

MS. MAGAZINE:
AN IDEOLOGICAL VEHICLE IN A CONSUMER SETTING

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August, 1993

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
and Research in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

This thesis traces the history and development of Ms. magazine, in its three incarnations, between 1972 and 1992. Since its inception as a distinctly feminist monthly, Ms. has drifted between two categories of popular cultural artifacts (mainstream consumer culture and feminist counterculture) while distinguishing itself as the only national feminist monthly in the United States, a key economic and symbolic feminist institution. The author compares the economic bases, ideological orientations and readerships of Ms.' three incarnations in order to examine the ways in which an ideological vehicle negotiates a consumer setting like the women's magazine industry. While serving to highlight debates surrounding the limitations of liberal feminist ideology, the history and development of Ms. magazine also raises questions concerning the validity of categories like "mainstream consumer culture/feminist counterculture" where contemporary women's media are concerned.

ABSTRACT

Cette thèse retrace l'histoire et l'évolution des trois incarnations de la revue Ms. entre 1972 et 1992. Depuis sa commencement en 1972, Ms. s'est distinguée comme la seule revue féministe nationale aux Etats-Unis, une institution économique et symbolique importante. L'auteure compare les bases économiques, les orientations idéologiques et les lectrices/eurs des trois incarnations de Ms. afin d'examiner les stratégies de survie d'un périodique idéologique dans le milieu de la presse féminine. L'histoire et l'évolution de Ms. servent à démontrer les débats au sein du féminisme libéral ainsi qu'elles mettent en question la validité des catégories "culture de consommation/culture féministe alternative" en ce qui concerne les médias contemporains qui s'adressent aux femmes.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Although this is an insufficient way to thank the people whose support made the writing of this thesis possible, I will attempt to do so anyway:

My parents, who have consistently supported me in all of my endeavours and without whose love and encouragement none of my accomplishments would have been possible.

My co-students and professors at the GPC, who contributed to an enjoyable and enriching learning environment.

Haidee Wasson, who provided endless emotional support, intellectual stimulation, some great meals and lots of laughter.

Ms. Managing Editor Barbara Findlen, for taking the time out from her busy schedule to provide me with the invaluable information and insight that only a person directly involved with the publication could provide.

And last, but definitely not least, my thesis supervisor, Gertrude J. Robinson, who supplied enthusiastic support, intellectual challenge and encouragement from beginning to end.

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Chapter 1

A Women's Movement Vehicle Within A Consumer FrameworkFocus -

For the most part, feminist critical practices have remained apart from the realm of popular publishing, which has traditionally followed the practices of the consumerist publishing system. Feminist publications have typically appeared as journals or non-consumerist magazines like Britain's Spare Rib or the North American Ms.. Indeed, the latter has been described as everything from a "popularizing tool" (McCabe, 1989, 4) to the "most outstanding example of women's magazine responsiveness to the women's movement anywhere in the world" (Ferguson, 1983, 84). In her best-selling, critically acclaimed chronicle of the so-called "backlash" against feminism during the 1980's, Susan Faludi uses Ms. ("the flagship of feminist journalism") and its letters column as a gauge measuring women's very thoughts and feelings concerning the movement (Faludi, 1991, 58).

If, like all other discourses, feminism needs to be rooted in social institutions (Ballaster et al., 1991, 168) in order to acquire legitimacy and political clout, the history and development of an avowedly feminist and high-profile publication like Ms. magazine will undoubtedly shed light on the evolution and institutionalization of the American women's movement itself, its relationship to the dominant order and its role as a catalyst for or recorder of change. As Gail Pool argues in the context of women's publications as a whole,

the record of these self-consciously feminist newspapers and periodicals parallels the vicissitudes of the women's movement: exciting, vital, problematic and highly precarious (Pool, 1983, 467).

Over the course of its twenty-year history, Ms. has drifted between two poles or categories of popular cultural offerings: mainstream culture and feminist counterculture. From its inception in 1972 as a distinctly feminist monthly, Ms. had become, by the late 1980's, virtually indistinguishable from its glossy consumerist counterparts which are calculated to appeal to the "right" kind of female consumer in order to attract maximum advertising revenues and produce profits (Steiner, 1992, 130). Following a short publishing hiatus, Ms. reappeared in June 1990 as an advertising-free, bi-monthly journal stressing the latest in feminist analysis and activism. Media pundits predicted its demise but Ms.: The World of Women has, to date, managed to stay afloat.

Ideologically, Ms. is unique within the pantheon of high-profile women's magazines because it has a socio-political agenda, the explication and advocacy of a North American version of liberal feminism, as opposed to a conservative, consumerist program. Thus, the main questions to be examined are the following: How can an ideological vehicle like Ms. be placed into a consumerist setting and how does Ms. negotiate this apparent contradiction? Further questions/contradictions are then raised: how does one finance such an ideological vehicle in a consumer setting, how does such a vehicle distinguish itself in terms of "management" style and how, in turn, do these apparent tensions manifest themselves in its discourse? These questions will serve as the focal points of this project.

Despite Ms.' rather elusive position within the mainstream culture/feminist counterculture framework, isolating Ms. as an anomaly within the periodical-publishing world as a starting point for analysis would be a short-sighted strategy. Therefore, Ms. must be examined in the context of developments within the genre of women's periodicals and magazine publishing as a whole. Only then can we begin to properly assess Ms.' own circumstances and thus situate it within the pantheon of women's magazines. Indeed, Ms.' course of development, along with that of the women's magazine genre in general, indicate that categorization in terms of alternative/mainstream and commercial/non-commercial are increasingly problematic. To begin with, however, Ms.' relationship to the U.S. feminist movement as a whole must be examined, for in order to discuss a self consciously feminist publication like Ms., one has to take into account the political setting from which it came into being.

Relationship of Ms. to the American Women's Movement

The second wave of the American women's movement of the 1960's and 1970's was manifested in a wide variety of groups, styles and organizations. Sara Evans isolates three phases of women's activism in the 1960's that "weave together and pull apart in new ways by the 1970's": the repoliticization of domesticity, the renewed activism of professional women and the emergence of a "women's liberation" movement out of the civil rights movement and the activities of the New Left (Evans, 1992, 63).

Women's rights movements tend to emerge in the larger context of

widespread social change when women discover and create spaces in which they can foster a collective identity and sense of responsibility (Evans, 1989, 264). For many women, larger social changes in the 1960's (ie. greater educational opportunities, the development of the oral contraceptive, the end of the Cold War consensus) highlighted the problematic and contradictory nature of the domestic ideology of the 1950's. As new possibilities became apparent and a new consciousness struggled to articulate itself, housewives - the majority of American adult women - faced difficult dilemmas. Suburban housewives, in particular, began to construct an activist lifestyle which extended their mothering roles into the community through voluntary associations (ie. PTA, girl scouts, churches), but lacked concepts to describe or validate what they did (Evans, 1989, 267). Although they did not define this type of community work as "political", they nonetheless honed political skills and generated a new form of "politicized domesticity, a political claim on society in the name of family loyalty" (Evans, 1989, 268).

One particular event marks this stream of activism: the Women's Strike for Peace, held on November 1, 1961, to draw attention to "mother's issues", namely the radioactive testing of nuclear weapons. Most of the estimated 50,000 strikers were white, middle-class and educated, and had found themselves drawn into politics by growing fears for their children's futures as well as by the examples of civil rights activists in the south (Evans, 1989, 268). Indeed, the southern civil rights movement represents another form of politicized domesticity flourishing at this time, but its activism was interpreted largely in racial terms rather than in terms of gender.

However, as Evans argues, the conceptualization and reintroduction of a distinct new "feminist" consciousness derived from two groups of middle-class women: the first group consisted mainly of professional women, while the second drew on younger, more radical women already active in the civil rights and New Left movements. Likewise, Jo Freeman (1975) identifies these two streams as the "older" and "younger" branches of the movement respectively, arguing that they represent different strata of society with different styles, orientations, values and forms of organization.

The activism of the "older"/professional branch can be traced back to 1961 and President John F. Kennedy's appointment of the President's Commission on the Status of Women. Directed by Esther Peterson, a labour educator, lobbyist and head of the Women's Bureau, and chaired by Eleanor Roosevelt, the Commission consisted of members, staff and seven technical committees drawn from labour unions, women's organizations and government agencies.¹ Published in 1963, the Commission's report documented continuing discrimination in employment, pay disparities, lack of child care assistance and legal inequality faced by women, and led to a presidential order requiring that the civil service hire in a non-discriminatory manner; it also

¹The majority of Commissioners opposed the Equal Rights Amendment, arguing that "equality of rights under the law" was already achieved by the 5th and 14th Amendments to the Constitution, therefore, no amendment was needed "now"; the only ERA supporter on the Commission, lawyer Marguerite Rawalt, insisted on the insertion of "now", thus allowing for the possibility of change if the Supreme Court failed to accept the Commission's interpretation (Evans, 1989, 274-5).

provided documentation for advocates of the 1963 Equal Pay Act, as well as stimulated the creation of similar commissions in nearly every state (Evans, 1992, 66).

The Commission's findings also gave quantified validation to the problems experienced and observed by individual professional women who had not previously interpreted their personal experiences as part of an encompassing pattern of discrimination (Evans, 1992, 66). The year 1963 also marked the publication of Betty Friedan's The Feminine Mystique, a work that helped to articulate the frustrations and dilemmas of contemporary American women who had bought into the idealized, infantilizing domestic ideology of the 1950's. The stage was thus set for the debate surrounding the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Virginia congressman Howard Smith, encouraged by the National Women's Party, suggested that "sex" be included with "race, creed, and national origin" in the bill's Title VII, which guarded against discrimination in employment. Although this suggestion was initially met with dismissive laughter on the part of Smith's colleagues, congresswoman Martha Griffiths and senator Margaret Chase Smith set to work to pass the amendment which made Title VII "the strongest legal tool yet available to women" (Evans, 1989, 276).

The creation of NOW (National Organization for Women), the first and major structure of the modern American women's movement, emerged from a convergence of these various factors: the task of enforcing Title VII, the self-organization and clarity of purpose of the women who had worked on the commissions, along with a growing awareness that there existed no organized representation of women's interests capable of lobbying for such enforcement (Evans, 1992, 67). As Betty Friedan

relates in It Changed My Life:

"...in 1966 I saw that nothing was going to happen to most women except talk, words, words, words, unless we organized a movement to change society, as the blacks had done...I...began to organize, with other women, the movement 'to take action, to bring women into the mainstream of American society now...full equality for women in fully equal partnership with men'" (Friedan, 1976, xvi).

NOW officially began on October 29, 1966 with approximately 100 members, Friedan as President, the Women's Bureau's Kay Clarenbach as Chairman of the Board, former EEOC commissioner Richard Graham as Vice-President ("a male visible in NOW from the beginning, not as a token but as a fighter for equality" (Friedan, 1976, 85)) and Caroline Davis of the United Auto Workers' Union as secretary-treasurer, thus giving NOW full access to the UAW's printing, mailing and membership records facilities. Concentrating on the enforcement of anti-discrimination legislation, NOW displayed what Jo Freeman distinguishes as the organizational characteristics of the "older" stream of the women's movement: it focussed on the legal and economic problems facing women and operated in a traditionally "formal" style, with elected officers, boards of directors and other trappings of democratic structure and procedure (Freeman, 1975, 50).

Sara Evans argues that NOW's founders' lack of organizational skills² kept it from immediately growing into a national movement (Evans, 1989, 278). Furthermore, the organization's focus on "rights" and "individuals" left the bonds of "sisterhood" unarticulated and

²NOW's endorsement of the ERA in 1968 forced the UAW women to withdraw, thus leaving the former without the efficient, centralized organizational facilities to which it previously had access.

depoliticized; abstracted from communal relations, NOW's credo failed to speak to large numbers of women whose dilemmas, separate from the distinct problems of professional women, did not fit into any culturally available identity or definition of womanhood (Evans, 1989, 278; Evans, 1992, 68). The question of female "identity" was thus addressed by Evans' third phase of feminist activism: "women's liberation".

This "younger" branch of feminism is characterized by Freeman as "all mass base", with little or no national organization; it consisted of innumerable small groups (composed of mainly white, middle-class, college-educated women) engaged in various consciousness-raising and racial integration activities, and whose contact with one another was tenuous at best (Freeman, 1975, 50). Although it is tempting to label these two branches of the movement "reformist" and "radical" respectively, these terms actually tell us little of relevance (Freeman, 1975, 50). NOW's membership, for instance, has always had a liberal orientation and has been particularly susceptible to the influence of the "younger" branch (Freeman, 1975, 92). Great care must be taken in adopting such terminology, as the example of Ms. will serve to further illustrate.

Growing out of the experiences of younger women who were very similar to the NOW founders in terms of education, class, and background, the "women's liberation" stream of the movement was nonetheless shaped differently due to its members' earlier participation in the civil rights and New Left movements (Evans, 1992, 69). Within these social movements, the female activists were exposed to egalitarian ideas and an experience of participatory democracy that

enabled them to challenge prevailing cultural definitions of femininity (Evans, 1992, 69). Through a process they termed "consciousness-raising", women explored the political meaning of their personal experiences. The consciousness-raising group thus became a powerful organizing tool, politicizing the bonds between "sisters" and serving as bases for political action.

By 1970, the term "women's lib" had entered popular parlance. Substantial stories on the movement were appearing in the media, while the combined effects of its agitation and the legal and legislative strategies of organizations like NOW and WEAL (Women's Equity Action League) appeared to be transforming American society (Evans, 1989, 287). When NOW called for a Women's Strike for Equality on August 26, 1970, "a political miracle experienced by the women who made it happen" (Friedan, 1976, 146), the movement gained new visibility and credibility. It continued to gain momentum in the early 1970's, with legislative victories probably reaching an apex in 1972 (Evans, 1989, 290).

By this time, journalist Gloria Steinem was lecturing regularly as "a determined missionary for women's liberation" (Cohen, 1988, 320). At a Smith College commencement address, Steinem delivered an interpretation of history popular at the time in "radical" feminist groups:

"Male rule, this concept held, was a recent phenomenon. Originally - for 5,000 years, in fact - women had ruled the world in a gynococracy. The discovery of the male role in reproduction had led, as Gloria put it, to 'the idea of ownership...of property and of children, the origin of marriage, which was really locking up women long enough to make sure who the father was'" (Cohen, 1988, 321).

Taking a comparatively extreme line, Steinem's message was more "radical" and antagonistic to men than Friedan's and NOW's vision of "equal partnership". Nevertheless, in keeping with the media's penchant for appointing movement "leaders" (Freeman, 1975, 120), the photogenic and charismatic Steinem found herself featured on the cover of the August 16, 1971 issue of Newsweek, proclaimed by the newsmagazine as the personification of the movement itself (Cohen, 1988, 122).

Frustrated with the old "feminine" and "masculine" stereotypes still appearing in the contemporary media, women writers and editors, as well as readers, longed for a new kind of magazine - for, by, and about women - that supported the definition of feminism: the equality and full humanity of women and men (Steinem, 1984, 3). The March 18, 1970 sit-in at the Ladies' Home Journal, where 200 women occupied its offices and stayed for eleven hours of debate and negotiation with its male editor, suggested that the old magazine formula, with its emphases on traditional femininity, consumerism and domesticity, did not appeal to the sensibilities of contemporary American feminists. The fact that periodicals directed at women were totally male-owned and controlled, coupled with an awareness on the part of female journalists of many male editors' denigrating attitudes toward their women readers, mobilized the professionalism needed to launch a national, inclusive, female-controlled magazine for women (Steinem, 1984, 4). Given the popularity and high media profile of the movement at the time, it appeared inevitable that some media innovator would venture into feminism by way of the lucrative women's magazine rather than the modest feminist presses. Clay Felker, publisher of and

Steinem's boss at New York magazine filled this role and, recognizing that Steinem's "celebrity" status would attract a great deal of publicity for the fledgling journal, put her in charge of the project.

Appearing first as a forty-page insert in New York's December 20, 1971 issue and then in January 1972 as a 128-page "one-shot", Ms. was greeted enthusiastically (ie. 250,000 copies sold out in eight days, 75,000 subscription requests were mailed in). This response helped Steinem raise \$20,000 from publisher Katharine Graham and \$1 million from Warner Communications to launch a monthly. With its generous bankroll, Ms. was destined to become the most popular voice of feminism in North America and would come to address nearly every issue of concern to the movement (Cohen, 1988, 130).

Ms. was conceived at about the same time as Steinem's and Brenda Feigen Fasteau's Women's Action Alliance (WAA), an organizational response to the number of requests for information about the movement they and others had received. Indeed, according to Freeman, Ms. was to be the WAA's self-supporting newsletter, and foundation support was sought (Freeman, 1975, 154). The WAA was seen as a non-political complement to the National Women's Political Caucus, formed in July 1971 by Steinem, Bella Abzug, Betty Friedan and Shirley Chisholm, with the aim of supporting women's issues and getting more women elected and appointed to public office (Freeman, 1975, 161). The WAA sees itself as service-oriented and educational in nature, teaching feminists how to appeal to foundations for project support. Viewing organizations like NOW and WEAL (Women's Equity Action League) as "closed clubs", the WAA is oriented toward the so-called "younger"

branch of the movement (Freeman, 1975, 154).

The two projects, the WAA and Ms., thus acquired separate identities as they grew. The latter emerged as a slick magazine meant to reach out to women in a populist way that a newsletter could not. As a profit-making concern, Ms. was also intended to put money back into the movement:

"If we do make it, we will own ourselves. We will also be able to give a healthy percentage of our profits back to the Women's Movement, to programs and projects that can help change women's lives" (Ms., July 1972, 4).

A vital, though significantly less visible, underpinning of Ms. magazine was conceived as a conduit whereby these profits could be channelled back into the movement: the Ms. Foundation for Women. Although Ms.' editors concede that the "idea of plowing back profits to activists was optimistic", the Foundation is nonetheless the only national, public, multiracial, multi-issue women's fund giving grants to women's projects that lack funding by traditional sources (Ms., July/August 1991, 105). There is no organizational link between the magazine and the Foundation: as Steinem writes in the July/August 1991 issue of Ms., "there is again no more than a spiritual connection between these pages and the Ms. Foundation." She then goes on to relate that Dale Lang, the current owner of Ms. magazine, has pledged that any extra income will be given over, thus supplementing the charitable donations made to the Foundation.

Among the Ms. Foundation for Women grantees are: Charon Asetoyer, founder of the Native American Women's Health Education Resource Centre, addressing such issues as economic development, education,

AIDS awareness and land and water rights at the Yanlton Sioux Reservation in Lake Andes, South Dakota; Donna Red Wing, head of the Lesbian Community Project of Portland, Oregon, addressing hate crimes targeted at lesbians; Young Shin, founder of the Asian Immigrant Women Advocates in Oakland, California, helping Asian women achieve economic justice by providing services on job rights, leadership development and support networks (Ms., July/August 1991, 105).

Ms. magazine has become a popular and highly visible feminist institution. Although conceived by the "younger", seemingly more "radical" contingent of the movement, Ms. illustrates that terms like "reformist"/"radical" are highly problematic, for Ms.' overall middle-class, liberal bias suggests an ideological orientation more in line with NOW's "equal partnership" strategy than radical separatist feminism. Clearly, Ms.' line of argument derives from liberal-democratic theory and the espousal of "equal rationality": since women and men have equal standing as rational moral agents, both are qualified to fulfill social and political roles at any level (Cirkson and Cuklanz, 1992, 23), a philosophy currently elaborated in the work of both Steinem and Friedan, as well as Molly Yard (formerly of NOW) and Faye Wattleton (formerly of Planned Parenthood). But, has Ms., in its latest incarnation, moved towards adopting a relatively more "radical" line of argument, having shed the trappings of the mainstream, mass-appeal consumerist magazine? This is a question that must be considered.

Bibliography: Women's Magazines and Feminist Scholarship -

Research on women's magazines encompasses a number of different approaches; these approaches fall into a larger framework mapping out feminist popular culture scholarship in general. In this section, I will be outlining these categories and subcategories, placing particular approaches to the study of women's magazines within the larger rubric of feminist approaches to the study of popular culture, as set out by Lana Rakow in her article "Feminist Approaches to Popular Culture: Giving Patriarchy its Due" (1986). I will then elaborate on why certain approaches are relevant to the study of Ms. and explain why five works are useful as theoretical and methodological tools for my project.

To a large extent, reflections on the experiences of women have taken place within the rubric of women's literature and writing. However, one of the most understudied areas of this literature and writing has been that of women's magazines, despite the fact that these periodicals provide us with a substantial record of women's culture. As Mary Ellen Zuckerman (1991) points out, media historians have, by and large, neglected to analyze and interpret the history of women's magazines in any comprehensive manner. This in turn can be explained by the fact that there exists a dearth of usable sources for such a work: records of writers, publishing companies, editorial strategies and business information are not easily obtainable (Zuckerman, 1991, vii). Existing research on women's journals approaches these texts from a number of different perspectives.

Zuckerman outlines a historiography of scholarship on women's magazines in her introduction to Sources on the History of Women's Magazines, 1792-1960: An Annotated Bibliography (1991), pointing out that this research typically focusses on particular "aspects" of the magazines (ie. the histories of individual journals, critiques of the genre as a whole, content analyses examining one element or theme) (Zuckerman, 1991, xii).

