelor, women. Journalist and author, Ursula Bloom, for instance, argued for a marriage of equals: a "fifty fifty" partnership in which men and women shared domestic responsibilities and continued to work in *Home Notes* in 1932:

If both are breadwinners and share the duties of earning, then both must be home-makers and share the duties of domesticity... There is nothing to be ashamed of in a man sharing domestic duties, any more than there is in a woman sharing the bread-winning ones. (*HN* 26.11.1932: 505)

This radical role reversal was reinforced by humorous illustrations, a strategy used to introduce new ideas in magazines, where the wife was shown seated at her typewriter while her husband, pipe in mouth and sporting a checked apron over his business suite, removed a casserole from the oven (*fig.* 103).

Such images of domesticated masculinity challenged established norms they, nevertheless, overlooked the delicate matter of male pride. This was tackled by Mrs. Jim, *Home Chat's* agony aunt, in a 1934 article about that "very modern problem" the "barrier of

finance”, when a woman’s earnings exceeded those of her husband. Like Bloom, Mrs. Jim’s approach was surprisingly progressive. She argued that couples should continue to work, pooling resources in order to live “comfortably”, suggesting how material aspirations motivated social change for *Home Chat*’s respectable working and lower middle-class readers. Her vision of radical equality even extended to women’s right to propose:

We women are no longer the timid little domestic pets that men once invited into their lives. We are their friends, their colleagues. We play games with men, we work side by side with men; so surely we have earned the right – when we fall in love with one of them – to say: “Darling, let’s get married.” (*HC* 12.5.1934: 338)

As the numbers of older single women in the population grew in the 1930s, real financial hardship increased. A government Report on pensions for unmarried women in 1938 admitted that spinsters aged from 45-55 found it harder to retain and regain work than men of a similar age. Organizations such as the Over Thirty Association (OTA), The National Spinsters’ Association (NSA) and Florence White’s National Spinsters’ Pension Association (NSPA) were formed to support older single women and campaign for improved pensions provision (Holden, 2007: 35). Fears about the older single woman’s often perilous financial state lay behind a 1939 *Home Chat* editorial selling pensions to the business girl who, “whether she marries or prefers to retain her single state... has no fears for the future” (*HC* 18.03.1939: 731 & 730). Published opposite an ad for Norwich Union insurance societies, which offered “An income for ‘Bachelor Girls’ when they retire”, the article demonstrates how single readers attracted advertising revenue to magazines.

Accusations that older unmarried women were leading “abnormal lives” became more common in the 1930s (Holden, 2007: 41; Jeffrys, 1985). Positive images of the ‘bachelor woman’ and the ‘maiden aunt’, however, appeared in magazines challenging the derogatory stereotypes of ‘spinster’ and ‘old maid’. A *Modern Woman* reader who complained about assumptions that “old maids are, of necessity, both virginal and catty” was reassured by Ray Allister, the magazine’s agony aunt that, on the contrary, “unmarried middle-aged women are sophisticated, broad-minded, and have a fine capacity for friendship” (*MW* 03.1939: 36). Ursula Bloom, writing in *Home Chat*, meanwhile, advocated the joys of single living and the advantages of ‘career over marriage’ in characteristically strident terms:

No career ever lets you down with the same hideous bump. A career gives you a dividend on what you put into it. Marriage is not so fair. A pair of blue eyes can dislocate it. (*HC* 25.03.1939: 753)

Far better an “old maid” than an “unhappy wife”, Bloom asserted, citing the divorce lists. The single state, in her view, neither prevented women from having a home of their own (whether “lovely flat,” or “sweet little cottage”), nor barred them from adoption, and the “unbelievable happiness of having a child about the place”. On the contrary, for Bloom, the single state offered opportunities for self-development and the chance to challenge accepted social mores.

The bachelor woman’s struggle for survival, meanwhile, provided a ‘triumph over tragedy’ narrative that was ideal for *Woman*’s brand of fiction with a contemporary edge. Age discrimination, which was rife in clerical and shop work where older women were pushed

aside to make way for younger more attractive girls, for instance, provided the contemporary social context for 'Miss Battersby's Day', the tale of a 'walker' in a department store (with an invalid sister to support) who used her years of experience to save herself from redundancy when the store modernized (*W* 04.03.1939).

The "bogy of loneliness" and the physical, emotional and psychological welfare of single women, however, remained a cause for concern. 'I'm on My Own', a *Modern Woman* feature by Paul Grinsing, issued a "solemn warning" to the bachelor woman about the dangers of single living, rehearsing a familiar litany of 'evils' such as ill health and undernourishment (the result of "sketchy sandwich lunches" and "sleep starvation"), becoming neurotically house proud and, recalling Mary Scharlieb's (1929) fears about lesbian relationships, the "'vampire' type of friendship" that "too often leads only to loneliness *a deux*", which according to Grinsing, was "worse than solitude" (*MW* 09.1939: 14). A black and white photograph of a woman staring, head in hands, through a rain-soaked window drew on a visual rhetoric of documentary realism that was developed by later girl's magazines, most memorably on *Jackie's* Cathy & Claire page (*fig.* 104) (McRobbie, 1991). Assumptions about the vulnerability and misery of single living ignored the companionship and, in many cases, lifelong friendships that women made in schools, colleges, clubs and hostels, something that Vibart Dixon had explored in her article on clubs that engaged women from a wide range of backgrounds in a host of activities, in *Modern Woman* a few years before (*fig.* 105).

Married working women, that "formidable minority" who, unlike their younger sisters the bachelor girls, chose not to relinquish work on marriage and, despite the difficulties, lead "two parallel lives" were, according to journalist Margaret Lane, "more in the spirit of the nineteen-thirties and 'forties" than other women (*W* 05.06.1937: 7). She, however, remained a highly contentious figure in the period, criticized for taking men's and single women's jobs, and for her failure to live up to exacting standards of 'good motherhood'. Older bachelor women, meanwhile, were similarly reviled as their numbers grew. Both received more sympathetic treatment in women's magazines where, married or single, the domesticated working woman was celebrated as an acceptable alternative to the modern wife. The struggles and compromises, ambitions and dreams of the working wife and the bachelor woman made them characteristic figures of feminine modernity. While there was always ambiguity around the issue of married women's work, particularly for those with children, the range of possibilities discussed in magazines contributed to a clearly definable shift in attitudes to marriage as a partnership of equals and, by the end of the 1930s, to wider acceptance of the older single working, or 'bachelor woman'. Such alternative models of modern womanhood helped blur accepted categories and shape new attitudes, not least to domesticated men. One *Woman* reader, for example, described how her husband took on responsibility for home and family after losing his job. Her description of him as "a husband to be proud of" owes much to the reassessment of women's responsibilities at work and home that took place in magazines (*W* 14.08.1937: 46).

5.5 Conclusion: Adventurous Women

...only the feminist magazines projected an image of the career woman and the adventurous woman as positive and desirable. In fact they raised these to the status of heroines. (Beddoe, 1989: 16)

The new domestically-orientated publications, unlike the feminist press, Deirdre Beddoe (1989: 4) argued, promoted the housewife as the “only desirable image” for readers to emulate in the interwar years. The quite extraordinary range of possibilities in this chapter, however, reveals that the adventures of the working life were equally integral to the imaginary of commercial women’s magazines. To work, at least for a time before marriage, became accepted practice for the majority of women, irrespective of class, for the first time in the interwar years. It was a hugely significant shift and explains the presence of employment features in what were otherwise domestic magazines. In a volatile period that witnessed boom and slump, high unemployment and economic growth, editors were alive to their readers’ needs for secure employment and struggled to square this with the domestic values promoted in their magazines (see chapter 4). The bachelor girl who worked before marriage, the modern professional who used her femininity to further her career, the bachelor woman whose domestic skills validated her workplace identity, and the working wife managing family and career, signalled the tensions and contradictions, as well as the possibilities of employment for women. Whereas, the working girl is often seen as being emblematic of modernity, magazines suggest a feminine modernity shaped by the very real connections between women’s responsibilities as citizens and individuals, undertaking paid and unpaid employment inside and outside the home. Throughout the period fears about male unemployment, the declining birth rate and the nation’s health meant that women’s work was bound up with their domestic responsibilities, and this was reflected in magazines. Each publication’s treatment of the theme, however, was historically specific and shaped by its target readership. Career pages, in particular, appeared at times of economic or social crisis in *Woman’s Weekly* in 1919, the year immediately following war, or in *Modern Woman* in the early 1930s in response to the economic depression, for instance. The ‘Weekly’s’ answer to the post-war crisis in women’s jobs was to envisage new opportunities in office, domestic or retail work and debate the sensitive subject of the working wife. And while the female masseuse may have been a little far-fetched, the paper made a significant contribution to re-imagining employment possibilities for thousands of readers, many of whom were untrained and desperately in need of work. The large number of young women entering office work from the mid-1920s meant that the business or bachelor girl became a significant presence in *Home Chat*. The rise in older single women in the 1930s, meanwhile, meant that the female ‘bachelor’ could no longer be assumed to be young and only working until marriage. The ‘Regulo girl’ brought a mature sophistication to selling domestic appliances in *Woman’s Weekly*, while pension adverts addressed single women in *Home Chat* and Miss Battersby, the elderly department store employee, was considered a suitably modern heroine for a *Woman* short story. The career professional was central to *Modern Woman’s* ethos throughout the period, and the magazine eagerly celebrated her success. The difficult realities of women’s employment, nevertheless, were not entirely absent and on occasion appeared alongside the ‘dream’. A 1935 editorial included a discussion of voluntary welfare work for “women who have leisure”, an item about Labour activist Judy Manning’s campaign with the Association of Women Clerks and Secretaries to redress women’s “underpayment, scandalously long hours and insecurity”, and the photograph of a fashionable new suit designed to accommodate the business woman’s busy life (*fig. 106*) (*MW* 12.1935: 21). Foregrounding different versions of working womanhood, magazines also signalled the connections between women’s lives as workers, mothers and wives, and how, for instance, changing attitudes to employment contributed to new expectations of marriage. These connections were also evident in the ways in which women encountered publications.

Historian Diana Gittins (1982: 85) observed that young girls' exposure to magazines as part of work-place "networks" influenced changing ideals of family size and spread knowledge about birth control. The plurality of representations of successful career professionals, office girl sociability, 'nervous' workers, domestic bachelors (male and female), elderly working heroines, and working wives established the working woman (or women) as the flipside of the housewife heroine, and a central figure of feminine modernity in the interwar magazines.

Chapter Six: 'Natural' and 'Unnatural' Types: Performing Modern Femininity through Cosmetic Practice and Display

6.1 Introduction: A Migration to Surfaces

A sense of the instability of the modern world in the period after the First World War grew in the 1920s and 1930s into a sense of modernity as shifting, insecure, rootless, a time without depth when meaning could be read off surfaces. (Evans,1999: 4)

In the period from 1900 to 1930, making up became one of the tangible ways women in their everyday lives confirmed their identities as women: they became women in the application of blusher, mascara, and lipstick. These applications carried various contested meanings... (Peiss, 1996: 331)

The acute instabilities, social upheavals and psychological changes of the interwar years have been associated with a near obsessive preoccupation with appearances. Judy Giles (2004) refers to a 'landscape of appearances', while Janice Winship (2000: 27) describes the interwar feminine body as a site on which tensions around social class were played out as dress became, "the visible embodiment of respectability and class aspiration". Caroline Evans (1999: 4), writing about fashion designer Elsa Schiaparelli's work, uses the metaphor of a migration to surfaces to argue that her clothing embodied the, "the instability and contingency of modern life" when dress was "a necessary condition of subjectivity". Seeking to locate changing models of the self historically and map the development of a modern decentred subject, Evans examines the mask and the mirror as recurrent motifs that demonstrate the designer's playful, and sometimes menacing, questioning of a unitary self.

The idea that women "became women" in the application of cosmetics, as Kathy Peiss reminds us in her cultural history of beauty, was central to the rapidly growing and powerful beauty industry established in the first decades of the twentieth century (Woodhead, 2004; Corson, 1972). This chapter examines some of the many and varied beauty ideals in magazine editorial and advertising, arguing that such concepts as 'personality types' and 'transformation', and the contradictions between, for instance, 'natural' beauty and cosmetic artifice, or the increasingly cosmetic face and the 'natural'

body shaped by exercise, opened a space for women to adopt, question and perform multiple feminine identities, exploring as they did so what being modern might mean.

From the early 1920s an increasing number of ads for beauty products: face creams and powders, lipstick, perfume and hair products began to appear, and by 1930 a beauty editorial written by the publication's resident expert had become a fixture on most women's magazines (Angelogou, 1965; Scott, 2005). A central paradox, however, was the physiognomic paradigm established in the Victorian period, whereby surface appearance revealed inner spirit (Peiss, 1998:16). While, skin improving cosmetics (creams and lotions) were understood to assist nature, skin masking paints (powders and rouge) were regarded as 'unnatural' because they covered nature's handiwork, hiding expression and truth (Peiss, 1996: 314). A beauty industry under pressure to sell more goods had to counteract the associations with deception and immorality that coloured cosmetics, in particular, continued to carry and magazines, with their intimate relationship with readers, played an important part in this (Peiss, 1998). Tensions between the idea of 'natural' and 'unnatural' beauty run throughout magazines in the 1920s and 1930s, and will be explored in the following sections. It is essential, however, to recognize the radical nature of the dislocations (social and sexual) that 'unnatural' beauty in the form, for instance, of coloured cosmetics implied in a signifying system where the 'natural' face re-inscribed the naturalness of social hierarchies by ensuring that external appearance corresponded to inner being.

The new ideas about 'self' as a subject in process that were circulating in psychoanalysis, psychiatry, criminology, as well as the arts, proved enormously valuable for an advertising industry that wished to represent identity as a matter of merchandising, performance and style in order to increase sales (Dean,1992). Beauty editors, those self-styled artists of the cosmetic box, were acutely aware of the value of advertising revenue, yet had to balance this with their responsibilities to readers, the need to retain their trust and anxieties about respectability. Together with advertisers they developed a compromise: a new paradigm of female appearance whereby artifice was allowable if used in the service of representing a woman's 'true' identity, rather than any intention to deceive; an old woman attempting to appear young, for instance, would be an example of unacceptable duplicity (Peiss, 1996). Home Chat's beauty editor referred to the "cupboard of beauty", implying that beauty was a commodity that could be taken out and put on, yet cautioned against excessive use of cosmetics, and recommended home-made recipes for hand and face creams rather than named products (HC 19.01.1929: 111). Readers were advised to enhance and improve, but not entirely re-make what nature had given them. "You can't beat Nature!", actress Joan Barry proclaimed in a feature advising that "the art of make-up" was to "imitate" and "assist" nature, achieving a "healthy glow" by "natural" rather than "artificial" means (WJ 10.06.1930: 21).

Warren Susman (1984), in his formulation of American consumer culture, claimed that by the early 1900s the new apparatus of commerce (advertising, large scale retailing, mass communications, consumer credit and leisure) transformed the 'self' defined by 'character' into one typified by 'personality' signalled through such external markers as merchandising, performance and style. Susman's distinction between intrinsic character and personality that was acquired provides a useful means of charting shifting ideas about identity as natural and essential, or something that could be adapted, improved or even transformed in magazine beauty culture in the 1920s and '30s. Personality and character were, however, often inter-linked as advertising and editorial adopted a psychological, or in the case of a 1924 ad for Eastern Foam in Home Chat, astrological rhetoric in an effort to associate beauty products with the mysteries of the self:

Girls! Here is a chance to get to know yourselves. What are your powers – what are your weaknesses? For what position in life does your personality fit you?...Think what it would mean to know!- you would understand yourself better... You would be equipped with a knowledge of your gifts and an explanation of your failures. You would cultivate Character – and with it Beauty. (HC 03.05.1924: 257)

‘Personality’, in the Easter Foam ad, had to be discovered, while ‘Character’ could be cultivated. Both, however, were necessary for beauty, which significantly was not an end in itself, but rather a means of discovering one’s true aptitudes and thereby achieving success. Editorial made similar connections between character and surface appearance. A Modern Woman (07.1927: 29) article by Noel Jaquin a few years later claimed that hands revealed true “abilities, general character and temperament” and were an essential guide for career success. Short fingers, for instance, indicated qualities of “mental quickness, shrewdness, a certain critical faculty and the ability to visualize” that were necessary for the business woman. The handprints of such successful women as the novelist Margaret Kennedy and actress Fay Compton, among others, provided the reader with visual evidence of these claims, as body and print imaginatively combined on the surface of the magazine (fig. 107).

This psychological tone became increasingly widespread in the period as everyday phenomena were redefined as problems of psychological self-management in popular self-help manuals, and advice columns offered the “psychological secrets of perfect health, happiness and business success” (Thomson, 2001: 99). Elizabeth Wilson (1987: 125), observing a similarity between the appeals of consumer typology and astrology, which by the mid-1930s was an established component of women’s magazines, suggests that both represent a search for certainty in a world of change; a world, moreover, where identity was increasingly unstable and conditional as a result of the efforts of the beauty industry.

The preoccupation with appearances, or ‘migration to surfaces’, was part of a longer process of the “aestheticisation” of everyday life that resulted from the expansion and extension of commodity production in big cities, and can be traced back to the mid-nineteenth century (Featherstone, 1991; Frisby & Featherstone, 1997). As the urban landscape in the 1920s was transformed by a multiplicity of coloured, decorated planes (billboards, shop displays, cinema screens, advertising, magazines, packaging, signage) so were the city-dwellers who, like the shopper on the cover of *Modern Woman*’s November issue in 1929, moved and held their bodies in particular, stylized ways (Gronberg, 2000; Hollander, 1975 & 1994) (fig. 166). The technologies of modernisation, moreover: the expansion of electric light, film and photography, that increased levels of scrutiny in urban centres, entered the home through the pages of domestic magazines in the 1920s, and became internalised (Marvin, 1988; Thomas de la Pena, 2001). The “ideal electric home”, *Home Chat* enthused, ensured that a “good light” was always shed on one’s looking glass, while the film star close-up altered perceptions of looking and perspectives of scale (HC 1924: 378) (fig. 108). The need to codify and perform (self and others) that Elizabeth Wilson (1991) associated with the anonymity of the city, was thus transferred to identities performed in private, in the domestic spaces of suburban homes.

The self wrought and performed through commerce, nevertheless, was not unproblematic and the contested meanings that cosmetics or dieting carried are evident in the tensions between different beauty ideals explored in this chapter. Magazines, moreover, had to negotiate novelty with accepted norms. Celebrities’ flamboyant styles, or the slick modernity

of the fashions worn by sports stars, had to be reconciled with more conventional notions of feminine appearance and behaviour. Such innovations as trousers for women or red nail varnish provoked strong reactions in a period when many clung to conventions. Mass-Observation, when conducting a survey about reactions to hands, found that dirty or strongly coloured nails were associated with moral laxity, uncivilized behaviour and sexual aggression. One 19 year old man went so far as to compare long, pointed, painted nails with the “blood-stained talons of a bird of prey”, adding “which some of the owners of the nails no doubt are” (M-O, 1939: 15). The same image of “lurid scarlet” “talons” appears in Emma Smith’s memoir of a Cornish childhood between the wars. The “vexatious matter of fingernails”, she recalled meant that whereas trimmed nails with a thin coat of transparent flesh-coloured varnish were “perfectly in order”, and in fact demonstrated a “proper pride” in appearance, “no girl with long scarlet fingernails could be a nice girl, or other than extremely fast” (Smith, 2008: 93-4).

Tensions implicit in the typology ‘cosmetic and paint, nature and artifice’ continued through the interwar years intensified by the contradictions between a rapidly globalizing beauty industry driven by Hollywood and firms such as Max Factor, which promoted international ideals, and the virulent nationalism of 1930s (Jones, 2000). These tensions emerge in magazine debates about, for instance, the increasingly ‘made-up’ face and the ‘naked’ body exposed by sports and exercise, imperatives to use coloured cosmetics yet remain ‘natural’ and the white-skinned English beauty ideal, all of which are explored in the following sections. It was the growing, and sometimes uneasy, relationship between commerce and psychology, however, that above all else characterized beauty culture in a period when the “troubled relations between appearance and identity” were written on the skin and across the body in magazine advertising and editorial (Peiss, 1996: 323).

6.2 Personality Is Only Skin Deep? Types and Transformations

In an industrialised consumer society where standardization and consistency had become the norm people, like goods, were expected to conform to accepted standards of presentation. Magazines applied business metaphors to the body in the 1920s as women were told to have a “good stocktaking” (HC 12.1.1929: 111) and identify areas in need of improvement. Healthy bodies were efficient, rationalised bodies and beauty editors evolved pseudo-scientific tests echoed scientific management regimes introduced into the home and workplace (chapters 4 & 5). Margaret Hallam offered *Modern Woman* (06.1925: 25) readers ‘Ten Tests of Beauty’ assuring them that, a “well proportioned body” is “one of the greatest secrets of health”. A bewildering array of gadgets such as electric hair curling irons, hair driers, Electric vibromassage appliances or the “latest beautifying invention from New York” that peeled off the skin (recommended for the “plucky”), promised to reduce the work of beauty as body management became increasingly mechanised (HC 16.03.1929: 579) (fig. 109). Paradoxically, as pressure to conform to beauty standards established by Hollywood and international cosmetic brands grew, greater value was placed on ‘individuality’. A fine line existed between imperatives to look similar in order to belong and expectations to be interesting and different; “strategies” were required to find the right balance between “emerging consumer values and the local experiences of them” (Jones, 2010: 126).

The beauty ‘type’ and ‘transformation’ (or make-over) were two important strategies devised by a cosmetics industry rapidly developing a language of metamorphosis for its services and products in the form of complex cosmetic regimes, step-by-step illustrated guides, and ‘before-and-after’ features. ‘Type’ was based on physical attributes such as the colour of a woman’s

hair, eyes or complexion, but could also be determined by her nationality, race, career, astrological star sign or the magazine she read. It offered a near magical solution to the dilemma of how a woman could transform herself through the application of cosmetics without engaging in practices of deceit, enabling her to achieve beauty while simultaneously being 'true to herself'. Type, however, derived from existing visual taxonomies that naturalized social differences in terms of biology and race. These ideas persisted in advertising and editorial; Richard Hudnut cosmetics claimed that "personality colour" was based on scientific research into "racial strains and heredity", while Helena Rubenstein compared Polish, Spanish, French and American beauty types in 'Race for Beauty', an article that sought to persuade *Modern Woman* readers to use "intelligent beauty care" to maintain youth and improve their looks (*W* 12.06.1937: 37; *MW* 07.1930: 65). 'Transformation', meanwhile, an important motif in magazine fiction and beauty features, fascinated a generation whose lives had been irrevocably changed for better or worse by war. Set in 1926, the Cinderella-like transformation of Christine Hoflehner from impoverished postal clerk to 'modern girl' at the beauty salon of a fashionable Swiss hotel in Stefan Zweig's *The Post Office Girl* characterised these tales of metamorphosis. Fashion and beauty editors such as Mansel Beaufort supervised self-transformations; Beaufort published before and after photographs, asking *Modern Woman* readers to send in their photographs and benefit from her improving ideas (*MW* 03.1939: 32-3).

The concepts of type and transformation, nevertheless, are inherently unstable and ambiguous, representing a boundary or borderline where the psychological 'self' and the commoditised 'self' meet. Carrying a "mixed message" that both reveals and conceals identity, type blurs the distinction between the made-up face as "revealing a woman's inner self" and "constituting that self" (Peiss, 1996: 323). While, glorying in her transformed appearance, the 'post office girl' worried as to whether it revealed something previously hidden or constituted "some other brand new self" (Zweig, 1982/2008: 261). The following section explores some of the ideal types constructed for readers in British women's magazines, considering how they helped women manage the contradictions of being beautiful and modern.

