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THE IMAGE OF WOMEN IN MAGAZINE FICTION: CHANGING PERSPECTIVES, 1987-1990

A Thesis

Presented for the

Master of Science

Degree

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Elizabeth Atwood-Gailey

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ABSTRACT

This study examined how women's magazine fiction in recent years has responded to rising levels in women's education and employment. A content analysis was conducted of 93 short stories in McCall's, Ladies' Home Journal, and Good Housekeeping between February 1987 and February 1990. Following the research design used by Bailey (1969) and Loughlin (1983) in their fictional analyses of the same three magazines, data was collected on employment, education, goals, age, marital status, and other heroine characteristics. Results were then compared to: (1) United States census data on women's education and employment; (2) statistics on readers of the magazines in the study; and (3) heroine traits data presented by Bailey and Loughlin. In addition, telephone interviews were conducted with editors from each of the magazines to shed light on the fiction selection process. Brief plot summaries of typical short stories from each magazine were also included.

Quantitative data showed an increased responsiveness on the part of the magazines to changes in women's employment and education. Yet a large percentage of the stories either treated heroine education and employment superficially or omitted these topics altogether. Moreover, most heroines who worked held positions considered stereotypically feminine. Almost 63 percent of heroines pursued romantic love as their primary goal--a sixfold increase over Loughlin's findings.

Overall, the results supported the persistence of what Bailey described as the magazines' "basic conservatism." Although substantive advances were made in their fictional portrayals of women's social status, the magazines continued to socialize readers to accept stereotypical, limiting perceptions of themselves.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Of the profound changes in women's social roles that have taken place in the decades since World War II, those involving women's employment have been among the most dramatic. The presence of females in the labor force has spiraled upward at a dizzying rate: In 1950, less than a third of all women were employed, compared to almost two-thirds in 1988 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1950, 1990). The 1970s and 1980s also witnessed impressive changes in the types of careers open to women. Ehrenreich (1990) states that during these decades, "women increased their representation among the most prestigious and lucrative professions by 300 to 400 percent . . . . a change in the fortunes of women that has to be counted somewhere up near the achievement of suffrage."

By 1990, females comprised close to 20 percent of all physicians, 22 percent of all lawyers, about one-third of all computer systems analysts, and half of all accountants and auditors (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1988; Castro, 1990). In 1973 only about 5 percent of MBA recipients were women, compared to nearly 30 percent just one decade later (Ehrenreich, 1990). Even more startling is the Labor Department's projection that within the near future women will comprise the majority of highly skilled and educated employees entering the workforce (Castro, 1990).

Women have also made steady advances in education and politics. In 1987 almost half of all women in the United States had completed at least one year of college, compared to less than a third in 1970 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1988). By 1990, females actually outnumbered males on college campuses. And in the 1990 political arena, where they grew dissatisfied with their roles as outsiders, women campaigned for Governor in 11 states, sought 87 U. S. Congressional seats, and ran for hundreds of state and local offices (Carlson, 1990).

Despite these phenomenal shifts in women's status, a dark cloud has persisted in the relationship between contemporary women and their portrayal in certain mass-media outlets. Fifty years of research studies focusing on fiction in women's magazines, for example, have repeatedly demonstrated failure on the part of this medium to reflect significant changes in women's employment and education. In her landmark book, The Feminine Mystique, Friedan (1963) documented an alarming decrease in the number of working heroines in women's magazine fiction from 1939 to 1950. Six years later, Bailey confirmed the absence of working and educated heroines in Ladies Home Journal, Good Housekeeping, and McCall's fiction between 1957 and 1967. And as recently as 1982, Loughlin found the unemployed, outdated, stereotypical housewife still dominant in the fiction of the same three magazines.

Significance and Purpose of Study

Communications scholars generally agree that the mass media reflect, reinforce and/or influence attitudes and beliefs in society (for a more complete discussion of the relationship between media and social change, see Chapter II). Because of the media's socializing impact, failure on the part of women's magazine fiction to reflect women's real-life status has been cited as serious cause for concern (e.g. Franzwa, 1974; Busby, 1975; Tuchman, 1978, 1979). Such concern is heightened by the fact that women's magazines, unlike other forms of mass media, are targeted to and read primarily by women. Further, some studies have suggested that women view or read fiction to seek advice on everyday problems (Herzog, 1944; Gerbner, 1958). In this intense media-audience atmosphere, negative, stereotypical messages about women may have significant "potential impact on women's consciousness and self-perceptions" (Ceulemans and Fauconnier, 1979).