Approaching the genre from the perspective of business and financial concerns, advertisers and publishers have written on women's magazines. Advertisers emphasize that magazines serve as good media vehicles while publishers' market research studies and promotional materials provide valuable primary sources that can be examined for evidence elucidating the relationships between magazines, their readers and advertisers (Zuckerman, 1991, xv). Led by the pioneering publishing company of Cyrus Curtis, which began conducting research studies in the 1890's, major women's magazine publishers have carried out studies on readers, markets, advertisers and competitors (Zuckerman, 1991, xv). Although scant attention has been paid to the business aspect of magazines (excepting critical analyses of the role of advertising), competition within and without the periodical-publishing industry crucially affects the development and content of journals (Zuckerman, 1991, xv).

Criticism provides for a highly visible stream of scholarship on women's magazines. Perhaps the best-known critic of these texts and their content is Betty Friedan who argued in her classic 1963 work, The Feminine Mystique, that these journals played a crucial role in reinforcing an idealized ideology of domesticity (Zuckerman, 1991,

xvi). Following Friedan's lead, many scholars (ie. Carol Wald (1975), Kathryn Weibel (1977)) have set out to test her thesis through quantitative content analyses, focussing on images of women in the media and on the content of women's magazines; this "images and representations" approach to popular cultural artifacts marks the entree of contemporary feminism to the study of these texts (Rafow, 1986, 24). Inspired by the women's movement, female scholars often selected topic oriented towards women for their research; that so few have moved beyond content analyses and questions concerning the relationship between content and its "effects" on readers testifies to the difficulty of writing on women's magazines, a topic that "lacks secondary sources and a well-defined body of literature" (Zuckerman, 1991, xvii). I will be drawing to some degree on this "images and representations" approach in my third chapter where a discourse analysis of Ms. over its three periods of development will be used as a component tracing change in the magazine's ideological direction.

Some of the most compelling scholarship to emerge in recent years has concentrated on examining what is offered to readers by popular texts, namely romance novels, magazines, soap operas and so on, and poses the following question: what needs do these popular cultural artifacts address? The work of scholars like Tania Modleski (Loving With A Vengeance: Mass Produced Fantasies for Women, 1984), Janice Radway (Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature, 1984), and Ien Ang (Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic

Imagination, 1985), is of interest here. Proponents of this line of argument contend that mass-market magazines empower readers rather than weaken them or render them passive, as traditional critiques of popular culture have maintained; indeed, these artifacts bind women to one another, "giving them a common language, reference points, a cultural context" (Zuckerman, 1991, xvi).

Rakow labels this brand of feminist scholarship the "Reception and Experience Approach", focussing on the readers (or viewers) of popular cultural products within particular social situations or frames of understanding (Rakow, 1986, 12). The advantage of such an approach lies in its ability to begin to articulate the complex relationship between readers and their magazines. The problems with this perspective stem from the tension that exists between "ordinary" women and feminist scholars: researchers are faced with the problem of respecting other women's understanding of their own lives and experiences which may differ from feminists' interpretations of their situation (Rakow, 1986, 35). The "reception and experience" approach is appealing in that it serves to balance an otherwise text-oriented approach to popular culture.

Coming primarily from a leftist or Marxist orientation, much recent scholarship has concentrated on the role of journals in creating and reinforcing the tendencies characteristic of an individualistic, consumption-oriented society. For example, much of the recent work on British women's magazines provide history, analysis, explanation and discussion of the function of magazines within contemporary culture (Zuckerman, 1991, xxiii n.5). Some examples of this work are Marjorie Ferguson's Forever Feminine (1983),

Cynthia White's Women's Magazines, 1693-1968 (1970), and Janice Winship's Inside Women's Magazines (1987). Rakow characterizes this brand of scholarship as the "Cultural Theory Approach", which looks at the larger set of social and economic arrangements that produce culture in order to understand their implications for women's position and experience (Rakow, 1986, 35).

I will be drawing primarily from five sources which are grounded in this approach. They are: Janice Winship's Inside Women's Magazines (1987), E. Ann Kaplan's Rocking Around the Clock: Music Television, Postmodernism and Consumer Culture (1987), Marjorie Ferguson's Forever Feminine: Women's Magazines and the Cult of Femininity (1983), Ballaster, Beetham, Frazer and Hebron's Women's Worlds: Ideology, Femininity and the Women's Magazine (1991), and Ellen McCracken's Decoding Women's Magazines: From Mademoiselle to Ms. (1993). I would locate these studies within Rakow's "Cultural Theory" category of feminist approaches to popular culture. One prevalent connecting theme can be isolated throughout these works: in addition to contextualizing the women's periodicals⁵ as a profit-making business concern, all five studies appear to be working with the notion that it is in ideology that gender is produced and reproduced. Therefore, a medium's role in creating, perpetuating and sustaining its particular ideological frame needs to be carefully investigated. The mass artifact provides a crucial site for analysis because it represents the intersection between economic and industrial interests, an elaborate textual system and an example of a leisure/entertainment activity, highlighting the complex set of practices and relations that

⁵Although Kaplan does not focus on the women's magazine, her particular approach to the popular cultural artifact, "medium as apparatus", is useful to my project, as I will go on to elaborate.

feed into an ideological system (White, 1992, 170).

Because I am focussing on Ms. as an ideological vehicle within a consumer setting, promoting a brand of North American liberal feminism, these studies are relevant to my project. I will be employing Janice Winship's definition of ideology, a variation on Stuart Hall's notion of the term, as a site of struggle for competing definitions of reality, and ideological power as the power to signify events in a particular way. Strongly influenced by the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies and its theoretical sources (ie. Barthesian semiotics, the structural Marxism of Althusser, the social theory of Gramsci), Winship defines ideology as the common sense knowledges to be found in various media (ie. newspapers, magazines, films, scholarly books) which shape how people think, act and feel about their daily lives:

"...from a political position 'outside' them...ideologies tend to render certain aspects of life as natural, but also as just what seems normal and proper, rather than as the outcome of social and historical factors. Seen from 'inside', ideologies appear to be right and appropriate for deciding how to conduct one's life. And they do not seem to be about politics at all" (Winship, 1987, 21).

Every magazine has its own ideological pattern, offering knowledge, posing problems and suggesting solutions that will appeal to its particular group of readers. If, as Lana Rakow argues, it is in ideology that the meaning of gender is produced and reproduced (Rakow, 1986 (2), 23), then an examination of Ms.' ideological patterns must be traced and analyzed in order for a feminist politics to understand how such an intervention is constructed and functions

within its particular setting. In the process, we must bear in mind, however, that the pleasures offered to women by these magazines are not simply "liberating" nor "repressive"; they rather contribute to the continual construction and reconstruction of the cultural definitions of what it means to be a North American woman at the end of the twentieth century.

E. Ann Kaplan's notion of the popular cultural form or medium as "apparatus" serves as an additional means for conceptualizing and combining a magazine's industrial base and working environment with its symbolic output. She suggests that treating the medium/magazine as an "apparatus" draws attention to a complex of factors: 1) the machine itself (its technological features, or the way it produces/presents its images), 2) its various texts (ads, features, editorial, visuals), 3) the central relationship of "programming" to sponsors and, 4) the various sites of reading/reception (Kaplan, 1987, 5).

Marjorie Ferguson examines the relationship between stratified or segmented readerships and the women's magazine's mode of address. She contends that commercial, mass-market magazines for women are first and foremost about femininity itself, as a state, condition, a craft, an art form (Ferguson, 1983, 1). Employing Durkheim's work on religious cults (1976), Ferguson argues that the cult of femininity, as defined by women's magazines, does contain many of the elements of its religious counterparts "whereby a woman can worship that society's essentially social concepts through them" (Ferguson, 1983, 11). The creation and maintenance of this cult of femininity is the primary role of the women's magazine in patriarchal society.

Also strongly influenced by the B.C.C.C.S., Ballaster et al.'s Women's Worlds (1991) analyzes the readings of femininity which have been and are now offered within the women's magazine genre. In addition, the authors investigate the relations between those readings, the reader implied by the text and the historical reader who "consumes" or "re-reads" them herself (Ballaster et al., 1991, 129). Women's Worlds also includes an ethnographic component, a chapter devoted to actual magazine readers' responses to and thoughts on particular magazines as well as on the periodical-reading process itself.

Of my main sources on the history and development of the genre, McCracken's Decoding Women's Magazines most closely approximates the classical Marxist/leftist approach to feminist media studies. Arguing that consumerist periodicals exert cultural leadership to shape a "consensus" in which pleasurable codes work to naturalize social relations of power (McCracken, 1993, 3), McCracken examines the strong ideological messages that try to anchor "common sense" views of reality on the pages of most women's magazines. She connects the structural similarities between different publications to a common material factor: their dependence on a cycle of publishing profit, advertising and women's role as the primary purchasers of consumer goods (McCracken, 1993, 10).

Ms. is particularly interesting because, as a single publication, it has undergone three identifiable transformations. Over the course of its twenty-year existence, it has moved from a "mainstream" feminist periodical (1972-late 1980's), to a glossy, consumerist magazine (late-1980's-1989) and then to an alternative, ad-free

"magabook" (1990-present). In the process, it appears to have challenged the very socio-economic structure of contemporary communications media.

Therefore, a fourth category/approach to popular culture, as elaborated by Rakow, is useful where a publication like Ms. is concerned: the "Recovery and Reappraisal" approach. Rather than emphasizing "content", "audience" or socio-economic arrangements specifically, this approach sensitizes the researcher to the fact that women's culture is distinct from men's and has a positive value of its own (Rakow, 1986, 29). It draws attention to the way in which women have managed to express themselves within a male-dominated culture, and have thus challenged the social, political and economic structures that discourage women from expressing their creativity (Rakow, 1986, 32). Studies of the alternative feminist presses and publications (ie. Cadman et al.'s Rolling Our Own: Women as Printers, Publishers and Distributors (1981), Doughan and Sanchez's Feminist Periodicals, 1855-1984 (1987)), would fall into this category of scholarship. Due to Ms. metamorphoses over its 20-year history, it cannot be pigeonholed as an "alternative" feminist journal. However, the challenge it poses to the social, political and economic structures of its periodical-publishing setting merits examining it, to some degree, from this perspective. Perhaps we can then begin to assess how women's creativity and cultural production differs - if, indeed, it does - from men's .

Method of Analysis and Data --

E. Ann Kaplan's notion of the medium as "apparatus", as outlined above, is a useful tool for my project. It provides the organizing principles through which I will compare Ms. changes in ideological direction over the three separate phases of its history. Firstly, by treating Ms. as a "machine", we recognize that it is a magazine enterprise, an industrial product whose financing and editorial organization produce and present its "technological features" and images. Secondly, we can compare and describe Ms.' various "texts" (ie. ads, features, editorials, visuals) to understand ideological fluctuations or changes in the periodical's mode of address. Thirdly, by examining the crucial relationship between sponsorship and "programming" (or, in the case of a magazine, "content"), we can begin to grasp the economics of periodical-publishing and, more specifically, the changing financial bases of Ms. magazine's publishing stages which crucially affected its editorial content and tone. We can thus begin to draw some conclusions regarding changes in ideological direction from this important relationship. Finally, by taking into consideration sites of reading/reception, we can take a look at Ms. readers/consumers/critics. Focussing some attention on "reading" helps to remind us that "ideology" is less a fixed set of meanings or beliefs "than it is a negotiated position within a system of contradictory and contestatory meanings that are expressed in cultural texts" (White, 1992, 191).

Therefore, Kaplan's notion of the medium-as-apparatus serves as

the theoretical basis for my project, providing me with a way of relating the symbolic content of a cultural artifact to its industrial site of production. It derives from a brand of ideological criticism, rooted in Marxist theories of culture, that contextualizes the artifact socially and economically, while allowing for the fact that ideological practice does not linearly and unproblematically reflect economic practice. Such a theory avoids one of the principal pitfalls of classical Marxist analysis (White, 1992, 168), by recognizing that the economic base is only one of the sites where ideology is constructed. Working along these lines, one must take into account such elements as the periodical's mode of address and the reading experiences of its audiences, as well as issues relating to consumer culture and mass society.

In addition to drawing on various historical sources on the American women's movement and the changing magazine publishing industry over the last twenty years, my evidence will derive mainly from content analysis, statistical data, documentary sources on Ms., and interviews with Ms. staffers, including a personal telephone interview with current Managing Editor Barbara Findlen, one of the few Ms. staff members to have worked for the magazine in its three separate incarnations. While I am approaching Ms. primarily as an "ideological" apparatus, its consumer setting is also of concern. Therefore, I will be using publishers' market research studies and promotional materials, as well as surveys of Ms. readers, to help delineate Ms.' three periods of development and to place it within the context of the periodical publishing industry as a whole. Ms.' longtime struggle with advertisers (see Steinem's "Sex, Lies and Ad-

vertising", Ms., July/August 1990) is indicative of the tension that exists between the magazine's ideological agenda and the notion of the periodical-as-business-concern. The business aspects of publishing must, therefore, be taken into account.

Outline -

Chapter 2 situates Ms. within the industry setting of the publishing world of the last twenty years. An outline of this historical background is necessary in order to analyze the development of Ms. as a viable media publishing venture between 1972 and the present. An increasing narrowing or stratification of the women's magazine audience/readership has an impact on the delicate balance between publishing costs and subscription incomes. Along with this development went a growing concentration of magazine ownership and the rise of the multinational publishing corporation. How do Ms. financial base, circulation, owners and editors reflect these trends which ultimately lead to the demise of the magazine in 1987 and its financial reconstruction in 1990? This information will help to answer one of my principal questions: how does one finance an ideological vehicle in a consumer setting? The financial vagaries of publishing also provide the "economic context" in which an argument for Ms. fluctuations in ideological orientation and audience can be subsequently constructed.

In Chapter 3, I will be looking at the ways in which changing ownership affects changes in editorial policies and functioning, including the publication's overall message or mode of address, the

means whereby a female solidarity or unity is reaffirmed. I will be using such elements as editorials and changing features as evidence. This material will help me trace the different ways in which Ms. magazine addresses its readership and thus for noting ideological change.

My concluding chapter will take into account the "Readers and Critics" of Ms. magazine. I will begin by looking at the Ms. reader in an attempt to answer the following questions: what kind of "ideal" and "actual" reader is the magazine creating/addressing and does its audience change over the course of the magazine's three incarnations? Ms. magazine's relationship to the U. S. women's movement and its symbolic status vis-a-vis feminism and its industrial context will then be discussed in order to approach the question of the critics voices, for it is my contention that most of the criticism aimed at Ms. is rooted in a particular interpretation of the magazine as a significant symbol of American feminism. I will then conclude by refocussing on some of the questions raised at the outset of this study: how has Ms., an ideological vehicle functioning within a consumer setting, negotiated the economic and ideological tensions that it has encountered?

As an example of a woman-oriented, self-consciously feminist medium, Ms. magazine offers a serious critique of dominant media structures and professional and institutional practices (Steiner, 1992, 140). Furthermore, by constructing its readers as "social equals" who wish to know certain things in order to become more informed, well-rounded feminists, the third incarnation of Ms. looks beyond the borders of race, class and nationality. It has broadened

its white, middle-class focus in order to incorporate working women's and ethnic and African-American women's concerns. In addition, it has recognized that ecological issues unite women across borders and that American feminists must see themselves as part of a larger international feminist struggle.

CHAPTER 2

The Financial History of An Ideological Vehicle in a Consumer Setting

This chapter will situate Ms. within the larger periodical-publishing industry setting of the last twenty years. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, an outline of this background is necessary in order to analyze Ms.' development as a viable publishing venture. Elements such as the magazine's financial components (ie. circulation, advertising revenue, growth), parent companies and the editorial working practices must be situated within larger industry trends in order to trace and account for Ms.' development, demise in 1989 and reconstruction in 1990. We can then answer one of the principal questions posed at the beginning of this project: how does one finance an ideological vehicle in a consumer setting like the periodical-publishing world? Having thus outlined the magazine's economic or industry context, we can begin to construct an argument or explanation for Ms.' fluctuations in audience selection and ideological orientation.

The process of piecing together Ms.' financial history is challenging in that the data needed to draw an accurate and thorough picture of a magazine's economic framework over a twenty-year period (ie. subscription and newsstand circulation figures, advertising

volume, rates and revenues, investors' shares, etc...) are very difficult to obtain. I have thus been forced to "piece together" snippets of statistical data and information from various sources including Ms. editorials/"Personal Reports", business journals such as Advertising Age and Folio: The Magazine for Magazine Management, miscellaneous tables, charts and appendices of studies of the industry, in addition to the information provided by the publication itself. Therefore, my so-called "financial history of Ms." is far from exhaustive, but it will serve to delineate the economic vagaries of the magazine during its three incarnations, allowing me to contextualize it within the publishing industry and make progress towards examining the contradictions and problems which arise when an ideological vehicle is launched and expected to survive within a consumer setting. Any rigorous economic analysis would require substantial data at both the organization and industry levels. However, such an analysis is well beyond the scope of this study. This chapter will thus suffice as a "framework" which might nevertheless provide a useful starting point for future economic investigations.

Ms. and the U.S. Women's Magazine Industry -

From the mid-1960's onward, a general trend can be discerned in the realm of women's magazine-publishing. The industry "boom" of the late 1950's and early 1960's shaped and was shaped by the prevailing "never had it so good" mentality, as the earlier notion of domestic economy gave way to that of enthusiastic consumption (Ballaster et

al., 1991, 110). The sale of advertising space became increasingly crucial in the competitive search for revenue as the balance shifted between the editorial and advertising departments of consumer publications (Winship, 1987, 38). By 1964, however, a long period of decline in sales had begun. Between 1965 and 1981, total adult women's copy sales declined, a pattern that must be viewed in relation to a general downward trend of total consumer magazine sales overall (Ferguson, 1983, 27).

The 1970's was a decade of change for both women and magazines, resulting in publishers having to make new choices about the form and content of the messages carried by the women's press. The mass magazine formula appeared to be losing its appeal, as television offered an alternative form of mass relaxation and entertainment, and the women's movement's ideological debate surrounding femininity and the "new woman" cast doubt on the universal validity of the models of feminine domesticity offered by traditional service magazines. Within this context, two specific patterns developed, namely a movement on the part of publishers away from targeting generalist to more specialist products/audiences (Ferguson, 1983, 22). By and large, women's magazines proceeded in accordance with these larger trends.

The nature of magazine ownership changed profoundly in the 1960's, when the conglomerate began to play an increasingly important part in publishing. For many publications, the result was that they existed as only one part of a large diversified organization. Nevertheless, the industry continued to have a place for the relatively small publisher - thanks largely to the proliferation of special-interest publications - as magazines discovered their strength

of market selectivity (Peterson, 1980, 170). After the early 1960's, magazines began to deal with increasingly narrow editorial specialties and circumscribed readerships. Upon examining the developments in the magazine business between 1967 and 1988, industry pundit James B. Kobak -- noting the growth of smaller-circulation magazines during this period -- suggests that "there is no magazine business"; because of their circumscribed foci and readerships, "every magazine is in a different business. Every magazine appeals to different readers and different advertisers" (Kobak, 1990, 85). Likewise, Theodore Peterson compares these publications to trade journals for consumers; if the themes of trade publications are profits and efficiency, the theme of specialized consumer magazines is how to spend one's discretionary income (Peterson, 1980, 170).

As a former business editor of *Life* pointed out in 1977:

"The most financially successful magazines of the past ten years have designed to appeal to highly particularized intellectual, vocational and avocational interests and are run by editors who know precisely what they are saying and to whom they are saying it" (Quoted in Phillips, 1978, 116).

Although the risks of publishing ventures were high -- due to rocketing production and mailing costs, and competition from television for advertising and subject matter -- vital new magazines boasting such a circumscribed focus and designed to appeal to a select and limited readership were viewed at this time as particularly sound investments. (Williams, 1971, pp. 11-16). In the wake of the demise of several general-interest, mass magazines, among them *Life* and *Look*, others quietly retrenched, decreasing their circulation numbers in a

concerted effort to upgrade their readerships (Phillips, 1978, 116). One sector of specialized publishing that grew quickly in the late 1960's and later went on to become a distinct genre was the local and regional magazine. Among these, Clay Feller's New York, launched in 1968, has served as a successful model inspiring countless imitators.

Launching Ms. -

Recognizing that a specialized magazine can serve as a tool to identify an audience with a particular interest (as well as link up readers and generate income), a group of feminist writers and editors (Patricia Carbine, Joanne Edgar, Nina Finkelstein, Mary Peacock, Letty Cottin Pogrebin, Gloria Steinem) raised the idea of starting a national magazine that would remain under women's control and that would accurately reflect contemporary women's concerns. Having put together a list of article ideas, a mock-up of illustration and design, and a budget proposal, the entrepreneurs spent months looking for investors willing to put money into the new venture. Finally, Katharine Graham, publisher of The Washington Post and one of the few women publishers in the United States at the time, decided to invest \$20,000 which was later redeemed in stock. Then came an unusual offer from Clay Feller: New York would effectively "give birth" to this new magazine, Ms., underwriting the cost, supervising the production and soliciting advertisements for the Preview Issue "without the quid pro quo of editorial control, or some permanent financial interest" (Ms., July 1972, 5).

