



Daily (for the jet set crowd) and *Seventeen* (for 8th graders). These are *Mademoiselle*, *Glamour*, and *Vogue*. Although they are similar, if not identical on the surface, there are differences.

The career girl's Bible

Ostensibly, *Mademoiselle* is the college-educated career girl's Bible, telling them a lot more than just how to button this year's blouse. It leans on its reputation as a literate publication. (They never let you forget that Sylvia Plath was once a guest editor.) Each issue contains poetry and fiction, regular reviews of the arts and special interest columns, e.g., "The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Sex."

But *Mlle's* meat and potatoes is ultimately, clothes. The first two-thirds of each issue is advertising of them, and such accessories to them as jewelry, hair dye, make-up, shoes, underwear, nail polish, cars, glasses, purses, perfume, silverware, furniture, contraceptives, Jamaica and the National Guard.

Only after plowing through all that does one finally arrive at the title page, "Mlle's Next Word," which explains what is to be demonstrated in the layout that follows: "Now Sexy Is In" or "The New Summer Fates." (They are not above contradicting themselves, and after stocking your closet with monochromatic pastels, you may find that the next issue announces "The Big, Bold Brights.")

Glamour has no pretensions to high culture. Art reviews are replaced by "how-to" articles and "test yourself" quizzes, e.g.,

"How To Have a Happy Confrontation," or "How To Stop Making the Same Dumb Mistakes."

Glamour's fashion pages lean toward the basic "what-looks-good-around-the-water-cooler" are always fresh and wholesome—a type that is evidently in short supply since they've used the same cover girl for every other issue for the past couple of years.

If money is no object...

At the other end of the scale from *Glamour* is *Vogue*, regarded as the most sophisticated and intelligent of all women's fashion mags.

Vogue doesn't putz around with the "50 great fashion finds for a working girl's budget." They run spreads on seasonal collections with portraits of the beaming designers, and occasionally—not often—the price of some of the highlights, e.g., a gold lame pantsuit for \$1,300 or, "if money is no object," a \$35,000 sable coat.

Its avant-garde fashion photography is celebrated. A shoe ad that shows a woman stumbling from a burning car, an ad for something that shows a woman with a cord plugged into her back . . . the variety is endless. The models in *Vogue* are dark-eyed, brooding, with faces shaped like kites, unless they decide to shock the reader with Farrah F-M and her 23 visible teeth.

Like its sister publications *Vogue* is very big on health and exercise. Subtle class differences show up here as *Vogue* readers are advised to "consult your doctor" before undertaking the simplest routine.

Whose reality?

How closely do these magazines reflect reality? Well, it is someone's reality, but the clothes in *Vogue* were never meant to be worn on the bus. (*Glamour* and *Mlle* at least occasionally acknowledge that some of their readers could do with a bargain.) On the point of "Women as sex objects," despite the approach of the advertisements, the copy in all three Conde Nast magazines encourages women to be aggressive, individualistic and accomplished—within a capitalistic framework, of course.

I buy these rags every month—all three of them—and I'm still not sure why. I can't afford the clothes; I hate exercise; I don't like to cook—and I seldom read the articles. I guess maybe I hope to learn how to stop making the same dumb mistakes.

—P. Hertel

CONFESSIONS TURN TO ASSERTIVE- NESS TRAINING

Although confession magazines are not my escape reading (I'm hooked on *Vogue* for that), I buy them every once in a while to find out where the ideological front really is.

If you line up magazines next to the classes to whom they are addressed, you'll find—over the last ten years—relatively little change in *Vogue* at the top of the economic ladder and considerable change in the confession maga-

zines that occupy the lower rungs. This, despite the fact that the format of confessions plays down the changes in content whereas the format of *Vogue* (et al.) is geared to convincing the reader that lifestyle changes of such magnitude are taking place that substantial outlays of money can be justified as absolutely necessary for coping with them.