The underlying assumption of the present study is, as Tuchman has stated, that "the media should reflect society" and that "there should be a direct, discernible correspondence between the depiction of women in the media and contemporary life" (1979). It follows that systematic, long-term analyses are needed to pinpoint discrepancies between the status of contemporary women and fictional portrayals of

their status. Such studies illuminate the ways in which women's magazines "reflect and perpetuate outdated sex-role concepts persisting in Western cultures" (Ceulemans and Fauconnier, 1979). This type of research also contributes to knowledge of media content, which in turn lays the groundwork for studies on the effect of mass media on audiences (Gerbner, 1972).

Since 1950 the number of women in the labor force has doubled, with increasing numbers of women entering non-traditional and professional careers. Women's interests have expanded accordingly in the decades since World War II. Far from myopically focusing on romantic relationships alone, women have been increasingly involved with higher education, careers, and political, environmental, and social issues, as well as with their families. Clearly, women have outgrown the fictional corsets in which the major women's magazines have bound them since the 1940s.

In the face of such dramatic changes in women's lives, the way in which the media portray feminine sex roles assumes "great social, political, and economic importance" (Tuchman, 1978). Women's work, in particular, represents an essential aspect of research focusing on sexual stereotypes. Because of the economic control and autonomy women derive solely from paid work, numberous theorists (e.g. Woolf, 1938; Friedan, 1963; Grossman and Chester, 1990) have regarded "women's work as a central element both in understanding sexist social arrangements and in facilitating women's equal social status and power" (Stewart, 1990, p. 262).

At the time of this study, nearly 10 years had passed since Loughlin reported the same emphasis on domestic concerns in the late 1970s and early 1980s that Bailey and Friedan identified in preceding decades. Loughlin's work, which represented the most recent major research conducted in the area of women's magazine fiction, stands in need of updating.

Focusing on fiction found in Ladies' Home Journal, Good Housekeeping, and McCall's between February 1987 and February 1990, the present study updates Loughlin and Bailey's investigations, reprising their research question: How has women's

magazine fiction in recent years responded to rising levels in women's education and employment?

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter presents a brief overview of the dominant theories on the relationship between mass media and social change. One aspect of this relationship--the impact of popular fiction on society--is given particular attention. This discussion is followed by a review of studies that have focused on fictional content in women's magazines over the past 50 years.

Mass Media and Social Change

The contention that the mass media play an important role in the socialization process has been advanced by communications scholars since the 1920s. Yet the exact nature of media's role in this process remains the subject of debate. Two schools of thought on the relationship between mass media content and social change have historically divided the communications field:

According to reflective theorists, the mass media mirror dominant concerns, attitudes, values, and behaviors already existing in society (e.g. Inglis, 1938; Johns-Heine and Gerth 1949; DeFleur, 1970; Lazer and Dier, 1978). A related perspective argues that the media socialize audiences by focusing on particular attitudes, values, and ideas and reinforcing them. Examples of studies designed to test this notion include Bereleson and Salter's (1948) research on the under-representation of minorities in the media and Martel and McCall's (1964) discovery of media distortion of underclass Americans. In these studies, as Gerbner (1972) states, the presence or absence of certain groups in media presentations either "signifies social existence" or "symbolic annihilation."

Also included in reflective theory is the reflective social-control hypothesis, which maintains that the media reflect attitudes and values which lag behind those of society, thus preserving the status quo (Schramm, 1960). The mass media, in this view,

are forced to represent conservative attitudes and ideas in society in order to sustain the large and heterogeneous audiences they need to survive. Studies of women's magazines have frequently used this model to explain the "culture lag," as sociologists term it, between fictional depictions of women's attitudes, behaviors, and status and those of contemporary women (e.g. Inglis, 1938; Morelock, 1971; Wilson, 1981).