The 'Ideal Modern Type'

Variouly known as the flapper in Britain and America and la garçonne in France, the 'modern girl type' expressed desires for greater political, sexual and economic freedom through specific visual styles of dress and appearance, including bobbed hair and coloured cosmetics. A global phenomenon, the modern girl was interpreted to produce distinctly "country-specific versions of women's revised role" (Jones, 2010: 127). 'Mabs Types', a competition run by *Home Chat* in 1924, evidenced what that meant in an English context. Mabs, who the magazine described as a "famous dress artist and designer", was in fact an editorial creation used to promote Bestway, the AP's pattern house, and readers were asked to send in photographs of them wearing garments made from Mabs patterns (*HC* 03.05.1924: 227). Selections of the photographs (50 in total) were printed each week and readers voted for the 'Mabs Girl' or, as the magazine put it, "the ideal modern type". A creative marketing strategy, 'Mabs Types' were also an effective means of educating readers in the aesthetic codes and standards established by the magazine. Examples of Mabs' fashion illustrations decorated the page that announced the competition and readers were implicitly encouraged to approximate this 'look' (fig. 110). The description of what constituted a 'Mabs Type', nevertheless, was open and inclusive, presumably in order to maximise participants and pattern sales:

[T]he famous dress artist and designer... does not use a model. She puts her very charming clothes on a figure that is to her the ideal modern type – plump, but slim, big-eyed, neat-haired, neat ankled, and *not too ravishingly beautiful to be unbelievable*... there must be lots of *Mabs types* about. (HC 03.05.1924: 227)

The Mabs Type represented a fashion ideal that today seems radical in its ordinariness, underlining the democratising tendencies of popular magazines. For Mabs types were ubiquitous being defined not by their unattainable beauty, but by their “charm” and dainty grooming, qualities that were available to all who employed the sartorial skills and knowledge about self-presentation available in the magazine. (HC 12.07.1924: 72-3).

The competition placed readers’ photographs at the centre of *Home Chat*, reinforcing the belief that their interests, needs and requirements: their realities (the realities of their bodies) drove the editorial remit of the magazine. The dreamy expressions, softly waved hair and careful poses that readers adopt in their photographs reproduce an ideal of restrained, yet confident modern femininity reminiscent of the celebrities and aristocrats that filled the magazine’s editorial pages. Occasionally, a woman looks directly into the camera, but in the main they gaze modestly to the side. A respectably modest version of the ‘It Girl’, the ‘Mabs Types’ provide a visual index of the magazine’s approved versions of modern femininity and suggest how readers interpreted these. Publishing readers’ photographs, nevertheless, also carried risks. Photographs of real women would inevitably not match up to the idealised drawings that filled the fashion page, and the slightly gauche self-consciousness evident in many of the photographs reveal the gap between fantasy and reality that fashion editorials work hard to elide (fig. 111).

Mabs types carried mixed messages. Their plurality: they included older women as well as girls (although the latter predominated) of all shapes and builds, celebrated diversity. The emphasis on charm endorsed agency, encouraging women to cultivate their assets and perform individual interpretations of the Mabs’ look. Mabs Types, nevertheless, rewarded readers for learning *Home Chat*’s particular brand of modern fashionability based on beauty and style ideas culled from the magazine, not least its dress patterns. The photograph of the overall winner (no. 41) shows a slightly plump young girl with softly shingled hair wearing a full length evening dress (fig. 112). Of all the ‘types’ her pose and demeanour come closest to the idealised drawings that populated the fashion page. Ultimately, the process of self-transformation that readers were engaged in was managed by, and reinforced, the status of the magazine as an arbiter of modern taste and style. Readers voted for the winners yet, as Mabs’ reminds us, in all matters concerning the competition, “the decision of the Editress is final”. Whereas, *Home Chat* encouraged readers to conform to type, albeit one that embraced diversity, *Modern Woman* consciously promoted ‘individuality’ as a beauty ideal; the cultivation of ‘character’ rather than a personality type. Dissembling and disguise were positively embraced in an article titled ‘Coiffures and Characters’ in which Lola de Laredo described how the Scandinavian actress Lillebil Ibsen, granddaughter of the play-writer, performed different persona by changing her make-up and hairstyle. The article’s subtitle: “personality hangs by a hair” suggests that identity was fluid and could be changed at will, an idea that inspired Ibsen’s stage show in which she transformed from a French chanteuse to a German opera singer, for instance, simply by changing aspects of her appearance. The article is illustrated with photographs of the actress in various guises and de Laredo explained how, to “a lesser degree”, Ibsen’s method could be “accomplished in everyday life” (fig. 113). Ibsen

herself was encouraging, advising readers that the extent to which a woman could “change and enhance her personality just by altering her style of hairdressing” was “unlimited”. She expounded a beauty philosophy that prized distinctiveness and difference:

...the average woman is not beautiful. Most of us have nondescript faces, and we must above all things avoid a monotonous appearance...The majority of women cling to a sort of uniform shingle, which they believe adds to their prettiness and youthfulness. Personally, I would sacrifice those two things for distinctiveness. (*MW* 04.1927: 27)

Arguing that she “not only looks different, but also feels different” when she alters her hair and declaring that “we must break away from the awful uniformity of existing fashions”, Ibsen suggested a more fundamental transformation. Unlike the Mabs types, where difference was accommodated in order to promote conformity, *Modern Woman's* middle-class readers could dare to be different, imagining modern identities that moved beyond the accepted boundaries of appearance.

In *Modern Woman* in the 1930s, the professional women that the periodical regularly profiled provided rules for looking and being modern, and served as models of unconventional modern womanhood. Beauty Editor Mansel Beaufort, in her article ‘A Full Life and a Lovely One’, posed the question:

Busy women, famous women, women who can't have much time for their looks, are usually more vividly attractive, have a more up-to-date and youthful charm than their contemporaries who spend endless leisure on themselves. How *do* they do it? (*MW*03.1939: 22)

To find the answer she interviewed the travel writer Rosita Forbes and artist Anna Zinkeisen whose beauty philosophies were shaped by their unusual careers. Forbes, when in town, dressed in a manner that complemented her adventurous occupation; combining a gold evening dress with flaming red nail varnish, gold eye shadow and blue mascara, she wore massive gold earrings on the top of the ear and gilded her lobes. Her “psychological rules” for beauty provided a palliative to the demands of modern life and included avoiding the tiredness that results from hectic rushing and becoming bored; that is, getting depressed. Zinkeisen treated her appearance in the same way that she would a work of art. Cosmetics, she claimed, were such a natural part of her daily routine that, even when “working in overall and slacks or relaxing in the country”, she felt “slovenly” without them. Making-up after a long day's work had a pleasurable, therapeutic and transformative effect. Such daringly self-possessed modern individuals, moreover, could combine artificial and ‘natural’ effects with seeming ease. Nowhere was the performance of personality through cosmetic practice so dramatically visualized than in Hollywood, and the beauty industry it spawned (Massey, 2000; Berry, 2000). Whereas, *Modern Woman's* ideal types developed English middle-class cultural interests in the stage, arts and travel, the weeklies rapidly embraced Hollywood glamour (Gundle, 2008; Dyhouse, 2010). Information about how stars were ‘made-up’ for the screen sanctioned cosmetic transformation. ‘The Man Who Makes Up Stars!’, a *Home Chat* feature about Hollywood make-up artist Cecil Holland, described him as a “modern magician” who “understands more about making thin faces plump and plump faces slender than anyone else in

the business” (HC 02.03.1929: 484-5). Laid out as a series of framed shots and camera angles, the article suggests how the lens: the new arbiter of beauty licensed a greater degree of fabrication (fig. 114).

It was entrepreneurs such as Max Factor and Richard Hudnut, however, who sold the transformative possibilities of cosmetics to the masses through films, advertising and magazines (Berry, 2000). It was Max Factor who introduced the term ‘make-up’ to distance cosmetic practice from its disreputable associations; cosmetic beauty was no longer “just on the outside but beauty on the inside” (Jones, 2010: 103). Having normalised cosmetics, advertisers took the lead in developing their sexual appeal by using Hollywood celebrities whose studio contracts required them to endorse products (Peiss, 1998). Madeleine Carroll’s “screen beauty” was dramatically visualised for *Woman* readers in a Max Factor ad which aligned cinema fantasy with everyday life, promising that, “In your life, as in the drama of life you see on the motion picture screen, beauty will help you win romance” (fig. 115) (*W* 19.06.1937: 53). Sex combined with science and women were urged to send for charts, samples, booklets and a “personal complexion analysis” to ensure that their make-up matched their ‘type’.

By the end of the 1930s Hollywood stars represented a highly codified language of visual appearances that offered an exciting, and potentially dangerous, sexualised look (Stacey, 1994; Dyhouse, 2010). Beauty editors, eager to capitalise on the appeal of American glamour, nevertheless, had to interpret it, making it respectably English for British audiences. Helen Temple advised *Woman* readers on how to adapt Ginger Rogers’ coiffure in her latest film ‘Stage Door’ for “everyday wear” (*W* 29.01.1938: 1). The Hollywood pin-ups that headed *Woman’s Weekly’s* beauty editorials in 1939 favoured stars such as Ellen Drew and Deanna Durbin whose appeal was their capacity to appear, “at once extraordinary and ordinary”; a “newly aspirational and slightly daring modern woman” who stood for change and transformation that was acceptable rather than frightening (Kuhn, 1996: 118-19). Letters from readers such as Donna, who wanted to wear her hair like Deanna Durbin in ‘A Hundred Men and A Girl’ and asked for cosmetic advice, nonetheless, suggest a sophisticated beauty culture when compared with the requests for remedies for sore feet, grey hair or spots that up until the mid-1930s dominated the ‘Weekly’s’ beauty page (*W* 18.11.1939: 966).

As strategies, ‘type’ and ‘transformation’ addressed the particular problems and possibilities of beauty culture in the 1920s and 1930s, and were employed by editors and advertisers to manage the dilemmas and tensions that surrounded identity and appearance. Contradictions that arose, for instance, from the necessity to appear ‘natural’ while using cosmetic artifice, look youthful even when mature in years, conform to increasingly international standards of beauty while maintaining one’s Englishness and individuality, be modern without losing one’s femininity, or achieve health on limited means. Beauty editors, and to a lesser extent advertisers, were constantly engaged in processes of negotiation as they mediated, for instance, Mabs’ personality or the original character that Rosita Forbes’ beauty conveyed to *Home Chat* or *Modern Woman’s* readerships. Dramatic colour ads for Max Factor in *Woman* and other magazines legitimated cosmetic transformation for a mass audience in the 1930s that simultaneously signalled inner beauty. Personality materialised through the careful construction and management of surface appearance was more than just skin deep.

6.3 White Skin/Red Lips. Naturalising Artifice: Sexuality, Respectability and Display

You weren’t asked what you wanted to do you were told, the mothers wanted the

money. Where I was there was Peak Freans, there was Liptons, there was Shuttleworths chocolate... and really you went where your mates went. You've got a job - grown up, you could buy lipstick. (Kathleen Ash, 1997)

In 1931 it is estimated that 1,500 lipsticks were sold in London, whereas just one had been sold ten years before (Graves & Hodge, 1940: 278). Of all the paints and powders that masked nature's handiwork, lipstick was one of the most controversial because it signalled a woman's sex, her potential sexual availability and display (Pallingston, 1999). Advertisements for Tangee or the exotically named Kashana, which appeared in magazines from the late 1920s, testify to lipstick's growing popularity in Britain (Dade, 2007). The context in which it was worn and how it was applied, nevertheless, had to be carefully negotiated to maintain standards of respectability. Aged fifteen in 1931, Kathleen Ash, the daughter of an East London stevedore, started wearing make-up to go out. A little bit of powder and a touch of lipstick - never rouge - and a tiny bit of black mascara, but not in front of mum because, "you didn't really make-up much". Before going out Kathleen would call at a friend's house and "put a bit on" there. Sixty years on, she recalled brand names and their claims with a precision which suggested the fascination that cosmetics held, and continue to hold, for young women. "Icilma cream, a vanishing cream, I thought you'd vanish!" she laughed, "Tangee lipstick, changed colour to suit you... a load of cobblers really but, of course, you believed it". Kathleen left school one Friday and started work the following Monday at the local Peak Freans biscuit factory. It was a time when taking on adult responsibilities happened fast, and without ceremony. The small amount left from Kathleen's wage packet after she had handed it over to her mother was just enough for a few luxuries: a tuppenny seat in the cinema, a lipstick or magazine; pleasures that offered a little bit of independence and fun.

With their promise of semi-magical transformation, cosmetics signalled and materialised other potentially magical transformations such as growing up and becoming a woman, with all the changes: emotional, physical and psychological, which that implied (Alexander, 1994; Soland, 2000). This section examines debates about coloured makeup and face creams as they were developed in magazines. Beginning with the hostile reactions to lipstick voiced in editorial features in the mid-1920s, it shows how the cosmetics industry 'naturalised' artifice first through advertising and then editorial, accommodating what had previously been regarded as a transgressive and sexually active femininity. It argues, moreover, that attitudes to coloured cosmetics have to be viewed alongside the 'white beauty' ideal embodied in face creams, both unsettling notions of fixed identity as the boundary between skin and cosmetics became increasingly blurred.

'The Lipstick Girl': performing artifice in public

Coloured cosmetics were first used in public at theatrical performances, balls, and spectacular events (Peiss, 1997). The public application of lipstick, the act of making-up and exposing the artifice to public view, nevertheless, drew most censure in British women's magazines in the 1920s. The situation was different in Paris, that centre of the artistic avant-garde, where the fashionable young woman checking her make-up in her compact mirror, a slim pochette tucked under her arm, symbolised a new brand of daring feminine modernity in the mid-1920s (Gronberg, 1998). Few girls in Britain and America, in contrast, wore lipstick in the 1920s, when the actress Clara Bow epitomised that shocking, lipsticked vamp the 'It Girl' (Cohen Ragas & Kozlowski, 1998). What wearing lipstick meant, and its consequences, were hotly debated in women's magazines.

The shocking practice of applying lipstick in public was a particular concern in the mid-1920s

and a number of articles discussing the topic appeared in *Home Chat*. ‘Girls I Couldn’t Marry!’, ostensibly written by a “real live bachelor”, pronounced the “Lip-stick Girl”, along with the “Slangy Girl” and the “‘It’ girl”, far from marriageable material. “Why will some girls make a public exhibition of themselves when they feel they want a little touching-up?” he grumbled (*HC* 03.05.1924: 235). The Lip-stick girl’s modern manners, it seems, were the bachelor’s main complaint, her supposed lack of modesty and self-restraint humiliating her male companions. Features writer Lola de Laredo expanded on this theme the following week in an article provocatively titled ‘Girls Who Just Miss Marriage’ where she complained

All over the world, but chiefly in big cities, there lie scattered many heart-broken victims of the lip-stick. They are women who, by reason of their own foolish vanity, have allowed Love to pass them by. (*HC* 10.05.1924: 287)

Laredo, nevertheless, accepted cosmetic artifice, at least to some degree, claiming that the “modern man is not such a prude as to condemn a girl who makes up slightly”. Her concern, like ‘the bachelor’, was with the public application of cosmetics that she felt offended male sensibilities:

... He may suspect that his beloved’s lips have achieved their crimson glory with a little artistry, and so long as he is allowed to remain mystified, he will overlook it...But to see the trick being performed before his very eyes is disillusioning; it impresses him as being immodest and unwomanly; to see it being done in public simply disgusts him.

Words such as ‘immodest’, ‘disgust’ and ‘unwomanly’ suggest that the prostitute remained the touchstone for criticisms of coloured cosmetics in towns and city spaces (Walkowitz, 1980; Wilson, 1991). The levels of moral outrage that applying lipstick in public apparently aroused in men, nevertheless, suggest additional, deep-seated anxieties associated with modern femininity and female sexuality.

Rosalind Coward (1984: 17-8), describing the mouth as women’s “most intimate orifice” and the “site of sexual pleasures”, observed that it is also where the tightest controls are placed on women’s behaviour. It is through her mouth that woman announces herself, making claims on the world and asserting her right to exist, but because the mouth is also associated with nurturing it becomes the site of direct confrontation between her oral appetites and domestic place. This tension between women’s desires and needs (sexual or otherwise) and her responsibilities is played out in the discrepancy between Laredo’s text, which admonished the lipstick girl’s brazen behaviour, and the illustration of a confident, sophisticated, lipstick-wearing woman, who stares confidently out at the reader, casually smoking a cigarette, which accompanies it (fig. 116) (Hackney, 2008).

Both Laredo and ‘the bachelor’ alluded to men’s feelings of embarrassment, frustration, even inadequacy, when faced with the lipstick girl’s behaviour and in the illustration the girl’s male companion looks on glumly, resigned and confined to the background as the girl takes centre stage. The psychologist Flugel’s (1930/1971: 17-241) theory of modesty as the struggle between unconscious tendencies such as desire and disgust: its inhibiting opposite, suggests the psychological structures governing male

responses. Flugel conceptualised this in terms of the conflict between hiding the naked body and drawing attention to it. The act of reddening the lips not only signals female desire (conscious or unconscious) but also draws attention to 'illicit' female orifices (mouths and, symbolically genitals) in an open act of display. Flouting codes of (male) modesty the girl's behaviour arouses disgust and embarrassment. By 'making-up' in public, the lipstick girl disrupts her companion's voyeuristic pleasure in looking; Laredo describes the 'girl's' companion as having to avert his gaze, and "pretending not to see". No longer the object of the desiring male gaze, the lipstick girl's performance becomes a subversive display of womanly desire. Moreover if, following Joan Rivière (1929/1986), womanliness is a masquerade masking woman's desire for, or even possession of, the phallus and power, the public act of making up unmasks that masquerade, revealing the disguise as disguise, as well as the desire the masquerade of womanliness sought to hide' a process of simultaneous masking and unmasking, revealing and concealing that unsettled notions of fixed identity (Doy, 2007).

Naturalising Artifice: the art of the polychrome face

A very different attitude to coloured cosmetics began to emerge in magazines towards the end of the 1920s as advertisers strove to disassociate cosmetic practice from cheap girls, actresses and prostitutes, aligning it instead with a fashionably active, healthy and acceptably eroticised modern look. In a culture that was increasingly orientated towards spectatorship in the service of consumption, practices that previously had been viewed as falsifying and deceptive were recast as a 'natural' form of dramatic enhancement and respectable display.

Advertisers were more daring than beauty editors in their evocation of the mysteries of female sensuality and, influenced by the relatively advanced stage of the toiletries, advertising and publishing industries in America, British advertisers followed the American model and took on the advisory role of editorial in this respect (Scanlon, 1995). They, nevertheless, took care to balance sensuality with respectability. An ad for 'Khasana Mystic Lipstick and Cream Rouge' in *Modern Woman*, for instance, combined the sexual allure of "vivid lips" and cheeks whose "delicate flush so piquant and lovely... fascinate and enthrall", with assurances that this "nearly colourless" cosmetic "harmonises with each individual complexion" (*MW* 06.1927: 55).

Managed with care, erotically charged areas such as lips and cheeks could demonstrate a 'natural', and therefore acceptable, female sensuality without any allusion to coarse sexuality.

By 1929 the flapper, no longer a figure of disrepute, promoted wearing lipstick as part of the busy lifestyle of bright young things. Ads for 'Kissproof', "the modern waterproof lipstick", in *Woman's Weekly* showed girls swimming, golfing and undertaking other strenuous activities without fear of embarrassing and time-consuming reapplications (*fig.* 117). The ads were written in the form of a dialogue between two young modern women in a tone of breathless urgency that was calculated to convert even the most inexperienced cosmetic consumer. Any hint of moral impropriety which may still attach to coloured lips and, by implication, mixing socially with men, was erased by the product's 'natural' look; it "might be your *own* colouring", one girl admiringly observed to her companion. The 'Kissproof Treasure Chest', a 'special offer', informed readers about other products, everything from powder to lash and brow dressing, that should be used in conjunction with the lipstick, as advertisers established a "network of products" and educated consumers in cosmetic culture while establishing the brand (Belinka Keranen, 2000: 157).

'Kissproof' used dialogue and visual appeal to address consumers, and visual communication,

in particular, was central to the success of cosmetics advertising. Illustrations and photographs ensured that such novelties as Hudson's Vegetable Leaflets, miniature books containing pages of colour that could be applied to lips or cheeks, and the 'Davina Fact Lifta', a 'rejuvenation' device for furrowed brows, stood out amongst the ads for mouse poison and cures for epilepsy in the back pages of *Home Chat* at the end of the 1920s (fig. 118).

By the early 1930s coloured make-up was an established part of beauty editorials in middle-class monthlies and new weeklies. Paradoxically, as the range of cosmetics grew and beauty editors advised ever more complicated routines, so the imperative for faces to appear 'natural' increased. Coloured cosmetics had to be desexualised or, at least, made respectably sexual. Editors used different strategies depending upon their readership. Writing in *Modern Woman* in 1932, Hazel Rawson Cades emphasised aesthetics and hygiene, conflating ethical with physical considerations for her middle-class audience. The look women should aim for was somewhere between "'well bred' and 'natural'". In order to achieve this skin had to be "radiantly clean" and coloured make-up used with "art and restraint" for, "unless you are still in the happy possession of a schoolgirl complexion, it is idiotic to regard rouge, lip-stick or powder as 'not quite nice'", Cades opined (*MW* 04.1932: 25). Naturalising cosmetics in this way meant that the non-cosmetic face became 'unnatural', even a sign of illness. Face powder, for instance, was reconfigured as a natural, healthy component of growing up in ads that advised the "wisest mothers" not to oppose a "normal daughter's normal desire" to use it (*MW* 10.1935: 108). As powdering became a respectable sign of growing maturity (and sexuality), a mother's duties extended to the consumer skills necessary to ensure that daughters would avoid, as copy warned, "the heavy, mask-like coating of powder that a certain type of woman achieves".

Whereas, monthlies reworked anxieties about aesthetics, hygiene and social propriety, the new weeklies offered clear instructions on using cosmetics correctly in visually innovative ads and editorials. 'Tricks with Lipsticks', a *Woman* beauty editorial whose title alluded to a permissible degree of deception, endorsed coloured lipstick just as long as its use complied with 'type'. While "sophisticated people" could wear lighter and brighter make-up, "quieter types" had to stick to milder colours and, although "young girls" could experiment, "older women" had to find the "most natural shade and use it delicately" (*W* 25.09.1937: 47). Photographs of 'Miss Right' and 'Miss Wrong' showed readers how to identify 'faults' and adapt fashion to their 'true' natures.

"Stainless Stephanie", the "Modern Girl" in De Reszke Minors' cigarette advertising, was one of the most eye-catching examples of naturalised artifice in the period. Featured on *Woman's* prestigious back page slot in 1937, Stephanie was able to wear lipstick *and* smoke without fear of criticism thanks to her red-tipped cigarettes, which ensured that both her cigarette and, by implication, her character remained stainless. Her appearance signals a sophisticated (not to say aggressive) self-confidence - copy informed readers that Stephanie was, "got up to kill" - while, sans serif lettering, white space and dramatic colour contrasts (red and green, and black and white) visualise her modernity (fig. 119). And whereas, *Home Chat's* 'lipstick girl' could only "make up slightly", Stephanie's beauty was unapologetically artificial:

That lovely colouring, we assume, is not entirely the product of Nature - but who today would have it otherwise? The Modern Girl is a work of art. She knows how to make the most of her looks. But she is also careful not to offend. (*W* 21.08.1937: bc)

No longer castigated, the unnatural colour of the modern girl's lips was celebrated as a sign of her sophistication and modernity. This, however, came at a price. For, whereas a decade earlier the lipstick girl had performed her cosmetic artifice (and her sexual desire) in public, the "ugly smear" of Stephanie's lipstick: the unacceptable trace of her sexuality, was erased from public view; a point noted by her male companion's gaze, which the commercial artist helpfully rendered for readers in diagrammatic form! Angela Carter (1975: 155), noting the lipsticked mouth's tendency to bleed over everything announcing it as a "bloody gash", described it as "a wound" that cinema sirens such as Gabo and Dietrich wore like "a badge of triumph" in the 1930s. Stainless Stephanie's position, in contrast, was negotiated rather than triumphant, her identity dependent on her moral impeachability and a product that enabled, yet contained, the subversive implications of her lipsticked look.

Cosmetics and skin increasingly became one in the visual language of editorial and advertising in the later 1930s, as artifice and nature were elided. Whereas, it was generally accepted that lipstick could be visible by this stage, rouge had to appear completely natural, and cheekbones became the new danger zone for women. The problem of the overtly aestheticised "painted" face was explored in a series of Snowfire Rouge ads published in 1939, which showed modern couples dancing, driving and embracing, promising that a "touch" of "natural" colour could start a "new romance" (Snowfire Guard Books, nos. 23-26: 1939). Ads for Snowfire Blush Cream published in *Woman* and *Modern Woman*, meanwhile, used the mask not only as a metaphor to reconceptualise the relationship between the 'sexualised' artificial skin of cosmetics and real skin, but also as a means of transition (*fig.* 120). In a form of double masquerade, the cosmetic mask of beauty is lifted off and replaced by another 'natural' mask, which copy describes as, "your own beauty" (*MW* 04.1939: 93). The "fundamentally dialectical" nature of the mask simultaneously reveals and conceals, unsettling notions of fixed identity (Doy, 2010: 46).