This should come as no great surprise if we look at the social reality that is processed and packaged by these magazines. For the lifestyles of the upper bourgeoisie are relatively static whereas the working class must constantly adapt to change if it is to survive.

The advantages of a working wife

A year or two before the current recession I read a confession magazine story called "My Husband Caught Me Doing the Secret Sin," which ran as follows:

The heroine visits an orphanage with a woman friend who is adopting a child and is captivated by some of the unadoptable children she sees there. The next day she does her housework and then yields to this terrible urge she's been getting lately. She goes back in her mind to her wedding night (no weird fantasies for her) and just as she climaxes her husband walks in the door. "Aren't I man enough for you?" he shouts, then won't even talk to her. Her woman friend suggests a doctor she might see to find out what is wrong with her. The source of the problem, the doctor explains, is that she and her husband have different rhythms because he works and she doesn't. So the heroine saves her marriage and her husband's ego by getting a job with those unadoptable children at the orphan asylum.

Because confession magazine stories are firmly grounded in the daily details of working class life, going back to work is not generally presented as an avenue to personal fulfillment for women, except under circumstances like the following:

We were silent for a moment. Then Mom said quietly, "Let me explain how I feel about this, Heather. You see, in the first place, there is the question of money. Like you said, we're not poor. But your father is working awfully hard to keep us going, and he's not getting any younger. And I feel I ought to do my share. You can understand that, can't you?"

"I guess so," I mumbled. "But there's more to it than that," she went on. "There is me and what I am going to do with myself from now until I'm 65."

"What do you mean, Mom? Why should anything be different for you?"

She sighed. "Well, honey, just try to see it from my point of view. Tad will be graduating and he'll either go away to college or into the service. And in a few more years you'll probably be out of the house too. Your dad has his work and his organizations. So where does that leave me?"

"And having that job—that's going to make you feel like you're needed again?"

She nodded.

(*Modern Romances*, December 1977)

You'll notice that being "out of the house" does not mean going to college for Heather. Her brother may go, but the college experience has not found its way into the lives of confession magazine characters. What has found its way in is abortion, sex therapy, premarital sex, assertiveness training, interracial marriage and "total womanhood."

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Graphic/Tom Greenfeder

Assertiveness, yes; abortion, no

Sex therapy and (more recently) assertiveness training have blended smoothly into the confession formula, usually through the agency of a doctor. For instance, "I'm Afraid I'm Going Out of My Mind" (*Modern Romances*, December 1977) features a wife who, when the alarm goes off at six o'clock, has been "lying sleepless for hours" but is so overwhelmed with fatigue she can't get up to fix breakfast for her husband, who worked a 12-hour shift the day before and yells at her for being lazy. While recuperating from an unsuccessful suicide attempt, she turns on a talk show where a Dr. Graham is discussing depression. "One of the first things I tell my patients," he says, "is to learn to say 'no' to people." She does this more and more, finally running off to a hotel for two weeks, at the end of which she calls up her husband and comes home to his waiting arms a cured woman.

There is a lot left out of the confession magazine world for all its acceptance of women working, marital infidelity and other threats to heterosexual bliss. Attempts at reconciliation never fail. Single parents still tend to be widows and widowers, the current statistics on divorce rates notwithstanding. This is a world where life with another man can never be better than life with the one you have, a world where one can move sideways, as it were, but never up, where people who strive for more than what their parents had find that affluence means nothing but kicks.

This probably explains the absence of college as an option for its inhabitants. It also explains why the genre can be progressively more and more liberal in matters of heterosexual morality. For what does it matter what people do in their private lives so long as the wish for more is contained therein?

—Kate Ellis

MS—STILL THE ONLY LARGE CIRCULATION FEMINIST MAGAZINE

In *Ms.* magazine's first issue, July 1972, the editors offered a statement of purpose that bubbled with optimism about this new, national feminist journal's ability to provide the women's movement with its own communication and outreach. Priority was to be placed on activist-oriented articles that would speak directly to the concerns of working-class women and welfare mothers, as well as the reliable middle-class constituency. A

firm stand was taken on advertising: no ads insulting to women would appear in *Ms.*

Five years later that statement seems naive, and today's *Ms.* seems far removed from it. There are plenty of ads in *Ms.* that promote sexist stereotypes if they do

not actually insult women, and the notion that the magazine's mission is to serve the grass roots of the women's movement seems a dead letter.