A second group of communications theorists propose that the mass media serve in an innovative or agent-of-change capacity. In this view, the media create and inculcate new ideas into society. Based on the assumption that "content is decided by those who control the culture industries and therefore represent the ideology of the dominant class" (Cantor, 1987, p. 211), the innovative theory has received limited support among communications scholars. Yet a number of social scientists have hypothesized that media may change behavior patterns under specific circumstances such as audience predisposition or monopoly (e.g. Berelson, 1960, Klapper, 1963; Pool, 1964; DeFleur, 1970).

Although research has provided some support for each of the two major theories, both remain less than conclusive. Such variables as the influence of media organizations, audience, advertisers, writers, and editors, as well as the type of medium, content, and exposure being investigated, complicate and restrict research efforts on the relationship between media and social change (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955; Wilson, 1981). Despite these caveats, communications scholars generally assume that "the media operate as agents of socialization [and] that definitions of reality are created and sustained by mass-media presentations" (Wilson, 1981). In the current climate of accelerating social change, the media's role as a transmitter of cultural signals from generation to generation has never been more pivotal. As Angus and Jhally conclude:

> In contemporary culture the media have become central to the constitution of social identity. It is not just that media messages have become important forms of influence on individuals. We also identify and construct ourselves as social beings through the mediation of images (1989).

Fiction Studies

Of the myriad images pumped into American culture by the mass media, those found in fiction have been singled out as a uniquely "important vehicles of social

values" (Johns-Heine and Gerth, 1949). According to communications scholars, fiction confirms "strongly held conventional view[s]" (Cawelti (1976) and serves as "a key source for the articulation and reinforcement of certain moral norms" (Fowler, 1984). Taking this further, Pawling (1984) contends that popular fiction "intervenes in the life of society by organizing and interpreting experiences which have previously been subjected only to partial reflection."

Sensitive to the relationship between fictional images of women and women's real-life social roles, many researchers have focused on fiction targeted to female audiences as a primary agent in the socialization process. Cantor (1987) holds that women's popular fiction, like other "cultural products marketed through the mass media," serves to "continue and maintain social order by reflecting and transmitting traditional beliefs deeply implanted in Western culture. "Tuchman (1979) has argued that stereotypical or deleterious portrayals of women in magazines may, "when internalized, prevent and impede female accomplishment." This may be particularly true of women's fiction, where "aspiration and fantasy-inspiring potential" may magnify deleterious effects (Ferguson, 1983). Honey, who analyzed propaganda images in women's magazine fiction published during World War II, justified the study of women's fiction in this way (1984, p. 15):

> [F]iction is a rich source of information about its readers' most deeply held values, wishes, and fears, for it expresses their innermost dreams in a satisfying way. It is for that reason a good indicator of widely shared cultural assumptions, myths, and symbols.

Concludes Fishburn (1982): "[M]ost scholars accept the fact that [women's magazines] have been instrumental in socializing American women and in creating an image of the idealized American woman."

Given this consensus, what <u>is</u> the nature and significance of the messages women's magazines have transmitted to women over the past 50 years concerning employment and education? An in-depth exploration of this question follows.

Women's Magazines

With the publication in 1963 of The Feminine Mystique, Betty Friedan galvanized research targeted at the fictional content of women's magazines. Although she was not the first to examine how major women's magazines portrayed women's work and education, her results, reported in her groundbreaking book, were explosive. Conducting an informal content analysis of short stories in Good Housekeeping, Ladies' Home Journal, Women's Home Companion, and McCall's over a 20-year-period from the late 1930s to the late 1950s, she found an arsenal of weapons with which to attack the portrayal of women in the media. Short-story heroines in 1939, she discovered, were depicted as "career women--happily, proudly, adventurously, attractively career women--who loved and were loved by men." Ten years later, however, a far different picture had emerged. By 1949 fictional heroines had slunk from the office back into the kitchen, renouncing their careers for their true calling as housewives. By 1958 and 1959 this trend only intensified; for these years, Friedan failed to find a single heroine with a career. Women's magazines, she concluded, had transformed "certain concrete, finite, domestic aspects of feminine existence into a religion, a pattern by which all women must now live or deny their femininity" (Friedan, p. 40). She labeled the ethic that women may only achieve fulfillment through their roles as wives and mothers "the feminine mystique."