The Spring Preview Issue was put together in two months. Accord-

ing to its editors,

"...work got done, and decisions got made. They happened communally...We just chose not to do anything with which one of us strongly disagreed...Feminist philosophies often point out that a hierarchy, military or otherwise, is an imitation of patriarchy, and that there are many other ways of getting work done" (Ms., July 1972, 5).

Marjorie Ferguson writes that despite changes introduced to meet the demands of more sophisticated printing technology and closer cost accountancy, the editorial process of the women's magazine has altered only marginally over the course of this century. In other words, the principle of "the editor's word goes" and a division of labour founded on "female interest categories" continue to typify production lines and represent a structure that predisposes the editorial process towards hierarchical decision-making (Ferguson, 1983, 169). Indeed, Ferguson concludes that, despite the trappings of democracy that surround the decision-making process, only two editorial "styles" exist within the industry: "autocratic" and "not-so-autocratic" (Ferguson, 1983, 130).

Producers of women's movement media have, by and large, attempted to avoid such a "patriarchal" replication of top-down power structures by adopting styles that appeared leaderless. Adopting an alternative view of management to that of the bureaucratic organization wherein authority is located with individuals, feminist publishers proceeded with the principle of "equal participation" as the operating goal (Smith, 1989, 283). Such organizations thus stress consensual process over majority rule, the collective formulation and resolution of problems, collective control and loosely structured staffing. As the above quote indicates, Ms. attempted to apply these principles to the

working practices of a national magazine in a conscious effort to distance itself from the hierarchical editorial processes of its industry counterparts.⁴ In order to further avoid the establishment of a hierarchy among the Ms. staffers, the magazine's editorial masthead would list their names alphabetically, divided only by areas of expertise and full or part-time work.

As my interview with Ms. current Managing Editor, Barbara Findlen revealed, however, a communal/consensual editing process "really wasn't the case" where the day-to-day functioning of the magazine was concerned. Ms.' working practices were actually more structured than probably appeared for staff members were in fact divided into departments which contained hierarchies, with research directors, copy chiefs and so on. Although no "Editor-in-Chief" was named on the masthead, Suzanne Braun Levine, Ms.' "Managing Editor" during its first incarnation, acted as the former, fulfilling the duties that come with the role. Findlen describes Gloria Steinem's role as that of "a founder" who has "always been a very, very strong presence at the magazine." She was "an editor" ("in true Ms. fashion that could mean almost anything at any given time") who was nevertheless a "visionary" of Ms., editing pieces, developing story ideas, recruiting writers and doing virtually anything that was required of her.

⁴Indeed, Ms. was awarded the first Universalist Women's Federation's "Ministry to Women" award in 1974 for "teaching women to intercommunicate, providing a model for a nonhierarchical corporation in its operation of the magazine and establishing the Ms. Foundation for Women, turning back profits to help the constituency the magazine serves (Ms., July 1974, 75).

In a sense then, Ms. "non-hierarchical" label was misleading, for job titles existed and a certain division of labour was carried out: this simply was not indicated on the masthead. The alphabetical masthead is viewed by Findlen as a "real statement" in favour of some sort of collectivity", a step in a communal direction embracing the critique of hierarchy with which feminists were engaged and reflecting Ms.' more "cooperative" way of working than other women's magazines.

In December 1971, an insert from the Spring Preview Issue appeared in New York; the issue set a newsstand sales record. In January 1972, the full-length Spring Preview Issue was distributed nationally. Although the 300,000 copies (individual copies were priced at \$1; yearly subscriptions were \$9) were dated "Spring" and were meant to stay on newsstand shelves for approximately eight weeks, Ms. sold out in eight days.

Following this initial success with an appeal for more investors, the editors were rescued by Warner Communications in the Spring of 1972. Warner became the publication's major investor (\$1 million) and minority stockholder (25%); Ms. thus retained staff majority control of stock. Steinem characterized Warner's involvement as,

"an important step for women and for journalism...[it] has helped create the first large national magazine controlled by its staff rather than the financial supporters. This editorial freedom will make Ms. the accurate, vibrant, life-changing forum it should be" (Advertising Age, May 22, 1972, 96).

Ms.' first regular issue (July 1972), published by the "Ms. Magazine Corp." and produced by a full-time staff of twenty (including one male assistant art director) and a few part-time workers, featured

a total of seventeen advertising pages, with rates based on a circulation of 250,000 (ie. 1 pg., black and white: \$3,000; 4-colour: \$3950). The cover price (\$1/copy) and subscription rates (\$9/year) were significantly higher than those of other contemporary women's magazines in an effort to stay relatively independent of advertising revenue while operating on a publishing shoestring. Consequently, the editors insist that the magazine is a virtual bargain, reminding readers of the "production skill, careful financial planning, and movement-style salaries and devotion that have kept costs about 40 percent lower than those of comparable publications; and thus allowed us to price ourselves within the reach of more women" (Ms., November 1979, 8).

The Advertising Conundrum -

Ms.' rationale for accepting advertising was twofold. Firstly, the editors wanted to keep the price of the magazine low enough for most women to afford. Secondly, they felt that Ms. could serve as a forum where women and advertisers could communicate and thus work toward developing more progressive advertising targeted at women (Ms., July/August 1990, 19). Ms.' advertising strategy in its first incarnation is noteworthy in that it consists of two distinct phases. Its goals for the first phase are summed up as follows:

- editorial control (no hidden rewards for advertisers and no backing off certain subjects because advertisers would object)
- fair and aesthetic proportion of advertising to editorial (using a guideline formula of two-thirds editorial pages to one-third advertising)

- accurate reflection of the way women spend consumer dollars (ads for items not traditionally advertised in women's magazines, namely airline tickets, automobiles, insurance policies.)
- the exclusion of advertising deemed offensive to women or promoting potentially harmful products

As a result of this policy, some potentially lucrative accounts had to be turned down by the magazine. Rejecting a Virginia Slims cigarettes ad schedule, for instance, cost Ms. approximately \$80,000 in revenues; many readers objected to its advertisements, not because of the harmful nature of cigarette-smoking, but because of its questionable slogan, "You've Come A Long Way Baby":

"...the slogan...had become a symbol to women who objected to the implication that social justice had already been achieved, or felt that Virginia Slims was somehow taking the credit for what progress there was, or simply were put off by being called 'Baby'" (Ms., November 1974, 59).

The second phase of Ms.' advertising strategy consisted of an attempt to cover the total advertising spectrum, including food, personal care products and other items traditionally targeted at female consumers, without changing the magazine's editorial policy (ie. none of the supportive/complementary copy, in the form of recipes or beauty advice, typical of women's service magazines). In addition to its "regular" advertising, Ms.' introductory issue also features a one-page "Classified" section, "a national bulletin board", featuring employment opportunities, women's movement activities and the products/services of woman-owned businesses. This feature would go on to expand as the magazine evolved.

As Ms.' editors soon learned from its reader letters, women,

specifically the women who read Ms., took advertising very seriously, responding favourably to the progressive advertisements of corporations like American Express, Sony, AT&T and Gillette "who understood the value and enlightened self-interest of putting honest ads in a new and more trustworthy kind of magazine" (Ms., November 1974, 59). Likewise, negative reader reactions to ad campaigns elicited a response from at least one advertiser: the Heublein Spirits Group cancelled its "Hit Me With A Club" campaign when more than 1,000 reader letters cited the tag line as an invitation to physical abuse (Ms., October 1980, 108).

In a November 1974 editorial on the subject of Ms.' advertising and editorial policies, the editors explicitly acknowledged advertising's "potency as a socializing force" (p. 92) and described the magazine as a "laboratory of change". This can be understood in two ways. Firstly, Ms. served as a forum in which readers could benefit from the information offered by enlightened, progressive advertisers while, conversely, advertisers learned and profited from the responses and buying power of discerning readers. While Ms. emerged as a specialized publication giving priority to its audience, its editors nonetheless understood economic realities: in order to survive, the magazine had to satisfy both readers and advertisers. Since no consumer magazine gains profit from its cover price alone, the sale of advertising space is crucial in the competitive search for revenue (Winship, 1987, 38).

A second very important way in which the magazine made a contribution to the consumer publishing field was by training women as ad salespeople, jobs traditionally held by men. These "agents of

change" embodied an "inside" revolution in the publishing world (*Ms.*, November 1974, 58), and comprised what was, arguably, *Ms.*'s most significant contribution to the industry. This cadre of women includes several who have gone on to take managerial posts on the business side of a male-dominated industry. Until *Ms.*'s inception, however, women on the management-track of magazine ad staffs were virtually unheard of (Emmrich, 1982, M1). By 1980, *Ms.* remained one of the only examples where women could penetrate the ranks of magazine management; even newer magazines tended to follow traditional patterns where women ran the editorial side of a publication and men controlled the purse strings (Emmrich, 1982, M2). Such work practices thus challenged the traditional balance of power within the consumer magazine apparatus itself.

The Financial Vagaries of *Ms.*

(1972-1979) -

By the end of *Ms.*'s first year of publication, the three main financial elements or technical signs of the magazine's fiscal health (subscriptions, newsstand sales, advertising) can be examined for an indication of *Ms.*'s rate of growth, which is seen as more important to advertisers than size per se (*Ms.*, January 1973, 77). In an interview with Advertising Age, publisher Patricia Carbine states: "We've ended our first year substantially in the black. We're in excellent shape, both with our readers and our advertisers." *Ms.*'s subscription renewal record is 62% and growing: in January 1973, there were 145,000 paid

subscribers and an almost equal number of newsstand buyers (Ms., January 1973, 96; July 1973, 82).

Indeed, Ms. experienced rapid growth during its first year, enabling it to raise its circulation guarantee from 250,000 to 350,000 effective February 1973. Less than one year after the publication of the Spring Preview Issue, Ms. was already paying for itself on an issue-by-issue basis, being probably the first slick, four-colour, illustrated, mass-circulation monthly dedicated to a particular point of view to do so and be in a position to anticipate turning over 10% of its profits to its cause (Harrington, 1974, 74). Of the three financial elements indicating rate of growth, however, advertising proves to be the most problematic:

"...we were right to expect a reluctance on the part of some companies to advertise in a women's magazine at all...Purveyors of ..."unfeminine" items are also unlikely to support women's magazines (Ms., January 1973, 97).

The Ms. staff now numbers thirty-two (full and part-time) workers. Even though the editorial process remains "communal",

"...an individual no longer feels she has to ask everybody's opinion before making a decision - we've learned to trust the responses of three or four logical and/or diverse people as a good indication of how the whole staff will feel" (Ms., January 1973, 115).

A number of writers were critical of Ms.' "editing by consensus" policy, charging that decisions did not get made or were made by one editor only to be altered after discussion with others. They complained of having to satisfy editorial "committees", manuscripts

rewritten without the writer's knowledge, humour deleted due to a reluctance to treat women's issues lightly and feminist humour edited into pieces (Harrington, 1974, 75). It has been suggested that the so-called communal experience was in reality a tyranny of structurelessness, where Gloria Steinem ultimately determined the political tone of articles. Responding to these charges, Ms. acknowledged that individual editors consulted on articles pertaining to their areas of expertise and Steinem's specialty was politics. And, as I discussed above, nor were all decisions "communal": as Stephanie Harrington writes, publisher Carbine and Managing Editor Suzanne Braun Levine were "there to dispel hesitations" (Harrington, 1974, 75).

It would thus appear that the exigencies of producing a national monthly magazine required that some pragmatic, "logical" allowances be made where working practices were concerned. Presumably, the contradiction between communal/consensual and rational/bureaucratic became unmanageable, a development that may perhaps be inevitable in an industry that is predisposed to hierarchical decision making. Indeed, Ms. staff structure and working principles serve to illustrate the delicate balance that must be achieved between a hierarchical division of labour and communal disorganization in order to produce a monthly publication, even though Ms. insists that it has "disproved the hierarchical suspicion that a staff-controlled magazine would be chaotic and profligate" (Ms., November 1979, 8).

In July 1973, Ms. announces the formation of a new division, "Ms. Marketing Services", to work with advertisers and agencies on "any activities that affect women" (Advertising Age, July 2, 1973, 53).

This announcement highlights the interplay between Ms.' feminist and commercial concerns, namely its goal to reform sexist marketing patterns. It is at this time that Ms. also announces its plans to co-produce a pilot television program based on the magazine's format which, in addition to the Ms. Foundation-sponsored "Free To Be You And Me" record album (1972), marks the beginning of the magazine's involvement with/branching out into multi-media projects and its development as a "mini-conglomerate" (Harrington, 1974, 74).

By June 1974, increases in postage (35%), paper (20%) and ink (40%) costs necessitate an increase in subscription rates to \$10/1 year, \$18/2 years and \$25/3 years. As of July, the circulation rate base is increased from 350,000 to 400,000, thus allowing for increased advertising rates which the magazine hopes will help to absorb the impact of increasing publishing costs.

By July 1978, total Ms. readership is up to 2.2 million, according to audience surveys, an increase of 46% from 1977; advertising pages are also up 15 percent from the previous year (Ms., July 1978, 120). In order to keep the magazine accessible to readers of diverse incomes, the cover price is maintained at \$1, but distribution is limited to fewer newsstands with the argument that it is more economical to supply only to dealers who can handle more than a few copies and display them prominently. This strategy would appear to contradict the prevailing wisdom of the magazine business in the mid-1970's. With production and postage costs skyrocketing (ie. postage costs have increased 400% since 1972, paper has gone up 123.5%) (Ms., July 1978, 120), the profit-conscious magazine is advised to cut down on money-losing cut-rate subscriptions and shift

its marketing emphasis to newsstand sales (Harrington, 1974, 24). Ms. nonetheless continues to offer its subscribers substantial savings: a special Sixth Anniversary Offer in the July 1978 issue sets out to attract new subscribers by offering fourteen issues for the price of twelve (\$10).

Nonprofit Status (1979-1987) -

With circulation (ie. number of copies purchased) remaining steady at 500,000 and a total readership of over 2 million - despite receiving "none of the continuing injections of new money that have been available to other magazines" - Ms. applies for and is granted nonprofit status in November 1979. This move was prompted by the editors' discovery that the magazine was being used heavily on college campuses (for English, literature, economics and political science courses) as supplements to textbooks and newspapers. Being the only popular magazine regularly assigned in the classroom, "it was clear that the professors and the institutions would feel better about it if we were legally, technically as well as spiritually declared educational" (Dihlein, 1982, M30).

A separate Ms. Foundation, the Ms. Foundation for Education and Communication was thus started for the purpose of being the nonprofit publisher of "the new Ms.". As a result, the magazine was now eligible to receive tax-deductible grants and gifts from individuals and foundations, for money contributed to research and educational activities are legally and factually a contribution to "education" and therefore deductible: this, according to Barbara Findlen, was the main

advantage of going nonprofit. Another consideration playing a role in this transition: *Ms.* could be operated less expensively, largely because postal rates recognize the difference between for profit and nonprofit groups (*Ms.*, November 1979, 10).

"The New *Ms.*," growth plans appear to differ from those of most mass-circulation magazines whose publishers typically focus on raising circulation, spinning off new magazines and acquiring others. Rather, *Ms.* appears to be broadening its reach by taking an active role in the educational community, forming an advisory board of twelve women academics who will keep the publication abreast of the latest in feminist pedagogy and scholarship, and by transferring its material to multimedia projects, namely cable, video and book projects (ie. the "Free to Be..." record, book and television special, the "Woman Alive" series of ten half-hour television programs broadcast on PBS, several *Ms.* book projects) (Rozen, 1980, 20).

Although ad revenue is taxable, the editors insist that without it, the economic burden of sustaining a publication would be too great on the reader and on tax-exempt contributions. Now carrying about 500 ad pages a year, *Ms.* has managed to break through the "advertising barrier" that magazines devoted to political causes typically suffer from (Braithwaite and Barrell, 1979, 60). Its cover price is nonetheless raised to \$1.25 (with subscription rates remaining the same). The magazine reiterates its pledge to deliver more editorial content than ads to its readers, insisting that with no corporate parent overlooking the financial bottom line, it is able to forgo traditional ad revenue in a variety of ways. The magazine's new

tax-exempt status does feature one drawback, however: Ms. can no longer support declared candidates for electoral office (Ms., November 1979, 13).

With circulation remaining steady at 500,000 (70,000 newsstand, 430,000 subscription), publisher Patricia Carbine sounds optimistic in a September 1980 interview with *Advertising Age*, in which she announces the beginning of the second phase of Ms. advertising strategy:

"...having already tackled nontraditional product areas like liquor and automotive, we're now in Phase 2. We're out to cover the total spectrum, including food, personal care items, etc...[we] want to bring these categories in without having to change editorial style or run supportive copy" (Rozen, 1980, 98).

The wooing of advertisers without guarantees of such covert ad techniques as complementary copy and special placement turns out to be the magazine's most difficult task where advertising is concerned (Ms., July 1983, 105). *Advertising Age Yearbook* notes that during times of recession, as in the early 1980's, when consumers spend less, advertisers give greater emphasis to covert techniques of promotion, thus making it more difficult for magazines to preserve editorial autonomy (McCracken, 1991, 44). Nonetheless, Carbine, the New York Association of Advertising Women's "Ad Woman of the Year" for 1981, reiterates the publication's original goal of playing a role in reforming sexist, exclusionary marketing practices, assuring that the magazine will "always want to run advertising - whether we financially need it or not - because of the information it provides on products women want and spend money on" (p. 20). Ms.' ad volume appears to be

holding steady at its 1979 rates (a total of 526.5 pages): in the first six months of 1980, the magazine carried a total of 251 ad pages (p. 20).

The July 1981 "Personal Report"/editorial carries an urgent tone, as the editors appeal to readers for donations to meet an emergency: the new Reagan Administration's plan to slash federal responsibility for the U.S. Post Office would lead to an immediate increase in postal rates, especially for publications operating with a nonprofit status.

"For Ms., it will cost an additional 100 percent to mail each and every copy of the magazine. (This above and beyond those increases already experienced by nonprofit magazines like Ms.: a total of 480 percent between 1972 and 1981) (Ms., July 1981, 12).

Although this increase will be absorbed to some degree by new introductory and resubscription rates (indeed, subscription prices listed in this issue have been raised to \$12/year, \$22/2 years, \$30/3 years), the editors ask each reader to send between \$2 and \$25 to meet this particular need on the part of the magazine. Emphasizing its strengthened connection to academic institutions and thus its singular status as the exception among women's magazines, Ms. reminds readers that their contributions will be tax-deductible because Ms. is an "educational, nonprofit publication" (p. 12).

In 1982, Ms. announces that it will be buying radio and television ads for the first time in a bid to increase circulation and attract more advertisers. Furthermore, it will also be asking newsstand dealers to display the magazine with publications like The New Yorker and Esquire rather than with other women's magazines (Wihlein, 1982, M32). Although Ms. in particular

faced the burden of \$700,000 in additional mailing costs, 1982 was a particularly bad year for consumer magazines, especially the women's service sector who, rocked by both social change and economic recession, suffered substantial drops in circulation and advertising revenues (Business Week, August 30, 1982, 72). Ms., however, experienced a slight increase in ad volume between 1981 and 1982 (497 and 580 pages respectively), compared, for example to the drop from 1028 and 930 experienced by Ladies' Home Journal (McCracken, 1993, 302). Indeed, due to the public attention earned by the double size July/August 1982 Tenth Anniversary Issue, Ms. enjoyed 170% more newsstand sales, 25,505 more subscriptions from an invitation card in that issue and 20,783 more subscriptions from a letter sent at the same time. So impressive were the results of this particular issue's invitation to potential subscribers that the text of the advertisement won an Effie Award from the American Marketing Association for its superior writing and results (Ms., June 1983, 103).

In 1983, Ms.' newsstand circulation drops by 26%, signifying an estimated loss of 11,500 readers. It does, however, manage to raise its advertising rates between 1982 and 1983, with a 4-colour/1-page ad selling for \$8720 and \$9800 respectively (McCracken, 1993, 303). Raising its cover price to \$1.50 in May, Ms.' total revenues for 1983 are estimated at \$9.3 million, with \$5.1 million coming from advertising (McCracken, 1993, 279). Subscription prices are also raised in July to \$14/year, \$25/2 years, \$36/3 years.

In a 1987 interview, Gloria Steinem acknowledges that the publication is indeed losing money and estimates that

Ms.' losses over its 15-year history total approximately \$4 million; Esquire, she is quick to point out, has lost \$26 million over a shorter time period (Christopher, 1987, 29). Steinem would later come to paint a much grimmer picture of this period in Ms.' history, pointing out that production and mailing costs were ever increasing, advertising income was flat, and ads "that would look like a parody in our pages" were slipping through in an increasingly desperate bid for scarce revenues (Ms., July/August 1990, 24). Between January and June 1987, Ms. had run a total of 213 ad pages, "an 11.8% drop from the same period in 1986" (Reilly, 1987, 3).

Despite the fact that the magazine has not been able to afford a subscription mailing in two years, Steinem insists that readership is trending favourably and that the publication's advertiser guarantee rate base is 450,000. She also hints that Ms. may relinquish its nonprofit status in order to become a profit-maker, by mounting a paid advertising and promotional campaign for the first time (Christopher, 1987, 29), an important shift for a magazine that prided itself on not spending money on self-promotion. Despite these overtures to advertisers, however, requests for reader donations indicate that Ms. continues to rely a great deal on reader support for its fiscal well-being. Indeed, in 1987, approximately 8,000 readers donate \$15 each as contributions to Ms.' financial future and a "tangible tribute" to the publication as a whole (Ms., July 1988, 6).