In 1914 wearing lipstick had been barely acceptable in Britain. From the mid-1920s and throughout the 1930s the 'naturalisation' of make-up, driven by advertising and product innovation and reinforced through beauty editorials, accommodated coloured cosmetics and made them respectable, along with the sexualised feminine identities used to sell them. The social, ethical and psychological dimensions of this newly independent, sexualised modern woman were explored in the new romantic fiction (see chapter 7). Richard Sennett (1977: 261), writing about a public culture that, "moved from the presentation of a mask to the revelation of one's personality in the mask one wore in the world" in the first half of the twentieth century associated this with a "culture of intimacy" in which people were fearful of betraying their emotions and withdrew from contact with others. Commercial beauty culture in mass produced women's magazines, in contrast, suggests that the made-up face blurred the boundaries between skin and cosmetics in an, albeit negotiated, public declaration of the modern, feminine sexualised self.

The Lady Vanishes: whiteness and identity

Since the nineteenth century, cosmetics have sought to make rather than paint white skin white. At the end of the nineteenth century, the new creams and soaps were founded on the notion that by becoming really, deep down clean, a woman could become truly beautiful, because she would look clean. (Dyer, 1997: 77)

I seem to have a great collection of face-creams, jars of all sorts, but normally I use a light cream as daytime foundation, a heavier cream foundation if I am going out at night, and a skinfood. (Engineer's wife aged 30, *M-O* 1947: 3)

Soaps, creams and facial powders, skin-improving cosmetics that were considered to assist nature rather than masking it, prepared the way for coloured make-up. The ideal of white-skinned beauty associated with them was well established as a sign of health and pure, spiritual femininity for middle-class women by the end of the nineteenth century (Webb, 2006; Stewart, 2005). The proliferation of ads for soaps and creams, many more than for coloured cosmetics, and their differing appeals, however, suggest that the preoccupation with 'looking clean' took on new meanings for the extended readerships of interwar popular magazines. Anne McClintock (1995) demonstrated how soap advertising sold the twin messages of empire and racial hygiene in the nineteenth century, and ideologies of race and class inform the constructions of white English beauty developed in advertising in the 1920s and 1930s. 'Whiteness' as a social category, however, is inherently paradoxical. Cultural historian Richard Dyer (1997: 70) observed its democratising potential - as a non-colour that represents a group which "one might be admitted or up which you might climb" - as well as its exclusivity as a division upon which racial power and social status depend. Whiteness, moreover, both represents a fundamental transformation and an unachievable fantasy. Skins that are: sunburnt, dirty as a result of labour in the world or in childbirth, marked by the stains of corporeality, the pleasures of the flesh or the passing of time, that is most skins, will never be white enough, for to be really absolutely white requires dissolution into "pure spirit and no-thing-ness" (Dyer, 1997: 78). Yet, whereas, coloured cosmetics no matter how naturalised, always have to be applied to the surface of skin, a woman is deep down beautiful if she looks clean. This section argues that the ambiguities surrounding whiteness as a beauty ideal imbued it with powerful transformative powers at a time of social change in the interwar years. While, naturalised cosmetics performed a respectably sexualised femininity, cleanliness conferred the social status, glamour and respectability for the price of a cheap soap or face cream.

Natural bloom and a refined complexion

Early in 1919, in the wake of the victory celebrations, an ad for Colleen Soap in *Home Chat* allied 'whiteness', feminine beauty, patriotism and a return to domesticity after the war. Captioned, "A Flower of England", the Colleen ad associated the product's natural qualities which, copy assured, derived "entirely" from the "plant and floral world", with the natural tenacity of the "countless number of women" who

...despite the war-years of unaccustomed work, anxiety and heart-weariness, have maintained that dewy freshness and charm of skin and complexion so rightly associated with British girlhood. (*HC* 01.02.1919)

While acknowledging that victory depended on women's sacrifices and hard work, it was their ability to achieve an enduring beauty that the ad celebrated. A line illustration showing a young woman whose delicate features, white skin, semi-transparent gown, graceful neck and soft hairstyle evoke a classical ideal, pictured this for readers (*fig.* 121). The Colleen Girl's beauty, however, was not only about the past but had an urgent contemporary appeal. The bowl of roses by her side mobilised the familiar comparison of femininity with flowers, blossoming nature and fertility, and

simultaneously aligning feminine beauty with patriotism; she was the flower of England, not Scotland, Ireland or Wales. The legend, “Give a Disabled Man the chance of filling your next Vacancy” across the bottom of the page, meanwhile, locates the ad within the government campaign to force women out of war-time employment and return to the home (Beddoe, 1989). The ‘Girl’ gazes through a blank (white) window which, in the language of advertising signalled future change (Marchand, 1985). Her brand of ‘natural’ white beauty was a sign for women’s ‘natural’ patriotic duty to return to the home.

Much of the power of whiteness depends on graphic conventions and a reader’s readiness “to take the literally white graphic face as a rendering of the socially white face” (Dyer, 1997: 48-9). The Colleen Girl’s ‘white’ beauty was materialised in *Home Chat*, as graphic reproduction elided with social production on the surface of the magazine. An advertisement for Icilma face cream that was published few weeks later employed a similar effect but, whereas the Colleen Girl aligned white-skinned beauty with national duty, the Icilma ad associated with it with social prestige. With minimal text - what copy there is gives instructions about price and how to pronounce the product’s name, suggesting that it was new to the market - the image does most of the work. Showing a woman whose wide brimmed hat and elaborate stole suggest contemporary fashionability rather than timeless beauty, the ad’s sketch-like style and creative use of ‘white space’ suggest the immediacy of Impressionism rather than a classical ideal (fig. 122). The eye-catching simplicity and visual appeal of the Icilma ad marked it out as modern in comparison with more old-fashioned ‘wordy’ ads for Ejecthair or Strodonia on the page; products that, unlike Icilma, didn’t catch on.

By 1924 advertisements for Icilma cream, Ven-Yusa (the oxygen cream), Eastern Foam and Pond’s creams appeared regularly in popular weeklies, associating the products with a new style of youthful beauty and a decidedly active, energetic modern type (fig. 123). Depicting young women walking, playing tennis or riding in a motor car, they claimed that creams provided protection against the dangers of “exposure”, “dust”, “sun scorched or wind-burned skin”, allowing girls to fully participate in the modern world without compromising the “charm”, “smooth texture” and “natural bloom” of white skin (HC 24.04.1924: 419; WW13.09.1924: 389). Pond’s, in addition, associated its vanishing cream with a distinctly British style of fine-skinned beauty, developing the twin appeals of social prestige and national identity. “Love of the outdoor life - the sea - the country - and sports”, declared an ad in *Woman’s Weekly*, “is deep-rooted in the heart of every true British girl”; a pleasure that she could now indulge in without risk of her skin becoming “tanned and harsh”: dark and coarse like the skins of foreigners or those performing manual labour (WW 30.08.1924: ii).

These ideas were developed in a highly successful and long running advertising campaign conducted for Pond’s by Helen Landsdowne Resor and the Women’s Editorial Department at the American J. Walter Thompson agency, which employed celebrity testimonials to persuade middle-class women that face cream was a more respectable means of looking beautiful than using explicit cosmetics. The brand’s pitch capitalised on social elitism aligning this with the visual signifier of white skin; her grace the Duchess of Leinster, the Countess Howe, the Viscountess Tiverton and Lady Smiley, were only a few of the many worthies who lent their names to the Pond’s brand in British magazines. In the case of Donna Degna Marconi the advertiser had to work especially hard to make her style of Celtic beauty fit the preferred ‘English’ look (fig. 124). Copy emphasised the Countess’s “lily-and-rose” complexion, “soft

blue eyes” and “corn-coloured hair”, recasting her in terms that recall the Colleen Girl as a cultural symbol of antiquity and an unassailable English upper-class (*WW* 21.07.1934: 107). The message, however, was clear: any woman could be as attractive and admired as the beautiful Countess if, like her, they used Pond’s cream.

The visual language of Hollywood glamour rivalled the appeals of health and social status in weekly magazines in the 1930s. Soap, toothpaste and shampoo ads in weekly magazines offered to make users more attractive with white teeth, fresh breath and shining hair, never an explicit priority for the majority up till then (Schroeder, 1998). Macleans toothpaste employed photographic formats that resembled film stills, and the appeal of white teeth and bright hair reinforced one another in *Woman’s Weekly* in 1934 (*fig.* 125). The aesthetic of black and white photography (and film), in which strong red lipstick shows up as black, producing the effect of an impossibly and unnaturally white skin, was employed to dramatic effect in a Macleans ad, which framed Hollywood star Merle Oberon’s smiling face in a circular shape that resembled a camera lens (Dyer, 1977) (*fig.* 126). Advertisers and beauty experts encouraged readers to resort to ‘unnatural’ means to reproduce this screen-based fantasy. Even in *Woman’s Weekly*, a publication famous for its home-made recipes, soda and buttermilk were rejected in favour of peroxide toothpaste and vanishing cream (*WW* 11.11.1939). At the very time that coloured make-up was being ‘naturalised’, whitening cosmetics became more chemical producing an ‘unnatural’ look in the beauty discourse of women’s magazines.

The treatment of light in adverts for hair preparations was one of the most effective ways in which whiteness was materialised in beauty advertising. Imitating film conventions for ‘feminine lighting’ (haloes, backlighting, soft focus, gauzes and retouching), advertisers produced, what Dyer (1997: 124) describes as, the “effluent dazzle” effect of blond hair or, in the words of advertising copy, “a glorious film star gleam”, whose origins lay in Western Classical ideals and the inner spiritual beauty of Christianity (*fig.* 127) (Warner, 1994). The language of cosmetic advertising devoted to “glow” celebrated an image of whiteness that stood in contrast to the “ethically loaded evils of shadow and shine” that were associated with non-white and working-class white women (Dyer, 1997: 126). An ad for Drene shampoo in *Woman’s Weekly* in 1939 shows how racist assumptions and stereotypes underpinned the ‘white beauty’ ideal. Captioned “She’s a golliwog” the ad, which was laid out in comic strip format, compares Caucasian hair that is described as “fuzzy”, “difficult to manage” and “out of control” with hair that, due to the magical properties of the product, became “easy to handle”, tamed and, by implication civilised (*WW* 11.11.1939: 961) (*fig.* 128).

In order to succeed, the new ideology of beauty had to “resonate with women’s daily experiences and anxieties” (Belicka Keranen, 2000: 154). Market research suggests some consumer scepticism about the claims of cosmetics advertising in the period; a J. Walter Thompson survey about Pond’s creams revealed responses ranging from “approval, and amusement to disbelief” (Scanlon, 1995: 217). Mass-Observation surveys carried out in the 1930s and 1940s detailing use and attitudes to face cream provide an indication of how contemporary British women reacted to, and interpreted the new ideals. Phrases such as, “I’ve read that I should” and “I think that it’s important” suggest that by 1947 face creams had become a social imperative for many. Mass-Observation, concluding that a wide range of consumers habitually used face creams, nevertheless, identified social differences describing the practice as, “more of a class rite than anything”. Age and access to washing facilities, however, seem to have been equally significant; younger women and those without bathrooms, for instance, were more likely to remark on their pleasurable, freshening and revitalizing

qualities. The wife of a baker's roundsman exclaimed, "there's nothing more refreshing. I smear it all over my face and go to bed and in the morning I fancy my face looks as fresh as ever. It's as good as having a bath". A carpenter's wife agreed, saying "I rather enjoy putting it on, I suppose it is knowing that it keeps your skin fresh" (*MO* 1947: 4). Standards of cleanliness increased in the first decades of the century, yet when only a minority of houses had separate bathrooms, significant difficulties remained with the problem of simply getting clean (Stewart, 2001; Lupton & Miller, 1992). Face creams offered a means of 'feeling fresh' on limited means. Older (from their mid-30s) professional women or the wives of business men, in contrast, tended to regard face cream use as a tedious duty that had to be performed to counteract "sagging skins". A thirty five year old Civil Servant spoke of her extreme dislike of using creams; "I do it because I have to", she complained (*M-O* 1947: 6). While a director's wife remarked, "I really do think everyone should keep as young as they can. I'm thirty five and I have to be very careful" (*M-O* 1947: 5). For these women, face cream use was not about the pleasures of cleanliness, but rather the duties of respectability and maintaining a youthful appearance. The anxieties that some women expressed about feeling "undressed" or, at least "not really dressed" without a "touch of powder and face-cream" suggest the psychological, as well as social, aspects attached to cleanliness and face cream (*MO* 1947: 5). Whereas, coloured cosmetics such as lipsticks, eye shadows and nail varnishes were advertised first, and most frequently, in *Modern Woman* and other monthlies, soaps and face creams were a mainstay of popular weeklies throughout the period, suggesting that their message of respectable femininity was more immediately acceptable to wider audiences. The 'lipstick girl' and the 'white' English beauty represented opposite poles of femininity in the 1920s, yet by 1939 both featured on the cover of *Woman*; alternative ideals in an increasingly commercialised beauty culture (it is no coincidence that both promoted free gifts) (*figs.* 129 & 130). Reader Kathleen Ash laughed at her girlish belief that vanishing cream would make her disappear. Beauty's imaginative power and transformative effects: its ability to reveal and conceal the self, sometimes at the same time, nevertheless, should not be taken lightly. The 'white skin/red lips' aesthetic sanctioned female sexual desire and made its performance acceptable. Mass produced magazines, with their beauty tips and ads for cheap lipsticks and face creams, moreover, offered women alternative ways of performing the self and being modern. The new beauty culture, nevertheless, excluded coloured and ethnic women and was fraught with contradictions. 'White skin/red lips' embodied feminine ideals that were both accessible and allusive, inclusive and divisive, healthy and – particularly in the case of peroxide creams - unhealthy, and involved feelings of pleasure and irritation; a beauty ideal, in other words, that was both 'natural' and 'unnatural' at the same time.

6.4 'Natural' and 'Unnatural' Bodies: Beauty, Health and Bifurcated Garments

How can we write about the idea of female freedom without considering the changing relationship to the female body which surely dominates the post-war years. (Light, 1991: 9-10)

All healthy women desire to be as beautiful as they can. They want good figures, a good carriage. They know, much more strongly than men, the importance of looking and feeling well and they know that without a fit body a beautiful face is no more than a sham... (E. D. Stevenson, the secretary of the National Fitness Council for Scotland, 1937 cited in Macrae, 2010)

While the modern face was sexualised through cosmetics and made respectable with whitening creams, the modern body was also the site of competing and contradictory imperatives. In a reversal of nineteenth century practice, whereby a 'natural' un-made-up face contrasted with an 'artificial' body shaped by corset and stays, the cosmetic face offset a body that was increasingly 'naturalised', in that it was exposed through fashions for short skirts, sleeveless dresses, soft, clinging fabrics and the general fascination with sport, sunbathing and exercise (Ewing, 1978; Thesander, 1997). This section explores these tensions and contradictions as they emerged in magazines. It argues that the play between what was considered 'natural' and 'un-natural', respectable or shocking, in advertising and editorial in different magazines shaped a modern body (or bodies) characterised by mutability and change.

Physical recreation was an important part of the new leisure culture in the interwar years and women's sports expanded as increasing numbers joined clubs, took up exercise, and played sports as amateurs and professionals (Langhamer, 2000). The female body honed by physical exertion and exercise, however, was also a site of alarm. Eugenic, science and medical discourse taught that vigorous exercise had a damaging effect on the female form and reproductive capacity although, paradoxically there was also mounting evidence that fitter women produced healthier offspring (Soloway, 1990; Holt, 1989). Sports 'separatism' and gender 'appropriate', non-competitive activities such as modern dance, 'movement' and keep fit, which became a craze in the 1930s, were considered to help women retain their grace and posture rather than robbing them of their femininity (Morris, 1937). The government's Health and Fitness Campaign, which was launched in 1937 to improve the nation's health, promoted swimming, dance, tennis, and exercise as most appropriate for developing women's bodies, and these activities featured strongly in women's magazines (Macrae, 2010).

Women's sports were newsworthy in the 1920s and 1930s and sport was intrinsic to the magazine's seasonal appeal (Huggins, 2007). Coverage was directed at readers not just as spectators, but also as participants. "Every girl should be a swimmer", declared a *Modern Woman* feature on camping, tennis and outdoor summer recreations written by international cricketer Marjorie Pollard, swimmer Frances Collyer and other experts (*MW* 06.1930: 42). The institution of annual holidays for the first time gave workers' opportunities for extended breaks, which many spent at the seaside or rambling in the countryside (Walton, 2000; Holt, 1987). *Modern Woman* celebrated the "sheer fun" of "sun", "fresh air" and "freedom" to be had from sea and river bathing, while *Woman's Weekly* recommended walking tours of the Cornish Coast (*fig.* 131) (*MW* 08.1930: 42; *WW* 28.06.1930). Women who "tramp miles without tiring" and "work as hard as they play", meanwhile, advertised the health-giving properties of bread (*HChcHC* 15.04.1939: 205).

Activities such as golf or skiing required expensive travel, equipment, or the right social connections to access club membership. The pictures of fashionable golfing girls and features about skiing holidays in *Home Chat* showed sports that doubtless would have been out of many readers' reach, but dress patterns or diets helped them to imaginatively participate by achieving the sporting 'look' (*HC* 05.10.1929: 25) (*fig.* 132). Sport, in fact, was ubiquitous. It surfaced in features, fiction, advertising, and the beauty and fashion pages of magazines. *Woman's* 'Sports Girl Special', for instance, which was timed to coincide with Wimbledon, included a photo-feature about British women sports stars, a lesson from tennis champion Dorothy Round, a knitting pattern for a tennis cardigan, and a romantic story set on the courts and featuring the new style of androgynous, active modern heroine (*W* 26.06.1937; see chapter

7). Sports historians represent the interwar period as one in which the progressive and liberatory aspects of sports for women were restricted by concerns about their femininity (Hargreaves, 1994; McCrone, 1988). This section, in contrast, argues that the modern feminine 'sporting body' developed across sports and fashion features, fiction and advertising in women's magazines was fluid and contested; an important site for negotiating class and gender relations and identities.

The 'manly' girl: tennis

The "history of modern sport", Ross McKibbin (1998: 377) observed, "is largely part of the history of the modern English male". Tennis is an exception to this and, representing a high degree of gender equality, was attractive to women and younger men. It could be played enjoyably by those who were only moderately competent, and offered opportunities for mixed doubles at a time when women were not generally admitted as equals in sports. Conforming to middle-class codes of femininity, tennis played seriously was also a game that demanded a high degree of skill, physical stamina and mobility from players. This split between 'feminine' appearance and 'masculine' demeanour structured the discourse of tennis in women's magazines, which was conducted across fiction, fashion, ads for, for example, man-made fabrics and sports features where experts advised readers on how to improve their game.

The degree to which tennis signalled a new style of liberated femininity and new social relations between the sexes emerges in a romantic story published in *Woman's Weekly* in 1919, six months after the cessation of war. In 'The Comrade Touch', subtitled the story of "a man and a girl of To-day", a tennis match becomes a dramatic device to explore post-war subjectivities and social values. The story begins when the heroine is invited to stay with her fiancé Edward's family. Her war time experiences driving a tractor in France and doing canteen work, she ruefully reflects, had turned her into "a different girl", one his family would not approve of. She determines to act out a semblance of her pre-war self, dressing fashionably and doing, "pleasant peace-times things". "War-time habits", however, surface when Edward challenges her to a game of tennis. An illustration showing the heroine with short hair (a necessity of war) feminised by a headband, and a short-sleeved, soft-collared tennis dress, combines masculine and feminine features and visualises her newly liberated state (fig. 133). War, meanwhile, had also transformed Edward, and his expectations of women had changed. Critical of the heroine's slack overhand service (ironically the result of a secret war injury) he admired her stamina, fitness and aggressive play; all 'masculine' qualities. The story ends when Edwards sees his fiancée for the changed woman she is, delightedly declaring, "your one of the bold ones the dear People [his family] don't approve of". The pair unite in mutual recognition of their transformed selves, and the knowledge that they can never be the people they once were (*WW* 31.05.1919: 426-7).

The growth of sporting celebrity culture meant that women players in particular were feted and followed by journalists and photographers. The international circuit (including the U.S.A., Britain and France) ensured a wealth of possibilities for exciting stories and glamorous photo-opportunities. More than any other, the innovative style of the French player Suzanne Lenglen who, "violated nearly all stereotypes of the sportswoman", became synonymous with a new style of female modernity in the 1920s (McKibbin, 1998: 369). Lenglen was both astonishingly successful and acutely aware of her media persona. While not conventionally glamorous, she developed a signature style of dress and play that was simultaneously outrageously modern, feminine and chic. Her 'uniform', which consisted of a flimsy, short-sleeved, pleated tennis frock that barely reached her calves, worn with white stockings and a

soft linen hat, established a style of comfortable, fashionable femininity. Her astonishing balletic style of play required that she abandon the corset (Little, 1988; Horwood, 2002). In 1920 she added a 'bobbed' haircut and what became known as the 'Lenglen bandeau': several yards of brightly coloured gourgette, or silk swathed around her head and held in place with a diamond pin. Whereas, others such as her long-time doubles partner Elizabeth Ryan, shunned cosmetics, Lenglen's face was a picture of cosmetic artifice, conscientiously applied. French women, perhaps more than other nationals, played against a "negative stereotype of the sportswoman as unnaturally manly" and playing up her femininity enabled Lenglen to carve out an acceptable space as a successful sportswoman and celebrity (Stewart, 2001: 169). Her feminine appearance was so intrinsic to her professional persona that she publicly protested against shorts when other players adopted them in the 1930s.

Lenglen's influence was soon evident on the fashion pages of women's magazines. From 1924 the 'Mabs Girl at Tennis' modelled a narrow-shouldered cami (designed to prevent straps slipping), "comfy knickers" and a primrose linen party frock, with "futurist bands of China blue, black and red". Charm and practicality, meanwhile, were the watchwords in 'Make it for Tennis', a knitting pattern for a short-sleeved jumper, which editorial assured was both "comfy" and just the thing "to allow for a rattling good game" (*HC* 03.04.1924: 231 & 225). The following year *Modern Woman* achieved a considerable marketing coup when it contracted Lenglen to pen an exclusive article on her favourite tennis dress. Each issue carried a free pattern with suggestions about how it could be "personalised" and adapted for everyday wear with 'American collars', different pleats, necklines and patterned cloth. Lenglen, pictured in her 'uniform' (*fig.* 134), recommended extreme simplicity, advising readers that, "the less you add to make it pretty the better it will be". Abandoning the corset she also rejected that "enemy" the petticoat, which she claimed never to have felt comfortable in. A degree of modesty, nevertheless, was preserved as being sleeveless the dress was designed not to lift when the arms were raised during active play (*MW* 07.1925: 13).

Despite its reputation as a middle-class pursuit, the growth in provision of public courts meant that tennis attracted large numbers of women from different backgrounds, and magazines helped democratise the game, mediating standards of decorum, dress and manners on and off the courts. A *Home Chat* feature on tennis teas, for instance, advised that where public courts were available they should be booked for, while "not so nice as having one's own court" this was "better than nothing at all"! (*HC* 23.08.1924: 346). The inherent simplicity of the modern tennis dress meant that it was easy to make and girls of all classes copied the look (Horwood, 2005). Magazine advertisements used Lenglen-look-a-likes to sell synthetic fabrics, such as 'Viyella' or 'Delysia' to the woman, "who studies appearance as well as performance" (*HC* 27.04.1929: 249; *MW* 09.1930).

High performing women players raised standards for women's tennis, and like many sports stars in the period Lenglen wrote books and contributed articles on technique to women's magazines. She was known for her forceful forehand and accurate backhand, and encouraged women to 'Take Tennis Seriously!', urging beginners and those who played socially to study their strengths and weaknesses and develop their game (*HC* 04.05.1929: 283). The English player Evelyn Colyer was foremost among those who adopted Lenglen's style, both in appearance and play. Youthful, pretty and popular, Colyer teamed up with Phyllis Austen in the tennis partnership known as 'The Bobbed-haired Babes', and in 1924 co-wrote a series of instructional articles for *Home Chat* with her fiancée Pat Wheatley. Billed as the first time that a "man and girl player have joined forces in giving advice", the pair addressed such topics as

stroke production and strategy. Colyer emphasised the equality of the sport, arguing that while men are more powerful hitters and “quicker on the up-take”, a woman can compensate “*in strategy* for what she lacks in physical strength” (HC 03.05.1924: 252). An image of Colyer in characteristically dynamic pose featured on the cover of the magazine (fig. 135). Wheatley, in contrast, appeared awkward and old fashioned in trousers, blazer (displaying his club crest) and cravat, supporting Catherine Horwood’s (2004) observation that men’s sports clothing atrophied in the period (fig. 136).