The change did not come about overnight.

An examination of the contents of issues in 1972 and 1973 shows that there was coverage of a broad range of feminist concerns: news articles and features on sports, ERA, lesbianism, poverty as it affects women, psychology and housework. But in the years that followed there were more articles on the arts and individual artists, interviews with glamorous or successful women who have "made it" in a man's world and tips on how you can do the same.

There is now a steady flow of advice on credit problems. Therapy has replaced the issue-oriented, newsy, political approach. The magazine has become a forum for some excellent fiction writers and journalists, but its appeal is to a generally professional readership, and it is increasingly disengaged from the struggles of the feminist movement.

Reasons for the shift in focus may be the isolation of the New York women who founded and produce *Ms.* from the majority of activists in feminist projects in the rest of the country, as well as the gigantic job of getting out a successful mass-marketed

monthly. The harsh facts of contemporary publishing are that you must create a big readership fast or go the way of *Life* and *Look*.

And *Ms.* is the only mass-circulation feminist publication around.

With a circulation of 2.5 million, it reaches far more women than any feminist organization in the U.S. Even those who are most critical of it, read it. (A recent survey done by a radical, separatist, feminist publication showed that over 80 percent of its readership regularly reads *Ms.*)

There is some evidence of a repoliticalization of *Ms.* in the last 12 months, perhaps because the growth of anti-feminism has recharged the editors' commitment. Or perhaps because success allows them to be more daring.

But even when the magazine gives consistent coverage to a system problem like patriarchy or sexism, the solutions offered are simplistic and individual. The feminist vision projected is heartily optimistic: despite the nasty pervasiveness of male chauvinism, with some wit and hard work you (you healthy, educated, middle-class women) can get in touch with your own strengths and develop your own "self," career or whatever, supported by the vibes of that force of feminism—sisterhood.

Questions related to fighting on a broad front are never asked. *Ms.* has always been weak on the kind of theoretical analysis that might tie together the many problems it reports. The political spectrum of its contributors is wide, from radical, even separatist feminism to the anti-socialist bias that surfaces in regular contributors like Robin Morgan. But the predominant tone is progressive/liberal reformism.

But even accepting as incurable all its shortcomings, one must be glad that millions of women keep buying a magazine that chips away at the "consciousness" cultivated by *Family Circle*, *Vogue* and the other magazines that American women buy by the millions.

—Torie Osborn

A SELECTED LIST OF WOMEN'S MOVEMENT PUBLICATIONS

The Now Times, quarterly, to the membership of NOW, 425 13th St. NW, Washington, DC 20004.

The Majority Report, bi-weekly newspaper, 74 Grove St., New York, NY 10014.

Women: A Journal of Liberation, quarterly journal, 3028 Greenmount Ave., Baltimore, MD 21218.

Spokeswoman, monthly digest of women's news, 53 W. Jackson Blvd., Chicago, IL 60604.

Off Our Backs, monthly newspaper, 1724 20th St. NW, Washington, DC 20009.

Quest, quarterly theoretical journal, P.O. Box 8845, Washington, DC 20003.

Media Report to Women, monthly plus year-book, 3306 Ross Place, Washington, DC 20008.

Prime Time, concerns of older women, 168 W. 86th St., New York, NY 10024.

Chrysallis, literary quarterly, 1727 N. Spring St., Los Angeles, CA 90012.

Country Woman, five times a year, Albion, CA 95410.

Too numerous to list are special interest publications on women's studies, art and music, lesbian concerns, and many excellent local newspapers including *Pandora* in Seattle, *Big Mama Rag* in Boulder, and *Herself* in Ann Arbor, Mich.



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