The September 1987 Editors' Report introduces the "Ms. of the Future" to readers. The publication has undergone a face-lift: new typeface, graphics and organization. This reflects the repeated up-

dating of products that is so essential to capitalist consumption and "production-for-obsolescence", as if products would not sell without the semblance of novelty (Winship, 1987, 84). After all, a national feminist magazine competing in the marketplace has to be commercially viable on the basis of sales and advertising revenue and must measure up on the criteria that the market demands: design, marketing, a clearly designated audience (Winship, 1987, 160).

Ms.-as-Corporate-Product (1987-1989) -

Behind the scenes, changes are also taking place. Having spent the better part of 1987 searching for investors who would contribute to the magazine's growth and development, Australians Sandra Yates, President of Fairfax Publications (U.S.), Ltd., and Anne Summers, a journalist, political commentator and former head of the Australian Office of the Status of Women, came to Ms.' rescue. The Ms. editors and the Australians agreed that, with Fairfax ownership and backing, its American subsidiary "could help Ms. grow and prosper to the benefit of both" (Ms., December 1987, 6). Owning some 80 magazines (including Sassy in the U.S.) and 53 newspapers, Fairfax was a publishing giant. The rivalries of such publishing empires increasingly shaped the consumer magazine-publishing sector as the twentieth century progressed, a state of affairs precipitated by the emergence in the 1800's of large publishers who financed multiple publications from a mix of private capital and stock flotation (Ballaster et al., 1991, 113). As the example of Fairfax and its contemporaries (ie. Conde Nast, Murdoch) indicate, many of these

conglomerates - recognizing the advantage of using the capital and publishing experience acquired in one country as the basis for entry into a foreign market - have become "multinationals" whose interests are not confined to one country or product (Ballaster et al., 1991, 114).

Viewing Yates and Summers as "the best of all possible worlds: real feminists with access to real financial support" (Ms., December 1987, 6), the Ms. Foundation for Education and Communication agrees to sell the magazine for an estimated \$10 million. There thus ceased to be a formal relationship between the Foundation and the magazine. Fairfax agrees to provide the capital to expand circulation and thereby attract more advertisers ("properly financed, it has real commercial possibilities"), spending "a couple million" on further cosmetic changes, namely an enlarged 9-inch format, upgraded paper stock and a newsmagazine section imitating the graphics of the newsweeklies. In an effort to update its overall image, Ms. launched a trade advertising campaign showing the gradual transformation of a stereotypical "hippie" into a made-up, blow-dried, dress-for-success woman of the 1980's and bearing the tag-line: "We're not the Ms. we used to be."

Ms.' new owners also relinquish the publication's tax-exempt, nonprofit status, a move that will allow the magazine to report on elections and politics and endorse particular candidates. Anne Summers takes over as Editor-in-Chief while Sandra Yates, President of Fairfax's U.S. subsidiary supervises publishing. Gloria Steinem and Patricia Carbine agree to stay on as consultants for a five-year period, and the Ms. Foundation for Education and Communication takes

on the role of full-time media arm for the Ms. Foundation.

In February 1988, the redesigned Ms. debuts, maintaining its previous advertising rates of \$9290/1-page, black and white and \$12,485/1-page, four-colour. Yates' strategy is to first raise circulation and then follow by raising ad rates. By May, twelve new advertisers have signed on (Alson, 1988, 10). But developments in the Australian media industry, coupled with the stock market crash of October 1987, bring about a major shift in Fairfax's financial position and the group is forced to put many of its assets - including Ms. and Sassy - up for sale in April 1988.

Yates has the option to buy Sassy, but has it extended to cover Ms. and invites Summers to be her partner in the takeover. Over five weeks, Yates and Summers devise a strategy for finding a partner or investor who would provide the funds necessary to purchase the two magazines (an estimated \$30 million) and give them sufficient working capital to develop them while retaining editorial and management control.

"To raise the kind of money involved was a big deal. To try to do it in five weeks was incredible. Although we were both supremely confident we could do it, the process was both heart-stopping and exhausting. Dressed in our specially-purchased 'wish-for-success' outfits, we met with scores of potential investors. About three weeks into the search, an Australian commercial bank, the State Bank of New South Wales, agreed to provide bank financing for part of the deal" (Ms., September 1988, 8).

They went on to look for an investor willing to provide the balance of the working capital requirements, and by May 20, Citicorp Venture Capital Fund agreed to do so.

In the September 1988 Editor's Essay announcing the sale, Summers attributes the successful buy-out and reversion of Ms. to "woman-owned" status to the American free-enterprise system: "There are few countries in the world where two women, let alone two foreign women, could be given the opportunity to do what we have done, and we are very grateful that we found ourselves in the right country at the right time" (p. 9). Evoking its founders' national origins, however, the new company is named "Matilda Publications, Inc.": "We feel the name encapsulates both the open way in which we run the company, and the warmth and openness of both magazines" (Ms., September 1988, 9). Although the name on the masthead will change, the editorial and management staff will remain the same, with Yates as President of Matilda and responsible for overall financial performance and management of a staff of over seventy people.

Circulation peaks in mid-1988 at 548,708; between April and July, 50,000 new readers subscribe, due largely to an investment on the part of Matilda in circulation mailings and giving Ms. its largest circulation increase in a decade. Summers and Yates also abandon Ms.' nontraditional position vis-a-vis complementary copy and advertising: editorial features on clothes and products now make traditional bids for ads as in mainstream women's magazines. As William Melody suggests, upon weighing audience needs against advertiser needs, media will most likely give priority to those of advertisers (Ferguson et al., 1990, 49). Although Ms. emerged as a specialized publication with a mission and gave priority to its readers and their concerns, the economic realities of its consumer environment set in. In order to survive in this setting, Ms. had to satisfy both readers and

advertisers while new career-oriented magazines and editorial changes in traditional women's periodicals (allowing for coverage of issues like rape, abortion, conjugal violence) encroached on its specialized audience segment (Ferguson et al., 1990, 49). As Ferguson et al.'s 1990 study⁵ suggests, Ms.' changes imply that, under Malilda's direction, the magazine placed a greater emphasis on the corporate "bottom line" than on its original feminist agenda: it became advertiser- rather than audience-driven (Ferguson et al., 1990, 49).

The Reader-Supported Ms. (1990-1992) -

Going with the flow of the publishing industry did not, however, help Ms. in the long run: ad pages still fell below previous levels due to "rumours and poor management" (Ioffe, 1990, 58). By the fall of 1989, Ms. is losing \$150,000 a month and circulation has dropped from its all-time high of 550,000 to under 100,000 (Time, August 6, 1990, 79). Consequently, Malilda fails to meet the budget's projections for ad revenue and the investors force a sale. In a move suggested by Gloria Steinem, Lang Communications, owner of such publications as Working Mother and Working Woman and one of the few independent publishers left among the conglomerates, buys Ms. and Sassy in October 1989. The last issue to carry advertising (only 20 pages in total) appears in November after which the new owner announces that Ms. will suspend publication for a short time.

Lang, believing that Ms. would benefit his other magazines by

⁵This study is described by its authors as a manifest and latent content analysis to assess the extent to which Ms.' advertising in its first incarnation actually carried out the magazine's policy of precluding ads that were insulting to women or promoting products that were potentially harmful.

blazing a trail (Ms., July/August 1990, 25), announces his daring gamble: Ms. will reappear in mid-1990 as Ms.: The World of Women, completely devoid of advertising, sustaining itself through reader subscriptions of \$40 for six issues a year. Initially budgeting \$1 million for six issues, Lang contends that future capital will come from the hefty subscription price, which represents a steep increase from the old rate of \$14.97 for twelve issues a year, although "current subscribers will get a discount" (Ioth, 1990, 58). Since advertising is traditionally used to subsidize the low price readers pay, its exclusion means that readers will have to absorb the price of Ms.' new editorial freedom. Reader commitment is thus translated into bottom-line survival where a subscriber-supported magazine is concerned (Schlosberg, 1992, 18).

Ms.' new subscription price works out to be above rather than below the single-issue price of \$4.95. Although this is unusual in the context of magazine publishing, it is perfectly logical: the newsstand price does not have to cover postage and handling. Although there is no way to do market research for such a venture (Ioth, 1990, 58), a direct-mail campaign to 580,000 potential subscribers was conducted, featuring letters explaining the magazine's new course from Steinem and publisher Ruth Bower:

"YES! It's a precedent-shattering, totally new concept in publishing. And we think it's the next logical leap forward for Ms." (Direct mail campaign letter, 1990, unpaginated).

Ms.' switch to an ad-free format goes against the conventional industry wisdom that a magazine cannot be profitable without advertiser support. But, as Vincent P. Norris points out, magazines

like Reader's Digest (which flourished for thirty four years without advertising and never raised its price during that period) and MAD, shed doubt on the assumption that ad support is the sine qua non of the publishing industry (Norris, 1984, 44). Although some publications start off ad-free, thus saving on first year overhead costs, and then accept advertisements later on (Schlosberg, 1990, 23), Ms. is the first national magazine to jettison advertising and switch to total subscriber support. With a present circulation of approximately 200,000, however, it has become an increasingly specialized Ms.. As a completely reader-oriented publication, Ms.: The World of Women effectively illustrates James B. Kobak's contention that, if one examines a magazine's history over a number of years, one concludes that the most important factor in its success is the field served: the target audience takes centre stage (Kobak, 1990, 85). This, in turn, supports the argument that advertiser support is not as all important in the contemporary magazine business as conventional wisdom would suggest, for if the public does not buy and read the publications, "there won't be any advertising - or anything else for that matter" (Kobak, 1990, 84).

By the early 1990's, industry pundits are echoing Norris' and Kobak's sentiments, suggesting that traditional print advertising has probably seen a permanent decline. Industry literature advises publishers to "strengthen and leverage their bonds with readers", despite the pressures of a marketplace that could keep the focus on price and marketing programs that may threaten editorial integrity and undermine reader relationships (Donaton, 1992, 3). Indeed,

"The consensus among publishers at the 1991 American Magazine Conference was that the recession had led to a transformation of the magazine industry and that publishers must adapt to doing business in a permanently altered marketplace" (Donaton, 1991, 1).

Circulation quality and value are predicted to gain in importance as the magazine industry attempts to shed the perception that "more is better"; the industry finds itself paying the long-term price for the 1980's short term approach to circulation, in which subscribers were lured with discounts and promotions (Donaton, 1991 [2], 50), as practiced by Ms. under Fairfax/Matilda's control. Other successful, contemporary reader-oriented, small-circulation publications, such as The New Republic, Harper's and The Utne Reader accept limited advertising, arguing that ads placed in an intelligent, uncluttered environment and surrounded by editorial content consumed by readers with intense involvement, has a greater impact than when placed in a more conventional consumer vehicle (Schlosberg, 1992, 22).

Admittedly, this cannot be measured, but the fact that a well-known national magazine could convert itself from ad-supported to subscriber driven is relevant to anyone concerned with the economics of publishing. Although publisher Ruth Bower has received several confidential requests from other publishers seeking advice on how to ease ad revenue reliance, Ms. may be too small to have much of an impact on the advertising practices of the magazine-publishing industry as a whole (Braden, 1992, 23). Bower argues, however, that in today's economic climate, any special-interest publication with a clearly-defined focus and loyal readership of 500,000 or less "should take a look at what we're doing" (Quoted in Braden, 1992, 23).

So far, this experiment in journalism has been a success: the July/August 1990 Premier Issue sold out (25,000 copies) nationwide within 72 hours in July 1990, as did a second press run of 25,000. Within a year, it had turned a profit, operating in the black for one of the few times since 1972 (Braden, 1992, 23). At 100,000 subscriptions and 70,000 newsstand sales, its circulation is less than one-third of what it was in its last incarnation, but high circulation figures are not as crucial for a magazine unconcerned with attracting advertisers.

Ms.:The World of Women insists that neither its parent nor its proximity to Lang's ad-supported magazines affect its editorial independence (Braden, 1992, 24). Although its full-time editorial staff was reduced from eighteen under Matilda to fourteen, and such eminent contributors as Margaret Atwood, Toni Morrison and Adrienne Rich are paid only one-fifth of what they ordinarily receive from magazines (Braden, 1992, 24), the relative success of the new Ms. testifies to the loyalty of its reading audience and the resolve of the women behind it. Indeed, publisher Bower plans to increase readership by reaching women in women's organizations and campus women's studies groups and by expanding the magazine's international market. Entertaining the possibility of foreign editions, Editor-in-Chief Robin Morgan notes:

"In the old days, we used to have quite a few foreign subscriptions - people just sought us out. Now we're going to pursue them actively" (Quoted in Hovey, 1990, 42).

Summary -

The reasons for Ms.' failure to survive in its first and second incarnations are complex. In sum, it can be argued that Ms. foundered in its first incarnation for two principal reasons: the shift to non-profit status failed to offset rising costs to the degree to which it had perhaps been calculated to do so, and advertisers were reticent to advertise in a specifically "feminist" publication. As Barbara Findlen notes of the first incarnation, the magazine had to balance the needs of advertisers and the needs of readers which, in Ms.' case, were very different needs. Ms.' difficulty laid in attracting advertising from companies used to controlling the editorial content of women's magazines.

Not only did Fairfax/Matilda fail to resolve this conflict between readers and advertisers, it went much further away from solving this problem by orienting the magazine more towards what it perceived to be advertisers' needs. In the end, however, advertisers found Ms. to be "feminist enough", to quote Findlen, to avoid. Feminist readers, on the other hand, were turned off by the magazine's orientation and Ms. lost crucial support on both fronts.

Now part of a small for-profit, magazine publishing company, Ms.:The World of Women has, technically, no relationship to the Ms. Foundation or the Ms. Foundation for Education and Communication, which currently funds various media projects: all three exist as separate entities. Findlen explains:

"We all know each other and we try to help each other out and it would be foolish not to try to work in conjunction with each other, but there's no formal relationship."

The precedent-setting, latest incarnation of Ms. has opted to solve the reader/advertiser dilemma by dropping the "advertiser" portion of the equation altogether and fostering an unmitigated relationship with its feminist readership. This represents a bold departure from traditional women's journalism whose full impact on the publishing industry as a whole remains to be seen.

Chapter 2

Ms.' Ideological Progression (1972-1992)

In this chapter, I will be comparing the editorial policies and functioning of Ms. during the three periods of its existence. By using such elements as the magazine's editorials and features, I will trace the different ways in which Ms. has addressed its readership over its twenty-year history. In the process, it will be possible to compare how different owners and editors have responded to their readers' changing ideological interests by initiating unique modes of address. Although women's magazines' messages and their presentation altered as a whole in response to changing social conditions between the 1950's and 1960's and the impact of the women's movement, Ms. serves as an interesting example of "narrowcasting" and the genre's responsiveness to a particular interest group: North American Second Wave feminists.

Since Ms.' writers and editors translated what they perceived to be a deep cultural change happening to women into articles and editorials about world issues, national problems and women's political and social roles, we can take these elements as evidence of the publication's changing ideological orientation, as well as the conflicts and debates taking place within feminism itself. A comparison of the magazine's content over its three periods of life

serves as a useful starting point for delving deeper into what Ms. ideological fluctuations have to say about the history and future development of North American liberal feminism. Furthermore, an examination of Ms. editorial content will set the stage for the next chapter, which includes an exploration of the "Ms. reader", since it is through editorial content and style that a magazine develops its unique image and, in turn, hopes to attract a particular readership. "Differences in magazine content do reflect differences in the composition of readership" (Phillips, 1978, 125), therefore, various contingencies depend on the editorial approach to perceptions of changing or unchanging audience demands. In order to examine Ms.' modes of address/orientations, I will be comparing the editorial content of its three incarnations, isolating editorials, features and departments (ie. the umbrella categories in which articles regularly appear, the "regular" features of a magazine) as the major components to be compared.

The editorial serves as the publication's "voice". It makes public statements about where the magazine stands on issues, how it operates "internally" and its relationship to its audience. It thus serves to make manifest the magazine's "mode of address" which is simply a composite of all of these components. Employing terms like "I" and "we", the friendly tone of the women's magazine editorial allows readers to feel as though they are being addressed individually (Winship, 1987, 66). A "friendship" of sorts is thus developed

*As Tables 1A and 1B indicate, however, I have divided Period I into two separate phases (A and B), in order to distinguish between Ms.' "for-profit" and "nonprofit" stages and to simplify the process of examining the magazine's evolution over a fifteen-year timespan.

between the reader and her magazine, a relationship that is nurtured by the editorial staff's efforts to satisfy audience wants/desires.

Throughout most of Ms.' first incarnation, the Ms. editorial appeared in the form of the "Personal Report", originally conceived as a way of replying to the deluge of reader mail that responded to the Spring Preview Issue in 1972. This line of communication to readers came to serve as a vehicle for answering their most frequent questions and a channel for reporting backstage news. The Personal Report also focussed on Ms.' various unorthodoxies, providing such information as how the magazine was launched, where funding came from, who the staff was and how they were organized. As I will elaborate further below, Ms.' "Personal Reports" and "Editors Notes" avoid constructing a clear, individual editorial "voice"; rather, their "collective" posturings represent a communal editing process consistent with feminist critiques of hierarchical organization, despite the fact that, as was discussed in Chapter Two, Gloria Steinem was "a very strong presence at the magazine" and Suzanne Braun Levine served, for all intents and purposes, as "editor-in-chief".

"Features" are articles that cover a wide range of material and, since the early 1970's, have provided an area in which new topics relevant to social and economic changes have typically made their first appearance in women's magazines (Ferguson, 1983, 40). The inclusion of a regular feature entitled "Ecofeminism" in the third ad-free incarnation of Ms., for example, reflects the high priority given to environmental issues in the 1990's and the editors' interests in framing such a high-profile topic as a specifically feminist issue:

"The environment is a feminist issue not only because all issues are women's issues and not only for the economic survival of most of us and the literal survival of all of us, but because women everywhere have been the background - the environment - against which patriarchy plays its deadly game" (Ms., September/October 1991, 1).

Ms. features and departments serve as useful tools in tracing the magazine's changes in ideological orientation because of their potential for allowing the periodical to "speak for itself" in terms of the dominant themes, roles, values and goals it conveys (Forquison, 1983, 90). In potentially reflecting editorial responses to social change as well as addressing a particular "kind" of reader, features serve as an additional means of gauging variations in the editorial stance of a publication.

Tables 1-3 constitute a rough analytical summary and comparison of Ms. magazine's three different editorial incarnations during its twenty years of existence (1972-1992). Furthermore, the tables provide the framework for undertaking a rough discourse analysis, using elements such as the magazine's editorial "voices" and examples of Ms. leading features and departments to derive the publication's "point of view" on major social issues concerning North American women. The data to be analyzed are every July and December issue of Ms. between 1972 and 1992 (a total of 42 issues) with two omissions (July 1989 and November/December 1990) owing to a lack of availability. (I also looked at the last Matilda issue of Ms. (November 1989) instead of the December 1989 issue which was never published). The analysis based on this evidence permits me to interpret the magazine's changing modes of address and ideological orientations vis-a-vis the North American women's movement over its three different ownership and management periods.

A Ground-Breaking, Liberal Feminist Publication (1972-1979) -

Any social movement must have the ability to communicate with its potential adherents. Media outlets developed by women's movement activists, therefore, became crucial organizing tools due to their capacity to relay information about political actions, to create a space for discussion about their concerns, and to offer support to and seek input from readers/audiences (Smith, 1987, 282). Ms. set out to support women who, to varying degrees, felt alienated from the traditional, patriarchal construction of feminine roles and were trying to forge their own egalitarian and equal identities. The magazine's philosophy is spelled out in the first "Personal Report":

"We want a world in which no one is born into a subordinate role because of visible difference, whether that difference is of race or sex. That's an assessment we make personally and editorially, with all the social changes it implies" (Ms., July 1972, 4).

In discussing the need to redefine sex roles and overhaul the economic system to ensure equal opportunity for all women, Ms.' liberal feminist aim was to raise the understanding of readers about their social position vis-a-vis the social and economic policies that influence that position (Ferguson, 1983, 187). Liberal feminism, following liberal-democratic theory, is based on an assumption of free and equal individuals participating in politics which, in turn, rests on the principle of reasoned self-interest as a motivating force in individuals' choices in the political realm. Feminists working within this framework argue that justifying and ensuring the equal political participation of women is the first step towards social equality (Cirksema and Cuklanz, 1992, 21-3).