Such athletic performance, however, transgressed the boundaries of acceptable feminine behaviour and criticisms of competitive play as unwomanly, that it wrecked beauty, caused nerves and injured health appeared in the press from the mid-1920s. The term “tennis intemperance” was applied to those who played seriously rather than socially (Langhamer, 2000: 80). While, “Tennis Face”, a condition produced by the harmful effects of prolonged concentration and strenuous activity that was inspired by American champion Helen Wills-Moody’s intense gaze from under her signature eye shade, became the subject of a humorous poem in *Home Chat* (HC 27.07.1929: 196). These anxieties reworked magazine debates about neurasthenic housewives and business girls, as the sportswoman was considered at risk of becoming over exerted and unhealthily obsessed (see chapters 4 & 5). Vollying, due to its association with the kind of forceful, aggressive play that characterised the male game, was particularly controversial. And while female experts such as Colyer and Phyllis Satterthwaite encouraged *Home Chat* readers to “volley hard”, applauding quick and decisive play, Godfrey Winn considered volleying a “man’s job” (HC 19.05.1934: 351; 28.07.1934: 210). The topic was explored in *Home Chat* in 1924 in a Betjamen-like verse. Joan, ‘The “Manly” Girl!’ of the poem’s title, volleyed and served with such enthusiasm that her partner feared she had “forgotten” her sex:

When Joan plays tennis, I declare
Her style is really quite alarming.
Though Joan herself is passing fair
Her “form” is far from charming.
I hate a girl who thinks she can
Play games exactly like a man.
(HC 07.06.1924: 509)

Sportswomen were regularly accused of ‘mannish’ behaviour in the press, and “condescension and patronising humour” characterised much of the coverage of women’s sport in contemporary newsreel footage (Huggins, 2007: 691). The joke here, however, as was often the case with women’s magazines, was on the man for, playing like a man Joan played better than one and, beaten to “a frazzle”, her unfortunate partner could only, “sit and groan, about the mannishness of Joan”. The illustration, which shows an athletic young woman in a short tennis dress, hair flying and legs revealed as she rushes to the net, reinforced the message, as Joan’s feminine attire belied her supposedly masculine behaviour (fig. 137). ‘Tennis Court Types’, in contrast, a set of humorous cartoons that appeared at the end of the 1920s, lampooned the stereotypically feminine behaviour of “girls who drive the mere male mad” by calling out to friends or powdering their noses, “while he who serves, also stands and waits”! (HC 22.06.1929: 742-3).

Swimming and exercise: streamlined glamour and an androgynous look

Swimming and exercise, even more so than tennis, were democratising sports. Municipal swimming pools were established in the majority of major towns by the turn of the century and admission prices were relatively cheap, while membership of Mary Bagot Stack's Women's League of Health and Beauty (WLHB) soared and interest in the Margaret Morris Movement system of expressive dance and exercise was at its height in the 1930s (Matthews, 1990; Bagot Stack, 1931; Morris, 1937). The streamlined, suntanned modern body stripped down to its functional essentials in exercise features or ads for sun-tanning creams was principally the product of these activities and the lighter, more exposing fashions and fabrics they involved (Craik, 1994). Tensions, nevertheless, emerged. Swimmers were in danger of developing masculine muscles and could seem either daringly asexual in the 1920s or glamorous and shockingly sexualised in the 1930s in the new swim suits, while exercise was intended to reshape bodies that were either too fat or unhealthily thin.

Feminine beauty, health, fitness and celebrity combined in a number of magazine features in the mid-1920s about the Hoffman Girls, an American dance troupe who performed acrobatics, dancing and "webbing" in the Beauty Chorus at the Hippodrome theatre in London. Off stage the 'Girls' practiced their synchronised moves in the pool and in 'Svelting', Lola de Laredo, underscored the democratising health benefits of swimming, urging readers to follow their example and, "Swim if you would be slim", for while not everyone could be a dancer, swimming was an exercise in which "every girl can indulge" (*HC* 09.08.1924: 241). Troupes of dancing girls were popular in Europe in the 1920s where they appealed to young, urban, white-collar workers seeking to escape the inequalities and grind of modern life (Berghaus, 1988). In his essay 'The Mass Ornament', Siegfried Kracauer (1995/1963) used the dancers' synchronised moves as a visual metaphor for a Taylorized economic system: the aestheticised modern body as machine. Troupe leader Miss Gertrude Hoffman, in contrast, was less concerned with feminine spectacle than the pleasures of physical activity. Like Mollie Stack and the members of the WLHB, she advocated exercise for the "sheer joy of doing it" (Matthews, 1990). Describing how the 'Girls' fenced in the water, played hockey and organised racing and diving contests, Hoffman, nevertheless, was quick to assure readers that swimming need not entail "violent exertion" or "over-develop" muscles. She likened it instead to the suitably feminine sport of gymnastics, swimming, which she claimed brought "every part of the body into easy, rhythmical action" and was "the best way of promoting perfect poise and beautiful lines"; a beauty ideal that photographs of the 'Girls' performing graceful dives and arabesques underlined (Soland, 2000) (*fig.* 138).

The streamlined simplicity of bodies in close-fitting, machine-knitted swimming costumes created an androgynous look that had to be counterbalanced with make-up and feminine accessories. Miss Phyllis Austin, Captain of the Hippodrome Swimming Club, counteracting fears about the overdeveloped muscles and "mannish stride" that resulted from outdoor exercise by extolling swimming's health and beauty benefits in full make-up and decorative headscarf in *Modern Woman* (*fig.* 139). Swimming's health-giving aspects sanctioned new forms of modern heterosociability and less strictly differentiated codes of conduct between the sexes (Langhamer, 2000; Horwood, 2000; Bingham, 2004). By 1927 swimming's competitive, social and democratising aspects were the subject of a *Modern Woman* feature. "Swimming has never been so popular among Englishwomen of all ages", enthused author Mona Wilson, "It is the one sport in which women can hope to rival men and where grandmother can meet grand-daughter on equal terms" (*MW* 02.1927: 15). Giving full details

of swimming baths around the country and the costs of learning to swim, Wilson urged readers to take the sport seriously and join clubs for “wholesome romping and games” with male and female friends (*MW* 02.1927: 15). The photograph of chorus girl Ella Atherton shows a toned, muscled and boyish body in marked contrast with Austin’s earlier overtly feminised look (*fig.* 140).

Much of the controversy surrounding the swimming costume derived from its being underwear transformed into outerwear, and swimwear was differentiated through accessories and design (Craik, 1994). The new elasticated fabrics developed in the first decades of the century produced corselets, camisoles, bras, girdles and combinations that were increasingly light, comfortable and contoured to the body’s natural lines like a second skin. Located at the boundary between the individual and society, the inner and outer body, the public and private self, underwear carried ambiguous, highly charged messages (Steele, 1985). From the 1920s corsets were sold for their supposed ‘natural’ health-giving properties. The Health Corset Company promoted its product’s benefits for “ladies who enjoy cycling, tennis, dancing, golf etc.” in *Home Chat* (*fig.* 141). A small ad promoting belt corsets for “Every woman who suffers from weakness of the abdomen from whatever cause”, however, suggests the ill health many actually suffered as a result of multiple pregnancies (*HC* 25.10.1924: 663; Llewelyn Davies, 1931/1977).

By the end of the 1920s the body shaped by exercise was explicitly aligned with being modern in magazine editorial and advertising. Irmo employed a striking image of a streamlined, youthful, active, female body to sell its woollen underwear (*fig.* 142). “Let Irmo be “your bodyguard”, copy enthused, promising wearers that the “slim fitting” garment’s protective layer would ensure they felt “alive” even in the coldest weather (*HC* 14.12.1929: 699). Female sexuality, Jennifer Craik (1994: 131) observed, has been problematised as a “set of moral injunctions and body disciplines” and the modern body was to be neither too fat nor too slim. “[F]igure culture expert” Peri Cotgrave demonstrated “scientific exercise” for “the woman who fears to be fat” one week, and for “thin, nervous women” the next, in her column in *Modern Woman* (01.1929: 24) (*fig.* 143). Kitty Vincent, *Home Chat*’s Beauty Editor, meanwhile, *omHoHh*prescribed diet and exercise for those who were a “bundle of nerves”, encouraging women to manage their bodies outside and within. Ironically, the aim of all this self-discipline, according to Vincent, was to create an individual who was “healthy and carefree as a savage”! (*HC* 03.11.1929: 289; 05.01.1929: 17; 20.04.1929: 146). J. Ellis Barker took the responsibilities of body management still further when he attributed most of “women’s diseases” to the habits of the modern girl who, “underfeeds”, “over-smokes”, has “insufficient sleep” and whose body is “relaxed, flabby, unhealthy, toxic and reduced in vital strength” (*HC* 23.03.1929: 705).

The new fashion for sun-bathing spread across Europe and America in the 1920s and men and women exposed their bodies without fear of reprisal encouraged by medical opinion that sunlight had healthy qualities. The immediate effect of increased sun-tanning, however, was an epidemic of sunburn and cosmetics companies were quick to see a marketing opportunity (Segrave, 2005). Pond’s replaced the sporting girls of the early 1920s with fashionable women in abbreviated swimsuits soaking up the sun’s “healthful rays” in *Women’s Weekly*, claiming that their creams could “protect from sun-burn” (*fig.* 144). The erotic pleasures of the body liberated through healthy exercise were explored most convincingly in advertising although, even here, concessions were made to propriety and restraint. Ads for innovative wrap-around brassieres, which appeared in *Woman’s Weekly* and *Modern Woman* in the

mid-1930s, used film-like images from different angles that recall David Kunzle's (1982: 274) remark that nineteenth century corset advertising evoked "sexual and dream images of movement and suspension in air and water" (fig. 145). This dream of freedom, however, was balanced by sartorial correctness. The brassieres were designed to be worn under a swim suit to avoid, as copy coyly put it, the embarrassment of, "Beach attire, negligently worn"! (*MW* 08.1935: 3). Sexual fantasies and social respectability were integrated into an evocation of streamlined motion and modernity.

Technicolour in film and colour printing encouraged the display of a wider range of female beauty types. This together with the exoticism and colour of the suntanned body sanctioned the artifice of the cosmetic face and with it a sexualised, activity desiring femininity. 'Take Beauty to the Sea', a full-colour double-spread in *Woman* (10.07.1937: 24), which matched the colour of bathing costumes to beauty types, celebrated the "glorious dusky siren" whose "rich" rouge and "glowing" lips, though "obviously artificial" were deemed not only acceptable but "also intriguing" (fig. 146).

Women in Trousers

One of the most visible and controversial signifiers of the modern body was the fashion for trousers and shorts, which appeared in magazines, at sports events, on film and in advertising (Wilson & Taylor, 1985). A short-lived sporting vogue for females in white trousers existed in 1927, and pyjamas were worn by daring young things; their novelty and modernity made them ideal for selling the new synthetic fabrics in *Modern Woman* (Wilson, 1985) (fig. 146).

Although trousers regularly appeared in the pages of *Vogue* throughout the period, associated with sports or leisure wear, it was not until the 1930s that slacks, shorts, divided skirts and other forms of bifurcated garment featured regularly in sports, fashion features and advertising in domestic women's magazines. Trouser-wearing for women, however, remained a contested and ambiguous area and the subject of on-going debate (Tickner, 1976; Wheelwright, 1989; Smith & Greig, 2003). It was illegal in towns and cities in the Netherlands and France, and was condemned in the British popular press as immodest and unfeminine (Doy, 2007; Bingham, 2004). Oral history reveals that wearing trousers provoked hostile public reaction and women were accused of being "improperly dressed", "cracked", "disgusting", "indecent" or "immodest" (Bill, 1993: 45, 54). The meanings attached to bifurcated garments in the period, nevertheless, were fluid not fixed. They depended not only on cut and fabric, but also on who wore the garment, where and how it was being worn, and magazines provided a contextual narrative that helped accommodate and normalise bifurcated garments for the mass of women, at least for sports and leisure wear.

Shorts for women, which made their appearance in Britain in 1931, were largely an American import, popularised in Hollywood films by stars such as Loretta Young. When the American tennis player Helen Jacobs introduced tailored shorts in the mid-'30s, they proved a challenge for the British sports authorities. National pride, it seems, was at stake when some newspapers represented the 'shorts versus skirts' debate as, "a battle of British modesty versus American masculinity" in the press coverage of the 1934 Wightman Cup. Perhaps the most significant factor determining the introduction of shorts, however, was the coincidence of two forces in fashion and sports when hemlines dropped and the pace of women's tennis increased. The English tennis player Phyllis Satterthwaite, writing in *Home Chat*, described short-wearing as the, "burning question of the hour" and encouraged women to volley aggressively and "speed up" their game, arguing for shorts on functional grounds:

Personally, I think that once you have worn shorts you will never give them up; and although it may take a little time for people in England to get accustomed to them, once they have accepted them, they will be here 'for keeps'. (*HC* 09.05.1934: 350)

Mrs Fearnley Whittingstall, credited as the first player to wear an above-the-knee form of divided skirt for competitive tennis, Miss Nuthall, and Miss Dorothy Round were among the "leading girl players" cited as supporting shorts. Photographs of Satterthwaite and Miss Joan Ridley, described as "one of England's 'Young Hopes'" and a "devotee of shorts for strenuous play", show them wearing what *Home Chat* describes as "very wide not too short shorts"; garments that in reality resemble a divided skirt (*fig.* 148). Short-wearing had to be carefully managed and sartorial presentation was a key issue. "Nothing looks so dreadful as badly-made shorts", Satterthwaite reproved, advising readers to get a "good pattern" before making their garment; a nod to the magazine's pattern department. Such optimistic predictions in reality proved only partially correct. The British women's team still wore knee-length skirts in the Wightman Cup in 1938, and the All-England Club committee were only stopped from banning shorts for women when the Prince of Wales gave them his blessing at the British Industries Fair in 1934 (Horwood, 2002: 56).

The taboo had been broached, however, and the freedom and ease of movement that shorts allowed sparked the imagination of fashion editors looking for flexible garments to reflect the new healthy, modern lifestyles. The divided skirt, which combined the illusion of a feminine skirt with the practicality of men's trousers, represented a successful compromise for everyday wear. An innovative sports-inspired, three in one outfit consisting of "one-piece blouse and knickers" with "pleated shorts" appeared in *Modern Woman* in 1935. Designed to accommodate the demands of tennis or deck games, an "Iron-out-Flat" button through skirt could be added for more leisurely, "holiday and garden wear"; the model's curly crop and stylish beret underscored the outfit's modernity (*fig.* 149). "Divided dresses and shorts have come to stay", a sports-inspired fashion editorial confidently declared a few years later. Co-written by Kay Stammers, Fearnley-Whittingstall's tennis partner and one of the "hard-hitters" on whom Satterthwaite advised *Home Chat* readers to model their game, and fashion expert Elizabeth Troy, it promoted "practability", "comfort" and a "smart" look that included "abbreviated tailored shorts" with "mannish creases and a touch of colour", "swing skirts" and dresses (*MW* 04.1939: 54-55).

Tennis was not the only sport to encourage fashion innovations in *Modern Woman*. Designer Eva Tingey wrote and illustrated a fashion feature on clothes for, and inspired by, cycling, an activity long associated with liberating women. Tingey, who described her own "practical" designs as "feminine, tailored and svelt", saw "tremendous possibilities in putting sports fashions on the road" and introducing them to the wardrobes of ordinary women. After conducting research with professionals, amateurs and those who "just cycled casually", she produced a two-piece suit, with buttoned-up sports frock over tailored shorts (the skirt could be buttoned back for riding and let down when entering an inn for tea!), a corduroy "slack suite" (for cycling around the seaside) and "wrap shorts", with a little skirt that wrapped around the back, eliminating the problem of "unsightly seats"! Professional cyclist, Mrs 'Billie' Dovey was pictured modelling the shorts (*MW* 03.1939: 44-5). Catherine Horwood (2002: 58) argues that women's sportswear took on a "distinct and instantly recognisable look of its own" separated from everyday fashion in these years. Magazine articles by sports personalities,

designers and fashion editors, nevertheless, show how they adapted the practicality and flexibility of sports styles, helping to normalise bifurcated garments for women by making them seem fashionable, feminine and glamorous, as well as practical.

Trouser-wearing for women, nevertheless, remained radical and shocking: the preserve of bohemians, feminists, intellectuals and the odd film star. When women's fashions became more 'feminine' in the 1930s trousers were perceived as 'mannish' and, according to historian Florence Tamagne, strongly associated with female homosexuality (cited in Doy, 2007). The freedom and independence that trouser-wearing represented, nevertheless, made it an important signifier of modern femininity. Trousers had to be renamed, re-designed and worn in designated locations for particular activities, and respectably distanced from the gender distinctions that operated in everyday life. The term "slacks" started to appear in women's magazines towards the end of the 1930s (*WW* 11.11.1939: 928). "Slacks are right in fashion, in comfort and appearance for all holiday hours", announced a *Modern Woman* feature on the latest styles for relaxation and leisure hours (*MW* 06.1939: 47). Celebrating what it termed this "Eve-olutionary" style, the magazine explained how research by men's tailoring firms resulted in a design that, "though mannish suits the feminine figure". The functionality of these "tailored and svelte", "waist-hugging" garments anticipated the 1940s wartime look (*fig. 150*) (Kirkham in Attfield, 1999). Slacks, like the divided skirt, represented an acceptable compromise between masculine and feminine conventions, tradition and modernity.

'Let's look alike', a beachwear feature the following month, went one step further, blurring the boundaries between the sexes while simultaneously retaining signs of difference. Editorial was careful to differentiate the beach as a liminal space, and holidays as a time for playful experimentation, where alternative personalities could be imagined and performed:

"look-alikeness" is the new theme played on 1939 beaches when enterprising couples play up the idea deliberately...all in the holiday spirit... Jack has borrowed Jill's best colour schemes, and Jill has raided the masculine camp for inspiration in trousers and shorts. (*MW* 07.1939: 47)

The women resembled Hollywood stars - a figure in linen trousers and a large straw hat, for instance, recalls Katherine Hepburn's distinctive look - while the men, in gay silk cravat, shorts and striped beach gown, adopted the casual ease of matinee idols; a feminised masculinity that was as revolutionary as trousered women (Ugolini, 2000). If "bifurcated garments for women was a questioning of traditional bourgeois notions of femininity", as Gen Doy (2007: 101) suggests, both masculinity and femininity were interrogated here in the imaginative, modern, liminal space of the magazine.

The healthy pleasures of sun, sea, sand and sports sanctioned experiments in dress and body shape as part of what Anne Hollander (1994: 143) terms, "the newly dynamic and sexually charged look of practical function". By the end of the 1930s magazines with their 'chorus girl' swimmers, sewing patterns to make Suzanne Lenglan's 'uniform', ads for 'health' corsets and sun creams, and pictures of women tennis players in shorts, offered readers new, ambiguous self-identities that could be performed with an air of fund and casual confidence that would have been unimaginable in 1919. 'To Glorify your Suntan', a double-page fashion feature in *Woman*, exemplified the new attitudes. A group of young women stride confidently hand-in-hand across the sands, the easy movement of their suntanned limbs enhanced by the freedom afforded by slacks, swimsuits, shorts and 'playsuits' in bright arresting colours (*fig. 151*).

Anxieties about the modern body, nevertheless, remained. An article in the same issue warned that, “while sport and play are essential to health” “too much can be ruinous”, for muscles “over-developed” by sport are a “menace to the bearing of children” (*W* 17.07.1937: 14). Mutable, the modern body was a repository of ‘natural’ and ‘unnatural’, physical and sexual, male and female, energies and urges that magazines both developed (particularly in advertising) and contained (in editorial). Just as home editors facilitated change by managing the boundaries of taste in furnishing, so fashion, beauty and sports editors offered readers ways to construct, re-construct and perform the female body (see chapter 4.4). The ‘naturalised’ cosmetic face developed across advertising and editorial imaginatively collapsed the boundaries between inner beauty and artifice, self and surface. Shaped by tensions between healthy and unhealthy, masculine and feminine, shocking and respectable, internal and external bodies, the ‘naked’ modern body visualised in *Woman* by the end of the 1930s promoted ‘masculine’ freedom without compromising ‘feminine’ function.

6.5 Conclusion: ‘I’m going to make the best of myself’

These girls, not the wealthy beauties, have created the great and growing cosmetics industry. Look at the dressing table of a smart typist or saleswoman today. As mere necessities there will be a cleansing, a nourishing and a day cream, a skin tonic, and, of course, rouge, lipstick and powder. (*W* 12.07.1937: 10-11)

As she helped me sort index cards, she said with a scowl on her pretty face, ‘I don’t see any reason to look dowdy all my life. I’m going to make the best of myself.’...Fiona, much less cut off from other girls than I was, had borrowed some women’s magazine which showed how to apply make-up. In exchange for a chance to paint her own face, she brought these magazines out from under her mattress and let me read them. When Mother was out, we both tried to follow the instructions, vying for peeps into the bit of mirror, as we worked. There was a special diagram showing how to place rouge on a long, thin face. I was surprised as the improvement, though the magazine confirmed that the colour was wrong for a brown haired, green-eyed person with a yellow skin. When I looked at Fiona’s more successful efforts, I realised, with a shock, that she had grown up... (Scannell, 1974: 262-4)

Labour MP Ellen Wilkinson, writing in *Woman* in 1937, referred to working women’s habitual use of cosmetics to support her argument for the value of women’s paid employment to the British economy. Demand for cosmetics grew during the war and by 1944 a British government committee declared beauty products, along with cigarettes, sweets and beer, among the “accepted necessities of a modern standard of living for the mass of people”. The “norm of near-universal use of lipstick” and other cosmetics had been established over the course of twenty years, and magazines played a vital role in this (Jones, 2010: 135-136). Selina Todd (2005: 108) associates the changes in women’s appearance with a discernable erosion of social barriers in Britain the 1930s, as “wearing lipstick and rouge became classless”. The new beauty culture ‘opened things up’ in other important ways. For Ella Hallsmith, growing up in Newquay, Cornwall in the 1930s, the sight of elegant women wearing “dashing beach pyjamas” or sunning themselves in “scanty bathing costumes” promised a thrilling world of adulthood (Smith, 2008: 95). While the rules, codes and step-by-step instructions in women’s magazines helped Dolly Scannell and her sister Fiona magically perform that mysterious

transformation, becoming a 'grown up', as they secretly experimented with make-up in their East London bedroom.

Magazines evidence a gradual shift away from an ethos of 'making the best of oneself' with the help of home-made recipes, which characterised the penny weeklies in the 1920s, to the promotion of a wide range of cosmetics and complicated beauty and body management routines by the end of the 1930s. Cultural historian Mary Louise Roberts (1993), pointing to the pressures of exercise, diet and health regimes, questions the freedoms associated with the modern look in the 1920s. Matters became even more taxing in the 1930s with complicated beauty routines. Helen Temple, *Woman's* beauty editor, advised readers to allow an hour and a half's preparation for an evening out, detailing a different task for every 10 minutes! Certainty, moreover, was eroded as belief in a fixed 'true', 'natural' character was replaced by mutable 'personalities' and a self in process constructed and performed through artifice and appearance. "You not only enjoy a change of air and scene, but you work a miracle, a transformation of personality", *Woman's* 'Good Looks Expert' assured readers in her article about beauty on the beach (*W* 17.07.1937: 24-25). As the range of possibilities grew so did the possible pitfalls. Ella Hallsmith recalls how her bewildered parents were in a "perpetual muddle" about what to "label right and what to label wrong" in a world where appearance and manners were so "variable". Settling for a compromise, they decided that wearing lipstick wasn't necessarily "fast" (the ultimate censure) but did suggest a "deplorable leaning in that direction"; the "young woman capable of dying her hair", meanwhile, was deemed "capable of anything" (Smith, 2008: 93-94).

Magazines, with their improved techniques of pictorial reproduction, provided essential guides to the new visual language of appearances. Advertising and editorial played distinct yet inter-related roles. Advertising brands such as 'Kashana mystic rouge' or 'Kissproof lipstick' introduced a new sensuality to the otherwise respectable pages of publications such as *Woman's Weekly*, while editorial managed the new ideals to ensure respectability. Modern 'types' were mediated, managed and carefully targeted at different audiences at different times. *Home Chat's* 'Mabs Girl' was intentionally inclusive in the mid-1920s, being designed to appeal to the growing female readership among middle and working-class women (see chapter 3). Rosita Forbes' exotic blue mascara and gilded ear lobes, and Anna Zinkeisen's therapeutic use of cosmetics, addressed *Modern Woman's* audience of career professionals and housewives in the later 1920s, while in the 1930s *Woman* capitalised on Hollywood's ubiquitous appeal.

All of which required women to make conscious and unconscious decisions about who they were, how they wanted to look, and who they wanted to be, processes which implied "a degree of agency, self-creation, and pleasure in self-representation" (Peiss, 1996: 322). By the end of the interwar years magazines, like the beach and other designated areas of leisure and recreation, represented a 'liminal' space in which women could safely take risks, experiment and perform a variety of appearances and, by implication, identities.