To explain the radical shift in heroines from the adventure-seeking career woman of the 1930s to the "fluffy and feminine" heroine found in postwar fiction, who was "gaily content in a world of bedroom and kitchen, sex, babies, and home," Friedan points to the postwar trauma that befell Americans following World War II (Friedan, p. 36). During the war American businesses had hired massive numbers of women to fill positions vacated by men away at war, jobs which paid higher wages and offered more stimulation than women had ever known (Honey, 1984, p. 21). Asked if they would like to keep their jobs after the war, "75% of the women workers said yes and a full 81% of the women over 45 intended to remain in the paid work force," writes Bose (1987, p. 279). "However, most women in industrial work were not allowed this choice and were actually fired shortly after the end of the war."

Rather than enjoying an expanded role in the workplace along with increased status and mobility within society, states Friedan, women were shepherded back to hearth and home with no trace of their career identities intact. There, as if suffering from amnesia, they lived through the next decades as though they had never built or flown aircraft, assembled munitions, or welded steel with their own hands. Friedan theorized that after 15 years of the insecurities and deprivations of war, as well as feelings of confusion and ambivalence brought about by changing women's roles, Americans craved a return to domestic security and simplicity. She described the postwar climate in this way:

> The American spirit fell into a strange sleep; men as well as women, scared liberals, disillusioned radicals, conservatives bewildered and frustrated by change--the whole nation stopped growing up. All of us went back into the warm brightness of home, the way it was when we were children and slept peacefully upstairs while our parents read, or played bridge in the living room, or rocked on the front porch in the summer evening in our home towns (p. 186).

Yet the rise of "the feminine mystique" was not strictly the product of postwar craving for domestic tranquility, according to Friedan. She accused American businesses, along with the mostly male editors of women's magazines, of also fostering "the perpetuation of housewifery." Advertisers, she charged, openly sought to exploit domestic feelings in order to boost product sales. "Somehow, somewhere, someone must have figured out that women will buy more things if they are kept in the underused, nameless-yearning, energy-to-get-rid-of state of being housewives," she writes (p. 207).

A second researcher offers a variation on Friedan's economic theory of why women's magazines and other media began promoting "the feminine mystique." Drawing parallels between the rise of the "cult of domesticity" and the rise of racism against blacks in the United States, Bose (1987, p. 268) contends that both "were used ideologically and structurally to preserve jobs for white males, [initially] . . . in the late nineteenth century when high immigration rates meant . . . considerable competition for work and again in the twentieth century when jobs were scarce."

By the turn of the century, women had begun entering the workforce in significant numbers and continued to do so until the Great Depression of 1929. During

this period fear spread among males that working women were depriving them of jobs. As a result, according to Bose, "women in general faced increased obstacles to their employment" during the Depression. The advent of World War II, however, boosted women's employment rates to the highest in history. Yet after the war, once again women were urged to return home to avoid competing with returning veterans for jobs (pp. 278-279).

Like Friedan, Bose argues that the postwar media including women's magazines reflected this economic agenda. "The cult of true womanhood had clear economic utility for middle-class white men," she states, "and it was this group that had the social power to promote the concept" (p. 268).

Friedan's allegations sparked a number of studies published in books and master's theses, as well as communications, sociology, and women's studies journals, most of which in some degree supported her conclusions. Yet more than a decade before Friedan's best-seller served as a catalyst for the modern women's movement, other researchers had also noted the postwar shift in women's magazine heroines from career women to housewives.

In her 1949 study, Griffith found an emphasis in postwar heroines on homemaking and romance. Few heroines had jobs, she noted, and 85 percent of the fiction plots in her study focused on ensnaring a man. In addition, only 10 percent of the stories presented recognizable problems or realistic people or settings (Griffith, 1949, p. 274).