As I mentioned in my introductory chapter, there is a tendency on the part of American women's movement historians to divide the movement into two rough parts: the reformist/NOW/older wing and the radical/women's liberation/younger wing (see Freeman (1975), Holo & Levine (1971)). Although this is an oversimplification, it nevertheless provides a way of looking at a movement that is neither internally coherent nor ideologically symmetrical (Ms., December 1973, 36). Indeed, Ms. serves to illustrate the problematic assumption that the American women's movement constitutes two distinct "camps". Although labelled a "radical" by Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem, a founder and "backbone" (to use Barbara Findlen's term) of the magazine throughout its first incarnation, appeared to embrace a feminist approach that combined the activist characteristics and philosophies of both the so-called "reformers" and "revolutionaries", even though she herself came from the "younger", more "radical" wing. In "The Way We Were - And Will Be" (Ms., December 1979, 59-94), an essay marking the end of the 1970's, "The Decade of Women", Steinem alludes to her particular perspective:

"My memory tells me that I was certainly old enough to understand these well-educated, white upper-middle-class housewives who began to rebel in the 60's against the feminine mystique (p. 60)... Nonetheless, I not only felt little personal connection between their words and my own life, but was often put off by their emphasis on getting a piece of the existing professional pie: on bringing women as NOW put it in 1966, "into full participation in the mainstream of American society"...feminism - that is an analysis that included all women as a caste and called for a transformation of patriarchy, not just integration into it by a few women (p. 62)...At the same time, most of the early feminists were

learning the importance of being inside as well as outside those structures that need change; of legislative lobbying and electoral politics...of the skills that their reformist sisters often possessed (p. 68).

Ms. set out to end discrimination in social institutions while analyzing women's subordinate position in society. As a national publication, Ms. served a twofold purpose, reflecting what was happening to women and advocating social change by pushing certain boundaries. Ms.' editors used the magazine's own unorthodoxies and untraditional goals as examples of a political activism of sorts: it refused advertising considered desirable by other magazines, it opted not to spend money on publicizing itself, its staff ran itself communally rather than hierarchically, its subscribers paid close to the real production cost for each issue, readers donated money so that those who could not afford subscriptions would have access to the magazine and, last but not least, it was concerned with "changing lives, not just offering escape from them" (Ms., July 1973, 84). In doing so, Ms. expressed a distinct self-view which served as an aid to individual identity formation and a means whereby readers could identify one another, a role singled out by Marjorie Ferguson as the ultimate function of traditional women's magazines (Ferguson, 1983, 186-7).

At its inception in 1972 and as Table 1A indicates, no "editorial" appeared in Ms., but the "Personal Report" became a semi-regular feature of the magazine. This polyvocal yet intimate

editorial mouthpiece reflected the magazine's "collective" editorial organization, as an individual editor's address was disavowed in favour of a communal letter to readers from the Ms. staff, a strategy similarly represented in the magazine's "non-hierarchical" editorial masthead. Self-conscious about the politics of their practices and organized as collectives with work and responsibilities dispersed, Ms. and other feminist periodicals are careful not to allow a single editor to monopolize status and authority. Collectively written editorials are consistent with the primary role of feminist periodicals: the establishment of a space wherein members of the editorial collective and readers are able to exchange views (Smith, 1989, 284). The "Personal Report" can thus be understood as a manifestation of such a renunciation of formats perceived to be authoritarian, even though, as Managing Editor Barbara Findlen confirms, actual divisions of labour did exist among the Ms. staff.

By answering readers' questions, explaining the magazine's philosophy and the politics of its expression, Ms.' eleven "Personal Reports", appearing from 1972 to the mid-1980's, served to elaborate on the magazine's somewhat paradoxical position as an ideological vehicle in a consumer setting. It can be framed as both an "educational" and a "consciousness-raising" tool of sorts, explicating the magazine's philosophy and the fact that Ms. functioned as an example of that philosophy in action. For example, the November 1974 Personal Report, entitled "Everything You Ever Wanted to know

About Advertising and Were Not Afraid to Ask" (pp. 56-94), explains Ms.' unusual advertising policy, its commitment to clarifying the blurred distinction between editorial material and ads and how the ad sales department of Ms. constitutes a direct challenge to the publishing industry as a whole. Ms.' self-concept as a forum for exchange between women is demonstrated in the August 1979 "The Truth About Unsolicited Manuscripts" Personal Report (p. 2), describing the weekly influx of 150-200 manuscripts as "important conduits of feelings and interests between our readers and us."

Other "Personal Reports" focus on soliciting reader donations and paying tribute to individual and uncelebrated Ms. staffers (July 1979, 106). The "Personal Report" thus reflects Ms.' mode of address which treats the reader as an "equal" and thus fulfills, editorially, the equality goal set by the movement. However, it sets itself apart from the "cult of femininity", to use Ferguson's terminology, which prevails in consumerist women's magazines: while affirming the female unity and solidarity that is a first-order message of traditional women's magazines, Ms. nonetheless represents a different, "feminist" vehicle that constructs an alternative definition of femininity.

Features and departments are important indices of Ms.' "voice" or orientation, and Table 1A suggests that Ms. identified the achievement of equality with informing women about topics dealing with the public world rather than focussing exclusively on the home and children. Departments like "Notes From Abroad", "How to Make Trouble", "Populist Mechanics", "All In A Day's Work" and "Money" feature articles that both inform and encourage readers to take on active roles in the world around them, a world that is not circumscribed by traditional notions

of feminine domesticity.

The features and departments listed in Table 1A, the framework through which Ms.' messages of equality and consciousness-raising are conveyed, also point to an impulse to "resurrect" women whose voices were hitherto silenced or ignored; "Wonder Woman Revisited" (July 1972), for instance, redefines the comic book hero as a distinctly feminist figure while the regular feature "Lost Women" similarly profiles women whose accomplishments have been buried or obscured by masculinist histories. There is an overall attempt on the part of the magazine to "even the score" or redress past imbalances, giving women access to a "public" world through its pages, without abandoning the realm of the private altogether. Departments like "Stories For Free Children" and "Men", a space for men to reflect on their roles in the fight for equality, and features like "Is Romance Dead?" suggest a discourse based on the notion that the personal is political. In other words, an attempt is made to redefine all issues as women's issues, including those that have traditionally been associated with women's concerns (ie. childrearing, interpersonal relationships).

The features and departments listed in Table 1A indicate that, for the most part, Ms. editorial thrust changed little between 1972 and 1979, although the magazine's overall "look" became progressively slicker and more colourful over this period. Features focus readers' attention on a wide range of topics: world issues, national problems, women's achievements outside the domestic sphere (ie. politics), role-free childrearing, reproductive freedom, women in sports, the arts and women's studies programs, all combining to produce a heterogeneous publication that nonetheless attempts to cut across the movement and downplay bases for conflict between women despite their

different positions in the wider social structure.

Ms. thus tailored its nonfiction features to its target audience by focussing on women as active and productive in public and private life. The "Ms. heroine", as identified by F. Barbara Phillips in her 1978 study of Ms. features, is an "idol of production", a woman rooted in a socially productive life of politics, business and the professions; this archetype is contrasted with the "idols of consumption" of traditional women's magazines, heroines whose activities are related to the leisure time sphere (Phillips, 1978, 126-7). Examples of these heroines/idols of production include professional tennis player Billie Jean King (July 1973), politician Barbara Mikulski (July 1975), and Congresswoman Bella Abzug (December 1985), as well as skydivers (July 1973), cowgirls (May 1982) and activists like Angela Davis and Charlotte Bunch (July 1977). These idols of production, however, are rarely described as "self-made" women, aspiring to individual success and status; rather, "most often they are exemplars of people who improved the lot of others, who struggled for social (not personal) goals" (Phillips, 1978, 127). Furthermore, unlike its more traditional counterparts, Ms. was a publication "to be read rather than merely thumbed through" (McCracken, 1991, 181). Its in-depth features presumed an educated, feminist readership, despite vague editorial statements that the magazine "meant to reach out in a populist way" (Ms., July 1972, 1). For instance, "Forum", a department added in July 1973 in response to reader requests, tackled contemporary debates within feminist theory and featured such dense essays as feminist historian Jo Freeman's "The Tyranny of Structurelessness" (July 1973) and Vivian Gornick's "Feminist Writers: Hanging Ourselves On A Party Line" (July 1975).

The Nonprofit Ms. (1979-1987) -

A particular point of pride for the magazine was the appropriation of Ms. on college campuses (ie. the assignment of articles as textbook supplements). Ms. was explicitly reframed as an intellectual, educational tool in the Fall of 1979 with its shift to nonprofit status²¹, a move that was explained by the editors as a strategy whereby they could more effectively "resist the pressures to become more conventional and lag behind the real interests and capabilities of you...pressures that the marketplace has sometimes exerted" (Ms., November 1979, 13). Now "legally" and "spiritually" a nonprofit educational periodical, "the new Ms." was introduced in the November 1979 Personal Report "not without those features you have responded to as helpful and original in the past, but with additions, expansions, a more readable, accessible design - and a whole new life" (p. 10). The publication's academic orientation is further underscored by the announcement of the formation of the Ms. Advisory Board of Scholars, a channel for translating feminist scholarship into publishable articles, and the increased presence of Ms. staff members at college campuses and academic conferences (Ms., July 1981, 14).

Although Ms. was reframed as an educational tool, its features and departments, as listed in table 1B, do little to reflect this

²¹ regard this as a different "stage" of Ms.' first incarnation rather than as an incarnation of the magazine in itself because the editorial and management bases of the publication remained the same. Although Ms. was now published by "The Ms. Foundation for Education and Communication", the magazine did not change ownership/management hands as it would come to do in 1987. This Foundation was simply created in order to be the nonprofit publisher of Ms..

APPENDIX

THE APPENDIXES TO THE REPORT

APPENDIX I - THE APPENDIXES TO THE REPORT

Part I - The Appendixes to the Report

Part II - The Appendixes to the Report

Part III - The Appendixes to the Report

Part I

Part II

Part III

Part IV

Part V

Part VI

Part VII

Part VIII

Part IX

Part X

Part XI

Part XII

Part XIII

Part XIV

Part XV

Part XVI

Part XVII

Part XVIII

Part XIX

Part XX

Part I

Part II

Part III

Part IV

Part V

Part VI

Part VII

Part VIII

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Part XI

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Part XV

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highlighted "academic" orientation; they simply serve as useful textbook supplements and women's studies course materials by virtue of their thorough treatment of issues/topics of concern to women. As Barbara Findlen points out (and as was noted in Chapter Two), the main impetus behind *Ms.*' shift to nonprofit status was economic: operating as a nonprofit publication enabled the magazine to receive tax-deductible grants and gifts from individuals and foundations. In terms of content, however, *Ms.*' articles continued to focus on a wide range of topics rather than those assumed to be of interest to women traditionally. With the exception of the September "Back to School" issue and the sporadic "Campus" department, a perusal of *Ms.*' features and departments suggests that *Ms.* content changed little in this respect: it is not clear that the magazine made any new or concerted effort to aim more articles at its university or academic audiences.

Ms. content does, however, continue to point to the magazine's "middle-of-the-road", liberal feminist orientation, which has served as the focus of much past criticism (see Valverde, 1985). Because *Ms.* (1972-1987), an alternative feminist publication that nevertheless accepts advertising and competes within the consumer magazine marketplace, grapples with some fundamental contradictions, it serves to elucidate some of the limitations of liberal feminist politics. In other words, the feminist scholar is forced to pose the question: how revolutionary is a politics when it is expressed through fairly conventional codes? This is a point that I will be taking up in greater detail in my concluding chapter.

As I mentioned above, tied to this particular feminist orientation is a liberal investment in the state as representing the

individual's interests in society: political participation is related to government activity, policy and voting (Eisenstein, 1981, 164). In order to achieve social equality, woman needs representation in the mainstream, public sphere of government politics. Contemporary liberal feminist politics have a very complex relationship to the state and, although there is no unified position among feminists about how to negotiate the ideological conflicts that arise, the challenge remains: how does one use the liberal feminist position vis-a-vis the state as progressively as possible without being constrained by it? (Eisenstein, 1981, 221).

Ms. features and editorial stance testify to this investment in government politics as a means whereby feminist goals can be achieved. Although unable to endorse specific electoral candidates after 1979 due to its nonprofit status, *Ms.*' editorial content reflects the magazine's interest in relating feminist activism to local and national mainstream politics. Features like "The Leadership Crisis", "All About Power" and "Women: The Political Time Bomb of '84" (as listed in Table 1B) grapple with these issues. The trials and tribulations of the Equal Rights Amendment, an illustrative example of the reformist, legislative, liberal feminist strategy, figure prominently in the monthly "Ms. Gazette" and throughout the magazine. The July 1981 "Personal Report" introduces "Watch On The Right" (see Table 1B), an analysis of the machinations of the New Right: with anti equality leaders in positions of electoral power, "this column and regular 'Gazette' alerts will decode the current legislation and offer other monitoring services" (p. 15). This "political" orientation is particularly evident in the January 1985 "Post-ERA

Politics" issue; its features include: "Post-ERA Politics: Losing the Battle But Winning the War?", "Watch On The Right: The Big Time Players Behind the Small-Town Image", "The Question of Tactics: Electoral Politics or Civil Disobedience" and "Abortion Rights Rescued - A Triumph of Coalition Politics".

Although an examination of *Ms.* in its first incarnation (1972-1987) uncovers certain themes and an overall middle of the road, liberal feminist orientation, changes in tone and editorial content are nonetheless discernible by the mid-1980's. A "post feminist" cultural climate and a new generation of women for whom 1970's style "strident, serious, sister stuff" was inappropriate, made a heavy sectarian stance less tenable than it was at *Ms.*' inception in 1972 (Winship, 1987, 157). With the success of feminism, some ideas no longer had a revolutionary, oppositional charge, but had become a part of many people's, rather than only feminists', common sense (Winship, 1987, 149). Indeed, *Ms.*' anniversary issues (see tables 1A and 1B) are noteworthy in this respect, for they serve as spaces in which the editors can reflect on the progress and accomplishments of the movement, as well as the magazine's role in relation to these developments.

A comparison of tables 1A and 1B indicate that between 1979 and 1987, articles were grouped within 27 different departments, as opposed to seventeen between 1972 and 1979, while seven of the magazine's original departments reappeared in the nonprofit *Ms.* It can be suggested that this "expansion" or appearance of new departments and diversified feature topics reflects *Ms.*' interest in relating feminism and feminist concerns to a wider variety of topics.

While topics not traditionally associated with women's concerns were being redefined as "women's issues", a more inclusive definition of feminism allowed Ms. to expand its coverage of subject matter common to conventional women's magazines (ie. fashion, food).

In reaction to what it perceived to be an overall shift in cultural climate, Britain's women's liberation magazine and interesting parallel to Ms., Spare Rib, commissioned a reader survey in the mid-1980's. Learning that its audience was younger than it had assumed, the magazine responded by giving itself the requisite "face-lift" (redesigned logo, glossy cover, lay-out) and introduced new, more "user-friendly" slots like "Feminists' Bedrooms" (Winship, 1987, 158). The austere look and strident tone of the early Spare Rib were jettisoned in favour of a slicker, more conventionally appealing package. Because feminism had evolved and no longer had coherence around a set of easily identifiable principles, it allowed for a more diverse and contradictory mix of ideas and tenets (Winship, 1987, 149). Janice Winship has suggested that, as feminist ideas of "equality" penetrated mainstream women's groups and their activities throughout the 1970's and the boundaries between feminists and non feminists became less rigid, the line between commercial, glossy women's magazines and alternative feminist publications blurred (Winship, 1987, 149), a trend to which Ms.' evolution testifies.

Steinem concedes that the magazine's original ratio of "1/3 advertising to 2/3 editorial" had become half and half by 1986 due to financial constraints (Ms., July/August 1990, 24). As a result, the space previously allotted to children's stories, poetry and fiction was reduced to accommodate advertisements. Rather than dwelling on

consciousness-raising and the fact that women were being discriminated against, Ms. editorial focus had shifted by the mid-1980's to looking at how these problems were being addressed. In Sternom's words,

"...in general now, there is a public majority acceptance that women are discriminated against and it's wrong. It's more fun editorially because we can report on solutions" (The Montreal Gazette, August 17, 1987, B-10).

Features echoing the fare of more conventional women's magazines also made their way into Ms. pages, a trend that becomes evident if we compare the departments listed in Table 1B with those listed in 1A. "Lifestyle" items appeared regularly as did articles on show business celebrities (ie. Bette Midler, Teri Garr). Echoing publications like Glamour and New Woman, the September 1986 "Special Issue On Men" included "The Bare Facts About Balding" and "The Ms. Gallery of Sexy Balding Men". As Table 1B makes clear, by 1987, features on lifestyle trends, travel and food combined to give the magazine a more conventional tone and orientation. Articles were now organized under eleven "umbrella categories" (see Table 1B) and shorter items appeared with "the more complex thoughtful pieces", with these new fast-paced features "moving to the beat of TV information that has become second nature to most of us" (Ms., September 1987, 5). This description evokes E. Ann Kaplan's characterization of the "televisual apparatus" as "the linear flow of relatively short text-segments of different kinds" (Kaplan, 1985, 85) and points to the complex of factors common to both the televisual and magazine apparatuses, as well as to the degree of influence respective media discourses have on one another.

By this time, the "Personal Report" had disappeared and was replaced by the "Editors' Note", ostensibly written by the editorial collective but signed by Managing Editor Suzanne Braun Levine. Interestingly, as Ms.' overall identity appears to be blurring, the editorial "voice" of the magazine has become more individual, identifiable. These editorials no longer focus as self-consciously as did the "Personal Reports" on the role and functioning of the magazine itself. Rather than dwelling on Ms. place in the worlds of publishing and feminist activism, the "Editors' Note" tends to serve more as an elaborated table of contents, introducing feature articles and explaining their relevance to contemporary women's issues and concerns.

The September 1987 "Editors' Note" discusses some of the above-mentioned changes, arguing that the enlarged focus, "while starting from the feminist baseline of theory and politics, will embrace the expanding range of interests among our readers and writers" (p. 5). A wider range of topics, including those assumed to be of interest to women traditionally, addresses a reader who is presumably no longer marginalized by a narrow definition of feminist correctness, but who rather embraces elements of the "centre" or mainstream, including the trappings of consumer culture. Thus, if the Ms. of the 1970's took part in the creation and maintenance of a feminist culture within and beyond its pages - its classified advertisements, for instance, gave nationwide publicity to events and businesses that would have otherwise remained isolated - the Ms. of the late 1980's addressed a readership who may have had feminist leanings but certainly no longer inhabited the "fringes" of society.

The Fairfax/Matilda Ms. (1987-1989) -

The sale of the magazine to Fairfax Publications (U.S.), Ltd., marked Ms. shift from an "ideological" to a consumer vehicle. Although the December 1987 "Editors' Note", signed by Gloria Steinem, assured that Ms. feminist purpose would remain intact and that readers would continue to see familiar writers and features within its pages, the publication changed noticeably, both in terms of outward appearance and content, as the features and departments listed in Table 2 indicate. Because the January 1988 issue was already in production when the sale of the magazine was finalized, these changes were introduced with the February 1988 issue and included a new "look", columns and features.

The "Editors' Note" was replaced by the "Editor's Essay", individually written by new Editor-in-Chief, Anne Summers. In addition to serving as introductions to individual issues and features, and as means of justifying their relevance to contemporary feminism, the "Editor's Essays" also served as vehicles for Summers' own personal viewpoint on topics like reproductive technologies (May 1988) and voting (November 1988). Although many of Ms.' original editorial collective remained on board, along with the Advisory Board on Research, Scholarship and Education, the masthead now listed names in order of rank and area of expertise. As I will discuss below, individual voices are emerging from the original aggregate, a shift that is consistent with the magazine's increasingly "aspirational", individualist orientation and tone.

As Ferguson et al. (1990) noted of the new Ms.: "Once filled with urgent calls to the barricades, more recent fare resembles that found in traditional women's magazines" (p. 49). Indeed, articles like "The Choice of Slaying Gray" and "Cookbooks to Dream About", in addition to the features and departments listed in Table 2 contrast sharply with those listed in Table 1A. Twenty "departments" appeared in my sample of the Fairfax/Matilda Ms. between 1987 and 1989, of which five appeared in the magazine's first incarnation. As a comparison of Table 1A with Tables 1A and 1B indicate, the "Services/Classified" and "Poetry" categories have disappeared, although short stories occasionally appear as "Features".

One particularly contentious addition to the Ms. formula was "Personal Appearances"; Summers defends this regular feature in her April 1988 editorial:

"We know from research we did last year that a great many women feel that most magazine fashion coverage bears no relation to their own clothing needs. But we all must make decisions about what to wear, and when we buy new clothes we must decide what suits our shapes, our lifestyles, and our budgets. It helps to see how other women deal with the daily problem of what to wear" (p. 4).

Readers continued to protest this thinly disguised fashion column and it was later dropped. But the ill-fated "Personal Appearances" serves to illustrate the degree to which Ms.' identity had blurred. This revamped "flagship of feminist journalism" (Faludi, 1991, 108)

"Due to the small number of Fairfax/Matilda issues analyzed, I have included two features per issue under the "Leading/Cover Features" heading in order to convey a better sense of the magazine's orientation than would be provided by presenting only the cover feature of each issue."

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tried to broaden its appeal to both readers and advertisers by encroaching on traditional women's magazines' territory. Attempting to mix a more traditional style with feminism, *Ms.* came to resemble upscale glossies like *New Woman*, *Working Woman* and *Savvy* which combined the fashion, beauty and entertaining articles necessary to attract advertisers, with features on careers. The antifeminist "superwoman" stereotype, balancing career, family and myriad responsibilities thus began to surface on *Ms.*' pages, a development suggested by the titles and lead-ins of two features from the January/February 1989 issue: "More Than She Bargained For - if money is power, what happens when she makes more than he?" and "Doing the Double Juggle When baby makes three, how do you share parenting and still have time for work and love?"