Chapter Seven: Agony and Ecstasy: Romantic Fiction and the Problem Page

7.1 Introduction: A Mentality of Modernity

Sexual knowledge is difficult to historicise. Constituted through fantasy, emotion and the mother's body it belongs to the realm of the imaginary. Surrounded

by taboo, the wishes and feelings associated with it are often repressed and always ambivalent. (Alexander, 1996: 171)

Sex should be an influence for good, intensifying all that is fine and beautiful, stimulating creative work and making possible the joys of happy mating and parenthood. (MW 10.1932: 24)

Despite a commonly “shared mythology” of the decades up to the 1960s as “an innocent age”, problem pages and romantic fiction reveal that sex was never far from the surface in women’s magazines (Langhamer, 2000: 125). “Sex knowledge,” moreover, Sally Alexander (1996: 161) reminds us, is “fundamental to the formation of the self”. For any study exploring not only sex attitudes, but also the fears, hopes and everyday difficulties that surround sex and shape feminine subjectivity, magazine fiction and agony pages provide a rich and largely untapped resource. Alexander (1996: 171) identified a particular “mentality of modernity” in the inter-war years, as the shame and silence surrounding women’s bodies came into conflict with the freedoms and opportunities generated by new housing, jobs, the cinema and birth control; a mentality that was expressed through “new vocabularies of sexual difference and desire”. This chapter explores that mentality as it was shaped by and articulated through the content, formats and devices of agony columns and romantic fiction in women’s magazines.

Fertility underwent a dramatic decline in the inter-war years and family size fell among all occupational groups, including working-class families (Lewis, 1980). This has been associated with the diffusion of middle-class ideals and the availability of birth control, but historian Diana Gittins (1982) points to a complex landscape of socio-economic, demographic, political and ideological changes, including the influence of cinema, radio, new reading practices and magazines, which resulted in a new ideal of home-centred family life that was predicated upon smaller families. Tensions and contradictions abounded. Sexual practice began to be discussed openly in high-selling publications such as the sexologist Theo van de Veld’s *Ideal Marriage* (1930) as a component of good parenthood. Yet strong pressures persisted for female sexual orthodoxy at a time when “successful womanhood was virtually synonymous with successful motherhood” (Fink & Holden, 1999: 236; Kaplan, 1992). Sex remained a secretive business and the strict single standard of sexual morality to which the majority claimed to adhere obscured the fact that many were not virgin at marriage. The extent to which pre-marital intercourse took place is contested and, whereas oral historian Steven Humphries (1988: 17-18) declared that a “taboo on sex before marriage” existed in the 1930s, the comparatively high rates of pregnancy at marriage indicate that it was a more widespread social phenomenon than oral sources suggest. Many more women than men, however, *were* virgin and the traditional double standard operated, whereby female chastity was valued more highly than male (McKibbin, 1998).

This chapter argues that the hybrid environment of women’s magazines provided a unique space in which the tensions surrounding sexual practice for women could be imagined and explored. It will focus on the close relationship between fiction and the agony column, the first sections many readers turned to on opening their magazine. Both dealt with sex but in different and sometimes complementary ways; the one giving guidance and disseminating information on such diverse matters as birth control or social etiquette, while the other explored the complexities of intimate emotional relationships through fantasy. The introduction of the American influenced ‘factional feature’ in the 1930s, a composite of the short story and the

correspondence page, moreover, combined aspects of both areas in, for instance, a full-length feature about a reader's fears on the eve of her wedding night or, a thirty year old single woman's candid views on marriage and men. Compelling visuals were designed to enhance a sense of realism (*fig. 152*), while 'For Nancy's Sake', a short story about a couple's opposed ideas on parenting, requested enhanced readerly interaction by asking them to send in their views (*W* 28.08.1937 & 07.08.1937).

A brief summation of the debates shaping, and legislation governing, marital and sexual relations in the period will contextualise accounts from magazines. Sexual 'norms' were affected by differences of class and gender. Those on higher incomes were more likely to condone premarital sex, believe in equality of sexual needs and use reliable contraception, eliminating the "dread of pregnancy" that, Steven Humphrey (1988: 32) remarked, so incapacitated working-class sexuality (McKibbin, 1998). Due, in part, to the influence of sexologists and psychologists (Kingsley Kent, 1993), marital success for this group began to be judged by conjugal sexuality, that is the degree to which husband and wife established a mutually satisfactory sexual relationship. Mutuality was promoted vigorously in *Modern Woman*, which enthusiastically engaged in the new debates. A psychologist advocated "proper sex education" in childhood as a "safeguard", while a series on 'Marriage Failures' by a "London doctor" with an "extensive practice in nervous breakdowns" discussed such topics as impotence in what editorial described as a, "strikingly frank and helpful" way, accompanied by startling black and white illustrations (*fig. 153*) (*MW* 10.1932: 24; 07.1935: 23).

Elizabeth Roberts' (1984: 72-80) discovered a very different picture among the 160 female Lancashire textile workers she interviewed who recalled a "profound pessimism and conservatism about sex and sexual desire" in the period. Author and journalist Leonora Eyles (1922: 11) heard a similar tale from the wives of "steady working men" (a skilled labourer, shop assistant, corporation worker and a factory hand) who regarded sex as a "necessary but distasteful" duty. Others, associated sex with violence and the assertion of male power, viewing it with what the social psychologists Slater and Woodside (1951: 165-9) described as, "a barely veiled antagonism". In this context the contemporary obsession with sex-novels, love-films and serial fiction, not only provided escape but also an important outlet for female sexual desire and frustrated sensuality (Melman, 1988).

Perhaps more than any other, the issue of birth control and the figure of Marie Stopes dominated sex discourse in the period. *Married Love* (1918), Stopes' most notorious publication, discussed sexual technique and sold over 400,000 copies by 1923. In 1921 she opened the first birth control clinic (the Mothers' Clinic) and founded the Society for Constructive Birth Control and Racial Progress to promote her views, organising the world's first travelling birth control caravan in 1927-8. Contraceptive methods available in the period included withdrawal (coitus interruptus), the diaphragm or 'Dutch cap' (which as a 'women's appliance' was recommended by Stopes), the sheath and the 'safe period', with withdrawal being the most popular method reported among working-class couples; as condoms cost between 2d and 3d a dozen it was also the cheapest (Lewis, 1984:18; Holdsworth, 1988). From a fringe movement in the 1920s, advocacy of birth control became partially integrated into the official machinery of local authority health provision by the late 1930s (Soloway, 1982).

Stopes' work demonstrated the extent of sexual ignorance, its resultant misery, and the fact that demand for information on fertility control came from all sections of the population (Hall, 1979). An important figure determining the nature and tone of the debate, she connected

birth control with a fairly conservative familial tradition rather than notions of free love, changing “without obliterating perceived gender distinctions” (Weeks, 1981: 206). By developing a message that was morally conventional, romantically appealing and, on the whole, scientifically legitimate, Stopes was able to position birth control as respectable; an appropriate topic for discussion in women’s magazines. She found a sympathetic ally in Leonora Eyles, who edited *Modern Woman’s* problem page in the 1920s. The two were in regular correspondence, and Eyles recommended Stopes’ clinics, books and the Society for Constructive Birth Control to *Modern Woman* readers. Stopes, moreover, was acutely aware of the power of the popular press and the ‘conventional’ nature of women’s magazines provided an ideal context for communicating her message. In 1929, for instance, her photograph appeared in a *Home Chat* feature debating whether or not men should wear wedding rings. Stopes’ response was, “of course they should, because love is mutual”; an observation that, alongside admiring editorial comment about her “charming baby” and a puff for her society, neatly aligned birth control with mutuality and motherhood (*HC* 29.11.1924: 505-6).

Illegal abortion in the form of self-induced miscarriage, however, was the contraceptive technique most widely used by working-class women and 50 per cent of pregnancies were unwanted or unplanned (Gittins, 1982: 171-2). In 1939 the Inter-Departmental Commission on Abortions suggested that there were between 40-66,000 abortions each year, a figure that, if it included the self-induced miscarriages, would total between 110, 000-150,000 (McKibbin, 1998: 304). Reference to abortion was, unsurprisingly never explicit in magazines; it was, after all, illegal. It, nevertheless, haunted the problem page, emerging in veiled editorial responses to unprinted but, one can imagine, desperate letters from young girls such as ‘Tess from Stoke-on-Trent’. Eyles urged Tess to send a home address, adding sympathetically, “I can help you out of your trouble, but not in print” (*MW* 08.1925: 64). Eyles, troubled by the rise of maternal mortality rates as a result of the dangers of illegal abortion, had dramatised the subject in her best-selling book *Margaret Protests* (1919) in which the heroine, a chemist, assisted miscarriages to help her friends (Brookes, 1988). The many advertisements for pessaries and pills, which filled the small ads at the back of penny magazines, serve as a poignant reminder of the dangerous measures which women ‘in trouble’ were forced to take.

Women’s magazines could not offer a conclusive solution to such problems, but they could, and did, provide a forum for debate. ‘Is Birth Control Wicked?’, an article by the progressive Anglican Minister the Rev. Dick Sheppard argued that planned birth control could bring benefits to the poor in *Modern Woman* in 1935. Critiquing the hypocrisy of those (clergymen, teachers and doctors) who used contraceptives themselves but spoke with a “different voice” when they advised others, Sheppard concluded that some form of family limitation should be a normal factor in “well-ordered family life”; “complete abstinence” or “contraceptives” were equally legitimate (*MW* 08.1935: 11 & 56). Relevant and controversial, the urgency of Sheppard’s argument was conveyed visually by dramatic black and white photographs of an impoverished mother and uncared for children playing in the street, which referenced the new pictorial journalism of such periodicals as *Picture Post* (*fig.* 154) (Jobling & Crowley, 1996). For those wealthier members of society, at least, debates about marriage were increasingly structured by changing legislation and attitudes to divorce. Procuring a divorce remained a blatantly discriminatory procedure, despite the recommendations of a Royal Commission in 1909 that grounds should be equalized and extended, and divorce made less expensive. The Matrimonial Causes Act of 1923 went some way towards redressing the situation, but divorce

remained expensive, sordid and demeaning and surrounded by suspicion (Gardiner, 2010). It was not until 1937, however, that the contents of the 1909 report were enacted when A. P. Herbert, the well-known novelist and independent M.P. for Oxford University, introduced a bill extending the grounds for divorce to desertion (after 3 years), cruelty, insanity, and drunkenness. *Modern Woman* supported reform with features reassuring readers about the legislation's effects and publishing information (mostly in response to letters from men) about grounds, process and costs of divorce, while Herbert's *Holy Deadlock*, which argued for divorce law reform, was recommended in the magazine's book column two years before his bill was passed (*MW* 04.1935; 08.1935; 06.1935; 12.1935; 06.1935).

A cluster of competing pressures, from eugenic and imperialist concerns about motherhood to sexologists' promotion of sexual mutuality in marriage and feminist arguments about welfare, in addition to the interests of sex reformers, religious leaders and the medical profession shaped female sexuality. The more relaxed attitude to sexual relationships in some quarters existed alongside a strong sense of hostility, ignorance and taboo that continued well into the post-war years. Historian Jeffrey Weeks (1981: 209-10), moreover, argues that a "new mood", or "sexual revolution" in the 1920s, when birth control and sex reform were more openly advocated and new feminists spoke about sexual pleasure, was followed by a "backlash" in the 1930s due to the decline of reform organisations and hopes of radical change in the face of more pressing political and economic concerns (Dyhouse, 1989; Harrison, 1987). Drawing on examples from *Modern Woman* and *Woman*, both publications that discussed women's sexuality in comparatively frank and open terms, this chapter explores how the paradoxes surrounding women's sexuality were discussed, imagined and visualised in women's magazines, first through the style and content of the agony column and then the narratives of romantic fiction and the illustrations that accompanied them.

7.2 "A Friend in Need": Agony Aunts and the Modern Problem Page

In 1909 the feminist and writer Cicely Hamilton (1909: 129) called for a new sense of fellowship among women, a "feminine class-consciousness" that could be fostered through awareness of disadvantages held in common. In the early decades of the twentieth century the problem or agony column, which by this stage was firmly established as woman's domain (Kent, 1979), offered a space where a shared modern feminine identity, or consciousness could be forged. Both Eyles (1953) and Makins (1975) were aware of the unique possibilities this semi-private, semi-public medium afforded for voicing women's (and many men's) struggles and anxieties, from queries about etiquette to heartfelt requests for help from those who had, "missed all the joy which the intimate side of marriage is supposed to give" (*W* 20.11.1937: 32). Editors cultivated their own distinct style and tone, which was partly determined by their personality or, in the case of the cheaper weeklies, journalistic persona, and partly by the nature of the publication and its target audience (see chapter 2). Whatever the case, the correspondence column, perhaps more than any other element, became vital in establishing the sense of collective identity that bound readers to a publication and, in this, the editor's role was vital.

Leonora Eyles, a relatively forgotten figure today, was a prolific journalist and author of, among others, *Margaret Protests* (1919), a novel that courageously dealt with the taboo subject of abortion, and polemical texts such as *The Woman in the Little House* (1922), a campaigning study of women's unrelenting struggle with ill-adapted, inconvenient housing in

Peckham, South London. Her eclectic output embraced smaller circulation and left wing publications such as the *Daily Herald*; using the pen name 'Martha' she edited the correspondence page for George Lansbury's *Labour Leader* and wrote the woman's page for *The Miner* during the 1927 strike (Hackney in Hammill & Sponenberg, 2006). Running from 1925 until 1929, Eyles' editorial in *Modern Woman* was a distinctive synthesis of her ideological convictions and personal experience. Two themes emerge. Firstly, her certainty that if provided with the appropriate support and information women could change their lives for the better. And secondly, her belief in the extraordinary ability of popular media such as journalism, fiction and the cinema to penetrate the lived texture of women's daily lives, which meant that they could not only promote, but also invoke change. Eyles applauded the "columns of advice about dress, health and toilet matters" in magazines which, she felt, could stir women from "lethargy, complacency or hopelessness" by making "Mrs. Britain and her sisters dissatisfied with themselves and their surroundings". Part of Eyles' originality lay in her awareness that the power of popular literature lay as much in how it was used as what it said (Eyles, 1922: 101-2).

It is difficult to describe Eyles's *Modern Woman* editorial as an agony column, partly because it rarely included romantic dilemmas - a high percentage of the letters in fact dealt with questions about training and employment (see chapter 5) - but also because her writing was so forceful and dramatic, betraying her deeply felt commitment to changing women's lives. In contrast to the sentimental, moralizing tone of more traditional aunties: *Woman's Weekly's* generic Mrs. Marryat, for instance, Eyles could be uncompromisingly frank. She consistently advised women to be independent. Older women, in particular, were encouraged to assert their own needs above those of others, and she would not tolerate what she perceived as useless self-sacrifice. When, for instance, thirty year old 'Alice' who had been left to "scrape along" on £100 a year after devoting her life to nursing an invalid aunt, received a marriage proposal from a man who drank, Eyles, who herself had been married to a dipsomaniac, replied "men drink to escape and marriage to him would be an unending burden to carry". Learn a profession and become "self-reliant" Eyles instructed, admonishing,

Some women rejoice in sacrifice, and find greater pleasure in it than in a life of comfort. And then, too, some women would rather have torture than loneliness. But don't say I didn't warn you. (*MW* 09.1925: 72)

For Eyles, much of the attraction of editing a correspondence page was that it provided a forum for women to talk and learn from one another, a concern that was reflected in her column's title, 'From One Woman to Another'; "Women," she observed, "talk to each other in a way that men don't share" (Eyles, 1922: 132-3). She made a point of prioritising the knowledge that came from shared experience, and claimed to have learnt about attitudes to sex, childbirth and motherhood from practical experience nursing women through their confinements, long before she read Havelock Ellis, Bloch or Freud. The hardships of her own, undeniably difficult life - among other things, she was abandoned by her alcoholic husband and left to support three young children, a predicament that initiated her journalistic career - were employed to dramatic effect in her opening editorial, where Eyles described herself as "one who had been through the vales of affliction and come out smiling. Smashed, ideals dragged in the mud, everything lost" (*MW* 06.1925: 72). The melodramatic tone was characteristic, and conscious. Eyles wrote with social intent in her novels and her journalism, and the dramatisation of real issues

was intended to engage readers and encourage them to question the gender and social relations in their lives (Joannou, 1995).

It was perhaps the influence of Freud rather than feminism, however, which made it possible to talk about sex in a popular yet respectable medium such as women's magazines (Rapp, 1990). The first Evelyn Home (issues 1-8) was an émigré German psychiatrist who had studied under Freud. Part, no doubt, of Odhams' policy to create a modern outlook, this resulted in editorial that was, in Peggy Makins' (1975: 37-8) view, "refreshingly honest"; the problem page was a professional service rather than a piece of frivolous fun. Makins took on editorship of the Evelyn Home page as an inexperienced girl of twenty-one, and was horrified to receive letters that made her feel, "utterly ignorant, bemused and scared". Following her predecessor's example she turned to psychology, reading all the books on the subject in the Westminster Library and even enrolling for a lecture series at London University. The limits of psychology in the agony profession, however, were soon revealed. "Freudianism," as Ross McKibbin (1998: 299) observed "offered no easily learnt sexual lessons", and Makins (1975: 49-50) became disillusioned, feeling that it was no guide to how "ordinary people" thought. Freudian (or sub-Freudian) terminology, nonetheless, was popularised in the mass media, fiction and film in the period, making it easier for people to talk about sex with less guilt, and the Evelyn Home page contributed to this.

Woman's editorial team ran into problems when the psychiatrist advised an unhappily married woman to spend a weekend with her lover. Mary Grieve, fearing prosecution for pornography, censored the copy and declared the column for "moral advice" only, demonstrating the boundaries of the 'new frankness' in a commercial magazine. This precipitated the development of an 'Evelyn Home policy,' as Grieve and Makins worked out editorial guidelines for the type of sentiments that could be expressed. The problem was how to respond to their readers' need for more openness without causing offence. It was a difficult balance to achieve.

When we talked over what the psychiatrist was trying to promote in the way of new freedom, and what our readers seemed to want in their lives, we came to some vague conclusions about respecting the conventions and sticking by Christian principles. (Makins, 1975: 45)

The "Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, and a working knowledge of the law in case you committed pornography or libel", as Makins described it, the 'policy' was a characteristically pragmatic response. It acted as a form of insurance (ethical and legal); a "check or balance" to avoid offending readers' sensibilities and alienating advertisers (Kent, 1979).

The question of authenticity has always dogged the problem page, and while accusations of 'creative editing' may have been true for some publications, the enormous amount of mail sent to Evelyn Home suggests that her page provided an authentic, if editorially managed, picture of readers' problems. The skill of editing, moreover, as Makins explained, is to convey the matter clearly while retaining the "poignancy of real feeling" in the original communication. Like Eyles, she valued 'women's talk' and strove to make her page as "friendly, simple but as explanatory as possible" (Makins, 1975: 41 & 160).

The letter format and 'private' nature of the agony column was, and remains, a central attraction of the genre, contributing to an aura of secrecy that lures readers with, "a half guilty sense of reading someone else's mail" (Makins, 1975: 41). This, nevertheless, should not

obscure its importance as a forum which, informed by feminism or psychoanalysis, encouraged readers to talk and even fantasise about sex. The problem page, however, also operated under constraints, which reflected the “prejudices, morals, customs, ideals and ideas” of the majority of readers, not to mention the interests of advertisers; anything considered too unusual did not appear (Makins, 1975: 161). Greive (1964: 88) later recalled that Lord Southwood, Odhams’ proprietor, prevented the publication of an article on birth control in *Everywoman* saying, “While we must be up-to-date, and if anything in advance of the times, we most not be *too* much in advance”. The organisation of sexuality, Jeffrey Weeks (1981) proposed, is an amalgam of inherited moral codes and exposure to felt needs of the time. A similar tension between established behaviour and new needs structured both Eyles’s column and the Evelyn Home page; a feminine modernity of progress within constraints. Above all, perhaps, the quality that marked out Eyles and Makins as modern agony aunts was the degree to which they strove to understand, empathise, identify and imaginatively engage with their readers; as Makins observed (1975: 162), “I never wanted anyone to look on me as an authority, only as a friend in need”.

7.3 “From One Woman to Another”: Leonora Eyles, Feminism and the Autonomous Woman in the 1920s

Three major interconnected themes demonstrate the progressive nature of Eyles’ column as a means of developing her feminist and reforming ambitions. Firstly, her belief in ‘sex enlightenment’: the dissemination of ‘sex knowledge’ to young people, and information about birth control to married couples. Secondly, her unshakable faith in the value of female autonomy, economic, social and emotional independence; and lastly, the value to the individual and the state of the improved conditions of motherhood that would result from ‘planned parenthood,’ was a major concern. This section will explore these themes as they were developed for Modern Woman readers on Eyles’s correspondence page.

Scientific birth control, as Stopes termed it, was a controversial topic even amongst advanced circles. At a time when *The Daily Express* operated a policy banning the subject, Eyles bravely promoted scientific methods, recommending Stopes’ publications and promoting the Society for Constructive Birth Control (*MW* 08.1929 & 12.1927; Rose, 1992; Bingham, 2004). One of the most contentious aspects was the ethics of separating sexual intercourse as a purely pleasurable activity from the purpose of reproduction; even feminists were split on the issue, many regarding preventatives as sacrificing womanhood to male passion (Dyhouse, 1989). Eyles was not without her own concerns. She feared, as she explained in a letter to Stopes, that birth control might sink women into “the dreary morass of sex obsession”, encouraging them to believe that sex was the most important aspect of women’s existence or, worse still, render them vulnerable to sexual exploitation from men (Joannou, 1995: 67). Birth control, she wrote, should be accompanied by “self-control”, which would improve the quality of the experience for husband and wife (Eyles, 1922: 140). Used constructively, however, preventatives (sheaths or the diaphragm) could revolutionise women’s experience of motherhood and married life. In a 1927 editorial Eyles enthused,

Our mothers never dreamed of discussing, before marriage, with our fathers, the question of babies - whether they would have some or none or many, and when they would have them - as we do now. (*MW* 03.1927: 84)

Nevertheless, her support for birth control was not unconditional. Rather, Eyles saw it as a component of mutuality: a marriage based on mutual respect in which husband and wife communicated on equal terms, and enjoyed a fulfilling sexual relationship that, ideally, resulted in healthy motherhood.

These pronouncements on married life must be read within the context of debates about the changing nature of modern life. Eyles was, after all writing in a publication called *Modern Woman and the Problems that "Modern Life" Presented for Women* were explored in a March editorial of 1927, which covered such topics as 'sex knowledge', the childless middle-class marriage and the single mother. 'Robin from Galashiels' asked for advice on how to educate his naïve fiancée who, being brought up in the most "rigidly religious way" knew nothing about "the realities of marriage and motherhood" (*MW* 03.1927: 84). Eyles (1922: 138) loathed ignorance and abhorred the resulting tendency towards inhibition or, more dangerously "sex experimentation," as she called it. Along with Stopes and many feminists, she believed that a major factor contributing to the 'sex problem' was the unhealthy silence surrounding sex. Young girls needed to be instructed about their bodies, pregnancy, motherhood, and how to behave with boys and she held mothers responsible for an innocence that was, in her view, dangerous. In her reply Eyles recommended that Robin enlighten the girl himself, beginning their marriage on companionate terms, by explaining the "facts of sex," which she described, somewhat obliquely, as "the most beautiful things on earth if they are approached by a mind not already smirched by false modesty"!

A letter from S. M., a young wife describing herself and her husband as, "healthy and fairly well to do", highlights eugenic debates about the effects of limitation on middle-class families (Haldane, 1927; Hall, 2000; Davin, 1973). While she was "craving" to have a child, S. M.'s husband was reluctant, being absorbed with business. Eyles (1922: 139), who considered women's role as "cradles of the race" as fundamental, advocated healthy motherhood warning that, "a marriage without children, unless there is some physical disability, is a terrible mistake", for a baby saves a woman from becoming bored with the "dull routine of housekeeping" and "tired of her life" (*MW* 03.1927: 84). An older woman, however, was given very different advice. Marrying at forty, Mrs. P. from Yarmouth who thought she may like children was told to use birth control to prevent this (*MW* 12.1927: 100).