The editorial material presupposes a successful, career-driven, heterosexual *Ms.* reader with a broad range of interests from the AIDS crisis and childcare issues to gardening and fashion. As Table 2 makes abundantly clear, celebrity journalism, an integral part of the traditional formulae of women's magazines, also makes considerable inroads into the new *Ms.*: cover stories on Cher (July 1988), Glenn Close (November 1989) and Oprah Winfrey ("...an inspiring example of a woman who, in making it, has not lost her sense of a higher mission") (November 1988, 4) render the publication virtually indistinguishable from the "non-feminist" consumer glossies. Although careful to premise the celebrity stories on feminist themes (ie. the November 1989 cover story on actress Glenn Close centres on her work with pro-choice organizations), they nonetheless contribute to an overall change in tone. As Susan Faludi writes of *Ms.* second incarnation:

"The first magazine to run the pulpy face of a battered wife on the cover now showcases instead the powdered faces of starlets and pulled a photo of battered wife Hedda Nussbaum from its cover to pacify advertisers" (Faludi, 1991, 108).

Further obfuscation of the boundary between advertising and editorial material went hand in hand with *Ms.*' conversion to a decidedly conventional format. The previous policy of distinguishing between editorial content and advertising material was jettisoned in, what many critics have suggested was a bid to broaden its appeal to advertisers (see Zuckerman (1988), Ferguson et al. (1990), McCracken (1993)). Indeed, Fairfax's and later Matilda's concerted efforts to raise *Ms.*' circulation above its previous levels would appear to support these assertions. Although "covert advertising" "a system of mutually sustaining techniques and themes linking editorial content to purchased ads" (McCracken, 1993, 63) in the form of "advertorials" appeared in *Ms.* as early as 1984, "the ideology of advice" (p. 56) now routinely disguised ostensibly objective, informational features that simultaneously promoted products or, as the "Money" column illustrates, recommended particular investments.

Editor-in-Chief Anne Summers attributed *Ms.*' shift in orientation to changing audience needs and interests and a widening definition of "feminism", as the following quotes indicate:

"We are a serious magazine for women who want to be taken seriously, but we also laugh - sometimes at ourselves - and recognize that pleasures, relaxation, and even, on occasion, frivolity are as much a part of our lives as the desire for news and practical information...We are keeping the feminist ideal alive and helping foster the vitality and energy needed to keep feminism relevant to women everywhere today" (*Ms.*, July 1988, 6).

"One of the things that emerged from the [consumer focus group studies] was that - especially in the young age groups - there was this incredible resistance to the word 'feminist'" (Quoted in Faludi, 1991, 109).

"The women's movement is not as militant as it used to be. The world has changed and we've changed too...we are still a feminist magazine, but we are aware that our readers have other interests than politics" (Quoted in Zuckerman, 1988, 72).

This last statement is particularly interesting in light of Summers' own liberal feminist vision and its impact on Ms.' ideological orientation, and serves to highlight the elusive nature of the term "politics". In her first "Editor's Essay" for the magazine, Summers (a former political commentator, head of the Australian Office of the Status of Women and consultant to the Prime Minister on women's issues) describes how feminism influenced Australian national government policy. As a "femocrat", a feminist bureaucrat, she was committed to ensuring the inclusion of women in the mainstream policy-making process, while conceding that "femocrats attracted suspicion from the women's movement that had created them" (Ms., January 1988, 96). Summers' personal commitment to women's involvement in the political mainstream is clearly translated into expanded coverage of political issues in the new Ms., the addition of a Washington correspondent to the staff and the revocation of the magazine's nonprofit status, thus enabling it to endorse political candidates. Summers' investment in electoral politics as the means whereby equality can be achieved through progressive health, education and employment policy-making, is manifested in her denunciation of American voter-apathy and her commitment to the vote as a vehicle of empowerment for women:

"In Australia, if you don't vote, you are fined...it has the effect of creating a culture where virtually everyone feels that voting is the socially responsible thing to do...I think that it is important to remember that democracy by its nature usually offers less than perfect choices and that, if voting turnout is low, a candidate we really dislike wins by default" (MS., November 1988, 4).

Susan Faludi's criticism of *Ms.* (1970-1974) is based on her impression that because of the magazine's excursion into traditional editorial subject matter and softening stance vis-à-vis advertisers, it became less "political": "What was most curious about *Ms.* plunge into the world of celebrity reporting was that the magazine plunged most deeply after jettisoning its nonprofit status...a course the editors took precisely so they could be more political" (Faludi, 1991, 107). What Faludi does not address, however, is that *Ms.* did indeed become more "political", but its feminist politics was defined in relation to the realm of state government and reflected a liberal/individualist/consumerist ideology. This politics, a feminism that asks for sexual egalitarianism within the structure of the liberal state, is presumably not conducive to the feminist politics that Faludi has in mind because, as the example of *Ms.* perhaps demonstrates, it "relaxes into a potentially detrimental compromise" (Winship, 1987, 126), an "aspirational" feminist discourse that separates the "personal" from the "political" (p. 161).

Because Summers was committed to keeping feminism "relevant" to the cultural mood of the late 1970's, *Ms.*' form and content were altered in order to appeal to a larger audience perceived to be "turned off" by the term "feminist" and what feminism apparently stood for: an outright rejection of the personal and institutional accoutrements of femininity such as marriage, consumer culture and

so on (Winship, 1987, 125). Because feminist ideas had, by the mid-1980's forged a majority change in consciousness, it became clear that feminism-as-ideology had become disseminated and lacked any one specific focus (ie. equal pay for work of equal value). It was comprised instead of many versions or ways to incorporate women's concerns into public life. By demonstrating that the "fringe" was no longer the only acceptable place for feminists to occupy, *Ms.* began to resemble, to some degree, mainstream women's periodicals, thus allowing for consumption and femininity to once again inscribe and define one another as they have traditionally done in the women's press (Ballaster et al., 1991, 117). Caught somewhere between feminist "shoulds" and "unreformed" pleasures and desires (Winship, 1987, 161), the *Ms.* of the late 1980's espoused a legitimized, aspirational feminism that equated liberation with consumption and individual success. Above all, what the Fairfax/Matilda *Ms.* failed to address was that in order to construct an egalitarian society, a whole web of social structures, including the structure that sustained the magazine itself (capitalism) and the structure that limited its reformist agenda (the liberal state) might require substantial change.

Table 2 indicates Summers et al.'s attempt to equate "woman" with "reminist" and mix traditional-style women's journalism (ie. departments like "Clobber", "Timesavers" and "Savoir Faire") with "political" feminist discourse (features like "Games Republicans Play" and "Unfinished Agendas"). This strategy failed on two counts: it lost longtime feminist readers who had become disenchanted with its complacent, apparently innocuous thrust, while failing to

convince advertisers that Ms. had become less militant than in the early days of its first incarnation (Braden, 1992, 24). The constraints and contradictions of Ms.' consumerist orientation finally spelled the magazine's demise when, following its sale to Lang Communications, it folded in December 1989. Ms.' days of occupying a tenuous position between mainstream consumer culture and feminist counterculture were apparently over.

Ms.: The World of Women (1990-1992) -

If, as Linda Steiner suggests, we can define women's alternative media as oppositional, alternative and resistant in product and process (Steiner, 1992, 123), Ms.: The World of Women, Ms.' third and latest incarnation, appears to qualify as a countercultural artifact. In the Premier Issue's editorial, Editor-in-Chief Robin Morgan explains that the new Ms.' content is determined by readers' demands:

"...we want to hear what you like and don't like. In our rebirth announcement, we asked for just such information. Your responses came pouring in. What you didn't want to see in Ms. shocked no one here; what you did want surprised a few folks" (Ms., July/August 1990, 2).

What readers did not want to see in a reincarnated Ms. are the typical topics featured in conventional women's magazines and the second, Fairfax/Matilda incarnation of the publication: fashion, interior design, celebrities (unless "feminist"), gardening, food/wine/diets, makeup and cosmetic surgery. What Ms. readers wanted to see were features and articles on the following:

- lesbian issues/relationships/parenting
- international news
- spirituality
- health (physical and psychological)
- environmental issues
- fiction/poetry/art/women's history
- coverage of older women
- politics/elections/activist strategies
- childcare issues
- profiles of women in the work place, sports, music
- reproductive rights
- feminist theory
- humour
- literary reviews

As table 3 indicates, for the most part, readers' demands are being met. Morgan admits that it is impossible to include in-depth features on each of the above topics in every bimonthly issue: "...it won't all fit, particularly since we want to print longer pieces now that we're not restricted to short (thus sometimes superficial) ones, as when every page had to be ad-subsidized". Indeed, the new *Ms.* is ad-free. By taking the original *Ms.*' attempt to separate advertising and editorial one step further in order to achieve editorial freedom, a set of standards can presumably be imposed on the magazine that will not be compromised by advertisers' concerns. This strategy is made particularly clear by Gloria Steinem's expose-style essay in the Premier Issue, "Sex, Lies and Advertising", elaborating on *Ms.*' struggles with recalcitrant, conservative advertisers between 1972 and 1989 and suggesting the degree to which, progressive advertising policy aside, *Ms.*' editorial content was in fact constrained by advertisers' demands and commercial considerations (pp. 18-28).

Ms.: The World of Women "looks" so different from its past incarnations and mainstream counterparts that it is dubbed a "magabook" by Morgan in the Premier Issue's editorial announcing

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1. The first group of variables includes the demographic characteristics of the respondents, such as age, gender, and education level. These variables are used to control for potential confounding factors that may influence the relationship between the independent and dependent variables.

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3. $\{x \in \mathbb{R}^n : x_i \geq 0, i = 1, \dots, n, \sum_{i=1}^n x_i = 1\}$ is a convex set.
4. $\{x \in \mathbb{R}^n : x_i \geq 0, i = 1, \dots, n, \sum_{i=1}^n x_i \leq 1\}$ is a convex set.
5. $\{x \in \mathbb{R}^n : x_i \geq 0, i = 1, \dots, n, \sum_{i=1}^n x_i = 1, x_1 = 0\}$ is a convex set.
6. $\{x \in \mathbb{R}^n : x_i \geq 0, i = 1, \dots, n, \sum_{i=1}^n x_i = 1, x_1 = 0, x_2 = 0\}$ is a convex set.
7. $\{x \in \mathbb{R}^n : x_i \geq 0, i = 1, \dots, n, \sum_{i=1}^n x_i = 1, x_1 = 0, x_2 = 0, x_3 = 0\}$ is a convex set.
8. $\{x \in \mathbb{R}^n : x_i \geq 0, i = 1, \dots, n, \sum_{i=1}^n x_i = 1, x_1 = 0, x_2 = 0, x_3 = 0, x_4 = 0\}$ is a convex set.
9. $\{x \in \mathbb{R}^n : x_i \geq 0, i = 1, \dots, n, \sum_{i=1}^n x_i = 1, x_1 = 0, x_2 = 0, x_3 = 0, x_4 = 0, x_5 = 0\}$ is a convex set.
10. $\{x \in \mathbb{R}^n : x_i \geq 0, i = 1, \dots, n, \sum_{i=1}^n x_i = 1, x_1 = 0, x_2 = 0, x_3 = 0, x_4 = 0, x_5 = 0, x_6 = 0\}$ is a convex set.

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(A) 100% (B) 90% (C) 80% (D) 70%

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"welcome to liberated territory where we defiantly proclaim the beginning of the postpatriarchal era" (p. 1). If the original Ms. can be interpreted as an "experiment" in women's journalism, the new Ms. can likewise be approached as experimental. Ms.: The World of Women represents a return to the magazine's original role as a source of feminist thought and activism. However, this third incarnation travels further than that, by ostensibly rejecting the capitalist/consumerist underpinnings of its predecessors.

As a comparison of Tables 2 and 3 indicates, poetry, fiction and specifically "feminist" themes remain a prominent position in the new Ms., while noticeably absent from the seventeen departments listed are the fashion and "lifestyle" articles that characterized the Fairfax/Malinda incarnation. Furthermore, as the features listed in Table 3 make clear, all traces of celebrity journalism have disappeared: cover stories on Cher, Meryl Streep and Glenn Close have been replaced by Steinem's scathing industry expose and an analysis of the debate surrounding questions of gender and race.

Immediately discernible in the new Ms. is the influence of its Editor-in-Chief on the contents of its pages: the magazine clearly shows Morgan's imprint and her commitment to forging a world community of women. The feminist vision of one woman thus determines, to a large extent, the orientation of the publication, much in the same way that Anne Summer's interest in governmental activity and policy-making influenced the orientation of Ms.' second incarnation. Morgan brings to Ms. her own established reputation and a large set of connections in the international women's movement; in addition to editing the influential anthologies Sisterhood is

Powerful (1970) and Sisterhood is Global (1984), she is co-founder of the Sisterhood is Global Institute, the first international feminist think tank (Hovey, 1990, 42). Rather than locating the new Ms.' orientation and ideological tone in any editorial "collective" characteristic of much women's media, the new Ms. possesses a clear editorial "voice" and bears the ideological imprint of the individual behind that voice.

Morgan's desire to contribute to an international support network is evident, not only in the magazine's new subtitle and the addition of the Ms. Board of International Advisors ("distinguished feminist activists from all over the world"), but in the editorials, written exclusively by the Editor-in-Chief, and features. As Table 3 indicates, at least one feature per issue focusses on an international story: "The New Cold War With Japan: How Are Women Paying For It?" (November/December 1991), "Cambodia: Can Women Survive The New Peace?" (July/August, 1992). These articles appear in addition to the regular "Sisterhood is Global International News" department featuring shorter items. Furthermore, these reports come from journalists whose countries are being written about in order to avoid "hegemonic errors, cross-cultural insensitivities made by instant experts" (Braden, 1992, 24).

Morgan's Premier Issue editorial points to the wide range of topics that the new Ms. embraces as well as the breadth of her editorial focus:

"I intend to write you the most passionate editorials I can. About religious fundamentalism and toxic groceries, female sexuality and children's suffrage, how debt affects women struggling to farm in Iowa (and in Brazil). About making

connections, sense of it, change, love, mischief, a difference, merry" (Ms., July/August 1990, 1).

Because Morgan's individual vision is integral to the new Ms., overall orientation, her bi-monthly editorials resemble more closely Anne Summers' Editor's Essays than the Personal Reports of the original Ms.. But instead of focussing on Ms.' role as an anomaly within the publishing industry or serving as an elaborated Table of contents justifying subject matter, these editorials effectively convey Ms.' broadened perspective: the magazine looks more to the world than back upon itself. I am suggesting that the new Ms. is less "self-conscious" than its previous incarnations perhaps because it no longer has to grapple with the fundamental contradiction that dogged its existence and drew widespread criticism from 1972 to 1989: its role as an ideological vehicle negotiating a consumer framework. No longer hovering between two conflicting ideological poles, Ms.: The World of Women can be unashamedly feminist without fear of economic repercussions because its fiscal health no longer depends on advertising revenue.

When the new Ms. first appeared, it was sold at newsstands in some major cities and over the counter at some bookstores, but was otherwise available only by subscription. A small distribution network and high subscription price cut circulation by half thus confirming Ms.' status as a "vertical" publication. Its new look, longer in-depth features and the notable absence of any advertising combine to give it an academic, intellectual air that far surpasses the highbrow orientation of its first incarnation. In addition to reaching younger women, the new Ms. is clearly targeting its original audience of educated, middle-

class feminists who, it is hoped, will support a publication that has "defined and legitimized their alienation from the prevailing (mass)culture" (Solomon, 1991, 9). Its form, content and alternative mode of financing thus combine to lend the new Ms. credibility as an academic-style journal.

What this juxtaposition of a broad, international perspective with a circumscribed, clearly-defined audience highlights is the difficulty of defining a single women's movement and points to some of the more perplexing questions facing contemporary feminists. In spite of women's efforts to form such a coherent body, it has become clear that women have many aims that often conflict; after all, if we cannot entertain the notion of a single "poor people's movement", why should we assume that a movement of women constitutes more of an organic whole? (Midgley and Hughes, 1983, 3). For women of colour, for instance, separation from whites may be required in order to voice the perspectives of Black, Native American, Asian, Hispanic and Third World women, for the majority of the participants in the American women's movement and the media it spawned were white (Smith, 1989, 286).

The new Ms. refuses to establish what it calls "constituency ghettos" in the form of "The Lesbian Column", the "African-American Page" or "Young Feminists Forum". Instead, it strives to "weave these voices throughout the fabric of the magazine" (Ms., July/August 1992, 1), a strategy that evokes the female unity/solidarity theme that Marguerite Ferguson highlights as the first-order message of traditional women's magazines. However, the new Ms. does come closer than most conventional women's magazines to admitting that diversity, in terms of ethnic/racial identification, sexual orientation or "party" political

adherence may conflict with the homogenising "woman" category" (Ballaster et al., 1991, 175).

The new Ms. "When Good Women Disagree: a constructive conflict forum", is an illustrative example pointing to the degree to which the "movement" has evolved and acknowledges that bases of ideological conflict can indeed be found between feminists: "We're a mature movement now and we shouldn't fear others labelling it a catchall when we refuse to be monolithic" (Ms., July/August 1990, 2). Indeed, Managing Editor Barbara Lindler stresses the importance of highlighting voices of dissent and disagreement within the movement and isolates this point as one of the future goals of the magazine. In order to reflect the multiplicity of voices within the movement, Ms. must reinforce a definition of diversity that is not limited to questions of culture, class and sexual orientation; great philosophical differences exist among feminists as well and Ms. must address these points of contention in order to reflect this.

In allowing for a space wherein debate can take place and different voices can be heard, the new Ms. is acknowledging that feminism does not cohere around a set of easily defined principles because the fight for social equality is fraught with complexities. Therefore, despite its renunciation of the underpinnings and trappings of conventional women's magazines, as well as the contradictions that arise when a professedly feminist publication functions within that framework, conflicts between female unity/sisterhood and individual interests/diversity nonetheless remain, suggesting perhaps that there exists "unity in diversity" as in "multiculturalism" ideology.

 *Ballaster et al. use this argument in relation to Spare Rib, but I argue that it applies just as well to Ms.

However, what a comparison of Ms.' three incarnations does, above all, is raise questions concerning the validity and relevance of terms like "alternative", "mainstream", "radical", "conventional", "feminist" and "politics" to contemporary women's media and feminist ideology. It would be an oversimplification, for instance, to declare the new Ms. "radical" or "revolutionary" for, although it does represent a bold departure from traditional women's journalism, it continues to reflect the problems that arise when we think in terms of a global sisterhood versus other group interests, tensions that have characterized every incarnation of Ms. discourse, for the categories "woman" and "feminist" are fissured with other forms of social identification like race, class and so on (Ballaster et al., 1991, 5).

Furthermore, Ms. continues to endorse a "liberal feminist" model of electoral politics,

"...less because we naively trust their system than because elections are crucial to our lives" (Ms., January/February 1992, 1).

The new Ms. equates, as did its predecessors, political clout with mobilizing women as candidates and voters and empowerment with representation within the electoral system. For instance, the September/October 1992 issue included an "Exclusive Ms. Supplement 'Election Guide to Women Candidates', a comprehensive national survey of nearly 2000 women. This, of course, is consistent with the liberal feminist belief that a positive shift in the gender balance of power would have a "trickle down" effect, as more women who "made it" passed on gains and empowered the women beneath them (Ferguson, 1990, 216). But, as Midgley and Hughes suggest, how can we guarantee that women

will ignore myriad other social divisions in favour of the tentuous bonds of sisterhood? How can we suggest that a gender group constitutes any more of an organic whole than an age or ethnic group?

By moving beyond some of the more blatant contradictions posed by a consumerist model of feminism and suggesting that certain social structures implicitly weaken any feminist thrust, *Ms.* has revealed itself as "a new communications medium for women" (McCracken, 1991, 388). But "recommitting [itself] to grasp hands and hold fast, across gulfs of ethnicity, age, ability, class, sexuality" (*Ms.*, January/February 1992, 1) is nothing altogether new. If indeed the recognition of women's identity as a "sexual class" is integral to radical feminism, as Zillah Eisenstein argues, we must reevaluate what we mean by "mainstream" and "alternative" publications, for such a conception of woman, which renders all other social cleavages virtually invisible, is also central to the modes of address of traditional women's magazines.

Ms.' Ideological Progression: An Overview -

What then can be deduced from this discourse analysis? What does a comparison of the modes of address of *Ms.*' three incarnations tell us about owners'/editors' responses to perceptions of readers' changing ideological interests? This comparative discourse analysis underscores the importance of the contexts in which *Ms.*' incarnations functioned, (i.e. cultural "moods", publishing milieus, readership interests). As will become clear below, *Ms.*' shifts in form and content imply deeper social and industry developments that play important roles in shaping the publication.

When Ms. was launched in 1972, its topics and its approach to covering them were ground breaking where a national monthly magazine was concerned. Ms. foregrounded or made visible the discrimination and misogyny that lurked in every corner of North American society but had previously been glossed over by the women's press (i.e. domestic violence, sexual harassment, abortion restrictions) and addressed an audience of women whose commitment to leading "non-traditional" lives would benefit from this kind of information. By choosing not to cover only topics and issues traditionally associated with women's "private" domain, Ms. suggested that equality for women could be achieved by broadening horizons and providing information about the public sphere of work in which women could become "idols of production". In other words, women can do what men have done, but we can do it "differently". With the help of our "sisters", we can bring about widespread social change without giving up certain supposedly "feminine" characteristics that have traditionally been great strengths: we are not required to abandon our roles as the nurturers and shapers of the next generation. Rather, we humans (women and men) must now work towards achieving a more balanced, rewarding gender experience. We must rethink our roles rather than merely exchange the supposedly "feminine"/private sphere for the supposedly "masculine"/public sphere.

Ms. role as a distinct consciousness-raising or educational tool was symbolically confirmed in 1979 with its shift to nonprofit, educational status. However, its function became increasingly complex as the 1980's progressed. As feminism forged an overall change in consciousness by the end of the 1970s - every major issue raised by the movement (equal pay, ERA, the right to choose) had majority support

in U.S. opinion polls (Ms., December 1979, 4) -- clear-cut "equality" issues no longer served as the focal points of the movement. More complicated political issues needed to be addressed, such as the distribution of power within families and women's "double day" of work; in other words, the question being asked was, "how exactly do we redress the "social" balance between men and women?"

A multi-faceted ideology allowed for a more contradictory mix: feminism no longer occupied a cultural "fringe" for the simple reason that the mainstream or "centre" had become more "feminist". As Barbara Friedlan stated, other magazines stepped in, "followed in some of the trails we blazed". Publications that previously ignored topics like rape, marital violence and Washington news, were now covering them regularly and readers who had needed to turn to Ms. for that kind of information, now had a plethora of magazines from which to choose. In response to these cultural and marketplace changes, the first incarnation of Ms. came to embrace this more contradictory mix of "feminisms". By the late 1980's, Ms.' unique mode of address had become blurred, uncertain, suggesting that the magazine could expand its editorial horizons, look slicker and allow its readers to indulge in the pleasures of mainstream consumer culture. But, as the "Editors' Notes" suggest, the editorial "collective" felt the need to justify these changes in the name of feminism. Therefore, this ideological vehicle's task of negotiating a consumer framework became increasingly problematic, thanks largely to the very changes brought about by the work of individuals like Steinem and Friedlan.

Indeed, by the time Ms.' second incarnation is launched by its Australian owners and editor, the very relevance of the term "feminism"

is being problematized. As Summers' quotes suggest, feminism has come so far and brought about such far-reaching social change, that all women active in the public sphere are incidentally "feminists"; they no longer need to explicitly identify themselves as such. Consequently, notions of "sisterhood" and recognition of women as a coherent, subordinate sexual caste are downplayed in favour of an individualist, "aspirational" message that says, "Don't limit yourself" and "You can have it all, if you play the game", embracing a masculinist value system and (literally) buying into a consumption-based paradigm of liberation.

The mode of address of Ms. third incarnation suggests, however, that the term "feminism" is indeed still required and any redefinition should embrace the diversity that is "the wave of the future" (Interview with Marcia Ann Gillespie, Literatti, January 19, 1993). Rather than imitating or integrating a masculine-patterned consumerist mainstream, as Ms. second incarnation attempted to do, the new Ms. sets out to re-create an "alternative" institutional space facilitating the development of a culture in which women are social equals and that could potentially transform masculinist value systems (Ms., December 1979, 86). In order to do this, the new Ms. suggests that we must get back to the basics and wholeheartedly embrace a notion of "sisterhood" as we did in the "strident, serious" 1960's and 1970's.

But because feminism has indeed helped to legitimize such principles as "economic equality" and reproductive freedom for women, 1990's feminist goals of "social" equality are more long-ranging and more complex than the movement's goals at the time of Ms.' first incarnation. The North American feminism of the 1990's is recognizing

that the struggle for social justice is taking place everywhere, in the developed and developing world. Indeed, as Robin Morgan contends, some of the most original, interesting contemporary feminist thought is emerging from the Third World (Braden, 1992, 24). Ms. message for the 1990s is that there is unity in cultural, ethnic and philosophical diversity and addresses a self-identified feminist readership committed to the global bonds of sisterhood, however tenuous they may be, and who is prepared to identify every issue as a "women's issue".

Chapter 4

Readers and Critics

In this, my concluding chapter, I will be taking a look at the Ms. reader in an effort to answer one of the questions posed at the outset of this study: what kind of reader is the magazine creating or addressing? Furthermore, does its audience, "those absent presences who inhabit our discourses and are remade by them" (Ganguly, 1992, 67), change over the course of the magazine's three incarnations? The Ms. reader plays a particularly prominent role in the magazine's discourse. This is clearly reflected in the magazine's atypically expanded "Letters" column, to which I will be paying special attention.

I will, therefore, be looking at the implied/ideal reader of Ms.' discourse as well as the "actual" audience as presented by infrastructural data and the magazine's own observations. The "implied" reader is constructed in and by the text in question; different texts and genres construct different implied readers. The ideal reader of most North American women's magazines is middle-class, white and heterosexual, although different magazines do address different groups of women: Essence, for example, addresses the affluent, career-oriented black woman, Sassy addresses the teenage market. The intimacy of the editorial "we" serves to define the

audience being addressed but, if we limit our analyses to textual interpretations, we neglect the whole area of readers' resistance to the subjectivities postulated by magazine texts (Ballaster et al., 1991, 25). In other words, the implied/actual distinction is important because hypothetical readers are different from real readers who can be described by such sociological categories as age, education, income, race and so on. Therefore, an "audience" must also be conceptualized in terms of numerical and demographic categories rather than simply as the idealized "other" of representation. No reader occupies the so-called "ideal" position produced in and by the ideology of a particular text: readings/interpretations are structured by women's social contexts and shared cultural meanings. I will thus be gleaming "the Ms. reader" from the individual constructed or implied by the magazine's discourse, as well as the infrastructural data provided by surveys and reader profiles.

Ms. relationship to the women's movement and its symbolic status vis-a-vis both feminism and the publishing industry will then be discussed as a means of approaching the role of critics' voices for, as I will argue, the bulk of the criticism aimed at the publication stems from a particular interpretation of Ms. as a significant symbol of American feminism. I will then wrap up by refocussing on questions raised at the outset of this study: as an ideological vehicle in a consumer setting, how has Ms. negotiated the economic and ideological tensions it has encountered?

Questions of Readership -

The reader's role is especially prominent where Ms.' discourse is concerned. Throughout every incarnation of Ms.' history, the reader is continually identified as the lifeblood of the magazine, the reason the publication survives. Indeed, the very inception of the latest, ad-free Ms. is attributed to reader support: "Your energy made it happen" (Ms., July/August 1990, 1). All three incarnations of Ms.' discourse highlight a caring, committed feminist readership who take the magazine's content seriously and to whom the publication feels an acute sense of responsibility. But, how do we begin to discuss the reader and her/his role in the magazine's development?

The role of the reader is crucial to an analysis of a popular cultural text like the women's magazine for, as Janice Winship argues, the coherence of the text lies not in the magazines themselves, but in and through the reader or rather the relation between the representations in the magazines and the social life experienced by readers (Winship, 1987, 153). The reader is crucial to the consumer magazine apparatus because the strategies of the sponsors/advertisers who subsidize consumer publications situate readers as endlessly consuming, perpetually occupying a state of about-to-be-filled desire (Kaplan, 1987, 29). However, ethnographic studies of the consumers of popular cultural texts - Hallaster et al.'s 1991 interviews with magazine readers serve as an excellent example - reveal that there is no "pure"/"ideal" reader/consumer: hypothetical readers are distinct from actual social beings.

Questions concerning "readings" and "interpretation" have gained prominence as a result of developments in the field of literary

criticism and the posing of a larger, though related question: is the text or the reader the source of meaning? The very notion of "text" has expanded (ie. more and more objects are seen as capable of being interpreted) and this has resulted in the reinterpretation of the text as object and, in some cases, its "evaporation" (Mukerjee and Schudson, 1991, 52). The focus has shifted to the text's readers and the interpretive communities whose mental universes make its interpretation possible. This brand of reader-response analysis, as exemplified by Janice Radway's pioneering 1984 study of romance fiction enthusiasts, Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature, purports to reject the method of treating readers as textually-constructed subject positions or "ideal readers" defined in terms of textual mechanisms and operations. Different readers read differently (ie. employ different interpretive strategies), because they belong to different interpretive communities, each of which acts upon texts differently and for different purposes.

By the 1970's, the women's magazine-publishing industry was engaging in its own variety of reader-response analysis, adopting a more reader-participatory approach as a whole (Ferguson, 1983, 86). While the old forms of audience feedback were maintained (ie. letters, "real reader" stories), new ways of involving the audience and learning about them were tried. Redbook, for example, initiated a closer dialogue with readers by pioneering a new form of audience involvement: a questionnaire was included in the October 1974 issue asking "How do you really feel about sex?" and solicited 100,000 responses (Ferguson, 1983, 83). Questionnaires about marriage, sex, childcare and so on became commonplace in women's magazines during

the 1970's. Response letters were analyzed and reported back on, thus initiating a structured form of two-way communication (Ferguson, 1983, 86). While Ellen McCracken maintains that the senders and receivers of women's magazine messages continue to engage in an unequal power relation with readers having little input in the representations that claim to be about their lives (McCracken, 1993, 301), the uncertain economic climate of the magazine-publishing industry in the 1980's created additional pressure to engage in audience research, thus furthering editors' search for new insights into and information about their client-target group (Ferguson, 1983, 144).

The Incarnations of the Ms. Reader -

Who, then, is the Ms. reader, and how has s/he changed with each incarnation? In 1974, the magazine commissioned a Target Group Index study which compared the buying habits of Ms. readers with those of the women readers of other magazines (ie. Redbook, McCall's, Ladies Home Journal, Cosmopolitan, Glamour and Mademoiselle), as well as magazines like Time, Newsweek and Psychology Today. The profile of the Ms. woman clearly emerges from the TGI demographics:

"...the Ms. reader ranks first in youth (18-34), in household income, professional/managerial status, education, and full-time employment. She is married (68.6%) and has multiple bank accounts, stock certificates and credit cards. Among the audiences covered, she is the most likely to live in the central city and the suburbs...In sum, she is young, affluent, well-schooled, well-positioned, and in the center of things - the emerging "new woman" of the American marketplace" (Target Group Index Demographics, 1974, unpaginated).

Hence publisher Patricia Carbine's assessment of the 1972-1981 Ms. audience as "almost a dream for quality product marketers". Ms. readers constituted a "class" audience; the Folio 400 even listed Ms. in its "Women in Business" category (McCracken, 1993, 281). Aimed at younger, urban working women in white-collar jobs - if married, then not self-identified housewives or mothers - the "ideal Ms. woman" of the first incarnation was, according to Marlane Valverde, a charming, energetic, heterosexual white woman, maintaining a solid relationship with a man while holding a "meaningful" job (Valverde, 1985, 81). According to Gloria Steinem, however, women of colour read Ms. in disproportionate numbers, a source of pride to Ms. staffers who were more racially representative than the editors of other women's magazines (Ms., July/August 1990, 25). A December 1981 survey presented an audience that was 20% male, whose median age was slightly higher than its founding year and whose number of Black and Hispanic readers was steadily increasing (Miller, 1981, 18). But, as Steinem insisted: "the state of mind of our readers transcends statistics about age, economics and race" (Miller, 1981, 18).

The magazine's own observations of its audience paint a portrait of a committed, caring feminist reader, representative of the movement as a whole. Numbering between 350-400,000, Ms. readers, according to the January 1973 "Personal Report", write unprecedented numbers of letters in response to everything, take advertisements almost as seriously as the editorial content, and are generous to their movement and their less fortunate sisters, contributing to help pay for subscriptions for individual women and organizations (p. 97). Readers are continually praised and identified as "the reason Ms. survives"

and the editors insist that the magazine belongs to the reader as much as to those who work there (Ms., July 1981, 13). Indeed, Ms. First Anniversary "Personal Report", drawing on the implied intimate relationship between magazine and reader and breaking down the space between reader/subject and text/object, states: "It's your birthday too" (July 1977, 89).

Interestingly, Ms. reader surveys found that its audience, for the most part, shunned conventional women's magazines, choosing instead to read publications like Time, Newsweek, Psychology Today, and Intellectual Digest (Harrington, 1974, 56). This, of course, became a selling point for the magazine, a means or strategy for attracting advertisers interested in targeting an affluent audience otherwise unreachable in conventional women's publications. With the sale of the magazine to Fairfax Publications, this conception of the Ms.-reader-as-monied-consumer was further stressed as Fairfax expanded on the magazine's previous attempt to link feminism to consumerism. Indeed, Fairfax's ads in trade publications simply reified Ms. readers as affluent consumers; one campaign featured a woman with ten-dollar bills covering her as a dress with the heading: "What do you call a woman with serious money to invest? Ms." (McCracken, 1993, 287).

The Fairfax/Matilda Ms. (1987-89) continued to construct an active, engaged reader who was still very much a part of the magazine's discursive process. In her January/February 1989 "Editor's Essay", Anne Summers states that she reads "every letter that comes in", acknowledging each with a postcard or letter and readers often write back expressing surprise at such personal attention; she wants readers to know that their concerns are appreciated, heeded (p. 8).

But as Summers' quotes in the preceding chapter indicate, this implied reader is no longer necessarily a self identified "feminist"; indeed, "feminist" and "woman" have been collapsed into one figure, a mounted female consumer. Ms. more conventional tone went hand in hand with this blurring of the Ms. reader's feminist identity and, as a result, the magazine sacrificed its unique status as a publication for women unreachable through other women's magazines. Consequently, this goal of reaching a broader spectrum of women led to a maximum circulation of 550,000 by mid-1988.

In contrast to the reader constructed by the Fairfax/Matilda Ms. discourse, Ms.: The World of Women's readership is explicitly identified as "feminist". The reincarnated Ms.' first direct-mail campaign soliciting potential subscribers provides a useful insight into the type of reader the new Ms. is targeting.

"It's not just for casual readers and thumbers through'. It's for people who care. People like you...You made it clear if any readers would pay for magazines as if they were books, you would" (Ms. direct-mail campaign letter, 1990, unpaginated).

The fact that the new Ms. is ad-free allows it to experiment editorially and politically while ideally maintaining an unmitigated relationship with readers who are the feminist community. In a January 1995 PBS interview, Executive Editor Marcia Ann Gillespie identified the new Ms.' "target" audience as "women who find themselves either already committed to or are more curious about what is this thing called feminism [sic]". While its actual readership may be significantly smaller than its previous audience¹⁰, its

¹⁰According to Managing Editor Barbara Findlen, Ms.' current circulation has reached approximately 200,000.

broadened, more inclusive mode of address presupposes a diversified readership of committed feminists interested in looking beyond the borders of race, class and nationality. The white, middle-class focus that was suggested in its first incarnation and intensified in its second, has been broadened in an effort to effectively incorporate working women's and ethnic and African-American women's concerns. Furthermore, the new Ms. reader is addressed as part of a larger, more international feminist struggle.

Nevertheless, as I mentioned in Chapter 2, when the new Ms. appeared, it was sold at newsstands in some major cities and over the counter at some bookstores, but was otherwise available only by subscription. As publisher Ruth Bower explained: "We felt that this is a vertical publication that shouldn't be in supermarkets and mom-and-pops" (Solomon, 1991, 9). This narrow distribution scheme, along with the high cover and subscription prices and academic "style" of the new Ms., clearly indicate that the publication is targeting educated, middle-to-upper-middle-class readers, people able and willing to pay for in-depth feminist news stories and analysis unadulterated by commercial concerns. Although the pronounced white, heterosexual bias of the two previous incarnations may have given way, to some degree, to a more inclusive notion of "diversity", in targeting such a circumscribed audience, the "class" bias of its predecessors remains. As Gloria Steinem wrote in her direct-mail campaign letter:

"Remember: when Susan B. Anthony started a magazine called The Revolution, she pointed out that freedom of the press belongs to those who own the press. If she had lived in this age of advertising, she might have added that freedom of the press belongs to those who pay its cost" (Direct-mail campaign letter, 1990, unpaginated).

The Ms. reader remains the affluent consumer; she is simply not addressed as such. She is, rather, addressed as a serious, self-identified feminist, engaged in learning exactly what that role presently entails.

The Role of the Reader and Letters to Ms. -

The role of the reader takes on an enlarged significance, however, where the new Ms. is concerned. Indeed, as Gloria Steinem insists, the entire venture was made possible by a tremendous wave of reader support. After publication stopped with the November 1980 issue,

"...a strange and wonderful thing began to happen. The phone rang off the hook. Letters poured in. Long, caring, helpful, smart, inspiring letters full of evidence that women - and a lot of men, too, really cared about Ms." (Direct mail campaign letter, 1990, unpaginated).

A referendum was thus held via direct-mail campaign, asking potential subscribers whether they would support an ad-free publication as well as inviting them to "shape the book itself" by offering suggestions on the reverse side of the ballot form enclosed.

"We want to hear from you. Not only now, at the outset, but as we go along, defining and refining this whole new adventure in publishing" (Direct-mail campaign letter, 1990, unpaginated).

The voices of Ms. readers have played an important role in each incarnation of the magazine. In 1979, for example, Ms.' monthly averages of reader contributions included 500 letters to the editors, 600 unsolicited manuscripts, 750 poetry submissions, 400 article

suggestions, 200 submissions for the "Ms. Gazette" (the department covering movement news), 1000 submissions to "No Comment" and several hundred letters to specific authors and editors in response to their work (Smith, 1989, 294 n.7). This open forum approach to magazine journalism is characteristic of many feminist periodicals: by eliminating the conventional barriers between editors and readers, the very function of the magazine is expanded. The two-way dynamic of communication between readers and magazine made possible by changes in the genre in the 1970's and 1980's are taken further where Ms. is concerned, making the publication even more direct and personal than its conventional counterparts. Part of the feminist periodical's overall renunciation of formats perceived to be authoritarian is this promotion of reader involvement, including an expansion of space for reader responses and submissions. Ms. felt that using only women "writers" was, in itself, a form of discrimination and misrepresentation of the lives of everyday women (Ms., July 1972, 3).

Nowhere is this impulse more apparent than in Ms. "Letters" column. Ms. has consistently given more space to reader letters than other magazines and publishes special forums when it receives many thoughtful responses on one subject (Thom, 1988, xi). Readers argue and disagree with one another and evaluate the magazine's content, conveying a sense of "real communication" between the readers who write the letters and the editors who read them and an opportunity for serious thought about feminist issues (McCracken, 1997, 281). Gloria Steinem insists that it is this kind of reader input that keeps the magazine connected, accountable. In her introduction to Letters to Ms.: 1972-1987, a book of collected reader letters from the

magazine's first incarnation edited by Mary Thom, Steinem writes:

"When I look back on the fifteen years of Ms., the letters from readers are what I remember best. More than reporting on short stories, poetry or humor (though the letters contain all of these) I look forward to our readers' continuing gift for putting helpful facts, personal stories, political alerts, article ideas, 'clicks of recognition', accurate criticisms and sometimes whole life histories into envelopes and sending them to far off editors as a gesture of faith" (Thom, 1988, xi).

Ms. received approximately 20,000 letters in response to its Spring Preview Issue in 1977 and with that deluge of mail an instant "community" was formed. The "Letters" column opened up a whole world of women's experience and served as a forum in which readers could participate directly in the magazine in several ways. As in the letters columns of other publications, readers often took Ms. to task, aiming their displeasure more often at the magazine and editors than at particular writers. They also used the column to communicate directly with each other, carrying on running conversations among themselves about issues and experiences. Furthermore, "Letters" was used as a forum to help Ms. and readers develop approaches to issues of concern and thus advance the feminist agenda (Thom, 1988, xvi).

Ms., in its first incarnation, published anywhere from fifteen (December 1977) to thirty two (December 1985) reader letters per issue. These letters ranged from short commentaries or anecdotes to long, thoughtful analyses of issues and experiences. The editorial voice often responded, in the form of "Editors' Notes", to particularly critical letters, explaining Ms.' position on specific issues and backing up contentious arguments or approaches.

A cursory examination of the Fairfax/Matilda "Letters" indicates

that, for the most part, less space was devoted to the column. Seventeen reader letters were printed in the July 1988 issue; seven appeared in May 1989 while the September 1989 issue featured a total of thirteen. There does not appear to be any correlation, however, between the Fairfax/Matilda Ms. increasing financial woes and the diminution of space devoted to reader letters. Interestingly though, the Fairfax/Matilda Ms.' editorial voice breaks into the letters much more forcefully by prefacing the column with synopses of the topics discussed. For example, the January/February 1989 column was introduced with "Readers speak out on sons leaving home, Olympic coverage, and an unwanted abortion"; reader letters in the September 1989 issue were prefaced with "Three grand debates about estrogen, the child welfare system, and body image". Readers' interactions with the community/ies of Ms. readers are thus further mediated by the magazine with this insertion of the editorial voice.

Ms.: The World of Women's "Letters" column is consistently lengthier than those of the magazine's first two incarnations, a characteristic perhaps attributable to the fact that this third incarnation of Ms. publishes bi-monthly instead of monthly. Considerable space - at least thirty letters are printed per issue - is devoted to the voices of Ms. readers responding to articles, relating stories and offering advice. As in the first incarnation, the editorial voice is generally only featured in an effort to elaborate or sustain the magazine's position on particular topics.