'Alicia of Kensington's' problem broached the controversial subject of unmarried motherhood. Despite the establishment of The National Council for the Unmarried Mother and Her Child in 1918 and subsequent legislation, the unmarried mother remained "on the outer fringes of respectability", and was demonised by papers such as the *Daily Mail* (Weeks, 1989: 208, Bingham, 2004). The moral ambiguities of her situation, however, seemed to be the last thing on Alicia's mind. Abandoned by "her people" after having a child by her employer, her complaint was that she had slid into the habit of being "dependent" on the father; while she wished to work, he would not allow it (*MW* 03.1927: 84). Reprimanding Alicia as a "very 'modern' girl who thought she could flout the laws by which human relationships to-day are governed", Eyles, nevertheless, agreed that she should regain her independence by secretly securing a job! Marriage, however, was the ultimate solution and Alicia was told to put the welfare of her child first and marry the father, because, "the situation is unnatural for all three of you". Sympathetic to the new freedoms and changed circumstances of modern life, Eyles underscored a woman's responsibilities to her family, as well as to herself.

The shocking subject of sex and the single girl appeared on other occasions. 'A. B', a

young girl who felt “ruined and dishonoured for life” after having been seduced, asked whether she should forgive the man who, despite everything, she still loved. Eyles reply, which was full of concern for A. B.’s feelings, neither preached conventional ethics nor castigated, but gently counselled self-respect:

In the ‘teens it is easy to let one’s emotions get on top, and even if social disaster is not the result, a girl is cheapened and spoilt by such an affair.

If girls would only remember that their caresses and kisses are something beautiful, which some day they will want to give to a man they adore, they would find it easier to master these emotions. Do let me beg you A. B. not to write to this man. He is not worthy of your friendship. (*MW* 12.1925: 76)

Older women, whose youthful mistakes had returned to haunt them, were told to act strategically. ‘Mrs. A’ who “like many others,” had “made a fool of herself” (a euphemism for having sex) during the war, was being bothered by a man who threatened to tell her husband, while ‘Perplexed’ of North London felt honour bound to tell her current fiancée about a previous sexual affair (*MW* 12.1927: 100 & 05.1929: 96). Eyles warned both women, and all others in similar circumstances, to remain silent, assuring them that what a woman did before she met a man was “absolutely her own business”; surprisingly progressive as well as pragmatic advice.

Finally, the benefits of birth control for enhancing sexual pleasure in marriage were explored in a letter titled ‘Tired of Marriage.’ Pansy complained that, while she loved her husband she felt “unable to be a wife to him”, “hate[ing] everything connected with sex” since the birth of their son the previous year (*MW* 08.1929: 96). Eyles immediately prescribed birth control, arguing that “there is no need in ‘these days’ to let fear of another child spoil married life”; as Stopes discovered, the use of contraceptives could not be assumed, even amongst the relatively affluent and well educated (Hall, 1979). Suggesting that Pansy’s boredom may be due to her husband’s lack of knowledge or technique, moreover, Eyles recommended that the couple read Stopes’ *Married Love*; “often a great shock to men who thought they understood all about women”, she wryly observed.

Maroula Joannou (1995: 76), writing about Eyles’ fiction, claimed that it represented an “escape from, rather than an assault on, patriarchal values”. This is less evident in her correspondence column where she continually urged women, if not to confront patriarchy outright, at least to negotiate it, advising on how to balance a need for independence against the responsibilities of motherhood. Addressing *Modern Woman’s* expanding and increasingly well informed middle-class readership in the 1920s, she developed the problem page as a serious form of journalism, disseminating progressive thought on birth control, sex knowledge and female sexual pleasure to improve the quality of women’s lives. From 1932 Eyles moved to *Woman’s Own* where she edited the problem page, disseminating her progressive views to wider audiences.

7.4 “Your Unseen Friend”: Agony and Romantic Pragmatism in the 1930s

In place of Eyles’ frank discussion of birth control, a discourse of ‘agony’ centring on emotional relationships defined *Woman’s* Evelyn Home page. The ‘single girl’s’ problems with boys dominated, accounting for nearly half the letters in my sample and reflecting the magazine’s youthful audience; married women wrote about their problems with husbands,

errant or otherwise. The main tenets of the 'new mood': birth control, 'sex knowledge', female sexual pleasure and mutuality in marriage, however, remained, albeit voiced with greater circumspection. Home, for instance, praised the "sensible" attitude of a young couple who, wishing to delay a family until they could afford one, wrote for advice on birth control, but instead of promoting Stopes' or local authority clinics, sent the details privately (*W* 28.08.1937: 26). Letters about pre and extra-marital sex continued to appear along with a new topic, divorce.

Eyles's frank and fearless promotion of female autonomy, however, was replaced by concerns about the destabilising effects of female sexuality as psychology reinforced fears about "philandering men" who used girls as a "safety valve" (*W* 07.01.1939: 41; Porter and Hall, 1995). The lonely older woman (single women above thirty!) was also at risk. One such who, in the euphemistic language of the problem page, had received an offer that "many people will think dishonourable" asked whether she should, "take the chance". Home urgently advised abstinence, reassuring the reader that many women marry late and, "heaps of interesting happy women have never married at all!"; a message that contradicted the blushing bride on the publication's cover a few months before (*fig.* 155) (*W* 16.09.1937: 37).

Sanctioning female sexual pleasure, she located it firmly within the sanctity of married life, the maintenance of which, of course, was women's responsibility. More worryingly, a young shop girl who had suffered sexual advances from her boss was told to give up her job and find another. Home described her employer's actions as "immoral and underhand", but it was the girl rather than her boss who had to sacrifice her employment (*W* 26.03.1938: 37). Just as women were achieving a greater degree of freedom and autonomy in their emotional, sexual and working lives, so the responsibilities they had to shoulder increased.

The discourse of agony on the Evelyn Home page, nevertheless, was highly pragmatic. Home's rational tone marked a break with earlier middle-class ideals whereby romantic fantasy enhanced the desirability of marriage, aligning her page with respectable working and lower middle-class values (Lewis, 1986; Bourke, 1994). Girls were expected to avoid being "in love with love" and to separate "real feelings" from the "thrill of romance" for, as Home intoned, love would last only if it was "an honest, human emotion unmixed with the sham of fantasy and sentimentalism". In frank acknowledgement of the day-to-day reality of relationships, she warned readers that, "true love thinks about mortgages and furniture and finance and families. That is the test of love - whether it will stand practically"; "Do you enjoy the physical side of his love-making as well as the adoration and tenderness?" Home demanded, unabashedly (*W* 18.03.1939: 61). While, not in favour of a couple rushing into marriage she, nevertheless, opposed the 'long engagement' which led to "nervous strain", a euphemism for sexual frustration and the risk of premarital sex, which was most likely to occur when a couple were already engaged (Lewis, 1980; Weeks, 1981). Her suggestion that a couple build a home together gradually (presumably, like the 'sensible couple' with the aid of birth control) before having children was in tune with a period that witnessed a trend towards younger marriage and smaller families (Langhamer, 2000: 125 & 116; Gittins, 1982).

Eradicating romantic myths, ironically Home contributed to the creation of new, often paradoxical, ideals that must have been equally demanding for her readers. Girls were told that "real" attraction, the kind that led to happy marriage, depended upon social and sexual mutuality. Yet, while she was vociferous about the dire consequences resulting from the wrong choice of partner – lives could be "ruined" – Home was vague about how couples were to recognise one another; claiming, ambiguously that the "sensual sides" of their natures would

“instinctively” fit (*W* 28.08.1937: 7). Some degree of sexual experimentation was clearly necessary, but dire warnings that sex before marriage could cause a “prejudice against men” that would make marriage and “the joy of physical union distasteful”, were alarming. The sexual double standard, moreover, pertained and male sexual desire was considered natural, whereas female sexuality was, supposed only to awakened within marriage (*W* 07.05.1938: 30 & 26. 03. 1938: 37). An independent figure who was told to “fight for her rights as a human being” for “we are not living in the days when a man owned a woman body and soul”, the modern girl had to manage both her own feelings and those of her man, helping him “overcome passionate feelings without snubbing him”! (*W* 30.10.1937: 26 & 07.01.1939: 41). The confusion and fear that many must have felt emerges in two letters from single women about their sexual experiences: one, a young girl who capitulated to her fiancée’s demands, and the other an older woman who was duped by a married man. Sympathetic, Home’s replies, however, upheld the sanctity of marriage, reinforcing the women’s responsibility to rectify the situation (*W* 23.03. 1939: 57 & 18.03.1939: 61).

Girls were trapped between not wanting to seem ‘cold’ and going ‘too far’. One reader complained, “he wants to caress me, and says that it is a perfectly normal expression of his love for me, and that I should be ready to reciprocate” (*W* 07.05.1938: 30). A twenty four year old, describing herself as “quite good looking, from a nice home with wonderful parents”, declared that she couldn’t keep a boy because she was “straight,” that is, wouldn’t indulge in sex or sexual petting before marriage (*W* 07.01.1939: 41). The problem of the lonely boyfriendless girl, Makins (1975) later recalled, was one of the most common in the period. Her advice to be “warm-hearted and friendly” and prepare for “a deep lasting affection” rather than indulging in many “small friendships”, while the safest option, reinforced a passive femininity: the myth of the ‘nice’ girl whose goodness would eventually be recognised and rewarded (*W* 20.11.1937: 34).

Married couples, in contrast, were encouraged to embrace sex and communicate openly: “less strategy and more outspoken attitude would prevent many misunderstandings”, Home urged. Despite assurances that sexual pleasure would blossom within marriage, wives’ letters provide plenty of evidence to the contrary; of the 12 letters from married women I read, 6 were concerned with unfaithful husbands, 4 with difficult sexual relations, and 2 with boredom and stress. If single girls were boyfriendless, married women’s greatest problem was ‘nervousness’ about sex, or sexual reticence; the “most commonly held wifely opinion about intercourse in the country” (Makins, 1975; McKibbin, 1998: 279). A letter titled, ‘A Very Intimate Trouble’ was characteristic. It concerned a couple who the wife described as “ill-adjusted” on the “physical side”, he being “extremely passionate” while she was “undemonstrative”; alarmingly, the husband proposed “some sort of glandular treatment” for his wife. Home, in contrast, proposed that they seek “knowledge” that, she promised, would open “vistas of possibilities which had previously been thought wrong or bad for health” (*W* 23.03.1939: 57). Like Eyles, she could exhibit surprisingly advanced views; blaming a culture of prudery in which women’s exploration of their bodies was taboo, she advocated masturbation, albeit in the coded terms of the period, encouraging experimentation to avoid “shocks and disillusionment”.

Divorce, however, was considered only as a last resort, and not at all if young children were involved. One woman, whose husband was having an affair, leaving her to bring up their two children alone with “never a rest from housekeeping”, was advised to “make the best of a bad job”, at least until the children were grown up (*W* 11.12.1937: 45). Husbands’ affairs

were often attributed to the machinations of an “attractive girl”, beautiful young widow or an ex-wife, and wives were habitually told to exert “patience, forbearance, resignation and humour” (*W* 11.12.1937: 45, 07.01.1939: 41, 23.02.1939: 53; Makins, 1975: 94-5).

The Evelyn Home page demonstrates how ‘agony’ developed in the 1930s, filtering Freudian insights through popular journalism. Neither as unambiguously feminist nor as obviously progressive as Eyles’ had been in *Modern Woman* in the 1920s it, nonetheless, promoted the tenets of the ‘new mood’: sexual mutuality, sex knowledge, female autonomy and sexual pleasure to *Woman*’s broader readership. Sexual passion remained located within an ideal that excluded all but long-term heterosexual relationships and there was little help for those who did not fit this mould (Oram, 1992). Home, on the other hand, envisaged women as sexually active partners in love and life, albeit with a renewed sense of their responsibilities and the importance of maintaining marriage and motherhood. She also encouraged sexual experimentation in marriage, perhaps the “most subversive” aspect of the ‘new mood’ (McKibbin, 1998: 320). For many women, however, as Lady Margeurite Tangye later recalled, it was “desire” that caused “the trouble” (Humphries, 1988: 44). Desire, the very thing that so often was forgotten in level-headed, rational explanations of sex, is the substance of romantic fiction; it constitutes the ‘other’ side of female sexuality in women’s magazines and will be explored in the final part of this chapter.

7.5 A Far Cry from Havelock Ellis, Freud and Jung? The New Realism in Romantic Fiction

...romance reading is as much a measure of the deep dissatisfaction with heterosexual options as of any desire to be fully identified with the submissive versions of femininity the texts endorse. Romance imagines peace, security and ease precisely because there is dissension, insecurity and difficulty. (Light, 1984: 325-6)

Reading is a sexual and sexually divided practice. (Kaplan, 1986: 142)

Much of the complexity of romance as a form of popular culture is in the range of, sometimes contradictory pleasures it offers; pleasures that cannot, Alison Light suggests, be understood as a straightforward process of identification, empathy or emulation on the part of readers. Cora Kaplan went further, identifying the potentially transgressive, erotic and psycho-sexual possibilities of romance when she recalled her own compulsive reading of blockbusters, declaring, “Psychically speaking I read myself into womanhood” (Kaplan, 1986: 142). A means of exploring desires that may be “in excess of the socially possible or acceptable”, romance, she asserted, is fantasy spoken “from the position of women”. As such, it offers access to the realm of the imaginary, sometimes repressed, and often ambivalent wishes and feelings associated with the female body (Alexander, 1996). In a period which, as Nicola Beaman (1983: 162) observed, was fascinated with the drama of psychological change and motivation this section explores how a new social and psychological realism in magazine fiction explored themes that defined the problem page: loneliness, errant husbands, trouble at work and deceitful friends, for instance. Fiction, read within the particular ‘environment’ of a magazine: the character of its editorial and advertising, for instance, became a persuasive means of imagining life beyond the socially permissible, of envisaging new feminine subjectivities and female desire, for the expanded readership of women’s magazine;

Life from the Feminine Angle: commercial fiction and the new heroine

...realism, judiciously and moderately applied, is becoming more and more a feature of even the most sentimental type of serial. (Joseph, 1927: 220)

It would have damaged confidence in the paper's integrity if, while being realistic about the readers' far from romantic lives and backgrounds in the practical features, we had made these same surroundings too glamorous in the fiction. But glamour was badly needed. Therefore the most successful story-writers of those days took a girl who was the reader - nurse, shop-girl, factory worker - and whipped her off to exotic climates or aristocratic homes where the necessity to be credible was less urgent! (Grieve, 1964: 96-7)

In 1927 the literary agent Michael Joseph identified a new psychological realism in modern serial fiction, which endeavoured to show life from "the feminine angle", giving women, as he put it, the "things they most want" (Joseph, 1927: 214, 220). Commercial fiction, as Joseph saw it, was a form of self-therapy; a repository of "frustrated desires and inhibitions" whose appeal lay in its ability to satisfy the "dream phantasy of the average reader". Writers were required to study female psychology and female society in order to convincingly look into a "woman's soul", while magazine editors embraced fiction that was "light in character with a modern tone" (Crawshay, 1932: 37). Middle-class monthlies, with their literary stories involving clever characters and an individual treatment, were ideally suited to the genre. *Modern Woman* "not only tells a story, but is full of the human problems" that readers will "personally encounter", the magazine proudly declared (*MW* 06.1925).

Even sentimental romance exhibited elements of the new style. W. A. O'Donnell, commissioning editor for fiction at the Amalgamated Press, advised aspiring authors to combine 'romantic' with 'modern' appeal in stories submitted to popular weeklies (Magnus, 1925). The new approach was not restricted to serial fiction. A general association of "reality" with "psychoanalysis" developed throughout middlebrow fiction in the period (Beauman, 1983:162; Humble, 2001; Pawling, 1985; Cockburn, 1972). While, describing how dress operated as a coded psychological language in 1930s Hollywood cinema, the cultural historian Jane Gaines' (1990: 19) observation that "fantasy" was "revealed to us in some of the terms of the familiar" suggests the powerful connections made between fantasy and everyday life in film in contemporary visual culture.

The new realism corresponded with reader demand. A librarian, writing in the *Manchester Evening News* in 1926 commented on young women's growing interest in romance that was "possible" and "not exaggerated", yet outside their immediate experience. They preferred characters and incidents that were judged, "likely to happen to any of us", and reading satisfaction was gauged by the extent to which a story "rings true" (McAleer, 1992: 96). Readers I spoke to recalled similar interests in a, "lovely everyday story", "about people who have problems and overcome them". "A young girl, not much money, growing up and getting married" was the structural narrative Avis Randal enjoyed; a situation not dissimilar to her own (see appendix 2). The appeal of "believable", "interesting everyday people" and "things that could take place" was particularly marked among *Woman* readers, many of whom liked working girl heroines; "I thought maybe I could be one of these women someday", one remarked (see chapter 3).

Fantasy and lived experience combined as fiction dramatised familiar problem page themes.

The search for and recognition of 'real' love and its reconciliation with the expression of 'true' self, was a predominant concern, as were unhappy marriages, problems at work, sexually predatory married men and troublesome best friends. Happy marriage, moreover, remained the ultimate goal. Located, for the most part, within an 'ideal' family (consisting of no more than two children, and often one), stories about married heroines dealt principally with the problems of maintaining and sustaining happy family life. Threats came not only from outside the family unit, but also from within. Characteristic scenarios included; the complaint of the housewife who had to "work, work, work" for her husband in her "horrible little house day after day after day", a couple's struggle to deal with the death of their child, the "heartbreaking" predicament of loving a married man, and the "dangerous modern problem" of reconciling sexual desire with a woman's successful career (*W* 11.12.1937: 17-18; *MW* 08.1934: 13). These, and many other storylines, re-imagined heterosexual relations from the perspective of the modern woman and, in some cases, the modern man.

A new style of heroine emerged. If single, she worked, usually at an office job or in a suitably glamorous contemporary environment, such as an advertising agency, film studio or aerodrome. Married heroines had comfortable suburban homes with domestic help and professional husbands who were doctors, businessmen or worked in the city. Robust, sensible, unselfish and cheerful the new breed of heroine, according to Joseph (1927: 220), was aimed at an intelligent female reader who could "identify" with her because she did not act or think with "impossible foolishness". Above all, she had to be "alive", exhibit variety and not be "too negatively virtuous"; "neither gods nor goddesses" modern heroes and heroines were "delightful humans". The author and successful serial writer, May Christie advocated the plain heroine, arguing that, a million housewives from Hornsey to Tooting Bec would "thrill" to the idea that, even without beauty, smart clothes or money, the "strong man trembles before her *womanhood!*" (Joseph, 1927: 218-9). Modern heroines, moreover, were not always young. Whether a housewife worrying that she had missed out on life, a spinster fighting to retain her job in a department store, or a domestic servant facing the economic uncertainties of retirement, older women made regular appearances (*W* 05.06.1937 & 04.03.1939).

An individual rather than abstractly feminine, the new heroine had to be convincing as a social and psychological being. Writers were expected to be closely involved with their characters. Serial writer T. C. Bridges advised them to "dream their [characters'] dreams, suffer with them, sin with them – and paint worked pictures of them for your reader" (Joseph 1927: 151). Male authors were instructed to feel their way into their heroine's unconscious, suggesting a more ambiguous and less differentiated conception of sexual identity. Indeed, Joseph believed that writers should "instinctively" possess a "sympathetic insight that is capable of crossing the frontier of sex", declaring that

Possibly the finest type of man has much of the woman in his nature, and also the finest type of woman possesses many attributes commonly regarded as essentially masculine. Few, if any, are a hundred per cent male or female. (Joseph, 1927: 214)

He attributed the franker writing on sex to growing public awareness of analytical psychology; "It may seem a far cry from Havelock Ellis, Freud, and Jung to the writing of serials," Joseph (1927: 221) pronounced, "but in reality it is not, for knowledge and theories of this kind permeate our newspapers, inspire novelists, lectures, and public speakers, and affect the production of films".

Heroines, according to the new conventions, could be audacious, exhibiting qualities of frankness and honesty in mutual relationships that were a partnership of equals. The association between the “supremely self confident” Midge, the boyish heroine of Valma Clark’s short story ‘The Will to Win’, and the tennis-playing hero, ‘Yank’ Shawn, was described as a “modern relationship”, as much a friendship as a love-match; they didn’t even hold hands (*W* 26.06.1937: 13). The fact that Midge and Yank were orphans who had grown up together located them, to some extent, outside the constraints of normative behaviour, heightening the ambiguity and modernity of their relationship. A convention regularly employed by authors of romantic fiction, ambiguity about parentage created a space for fantasising about, and remaking identity (Dixon, 1999 & Walkerdine, 1997).

The 1920s craze for ‘sheik fiction’ had established the modern woman as “a sensual and sexually motivated being” who, shockingly, appealed to a female public seeking escapism in the form of “vicarious sex as independent of, even opposed to, romantic love and matrimony” (Melman, 1988: 45). The sexually desiring independent modern heroine of the 1930s possessed the power to look at men. In Helena Frost’s two-part serial ‘Hotel Child’ the heroine Linda’s stare was described as lingering on the hero’s athletic form, gleaming hair, face and throat that “glowed with golden tan”; at least until she remembered her manners (*W* 17.07.1937: 8). Linda is pictured in the accompanying illustration as blonde and beautiful with pouting cupid lips, but the real subject, who occupies much of the right hand side of the page, is the object of her gaze: the muscular body and craggy profile of the hero (*fig.* 156). The sensuality and heightened intensity of the female gaze was daringly foregrounded in *Modern Woman* in 1935, where the caption under an illustration of a thoroughly modern heroine, dressed daringly in beret and shorts, read “Mary Faith didn’t kiss Dick but she looked at him so desirously that he almost felt her mouth” (*MW* 09.1935: 13). The modern heroine’s adventures, her glamorous appearance and sexual confidence, must have provided instructive, absorbing reading and a means of sublimating frustrated desires for the shy boyfriendless girls or frustrated wives who wrote to magazine problem pages.

Such sexually assertive heroines were generally single. In her work on Mills & Boon fiction in the 1930s, Jay Dixon identified (1999: 86) a second, equally modern “caring heroine,” who appeared in the new style of domestic fiction as wife, mother, or sometimes daughter, and whose caring activities were powerfully linked to the creation of female personality. Alison Light (1991: 89-90), similarly, points to Agatha Christie’s heroines who were “sensible, unassuming, self-reliant, quiet, efficient and possessed a muted sexuality”. In *Woman* this type of heroine appeared in domestic fiction where storylines about second marriages, divorce, adopted children, guilt and repressed emotions gave the conventional family a contemporary edge. ‘Day of Reckoning’ by Lyn Arnold, for example, explored the romantic difficulties of Nicola and Phil, a couple whose respective spouses were dead and who both had young children (*W* 03.07: 1937). While Jan Speiss’s ‘Wedding Dress’ began with Myra’s shocking revelation that her 12 year marriage to respectable businessman Henry was a sham because of her feelings for her irresponsible first husband Deric. (*W* 10.07.1937: 14-15). The story ends with a moral much favoured by magazines, that a safe, stable and mutually respectful relationship was preferable to the capriciousness of passionate love; a view that both Eyles and Home would have approved.

The following sections explore two stories published in the 1930s. Each features characteristic modern dilemmas and heroines that would have been familiar to problem page readers: the career girl and the domestic woman defined by her relationship to family. Exploring the

narratives of struggle and resolution that structure these stories and the multiple modes of identification they offered, it argues that the imaginary spaces of fiction provided readers with a means to explore new identities that were modern and feminine.

That 'Dangerous Modern Problem': sex and the single woman

Martina Raine, the heroine of Barbara Hedworth's 'The Business Baroness', a three-part 1934 serial in *Modern Woman*, was thoroughly modern. At 27, she was the highly paid Production Manager of a London advertising agency: a successful professional whose glamorous looks were matched by her reputation as an advertising genius. Subtitled a 'Dangerous modern problem,' the serial dealt with Raine's struggle to reconcile her career ambitions with her desire for emotional and, by implication, sexual fulfilment when she refused "a stay-at-home marriage" after falling in love with one of her employees, Gregory Greene (*MW* 08.1934: 13). The dangerous problem at the serial's heart, however, was not simply the choice between marriage or career, although this was a central motif, but rather the heroine's status as a sexualised single woman; a figure of widespread concern as the so-called 'surplus woman problem' heightened fears about unmarried women in the period (Melman, 1988; Jeffreys, 1985; Hall, 2000).

Tensions around female sexuality heightened as increased awareness of women's need for sexual fulfilment was used to bolster marriage (Kingsley Kent, 1993). The "Freudian revelation", as Winifred Holtby (1932: 29) wryly observed, meant that woman had to experience "the full cycle of sex-experience, or she would become riddled with complexes like a rotting fruit"; and few socially acceptable opportunities for this existed outside marriage. The dilemma of the unmarried woman became a popular theme in fiction and film where, amidst fears about the dangers of repression, the threat to marriage and higher divorce rates, she began to be represented as unnatural and even destructive; a danger to herself and others (Kuhn, 1989; Holden, 1996). Raine, a sexually desiring single woman with a highly successful career, was doubly dangerous.

This section explores how these issues were imagined for *Modern Woman* readers in 'The Business Baroness'. It argues that, if read within the hybrid environment of the magazine, the story provided a space for women to investigate what Cora Kaplan (1986: 142) describes as, "the contradictory feelings aroused by being feminine"; the topic that, more than any other, lies at the heart of women's magazines. More specifically for readers in the 1930s, Hedworth's serial offered a means to explore what being feminine *and* modern might mean. Regular readers of women's magazines would have found much to identify with in the story. The question of whether or not women should give up work on marriage was a familiar topic in magazine features, while the sexually active single woman cropped up on the problem page (see chapter 5 & chapter 3 iii & iv). Raine was both aspirational and empathetic. An advertising executive, she was a uniquely modern figure; the fictional equivalent of the advertising women who appeared in, or worked on women's magazines (see chapter 2 & *MW* 08.1934: 69). Success, however, disguised sorrow. While an innocent young typist, Raine had been seduced and betrayed by "handsome gadabout" John Carlton; an example of that scourge of the problem page, the older married man. Her achievements, moreover, depended upon hard work and determination rather than ambition, which was deemed a dubious quality even for 'moderns' in women's magazines (see chapter 5). Driven by repressed emotional energy and a refusal of sexual desire that, sublimated in her career, fuelled a neurotic obsession with work, Raine reproduced the 'nervous women' of editorial and advertising; *Home Chat's*

unstable business woman, for instance, or the neurasthenic typist in *Woman's Weekly's* Ovaltine ads (figs. 92 & 97).

Visual drama was as important in magazine fiction as it was in advertising (see chapter 2). Before the introduction of high quality colour visuals with the new weeklies much of this was communicated through 'word pictures' and vivid description. Detailed information about the material reality of Raine's life: her glamorous clothes and the expensive meals she ate, create a sense of 'intimate distance' by encouraging readers to imaginatively identify with the heroine, while underscoring the exclusivity of her exotic lifestyle. Jacky Stacey (1994:129), writing about processes of spectatorship and identification amongst cinema audiences in the 1940s, argues that such strategies produced a "gap" in which the imaginary self could temporally merge with the fictional feminine subject to test out new possibilities, at least until the end of the film. 'Word pictures' in 'The Business Baroness', I propose, functioned in a similar way. Marking, for the most part, moments of crisis, conflict or contradiction, 'word pictures' conveyed the tensions that shaped the characters and the transformations which structure plot. Personality is performed across a surface of changing 'looks', drawing on a visual syntax that was developed in advertising, fashion, beauty culture and film (see chapter 6). A description of Raine's mouth as being too large for her small face signalled awakening sexual desire, while, lips "drawn" into a "fighting grin" evokes her determination and courage in the workplace (*MW* 08.1934: 12 & 09.1934: 20). Surface appearances, moreover, signalled deeper turmoil as the heroine's psychological struggle enacted femininity's contradictions; Raine is variously described as "modern" and "hard-boiled", an "overwrought, nerve-strained young woman", and a "clinging, dependent girl" (*MW* 08.1934: 72-73 & 09.1934: 20).

The combative culture of the business world, meanwhile, was a means of symbolising and dramatising the battle of the sexes. Martina's actions were visualised in terms of an aggressively subversive sexuality. The couple's first meeting, when she interviewed Greg for a junior position in the firm, becomes a bloody battle masking secret desires, as Hedworth intoned, "Their eyes met in conflict across the wide desk. Both were saturated in the thrill of battle lust. Secretly each held the other in admiration" (*MW* 08.1934: 15). After a successful business deal Martina was "blushing with pleasure" having "conquered" her client while, at the height of her professional success, she was said to be "slashing" an expensive brand of lipstick across her mouth (*MW* 10.1934: 35 & 08.1934: 68). The implicit violence in these descriptions provides dramatic tension, alluding to the darker side of desire.

The gender ambiguities that publisher Michael Joseph identified as intrinsic to the new fiction underscored the serial's modernity. Raine was said to possess masculine, even machine-like qualities, being "all brain and no feeling", yet was not above using her femininity to further her career. Part male, part femme fatal, part child this modern woman was a complex amalgam of impulses and constraints. Her feminine appearance was a masquerade that both revealed and concealed identity; a foil disguising the profound tensions and instabilities produced by her predicament as a successful woman in a man's world (Rivière 1929/1986). Such contradictions were the very qualities that attracted Greg as, ever acute, he observed appreciatively, "You are obviously quite frighteningly clever and yet you've arranged to retain all your femininity. That's rather rare" (*MW* 08.1934: 69).

In direct contrast to Raine's masculine charms, male characters exhibited the softer masculinity of the feminised modern hero who emerged in fiction in the period (Light, 1991; Holden, 1996). Charles Logan, the agency's Managing Director, was "tender-hearted almost to the point of foolishness", while Gregory Greene combined a "healthy" masculinity with feminine

traits of vulnerability (*MW* 10.1934: 34). The latter's feminine qualities extended to listening to, and seeming "genuinely interested" in the heroine, something that subverted prevailing stereotypes of distant and disinterested men (the ubiquitous husband hidden behind his newspaper in Delafield's *Diary of a Provincial Lady*, for instance). The relationship between the hero and heroine, meanwhile, was a modern one of equals, the type of mutual affair that Eyles and Home would have approved.

The conflict between the heroine's desire for emotional and sexual fulfilment and her career are materialised in a series of transformations in appearance and the manner in which she is described. This begins, as in all good romances, with the kiss: the 'moment of bliss', which as befitting her status as a modern heroine, was initiated by Raine (McRobbie, 1991). No longer a woman, she suddenly becomes a girl discovering her "rare powers of fascination" something that, as a business (and implicitly unnatural) woman, Raine could never fully achieve (*MW* 08.1934: 74). The drama of sexual desire over, the couple immediately discussed marriage, quickly discovering that they were fundamentally at odds. While Martina wanted to retain her career, Greg's views were more conventional. Her "life work" like that of all women, he declared with more than a little arrogance, was "to marry and have babies". Hedworth, taking a critical swipe at such ideas, describes Greg as an "angry beast of the forest", while Raine articulates a feminist position referring to his, "antediluvian and rather selfish chivalry". Both, however, were depicted as victims of their own pride, he by refusing to live off her earnings and she by putting her job before her man.

Greene at last agrees to accept Raine's terms, only to experience increasing resentment, feeling emasculated by her job. His growing frustration ends in a "nerve-shattering night" for Martina after seeing her fiancée dining with a beautiful unknown blonde (the 'other' woman). The pressure eventually becomes too much for the hero who bursts out

"I just cannot stand this business of being engaged to a successful woman any longer. Hanging about waiting to be telephoned. Being put off at the last moment; being treated"- his eyes were bitter – "like an elderly dowager's favourite gigolo."(*MW* 09.1934: 36)

Greg's words herald an inevitable decline into a state of semi-hysteria and nervous breakdown for the heroine, as the emotional and psychological strain of her situation take hold. Once known for her "superb self-discipline", the 'business baroness' transforms again, this time into an infantilised invalid who, to make matters worse, was dependent on the hero's childhood nanny. "For once", readers are told, "Martina allowed another to regulate her life for her without resentment. For once she just hadn't the inclination to fight". In this state of passive resignation Raine proved far more acceptable to the hero, who returned to her side to murmur, with more than a hint of sadism, "you are the kind of brave young woman who can take punishment without squealing"! Holding her closely and, significantly, "with the tenderness of a woman" Greg soothed Martina while she cried against his shoulder in a "quiet despairing way" (*MW* 09.1934: 80).

In a final reversal, the heroine discovered the pleasures of being nurtured, pleasures that, as an orphan, she had been denied. Janice Radway (1984), conducting interviews with romance readers, found that the care and attention which the heroine received from the hero was as a major attraction for them, compensating for the demands and lack of attention experienced in daily life. Just at the point when Raine was entirely broken, describing herself as the "lowest

woman on earth” with even the “passing thought” of a layout producing nightmares, the hero declares his love, revealing in his next breath that he had been given her job. The shifting power relations are fixed as the Baroness takes a back seat, becoming the “power behind the throne”. The story ends with the couple kissing, “thirstily and hungrily” as Martina advised Greg to ask for a pay rise, her professional knowledge enhancing her wifely duty; a favourite theme in magazines.

Martina’s response to Greg’s initial marriage proposal had been, “I must be dreaming”; a dream within the ‘dream phantasy’ of serial fiction (Joseph 1925). As magazine editors and publishers were all too well aware, much of the appeal of romantic fiction was its ability to induce dreams in its audience but, as the journalist Mary Grieve reminds us, readers needed to identify with protagonists and situations, as well as escape with them. ‘The Business Baroness’ exemplified a new style of social realism in fiction and melodrama that dramatised contemporary social and sexual dilemmas which appeared on agony pages, editorial and advertising in the women’s press. Its ending, with the triumph of bourgeois morality as the disruptive sexually desiring single woman is broken, tamed and returned to marriage and domestic life, nevertheless, seems conventional. It is unlikely that Leonora Eyles would have advised Martina to take this course.

Rather than its conclusion, however, it is the role reversals, gender ambiguities, and shifting locus of power in ‘The Business Baroness’ that reveal this modern tale’s radical heart. Like many Hollywood films, the story drew on melodramatic conventions and, although set within a conservative ethical framework, such “over-dramatisation of the dilemmas, conflicts and constraints of femininity” may open different readings (Gledhill, 1987; Fink & Holden, 1999: 243). The safe ending in conventional marriage gives the reader permission to dream and explore fantasies of power and powerlessness, passion and passivity, nurturing and being nurtured, aggression and vulnerability. To explore, that is, life from the perspective of a masculinised woman and a feminised man. That similar themes could be read across the problem page, features and advertising, moreover, must have encouraged readers to imaginatively inhabit, explore and extend the models of modern womanhood envisaged elsewhere in the magazine. Although, the peace, security and ease associated with real love were located in marriage in ‘The Business Baroness’, the serial also expressed dissatisfaction with heterosexual options and, as such, provided a fantasy setting for readers to imagine a range of alternative modern subjectivities and potentially subversive desires (Light, 1984).

Domestic Desires: fantasies of escape, transformation and re-creation.

[She] had patiently waited these past nine years. For what? Mary twisted nervously in her chair. She really didn’t know *what* she had been waiting for. Marriage? Vaguely she supposed so. Or just escape? Escape from her office desk and the nine-thirty and the respectable little house in the row of respectable little houses; Tuesday night at the cinema with Phillip, an occasional theatre, a deck chair at his cricket club on Saturday afternoon, and a gentle run in his car with mother sitting behind, carefully and considerately supported with cushions, on Sunday. (*W* 07.01.1939: 11)

Authors such as E. M. Delafield, Rosamond Lehman, Naomi Mitchison and Rose Macaulay established domestic life as a “legitimate modern subject” in the 1920s and the domestic story

became a staple of popular women's magazines (Beauman, 1983: 95; Armstrong, 1987). Picturing ideal homes, marriages and families, which after all were the central remit of service magazines, these stories also explored dysfunctional relationships, providing a space for readers to question and reflect on the structures, expectations and assumptions that underpinned domestic life. Stories about cold husbands, neurotic wives, domestic violence, single parents, dead children, orphans, difficult toddlers, loveless marriages or the consequences of divorce, dealt with the same issues that appeared on magazine correspondence pages, but in a fictional format that visualised and encouraged readers to imaginatively play out their difficulties, insecurities and fears (*fig.* 157).

Divorce, in particular, was a central preoccupation and dramatic device. Whether framed as an immediate threat or a gradual working through of its long-term social, emotional and psychological consequences, divorce ran like a thread through 1930s magazine fiction. There were compelling reasons for this. When A. P. Herbert's bill extending and equalizing the grounds of divorce for men and women became law in 1937 there was general nervousness about the legislation's effects, above all, how women might use it; not without reason given that 55 per cent of divorce petitions between 1931 and 1935 had been filed by women (McGregor, 1957).

More dramatically, the social stigma and alarm surrounding divorce intensified as Mrs. Simpson's divorce in 1936 precipitated the abdication crisis (Gardiner, 2010). Magazines eagerly reported the case and dark imaginings invaded features and fiction. The social and psychological repercussions of divorce, which were widely believed to cascade down the generations, inform Helen Simpson's short story 'Coincidence' in which the heroine, Chris was accused by her husband of not being "normal" and having a "twist" as a result of her parent's divorce (*W* 14.08.1937: 18-19). *Woman's Illustrated* ran extracts from Phillida Hughes' book about Wallace Simpson, *The Duke of Windsor's Bride*, and the Royal spectacle provoked reflections on the repercussions of divorce on ordinary lives. 'What Shall I tell my Children of Love?', an article by Helena Frost in the same issue, warned ominously that the children of divorced parents would grow up "suspicious of love" and "afraid of marriage" unless carefully handled (*WI* 19.06.1937: 16). The piece concerned a young mother who, like Simpson, had divorced her husband and the design and layout of the page visually underscored the topicality of the subject, and the parallels with Simpson's case (*fig.* 158).

Mary Holden, the heroine of Rona Randall's short story 'Heartless Daughter', which appeared in *Woman* in 1939, was a product of divorce. Rather than a sensational exploitation of the fears and anxieties surrounding the subject, however, here divorce provides the context for the heroine's self-realisation and revolt, suggesting how the modern family and modern womanhood were being re-imagined in the years following Herbert's bill. Quiet, gentle and submissive, Holden was one of the period's 'caring heroines' who was defined by a set of unsatisfactory domestic relationships, a state of suspension and her growing consciousness of a desperate need to escape (Dixon, 1999). While seeming to live a secure, comfortable, suburban life with a "respectable little house", office job and Sunday jaunts in the motor car, Mary was in fact trapped in abusive relationships with her domineering, bedridden mother Grace, and Phillip her boorish fiancé (*W* 07.01.1939:11). The latter's refusal to allow the heroine to work after marriage marked him out as unpleasantly old-fashioned; an anti-hero of feminine modernity.

Divorce provided the context: the story's psychic 'mis en scene', yet the heroine's self-discovery and entry into modern womanhood was its central theme and, like so many modern

writers in the period, Randall explored this from a psychological perspective (Drew, 1926). Mary's dawning awareness of the damaging limitations and constraints of conventional notions of duty (whether to mother or husband) and her rejection of the qualities of sacrifice and martyrdom, which had defined femininity for her mother's generation, provide the narrative's psychic drive. The stakes were high for the heroine. And, as so often in popular melodrama, the struggle for self and a modern subjectivity as a confident, independently-minded woman was materialised through her struggle with her mother (Kaplan, 1992). Mary's own needs conflicted with her filial duty in a battle fought along social, emotional and psychological lines. Escape meant freedom but also betrayal, a crime made all the more acute because Grace had already been deserted; first by her husband and then by Mary's older sister Sylvia, who eloped when very young. Twice abandoned, the mother's suppressed rage and frustration infected her relationship with her remaining daughter. Hatred, jealousy, fear, guilt and obligation: the emotional legacy of her parents' divorce, were the metaphorical chains that the heroine had to shake off. Nicola Beauman (1983: 162), in her book on the interwar woman's novel, described the process of becoming modern in these years as a "sloughing off", an allusion that suggests shedding an outer skin. This was particularly apt for Mary, for it was through the act of renouncing one appearance and revealing another (something that beauty and fashion editors continually urged their readers to do) that Mary's new self emerged.

While the heroine's battle with Grace provided the story's fulcrum, her sister Sylvia and, most dramatically, an anonymous woman in black were the 'other' women. The "twin or mirror image" of the heroine (the two are connected but distanced, the same yet different), the 'other woman' was a common device in popular romance where she represented aspects of femininity that the heroine had to recognise as part of her in order to complete herself and move on (Dixon, 1999: 93). The concept of the 'other' was also central to constructions of the self in contemporary psychoanalytic discourse (Dean, 1992). Sophisticated Sylvia and the woman in black (who, coincidentally, was married to Mary's first love, who had been rebuffed on Grace's advice) were fulfilled modern women, as their self-possessed demeanour and air of casual confidence proclaimed. They symbolized the type of woman Mary might have been while Grace, the aggressive, frustrated divorcee, represented the woman she would become, unless something changed.

The scene set, the characters established and the psychological and social motivations for the drama in place, only the problem of how Mary was to accomplish her transformation from passive, unfulfilled victim to active, self-fulfilled womanhood, remained. To achieve this Randall employed a device familiar to magazine readers: the 'make-over'. The process began when Mary who, characteristically was waiting but this time for her sister in a hotel lobby, fails to recognise her reflection in a nearby mirror. Instead, she sees a "symphony in brown and beige", the product of long years of self-renunciation in the service of others, she reflects: a "nervous drab old maid" (*W* 07.01.1939: 12-13). A shock of the uncanny, this act of misrecognition prefigures her subsequent change. Spinsterhood, widely perceived as a defining anxiety of the age, was represented as lack of physical presence in a society that privileged marriage and motherhood (Jeffreys, 1985; Holden, 2007). Grace, the jealous mother who conspired against her daughter marrying, continued to remind Mary of her failure to have children. Yet, it was the revelation of her own invisibility: a revelation analogous to the experience of psychotherapy, which gave Mary the power to see both her predicament and her mother's abuse, as visual appearances, like dreams, reveal deeper psychological realities. Having gained the power to 'see', a second 'visual event' occurred when the heroine caught

sight of an(other) woman in the mirror; a woman who, “though plain and with not a single feature as good as her own”, had presence. People looked at her, Mary mused, somewhat bitterly (*W* 07.01.1939: 13). Just as seeing her own appearance revealed her own dilemma, so comparison with the ‘other’ woman provided the catalyst for change. The woman, a dramatic figure whose black frock, hat and gloves contrasted against her pale skin, possessed a beauty which was the antithesis of the heroine’s discrete and muted femininity; a look, moreover, that was celebrated on the front cover of the magazine (*fig.* 159). Descriptions of her mouth as a “vivid slash of red” and her jewellery as “beaten gold” and “barbaric” conjure up a heightened sense of exotic ‘otherness’, and the self-assured sexuality that such film stars as Bette Davis and Joan Crawford portrayed (Stacey, 1994). Mary, resolving to take action, swiftly booked herself into the hotel beauty salon.

The narrative shifted to Sylvie, her sister, and Andrew Lane, the hero-to-be, who were waiting, this time for Mary who was uncharacteristically late; a reversal that primed the reader to expect change. When, eventually she did arrive, Mary’s entry is described in terms of a vivid visual spectacle and performative event, as she sauntered, mannequin-style, down the long mirror-lined room with an “air of complete unselfconsciousness”. Heads, mostly male, turned and she watches the effect of her transformed appearance reflected on the faces of her audience and in the mirrors around the room. “Slender” and wearing a “perfectly fitting straight woollen frock of dull gold”, her only ornament a “beaten gold” belt buckle, Mary’s appearance replicated but subtly reworked the ‘look’ of the ‘other’ woman. Yet, whereas her beauty was implicitly ‘barbaric’, Mary’s was classical - “like a Grecian Goddess” her sister marvelled – connoting a feminine modernity that was ‘respectably’ civilised (*W* 07.01.1939: 13). By adopting the masquerade of femininity Mary gained the confidence to see and be seen (Rivière in Burgin, 1929/1986). Modern identity, moreover, is rooted in the visual and the scopic regimes of fashion, film and the mirror (Evans & Breward, 2005; Dean, 1992).

At once didactic and dramatic, the ‘makeover’ in beauty features was a performative event that was communicated principally through visual means (see chapter 6). Mary’s transformation was similarly materialised visually in Fred Purvis’s startlingly bold illustrations which, forming a double-page spread at the heart of the story, frame the text in a graphic evocation of the cinema or stage (*fig.* 160). The organisation and disposition of the images reinforce a sense of cinematic immediacy, as the full-length figure of Mary, striding purposefully forward, is counter-balanced by a close-up shot of the amazed faces of the spectators, Sylvia and Andrew Lane. Cropped and set against flat, rectangular blocks of colour the pictures suggest ‘moments in time’ in ways that are analogous to the film still or comic strip (Landy, 1991). They frame the text but also reconstitute it as a material space across which the spectators (in the story) and the reader must gaze at Mary’s performance, stage-directed by Sylvie’s gloved hand at the bottom of the page. Reading, looking and doing combine in a form of multiple-imagining, as text and image work together as a hybrid, rendering the magazine a material space through which the reader could visualise, and perhaps later perform, the transformation to modern womanhood.

‘The Business Baroness’ concluded with the hero taking the place of the heroine’s absent parents as she retreated from the workplace to the home. In ‘Heartless Daughter’ Mary rejected her mother in order to become more like her father, escaping her familial obligations by running off to Brazil with a man she had only just met; “I am beginning to understand now why he left you. I’m beginning to know how he felt”, she declares in a final confrontation with Grace (*W* 07.01.1939: 36). A seemingly risky mode of behaviour, Mary’s act of self-

realisation as she followed her heart, nevertheless, conformed to advice meted out in beauty features and problem pages; a message reinforced for readers when her confident, stylish appearance was replicated almost exactly a few pages later on the fashion page (fig. 161). The image of the woman striding confidently forward was a signature trope in *Woman*, as we have already seen (see introduction). 'Heartless Daughter' drew on discourses of beauty culture, popular psychology and film to dramatise the journey from an outmoded form of femininity to modern womanhood through a series of transformations and narratives of looking, seeing and being seen. In the process it reproduced the power structures embedded in femininity, but also challenged them within the context of the magazine.

7.6 Conclusion: "A level headed and normal idea of sex and sex morality"

The women's magazines, with their free articles on all kinds of sex matters and their comments on correspondence are, I think, very sensible and are resulting in a level headed normal idea of sex and sex morality. (*M-O DR1048*, 1944)

A series on 'Marriage Failures' in *Modern Woman* in the mid-30s claimed to respond to "hundreds of letters from unhappily-married men and women" sent to the magazine, something that echoed Marie Stopes' experience (Hall, 1979). At a time when many found the medical profession unhelpful, receiving at best an ambiguous and at worst an out-rightly hostile response from doctors (whose sex attitudes depended largely on received opinions and were coloured by religious affiliations), magazine experts represented a progressive, sympathetic and surprisingly non-judgmental alternative source of information and advice (McKibbin, 1998). By the early 1940s the social investigator Pearl Jephcott (1942: 139) noted that girls were more likely to learn details about sex or menstruation from an older sister or the "correspondence columns of the cheap magazines" than from their mothers, and *Mass-Observation* recorded the normalising effect of women's magazines' treatment of sex. Leonora Eyles, who provided advice and factual information, or 'sex knowledge', about sex and birth control for married, and occasionally single, women on her *Modern Woman* correspondence page, was an important innovator in the 1920s. And, despite a 'backlash' against the liberalisation of sexual mores in the 1930s (Weeks, 1981), Peggy Makins continued to explore such issues as mutuality, birth control, female sexual desire, extra-marital sex and sex knowledge, for *Woman*'s wider audience on the Evelyn Home page, albeit firmly within the confines of marriage.

Eyles and Makins, however, differed in approach and the ways in which their advice was visualised and framed. Eyles' forthright feminism was replaced by the attention to psychological impulses that characterised Makins' page; *Woman* even published a series on the 'Psychology of Sex' and included a test for frigidity in 1939 (Weeks, 1981: 2006-10). By the 1930s the connections and slippage between the messages and style of fiction, features and the problem page, which symbolized and materialised the connections between different compartments of readers lives, became evident in both magazines. This was particularly true of *Woman*'s more hybrid, integrated format with fictional features and dramatic eye-grabbing illustrations distributed throughout the magazines. The female figure standing, arms crossed and seemingly irradiating light, as she towers above a series of miniscule men, which illustrates the article 'know your men', for instance, is a powerful image of independent and informed

modern womanhood that recalls fiction's modern heroines, and undercuts the rather patronising tone of bachelor, Charles Gordon's text (*fig.* 162).

Located between the authoritative discourse of medical opinion and the intimate exchange of friends, agony aunts such as Eyles and Makins offered a means of thinking and talking about sex in the 1920s and 1930s, while the new psychological approach to fiction in the 1930s provided a space to visualise and imaginatively perform dissent and desire. At a time when paradox and contradiction, Alexander's 'mentality of modernity', shaped attitudes to women's sexuality, and fear of pregnancy was the flipside of sexual desire, magazines helped readers imagine the possibilities and manage the contradictions of being modern. Read with attention to the specific genres of romantic fiction and the problem page, they also provide an invaluable aid to understanding how sex was imagined and lived in the period.