It is primarily¹¹ through reader letters that Ms. takes part in the creation and affirmation of a collective feminist culture beyond its pages. Women participate in an ongoing dialogue, sharing

¹¹The "Ms. Gazette", "Classifieds" and reviews also play this role to some degree.

experiences and enduring trials and tribulations together. The self-affirmation of a "woman's world" is identified by Janice Winship as the primary role for readers' letters columns in women's magazines. (Winship, 1987, 68). But, Ms.' letters column is framed as a different form of writing, representing the voices of "women" rather than those of privileged female writers. A contentious issue is, however, whether the voices of these "real" people actually break the dominance of the authorial and editorial voice, although Ms.' editors suggest that readers "take over", with the editor becoming only peripheral to the process: "Correspondents generally addressed their letters to 'the Editor', but they sometimes seemed to do so only as a courtesy: we editors were intermediaries for messages directed to other readers" (Thom, 1988, 78).

Ms.' "Letters" column serves to provide evidence of how Ms.' readers actually interpret the symbolic content of the magazine as well as indicate what bearing these interpretations have on their public and private lives. It can, therefore, be suggested that reader letters serve as indices of an interpretive community, or rather communities, of Ms.' readers, allowing the analyst a glimpse of the mental universes that make the magazine's interpretation possible. Indeed, Ms.' letters column would appear to support Kadway's argument that readers of popular cultural texts cannot be defined in terms of textual mechanisms and operations. Ms.' correspondence indicates that different Ms.' readers employ different interpretive strategies, reading differently by virtue of their respective "interpretive communities".

The "open forum" approach to the reader letters column highlights the unique way in which *Ms.* constructs its relationship to its readers/correspondents. Framed as a "different" form of writing, *Ms.* reader letters are legitimated as equal to the opinions and writing of the editors and contributors. This notion of reader-as-contributor thus provides yet another example of *Ms.*' attempt to break down the hierarchies that have characterized traditional women's journalism, eroding the "top-down" power structure that, argues Ellen McCracken, continues to typify the women's magazine genre. By devoting more space to reader letters than other periodicals, publishing an edited collection of its correspondence and continually reinforcing the important role of the reader within its discourse, *Ms.* strives to establish an "equality of voices" among editors and audiences.

Feminist scholarship has redefined the notion of a valid text for scholarly study, turning to less "public" forms of communication (i.e. letters, diaries, gossip) for historical evidence. Central to feminist scholarship is the notion of "standpoint epistemology", referring to the importance of perspective and experience to conceptions of truth and to the existence of differing concepts of knowledge for people of differing experiences (Cirksena and Cuklanz, 1991, 40). Therefore, letters, like those published in *Ms.*, record the advance of feminism in a "personal" way while simultaneously serving as a form of "consciousness-raising", allowing women to share experiences and information within a community of readers.

Thus reader letters were further legitimated with the acquisition of *Ms.* voluminous Letters-to-the-Editors files by the Schlesinger Library at Radcliffe College. As *Ms.* announced in July 1981, the

Library planned to catalogue the magazine's correspondence as an ongoing history of change for American women. The Schlesinger Library is occupied with acquiring a representative record of the ordinary lives of women in the forms of letters, diaries, photos and so on: "the raw material of history" (Thom, 1988, 263). Understanding the Ms. letters as an illuminating, behind-the-scenes tool of American women's lives ("a personal record of the progress of this wave of feminism" (Ms., July 1981, 14)), the Library's work provides an excellent example of the kind of feminist scholarship described above. Gaining knowledge about the ordinary, lived experiences of women is central to the construction of a feminist history and Ms. letters column is interpreted as a gauge measuring women's thoughts and feelings concerning the progress of Second Wave North American feminism.

Ms.: Symbolic Relation to the North American Women's Movement

When Ms. was first launched in 1972, media pundits predicted its immediate demise, arguing that feminism was one topic, one subject, one movement bound to run out of things to say (Cohen, 1988, 33). But, ten years after its origination, it remained the only national feminist magazine in the United States. Ms. survived for seventeen years, folded and then reconstructed itself for the 1990's and its relationship to the movement is complex. As a key feminist institution, it occupies a special place in American publishing and women's movement histories. Ms. established itself as an institutional prototype for the appropriate conduct of advertisers to

women and is credited with spawning a whole new category of magazines: the career-oriented glossies like Working Woman and Savvy (Ferguson et al., 1990, 40-1). As an organ of the movement, Ms. preferred editorial role is assumed to be one of providing an open forum for women's movement debate, representing feminists' various interests and groupings and portraying how the movement should be to itself. Ms.' symbolic status, its role as an icon of North American feminism, is driven home in a seemingly offhand remark made by Mariana Valverde in her critique of the publication:

"...the fact that Gloria Steinem herself panics when she weighs more than 110 pounds and alternates between starvation and binging on sweets should give us pause" (Valverde, 1985, 81).

Here the personal is truly rendered political. The assumption is made that because an editor of Ms. (though herself an icon of the movement) may have a preoccupation with eating and dieting, Ms.' relegation of women's obsession with food to the background of the magazine's discourse is somehow devalued. When a publication has attained such a high profile, when it is deemed to be responsible to a multi-faceted movement and its constituents, its job is made very difficult. Its meaning has become larger than the magazine itself. As Barbara Findlen explains: "people read all kinds of things into it who definitely are not reading the magazine."

Indeed, the very term "Ms." is important as a verbal symbol of the movement. It originated in the 1930's as the proper form of address if one was unaware of a woman's marital status. But, by the

late 1970's, it had become synonymous with feminism, adopted by women who wanted to be recognized as individuals rather than identified by their relationships with men. Interestingly though, as a reader letter printed in the October 1973 issue of *Ms.* relates, such symbols can be invested with diverse meanings: the correspondent, a substitute teacher, was ordered to stop identifying herself as "Ms." to her students because, according to her superiors, the designation made youngsters think of "sexuality and liberation" (Thom, 1987, 140).

Thus bearing this contentious term on its cover, boldly announcing its ideological thrust, *Ms.* served as a very visible target of antifeminist sentiment. In July 1978, *Ms.* reports that a campaign is underway in Nashua, New Hampshire, to ban the publication from school libraries (p. 120). Reader letters related more subtle, private forms of censorship. In a letter printed in the September 1980 issue, a woman writes in to cancel her subscription to the magazine:

"Over the years I have enjoyed *Ms.* immensely, but for the last two months I've had to hide the magazine in my dresser drawer. My supposedly 'liberal and understanding' husband believes the magazine is changing my personality, making me less flexible to his demands. In an effort to 'save' my marriage, I am canceling my subscription" (Thom, 1987, 39).

As Ballaster et al. argue, reading or being seen reading a particular magazine is as important as the possession of any other commodity in the establishment of one's social identity, connected, as it is, to the notion that identity is achieved through consumption (Ballaster et al., 1991, 150). It has been suggested that, with industrialization and the development of mass production/consumption,

workers who had become used to the rhetoric of thrift, hard work and sobriety had to be "educated to appreciate a new discourse centred around the hedonistic lifestyle entailing new needs and desires" (Featherstone, quoted in Schulze, 1990, 63). The role of the women's consumer magazine in this dynamic is obvious.

However, *Ms.*' apparent role in the construction or elaboration of readers' identities would appear to support Marjorie Ferguson's suggestion that perhaps a transformation is taking place whereby the magazine's function is changing from institutional to more symbolic: "women's magazines may be in the process of becoming an emblem or badge of femininity rather than arbiters of what femininity consists of" (Ferguson, 1984, 192). Certain perceptual stereotypes of a magazine are created and fostered during the course of its publication that are often difficult to change. In fact, as I mentioned in Chapter 2, such preconceptions played a role in advertisers' reluctance to publicize their wares in the *Fairfax/Matilda Ms.*, despite the latter's "softened" ideological stance. But most of the criticism aimed at *Ms.* focusses on two themes: its overall liberal-feminist orientation and its alleged potential to promote the hegemony of a certain group of women over the very definition of feminism. In the following section, I will be using the criticisms raised by the Redstockings (Kathie Sarachild, Patricia Mainardi and Ellen Willis), Mariana Valverde, Susan Faludi and Deborah Solomon to elaborate these points.

Ms., conceptions? Critics' Voices -

Ms. is the target of much criticism in the radical feminist anthology Feminist Revolution published by the Redstockings women's liberation organization in 1975. The Redstockings critics label Ms. editors "liberal Establishment women" arguing that "[t]oday the women's liberation movement is in the hands of a group of liberal opportunists, and therefore in the hands of the left/liberal male establishment...they are supposedly 'the leaders' of the women's movement, but they are leading us down the road to a few respectable reforms and nothing more" (Redstockings, 1975, 163). Ellen Willis, a former part-time contributing editor of Ms., denounces the publication for presenting itself as a centre of leadership for the movement, serving not as a "forum" but to promote a specific ideology (Redstockings, 1975, 170). This ideology, argues Willis, is liberal feminist in orientation, denying the need for militant resistance ("We don't need to fight men, only our conditioning. We don't need to attack the economic system; we too can make it") and preferring a self-improvement, individual liberation philosophy relevant only to an elite (p. 170).

I have already discussed some of the limitations of liberal feminist politics in the preceding chapter, but a further elaboration may be useful at this juncture. As Zillah Eisenstein so painstakingly draws out in The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism (1981), liberal feminism is essentially contradictory because it asks for sexual egalitarianism from within a patriarchal structure: the liberal state cannot possibly meet the ultimate demands of women's equality because

its function is to protect the system of power called "patriarchy". Eisenstein argues that the liberal definition of politics as "government activity" makes it impossible to view the structural relations of women's lives - family, the sexual division of labour and so on - as part of the political life of a society (Eisenstein, 1981, 181). She claims that women are thus asked to enter the public sphere without calling for a restructuring of the relationship between the public and private spheres. It is further asserted that liberal bourgeois ideology tends to dichotomize life into male/female, public/private, state/family, and home/work, when the feminist project entails doing away with these types of binary oppositions. Radical feminists, like the Redstockings, therefore conclude that the contradiction between liberal individualism/patriarchy/liberalism and feminism cannot be negotiated through the state's reform process; indeed, the challenge for feminists lies in building a revolution from the existing political tools and context (Eisenstein, 1981, 222).

Mariana Valverde's criticism of Ms. follows the same line as that of the Redstockings, arguing that Ms. reflects "the class ideology of American society" (Valverde, 1985, 81). Because the magazine's emphasis is on "lifestyle", argues Valverde, accounts of the struggles of Indians, lesbians and immigrants are relegated to cameo appearances and do not directly challenge the class and race privileges of the presumed white, middle-to-upper-middle-class reader (p. 81). But the root of Valverde's concern appears to lie in a preoccupation, shared by the Redstockings, with the class or race bias of the magazine promoting the hegemony of a certain group of women over the very definition of feminism. Indeed, with many media women themselves

becoming the movement's representatives to the media, Steinem serving as the foremost example, there appeared to be an overall concern on the part of the more "radical" factions of the movement (ie. those who do not embrace Ms.' liberal feminist line) that Ms. was re-writing feminist history to make it look as though the liberals were the source and popularizers of women's liberation (Redstockings, 1975, 23). The class/race bias of Ms. first incarnation (1972-1987) was merely intensified in the magazine's second incarnation (1987-89), according to Susan Faludi, with the latter moderating its original ideological stance in a bid to attract advertisers and going "upscale" by claiming readers with high incomes (Faludi, 1991, 109).

The analyst's challenge lies in distinguishing "real" critiques from general, specious, ideological assertions. For instance, Eisenstein's (and, consequently, the Redstockings') argument begs the following question: why exactly is it "impossible" to view the structural relations of women's lives as part of the "political" life of North American society? The question that must be addressed is whether the integration of women's concerns and experiences into governmental activity is a "logical" or "political" impossibility. Can "gradualism" and "reform" not lead to "revolutionary" change? Eisenstein herself goes on to argue that feminists must reconceptualize the relationship between reform and revolution because, if indeed it is the state's concern to use the reform process to sustain women's subordination, as Eisenstein contends, then the challenge lies in building a revolution from what is available to us (Eisenstein, 1981, 222). The question to be addressed is: can reform not help lay the basis for a restructuring of a patriarchal, capital

istic society". Furthermore, how can we make the leap from merely challenging the ideological statements of patriarchy to reforming the actual organization of women's everyday lives? Likewise, Valverde's critique suffers from this tendency to generalize and confuse ideological with "real" arguments. Sweeping assertions regarding the "class ideology" of North American society are too general to be disproved.

If the Redstockings, Eisenstein and Valverde are claiming that only revolutionary change constitutes "real" change, this is implying a political program which one may support or disavow. This must, however, be distinguished from the ideological or philosophical arguments that obscure feminist rhetoric and render it ambiguous. What the research presented in this project reveals is that Ms. magazine has and does do things differently from the ways in which other (patriarchal) organizations do them. The execution of the magazine's policies, its working practices, political engagement, financial bases and relationships with its readers serve as evidence of Ms. unique contribution to the women's magazine industry and genre.

On the basis of the evidence I have collected then, we can begin to assess the adequacy of the ideological criticisms aimed at the publication. These arguments are hampered by the fact that they fail to make a clear, satisfactory distinction between the magazine's "economic" and "ideological" dimensions: they are not concerned with distinguishing between Ms.-as-an-economic-institution and Ms.-as-a-symbolic-entity and addressing these separate dimensions of its existence. Communications scholars, however, are concerned with

precisely the ways in which these two dimensions manifest themselves, in contemporary contexts.

I also believe that these criticisms are based on a fundamental misconception: Ms., as a very visible symbol of American feminism, sets out to define the feminist enterprise and what women's liberation is all about. Indeed, the problem appears to lie in the magazine's very visibility or symbolic value. Ms. has been invested with so much meaning because it is the only mass-circulation feminist magazine to have emerged and survived, albeit precariously, on the North American publishing stage. Because it has been thus inscribed, the fact that it is not, and has never set out to be, the "last word" on all forms and aspects of feminism seems to be lost. Perhaps this fear on the part of critics that Ms. will come to define feminism itself is not completely unfounded, for if the "liberal Establishment women" do have financial backing and access to the press, their ability to communicate and disseminate a particular brand of liberal feminism to the population is greater than that of their more "radical" and "marginal" sisters. However, this is ignoring the fact that Ms., although claiming to reach out in a populist manner, has throughout every incarnation been a "class" publication, targeting a circumscribed, specialized audience.

To imply that Ms. conceived of itself as the "last word" on feminism is misguided: the women's movement is multi-faceted and Ms. is simply one of its many voices or, as Barbara Findlen puts it, "we are only so big." Furthermore, the fact that Ms. is a magazine, a publishing venture located within a particular industrial context must not be underemphasized. Ms.' only viable option, then, upon recognizing the link between patriarchy and capitalism, was to sever

it. However, once this contradiction was addressed and the move was made to an ad free, editorially-free format, Ms. was again assailed, this time for travelling too far in the other direction.

In her review of the new Ms. in The Women's Review of Books, Deborah Solomon sums up her critique as follows:

"If Ms. aspires to a national audience, if it wishes to be more than a cult journal of interest only to the chosen, if it wishes to promulgate the idea of a sovereign womanhood on a broad scale, it needs to know its potential readers...to accord respect to a far wider variety of women than those it now chooses to recognize. It needs to reach out to women who...buy some of their reading matter in supermarkets and mom-and-pops...skillfully navigating the brightly coloured aisles, making informed, and sometimes unexpected choices" (Solomon, 1991, 10).

Likewise, Susan Faludi pronounces the new Ms. "purged from mainstream circulation" (Faludi, 1991, 111) thanks to its high subscription price and alternative format. The root of Solomon's and Faludi's criticism appears to lie in the notion that, in rejecting the logic of the capitalist ethic, Ms.: The World of Women is providing too few women with a feminist standpoint from which to critique patriarchy.

As I have pointed out in this and previous chapters, every magazine constitutes its "target" readers. Ms., in its latest incarnation, is simply no longer as appealing to a wide audience as it perhaps was in its previous formats: Ms.: The World of Women is a more specialized, more "academic" publication. To put it crudely, it cannot be criticized for not being something it was but no longer aspires to be. Solomon's and Faludi's arguments raise the question: by whose standard does the new Ms. provide too few women with a feminist perspective from which to analyze society? Solomon and

Faludi appear to be offering opinions rather than solid, logical critiques. Furthermore, having grappled with the question of *Ms.*'s place within the pantheon of women's magazines in chapters 2 and 3, I dispute Faludi's assumption that *Ms.* was a "mainstream" magazine to begin with: the circumscribed target audience and specialized subject matter of every incarnation suggests that such a classification is problematic.

Concluding Remarks -

As an ad-free feminist journal, the new *Ms.* has disengaged itself from the consumer magazine marketplace. It has chosen to negotiate its formerly contradictory position by dropping out of the consumer framework altogether. But, as Janice Winslip notes, of Britain's *Space Rib*, it not only does not compete with other magazines economically, it does not challenge them ideologically: "[i]f *Ms.* engages with those associations between capitalistic consumption, femininity and certain forms of visual pleasure...than evacuates from that whole area" (Winslip, 1987, 150). The history of *Ms.* suggests that the publication has been caught in a perpetual dilemma, providing the "mental chocolate", to borrow Winslip's term, deemed essential to visual pleasure, while avoiding the "trap" of subscribing femininity with consumption. Having thus concluded that the two are mutually exclusive, or at least conflicted, *Ms.* has embraced feminist principle rather than consumer ideology. Ironically, the new *Ms.* "ad-free, editorially-free" hype has itself become a selling point, serving as a means of attracting publicity for the magazine. However,

its progressive format and credo, developed in reaction to the exigencies of the marketplace, could very well play a small role in transforming the marketplace itself. As I note in Chapter 2, the fact that publishers are soliciting advice from Ruth Bower on how to become less dependent on advertising revenue, along with the success of "reader-oriented" publications like Harper's and The Utne Reader, imply that a slight shift may indeed be taking place within the industry. Whether Ms. will have any long-term effects on women's magazine publishing, however, remains to be seen.

By aiming at a narrow market of "self-identified feminists", people able and willing to pay for freedom of the press, and framing itself as a "magabook" (more of a feminist journal than a magazine per se), Ms. is suggesting that feminism is simply not conducive to consumerism and the pleasures associated with it. This is a difficult problem - indeed, one that the magazine has been grappling with for over twenty years - and raises some very important questions for contemporary feminism.

If feminism no longer coheres around a set of easily identifiable principles, if it is no longer relegated to the margins of society, there lies a risk in defining "feminists" and "feminist concerns" in too narrow, exclusionary terms. If indeed the line between mainstream/marginal, feminist counterculture/mainstream consumer culture is becoming blurred as a result of the proliferation and widespread acceptance of feminist principles, then Ms.' definition of feminism in strictly "non-consumerist" terms could be deemed problematic.

This does not imply, however, that the magazine as a symbolic vehicle subscribes to the "ideological" position that is incorrect for feminists to experience this pleasure. Ms.: The World of Women simply constitutes a readership whose object is not perceived to be the attainment of consumer pleasure. We can safely assume that readers do not purchase/subscribe to the magazine in order to experience the visual pleasure experienced with consumer glossies. When Ms. tried to fill this role, as it did in its second incarnation, it lost its initial appeal and, consequently, its distinct readership. The third incarnation of the publication has simply "fine-tuned" itself in this respect, understanding and addressing the needs and interests of its particular audience.

Ms. magazine's history and development illustrate the limitations of the liberal feminist model while serving as an example of an attempt to negotiate its contradictions. Liberal feminism has been very effective in addressing, for example, a fundamental goal of the movement: "equity" in the workplace. In making pay equity an accepted principle in North American society in the course of the 1970's, liberal feminists were then faced with the murkier question of "social equality" for women in both the private and public spheres. This has become the site of struggle for the 1990's but, because it is such a large, complex arena, no single ideological stance or approach to achieving social transformation on this scale will be "correct" or efficacious. Clearly, we will have to consider many ways of approaching these problems, among them those promoted by the so-called radical feminists. Furthermore, Ms. magazine highlights the

crucial nature of the relationship between reform and revolution, the need to attack an economic system/industry rather than simply work within its boundaries. After struggling to survive and disseminate a feminist message for seventeen years, Ms. finally concluded that the contradiction existing between capitalism/patriarchy/liberalism and feminism cannot be successfully negotiated.

Rather than persisting in constructing a revolution from existing tools, Ms.: The World of Women poses the following question: what can women really do with media? Adopting the profound, resisted and potentially liberating idea that "the world is of our own making" (Rakow, 1992, 50), Ms. is blazing new trails within the magazine industry. Indeed, the women's magazine may serve as the ideal space in which to conduct such a media experiment. After all, as Marjorie Ferguson points out, there exists a certain affinity between women's magazines and the women's movement: both define their constituencies in terms of women as separate and different, both promulgate the message that women must band together for the purposes of social support and female solidarity and both are directed at raising women's consciousness (Ferguson, 1983, 187). As women, we are caught in a web of social structures that, as feminists, we insist must be changed. Ms. magazine represents an attempt to grapple with and overcome the problems confronting contemporary feminists who must negotiate the contradictions between reform and revolution. As such, it serves as a valuable feminist cultural artifact, shedding light on the past as well as the future of feminism in North America.

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