Chapter Eight, Conclusion: Magazines and the Feminine Imagination

8.1 'Women as News': 'A Few Moments Idle Phantasy'

Ann is a personality;

Ann is a woman of note

Ann was a flapper the other day

But that's not the sort of thing you'd say

To one who possesses a vote!

She can make a cross as big as a man's;

It's a wonderful thing, is this vote of Ann's.

(*HC* 11.04.1929: 354)

Immerse myself in illustrated weekly. Am informed by it that Lord Toto Finch (inset) is responsible for camera-study (herewith) of Loveliest Legs in Los Angeles, belonging to well-known English Society girl, near relation (by the way) of famous racing peer, father of well-known Smart Set twins (portrait overleaf)...Turn attention to short story, but give up on being directed, just as I become interest, to page *XLVIIb*, which I am quite unable to locate. Become involved instead with suggestions for Christmas Gifts. I want my gifts, the writer assures me, to be individual and yet appropriate – beautiful, and yet enduring. Then why not Enamel dressing-table set, at £94 16s 4d...Why not, indeed?...Would not many of my friends welcome suggestion of a course of treatment – (six for 5 guineas) – at Madame Dolly Varden's Beauty Parlour in Piccadilly to be placed to my account?... (Indulge, on the other hand, in a few moments' idle phantasy, in which I suggest to Lady B. that she should accept from me as graceful and appropriate Christmas gift, a course of Reducing Exercises accompanied by Soothing and Wrinkle-eradicating Face Massage.) (Delafield, 1930/1984: 18–19)

"All the happenings of the world pale before the march of the fair sex in the conquering of the News Editor" with the presses "busy day and night distributing news about women's challenge to men's authority". "Women are most definitely 'News'", *Home Chat* reported breathlessly in 1924 (*HC* 19.04.1924: 119-120). A slew of articles appeared in magazines in the run up to the General Election in 1929 after the Bill granting female suffrage on equal terms with men added

five million new women voters to the register. Whereas, the daily press discussed the “flapper vote” in near hysterical terms, *Home Chat* and *Modern Woman* made it their business to inform the virgin voters, impressing the importance of their new responsibilities upon women, while representing them as the “practical sex” whose “common sense” values about housing, health and welfare would transform politics (*MW* 02.1929: 22; Hackney, 2008). These commercial women’s magazines, like Lady Rhondda’s literary weekly *Time & Tide*, provided what Cathy Clay terms, an “arena of public discourse for the newly enfranchised reader”. That ‘Vote of Ann’s!’, one of C. E. B.’s frequent, memorable contributions to *Home Chat*, complete with its illustration of Ann (the everywoman) as a crop-headed, monocled, be-suited, smoking, flapper, meanwhile, demonstrates the subversive humour that ran through women’s magazines (*fig.* 163). Far from retreating to the home and a passive, domestic femininity, *Home Chat* and other domestic magazines brought the home into the heart of modern life by showing how women were conquering fresh fields, setting up new records, exploiting crazes, playing sports, running enterprises, voting, smoking, loving, betting, sitting in parliament, attending boxing matches, piloting planes and wearing daringly short skirts, as well as creating comfortable, hygienic modern homes in which to raise healthy children (*fig.* 1).

Magazines ‘opened things up’, readers’ recalled, suggesting how their publications informed and shaped their imaginative lives, particularly at times of transition when, for instance, they left school, found jobs, married or had families. A desire to understand this ‘opening up’ process, how it worked in different magazines and what it meant for women, drove this project, which viewed the magazine as a hybrid product resulting from the combined efforts of readers, journalists, advertisers, illustrators, printers, publishers, retailers, papers-makers, and a host of others. Producing and consuming magazines, moreover, are not exclusive activities. Editor Biddy Johnston ordered her staff to read *Woman’s Weekly*, and readers contributed to competitions or correspondence pages, making ‘meaning’ through the many and varied ways they engaged with their magazines. The passage from E. M. Delafield’s *Diary of a Provincial Lady* perfectly captures the fragmented, cut-up format of the 1930s illustrated magazine. The ‘lady’s’ ironic tone, as she spent a “few moments idle fantasy” negotiating her way through her publication’s multifarious paths, signposted by a celebrity here and a commodity there, articulates a mode of reading that was at once absorbed and detached: critical and involved, amused and sceptical. It signals a subtle and sophisticated approach to commercial culture that found an echo in readers’ descriptions of ‘escaping’ with magazines (see chapter 3).

The ‘magazine-as-window’ that opens things up to reveal new ways of living, thinking, behaving and being, cannot be disentangled from the ‘magazine-as-mirror’ or stage, for women to see or perform themselves differently; an appropriate if mixed metaphor for such a complex process and experience as magazine reading. It foregrounds the magazine’s transformative and mediating function, as a bridge connecting and reflecting the private and public, domestic and civic aspects of women’s lives. Mirroring and ‘doubling’: feminist film theorist Mary Anne Doane’s (1987) ‘double mimesis’, meanwhile, exposes a slippage between what is represented and what we are supposed to be, or hope to become.

The twin ideas of the ‘magazine-as-window’, signalling the magazine’s transformative properties, and the ‘magazine-as-mirror’, which foregrounds the constructed nature of femininity, structure a *Modern Woman* cover from the late 1920s. This depicts a fashionable woman: a modern flaneuse, posed and stylish as a mannequin, and evidently at home in the city streets, staring into a shop window filled with books and magazines (Gleber, 1998) (*fig.* 164). The magazine becomes a shop and the shop a magazine in a multiple promotion, as the shop window doubles as a banner selling that month’s special offer: a ‘Two-piece’ designed by

actress Gladys Cooper. In a further doubling, the figure illustrating the 'two-piece' replicates the shopper in miniature (the image of an image), and the shop window becomes a mirror as well as a window. All of which underscores the coded, constructed nature of femininity, fashion and commercial magazines. The coloured border of the page, meanwhile, serves as a graphic frame demarcating both the edge of the shop-window and the magazine. The woman whose gaze directs the reader towards her doppelgänger (who meets that look with a reciprocal gaze), meanwhile, hovers ambiguously partly inside and partly outside the frame; a mediating figure between the reader and the imaginary space of the 'shop window/magazine'.

The mirror, which looks, reflects and doubles, was employed as a trope to fantasize alternative possibilities in women's novels in the 1930s. Gill Frith (1991) describes a process of 'double-gazing' in which two women (one older, one younger) look into a mirror together. This moment marked the heroine's transition from girl to womanhood and was initiated by a female friend: a woman who by virtue of age, class or worldly experience had a more secure footing in the world of femininity; a relationship not unlike that between editors and their readers (see chapters 1, 2 & 6). Frith relates the mirror ritual to psychoanalyst Joan Rivière's theories of masquerade and conceptions of womanliness as mask, mimesis, adornment and performance (Hughes, 1991). Femininity, as such, becomes a game played by women in order to survive the world of men, a chain passed on by one to another in and through the mirror/text of the magazine, where it is always unstable, being both 'true', imagined and acquired.

The multiple modern femininities produced in magazines are of course always historically located, producing different performances for different audiences at different times. 'Mrs. Penn Jones', for instance, dexterously juggled marriage and career for *Woman's Weekly's* readership of working wives in 1919, while the 'lipstick girl' 'made up' in public in *Home Chat* in 1924, advertising woman Florence Sangster's feminine appearance provided a model of how to further one's career in *Modern Woman* in 1929, and the modern housewife instructed *Woman* readers on how to bring 'personality' to their homes in 1937. The collision of editorial, fiction and illustration, sometimes in saturated colour, encouraged readers to consciously imagine and perform complex and sometimes challenging new personas. A 1938 *Woman* cover, for instance, shows an elegantly dressed woman lost in her own reflection, her hands framing her neck and face in a gesture of self-conscious artifice; an example of the ideal transformation wrought by the magazine's editorial departments, which are advertised at the base of the page (fig. 165). The strap-line announcing Hebe Elson's serial 'Masquerade', about a young actress who "rebels against convention" when she discovers that her marriage into a theatrical dynasty is a charade, underscored the performative and constructed nature of social identities, while introducing a subversive note to the cover girl's feminine appeal. 'Faces at the Cinema', meanwhile, a humorous photo-feature in *Modern Woman* in 1939, playfully drew parallels between on-screen drama and the dramatisation of daily life (fig. 166). A series of photographs (most likely agency photos for advertising) stage and decode three cinema-goer's emotions as they move from boredom to humour to pathos and back to boredom again, while text compares the "everyday role" of the audience with the parts played by "those other actors", the stars of the screen (*MW* 04.1939: 15).

The magazine's fragmentary format and multiple messages, which accommodated difference, similarity, continuity and change, was of central importance in the 1920s and 1930s, not least because this fragmentation and division reflected or echoed similar processes of conflict and continuity (or at least the desire for the reassurance that continuity brought) that were shaping readers' lives. New freedoms afforded by the vote, increased entry into the workplace, new habits of dress, leisure, social behaviour, and smaller families were opening women's lives up

to change and renewal, despite their consistently lower pay, fewer professional opportunities, limited access to contraception, and the uneven distribution of the marriage bar. While magazines examined women's careers, hinted at contraception or provided information and no-nonsense advice, celebrated the new fashions, and explored new romantic desires, they rarely confronted inequality or injustice directly. Their complex structure and contradictory messages, nevertheless, opened an imaginative space for readers to actively question, reflect and criticise. The struggles and conflicts women faced as they attempted to find a place in the modern world as career women, workers, mothers or wives, or a combination of these, must have taken a psychic as well as physical toll (they still do). Psychoanalysts dealing with female patients, whether middle-class professionals or not, found that they "suffered psychic damage in their attempts to survive and progress in an unequal society" (Doy, 2007: 53; Overy, 2010). For the majority who could not afford professional treatment, magazines with their reliable advice and friendly tone, offered support, ideas, managing strategies and momentary escape; a transformational space, or simply a place to belong (see chapters 2 & 3). The modern types that populated their pages, from the overworked mother or domestic worker to the neurasthenic secretary or lonely bachelor, represented an array of alternative identificatory types produced by, and responding to, modern conditions and concerns.

The final part of this conclusion summarises findings of the previous chapters, exploring how the various personas developed in publications, with their related discourses and themes, built one upon the other to reveal a nuanced narrative of feminine modernity in the tangled threads of continuity and contradiction, which connected the world inside and outside magazines in the period.

Opening the world to women magazines also opened women's lives up to the world outside the home. The new breed of better trained and better paid female journalists and advertising women, well versed in feminine psychology, were eager to represent women's interests and alert to the value (economic and otherwise) of the 'woman's point of view'. Modern professionals such as *Woman's* home editor Edith Blair, *Modern Woman* agony aunt Leonora Eyles, or the advertising executive Ethel Wood, were seriously committed to raising women's standard of living and improving their lives by educating them through editorial and advertising to be independent thinkers and critical consumers, actively engaged with modern life. The 'bright', illustrated women's papers, and new weeklies such as *Woman*, with their eye-catching colour ads and illustrations, and 'streamlined ideas' produced an emotionally compelling hybrid environment where editorial information jostled with advertising 'news', the fantasies of fiction, and the visual rhetorics of illustration and photography, to engage readers' emotions and intellects (see chapter 2).

Reading for relaxation and information, knowledge and escape, readers' motivations and habits reproduced the fragmented, diverse and varied nature of the magazine format. Far from escaping into a 'middle-class world', as press historian Joseph McAleer assumed, the expanded female readership of the period appear to have brought their own particular needs, interests, aspirations and concerns to their magazine reading as single girls, workers, wives or mothers. Rather than the stereotypes of 'slipshod', 'scattered' reading touted by critics of mass culture such as Q. D. Leavis, I found evidence of 'intelligent', directed reading when talking to women about their memories of magazines; girls who found clues to their changing bodies in advertisements, or advice on how to behave with men (because you 'couldn't find out anywhere else'), cut out recipes, or brides who saved up coupons to furnish a first home. Magazine reading for the majority involved a particular form of escape, one that enabled

women to 'lose themselves for a time' but was rooted in the specificities of their daily lives. What this meant and how it was experienced varied depending on a woman's circumstances and the magazines she read. Teacher Marjorie Denut enjoyed *Woman* because it "transported" her from her "everyday world" and yet, with its "sensible articles" and "down to earth characters", was also part of that world. Avis Randle and Dorothy Barton, meanwhile, read *Red Letter* or *Woman's Own* surreptitiously. Title choice could reflect a significant change of status or a particular outlook. Rose Wedgbury and Florence Spike abandoned the romantic 'bloods' of their youth for *Woman's Weekly* when they married. *Woman*, meanwhile, signalled a revolution in social relations with its stories about 'bosses and secretaries rather than mistresses and maids'. For Muriel Danpure, the postman's daughter who became a technical assistant at the BBC, or Mabel Cunningham, forced by her father's unemployment to abandon grammar school for a dead-end job, the magazine responded to their aspirations and concerns.

The housewife, whether *Modern Woman's* domestic manager, the glamour girls and domestic amazons of advertising, or the careful economists and creative craftswomen in *Woman's Weekly* and *Woman*, or some combination of these, was *the* dominant figure in women's magazines. The unprecedented growth in state and private housing from the mid 1920s for the first time brought the fantasy of the 'housewife heroine', who created delicious dishes in her gleaming, airy kitchen and raised healthy, vigorous children, within the reach of millions of women. While fears about the poor state of the nation's health, infant mortality and a rapidly decreasing population, placed housing reform, the housewife and the home at the centre of modern life. Such factors, along with the new consumerism of the 1920s, the increasing availability of gas and electricity, and the gradual demise of the domestic servant, fuelled the growth in women's domestic magazines and shaped a new discourse of modern domestic life. Magazine housewives' qualities of independence, skill, fashionability, individuality and responsibilities as citizens differentiated them from the anonymity and drudgery that traditionally defined domestic service. Advertisements for streamlined cookers, no-scrub powders and tasty tinned foods, and bright and breezy illustrated editorials, meant that housework became exciting and respectable, as *Woman* reader C. C. Russell recalled, an 'important job'. The alluring fantasy of the housewife heroine, nevertheless, masked the fact that housework remained unpaid and, for the most part, unseen and, for the many women struggling to maintain standards in the unsanitary, crowded, ill-adapted 'little house', unremittingly hard work.

The modern housewife's counterpart, the working woman, had a significant presence in magazines, particularly at times of economic crisis such as 1919, when career columns in *Woman's Weekly* outlined possible avenues for the 'untrained woman', or when *Modern Woman* encouraged girls to train for a career in teaching, nursing, or horticulture in 1932. The bachelor or business girl sold modern products: cigarettes and sanitary towels, to young workers with some disposable income, while editorial debated the rights and wrongs of the career professional, working wife, older single worker or the girl secretary, idling her time away before marriage in a 'rotten job'. The woman worker, meanwhile, was variously depicted in editorial and advertising as the heroine *and* the victim of modern life. Most surprisingly, at a time when employment opportunities were shaped by assumptions that marriage was a woman's 'true' career, I found a complex, shifting and nuanced relationship between work and marriage in magazines in response, for instance, to the increasing number of single women who had to earn a living in the 1930s. So, while marriage curtailed the bachelor

girl's career in *Woman's Weekly* in the 1920s, by 1930 the bachelor woman's domestic skills 'normalised' and legitimated her continued presence in editorial and advertising. The range of workplace identities in *Woman's Weekly* or *Modern Woman* shaped attitudes to the modern marriage, and the growing popularity of the companionate marriage of equals in *Modern Woman* and *Home Chat* was tied to the opening up of female employment opportunities in women's magazines.

The burgeoning beauty culture of the period: the growth of beauty commerce, the concomitant expansion of advertising, and the appearance of the beauty editorial in the 1930s, fuelled popular women's magazines. New techniques of 'type' and 'transformation' developed in editorial and advertising (and imaginatively explored in fiction) signalled a 'self' in process, as the conundrum between appearance and identity played across the surface of the body and through the pages of magazines. Change happened fast in the 'to and fro' between editorial and advertising. So, while red lipstick had marked a girl out as unmarried in *Home Chat* in the early 1920s, the 'naturalisation' of cosmetic artifice in advertising meant that twenty years later wearing brightly coloured lipstick was regarded as a normal, even a patriotic, part of the war effort. The job of editorial, meanwhile, was to manage and mediate the new ideals. *Home Chat's* 'Mabs Types', *Modern Woman's* exotic career women, and *Woman's* Hollywood stars educated readers about how the modern housewife, mother, secretary or business girl should appear and behave. Differing conceptions of 'natural' or 'unnatural', 'healthy' or 'unhealthy', 'masculine' or 'feminine', 'beautiful' or 'ugly', 'attractive' or 'disgusting' appearances or behaviours, in any one magazine at any one time, unsettled social, gender, sexual and racial differences and hierarchies. Risk, nevertheless, had to be balanced with respectability; *the* central tension, perhaps, that characterised modern, feminine beauty discourse in interwar women's magazines.

At a time when women's naked, reproductive bodies were surrounded by silence and taboo, despite a more relaxed attitude to sexual morality in some quarters, women's service magazines provided a unique space, and a language, to explore the contradictory feelings associated with being modern and feminine. Leonor Eyles at *Modern Woman* in the 1920s and Peggy Makins, who drew on the innovations of psychoanalysis for *Woman's* 'Evelyn Home page' in the 1930s, wrote about 'sex knowledge', sexual impotency, extra-marital sex, boorish husbands, and birth control, among many other topics in a progressive, frank and forthright way. Stories about working women, divorce, unhappy marriages or controlling parents, meanwhile, developed parallel themes in fiction. Barbara Hedworth's Martina Rane tackled the very modern problem of how to manage a relationship and a career, as well as the unsettling question of the sexually desiring single woman, while *Woman's* Mary Holden employed the arts of the beauty salon to slough off out-moded feminine conventions: her 'duty' to a bullying mother and boorish boyfriend, and assert herself as a modern woman with her own ideas, desires and needs (see chapter 7). These tales ended in marriage, yet they offered readers a means to imaginatively occupy different subject positions, to explore new ways of performing the 'self', seeing and being seen.

8.2 'The Political Equivalent of a Man': 'A Kind of Rose Pink Feminism'

Give a housewife an oil-burner, an electric incinerator, kitchen gadgets that make toast and squeeze orange juice automatically, a modern range and a refrigerator, and she has time to go out into the world, join clubs, make speeches, educate her children properly

and, in short, be the political equivalent of a man. (*W* 03.07.1937: 7)

Because we, as a nation, spend our money on guns and battleships, the great majority of women have to live in wretched, inconvenient houses, and manage with old-fashioned, second-rate tools. Because English statesmen are still dominated by military ideals, many mothers who might be saved continue to die in childbirth. (*MW* 02.1935: 7)

These rousing statements, the second written by Vera Brittain in an article warning women about impending catastrophe and urging them to “stop war”, demonstrate how the barrier between the ‘public’ and ‘private’, ‘personal’ and ‘political’ realms was, at least in the minds of some, being broken or leaked into one another in the interwar years as domestic magazines became a space for public debate. Both articles underscored the connections, co-dependency and repercussions between domestic life and the world outside. While, according to *Woman*, new labour-savers enabled women to ‘go out into the world’ and become ‘the political equivalent of a man’, women’s poverty and poor health, Brittain pointed out, were a direct result of the money spent on war. Brittain, who wrote articles for *Woman* and *Good Housekeeping* as well as *Modern Woman*, like agony aunts Leonora Eyles and Peggy Makins, home editor Edith Blair, Labour M.P. Ellen Wilkinson, the author Ursula Bloom, magazine editors Mary Grieve and Myfanwy Crawshay, the fashion expert Alison Settle, advertising woman Ethel Wood and birth control campaigner Marie Stopes, among many others, recognised the power of the women’s press to reach, inform and connect women; fire readers’ imaginations, provide a voice (or voices), and stimulate them to be critical, improve their lives and bring about change.

Brittain insisted that women’s “duty to mankind extends beyond their own little doorstep” (*MW* 02.1935: 62). Doors, like windows, provide access: they can open things up, introduce a ‘breath of fresh air’, help us see things differently, enable people and ideas to move in and out, and facilitate change. This access and interchange, moreover, goes in two directions. The new commercial culture of magazines, the press, film and radio, helped feminise the public realm while putting modern domestic life on show; the opening up of domestic life, through photography and architecture, was in fact central to the modernisation process. “News”, as the publisher Michael Joseph (1925: 215) observed, was being coloured with “a kind of rose pink feminism” in the interwar years, referring not only to women’s dominant presence in the press, but also to how that presence was changing the tone, content and feel of discussion and debate, as suffragists had argued and hoped. While suffragettes smashed windows to give women a political voice and bring about political change, the chatty, informative, interactive, emotional, and increasingly brightly coloured world of popular women’s magazines, offered a window through which women could imaginatively connect with others to see (and make) themselves, their relationships with others, and their lives differently. This ‘rose pink revolution’ involved new ways of thinking about the body, feminine desires and independence, criticised marriage, supported older women’s right to work, recognised the national importance of the housewife’s domestic skills, balanced innovation with compromise, and promoted progress through cultural means.

The 1920s and 1930s were times of rapid change, serious economic hardship as well as new opportunities, and magazines may be viewed as survival manuals for combating the stresses, strains, demands, isolation, disappointments, or simply boredom, of modern life. As such, they provided a source of social, emotional and psychological protection, as well as guidance

about what being modern and feminine might mean. The introduction of the new colour weeklies in the 1930s and the continuing high sales of penny weeklies such as *Woman's Weekly* meant that for the first time women's magazines reached a mass audience in this era. With their emphasis on visual communication and attention to the woman's 'point of view', magazines became sites where processes of conscious and unconscious communication collided, and meanings were performed and visually constructed, not just passively consumed. Not only a 'place' where women's lives and voices were represented, magazines were also 'space' in which subjectivities could be re-imagined, re-envisaged and re-formed. The compelling combination of mass audience, a new visual and verbal language, multiple and often contradictory femininities, reader agency and the potential to imagine 'self' differently, made magazines modern.

To close I will consider two images that demonstrate how the feminine imagination operated in magazines towards the end of the 1930s. 'Women do Strange Things', a *Modern Woman* photo-editorial that pictured the daring exploits and unusual activities of, among others, foreign correspondent Freda Uteley in China, the Australian ace-airwoman Nancy Bird and a woman barber shaving a client in London, established the independent modern woman as ubiquitous, and an international phenomenon. Sans serif titling, photography, white space, the grid format and dynamic diagonal layout communicate these women's modernity with the visual immediacy of film stills (*fig. 167*). The portrait of Nancy Bird, in flying cap and goggles on the top left hand side of the page, meanwhile, balances and connects with a picture of that ultimate domestic ideal: the bride. The angle of Bird's face, the towel, the barber's arm and the woman's gun in the pictures below, develop a visual narrative that leads the eye directly from airwoman to bride, the 'other' face of feminine modernity. This bride, nevertheless, is as modern as the other women, her modernity signalled by her status as a working woman – a model described as "America's most photographed girl" – and by the presence of a life-size, wax mannequin of herself, which is stationed between her and the groom; a spectacular example of mimesis and 'doubling' that foregrounds the constructed and performative nature of femininity.

The second image, a *Woman* cover from 1937, also depicts a couple, this time dancing. Whereas, *Modern Woman* pictured women as active agents in a modern world, *Woman* addressed the reader as active and knowing: a conscious agent of feminine modernity. Consisting of an illustration rather than black and white photographs, colour draws the reader through the 'window' into the magazine's imaginative world; an effect enhanced by the dancing woman who turns and fixes the viewer with a direct, uncompromising, even provocative gaze as she leans out of the graphic frame into the reader's space (*fig. 168*). The dance, of course, is an analogy for male/female relations in love, life and marriage, an idea that coincidentally was developed in a reader's letter the following week. The woman's unflinching gaze, along with the slight smile on her lips, suggests the playful yet confident presence of one who is in charge of herself and others, and who is acting a part and enjoying it. Her rather stolid male companion's gaze, in contrast, is dreamy - he is completely absorbed in her - and partly obscured by the woman's bright hair and face, as they whirl together, performing that most alluring fantasy: the dream of powerful femininity. Artifice, humour, self-mockery, ironic distance, closeness, consciousness of 'self'; each term suggests the survival strategies of independent femininity, as women struggled to position themselves in a male world. A letter from Mrs. T. C., published on *Woman's* correspondence page a few weeks later, signals at least one reader's response. Complaining about the "unnecessary" intrusion of a man on the

cover of a publication that “by virtue of its title as well as its contents, we can call our own”, Mrs. T. C. declared, with more than a little feeling, “I’d like *Woman* to get by without masculine aid.” The no-nonsense tone of this straightforward sentiment suggests both the power of everyday notions of feminine modernity, clearly but quietly expressed, and the value of the magazine as a space in which to imagine them (*W* 11.12.1937: 3).

Figure 120

Figure 119