This same emphasis on non-employed heroines was found in two other studies which preceded Friedan's. In the first, Johns-Heine and Gerth compared the major themes found in men's magazines to those found in women's magazines. Their analysis of short stories in Ladies' Home Journal revealed far more love themes than found in a men's magazine called Country Gentleman. In addition, recurring themes of the happy home and women's duty to preserve it emerged from their investigation. Commenting on these themes, the researchers wrote:

> One may impute that the function of such themes is the systematic magnification of the woman's traditional role precisely in contrast to her publicly changing role. Acclaim of the model lady, wife, and mother

> remains dominant in the face of current competing claims (Johns-Heine and Gerth, 1949, p. 109).

Seven years later, after analyzing a sample of 153 stories from True Story, True Confessions, American, Saturday Evening Post, Atlantic, and New Yorker, Albrecht concluded that American magazine fiction, with its emphasis on male supremacy, reflected prevalent cultural values. Like Johns-Heine and Gerth, he also found love and marriage to be dominant themes in mass-magazine fiction.

In 1969, Bailey set up a study to test Friedan's assumptions. She was particularly interested, in view of the rising education and employment levels enjoyed by women in the decade between 1957 and 1967, to discover whether women's magazines were beginning to reflect these changes. Investigating short-story heroines in Ladies' Home Journal, McCall's, and Good Housekeeping in 1957 and 1967, Bailey found "the happy housewife" motif even more in evidence in 1967 than 10 years earlier. During that 10-year span, the number of working heroines had shrunk from 9 percent to 4 percent. Moreover, she found that, "The career women who did appear were almost never sympathetic characters. They were usually pictured as 'unwomanly' and were seen most often in the act of threatening some 'true' woman's marriage." By 1967, she concluded, "It would seem as if these magazines had taken almost a reactionary stand against the career woman, which may have been intensifed by Betty Friedan's criticisms (p. 366)."

The conservative trend carried over into the next decade. In her cross-cultural comparison of U.S. and Central American women's magazines, Flora noted that regardless of her cultural background, every employed heroine in the study abandoned her job after securing a man (1971). A study of fiction in Ladies' Home Journal, McCall's, and Good Housekeeping between 1944 and 1972 found housewives disproportionately represented and working women portrayed in traditional occupations, "as are the goals they pursue in the course of the stories" (Tilghman, 1972). And Gouveia (1973), in a comparison of fictional women in six modern and traditional women's magazines, noted the absence of "professional, thinking, independent women in either magazine category."

An analysis by Franzwa of Ladies' Home Journal, McCall's, and Good Housekeeping from 1940 to 1970 (at five-year intervals) produced results nearly identical to those above. The majority of the 155 heroines that she studied were not employed and, of those who were, 51 percent held low-status positions such as clerical and servant jobs. Further, fiction sampled in 1955, 1960, 1965, and 1970 proved remarkable for its absence of a solitary working woman. All of the fictional women in Franzwa's analysis fit into one of four categories: "single and looking for a husband; housewife-mother; spinster; and widowed or divorced--soon to remarry" (1974). Absorbed disproportionately with sexual relationships, most characters worked only because they "had to" or "to catch a husband" (Franzwa, 1975). In addition, she reported that the stories cast working mothers and wives in a negative light. "When work is portrayed as important to [heroines], there is a concomitant disintegration of their lives," she reported (1974, p. 106).

Similarly, a study of Good Housekeeping short stories in 1972 found an overriding emphasis on domestic rather than employment or educational concerns (Lugenbeel, 1974). This emphasis surfaced yet again in an analysis that compared the number of female fictional characters who worked with actual labor-force statistics. The results showed that despite a substantial increase in the number of women in the labor force, female fictional characters remained largely unemployed (Lazer and Dier, 1978).

Only a handful of magazine fiction studies have produced results that deviated from this unidimensional portrait of women as undereducated and underemployed. Reischel (1977), in an investigation of fictional heroines in Ladies' Home Journal and Redbook during 1962, 1966, 1970, and 1974, concluded that heroines did "reflect the expanding role of women between 1962-1974." Wilson (1981), who analyzed Canadian magazine short stories from 1930 to 1939, found employment rates among single heroines to mirror increases in "the general world-wide pattern of increased female labour force participation." However, she noted that "the media greatly underrepresented the extent of female labor force participation." Moreover, she concluded that the stories "were primarily romantic tales and the dominant goal of these young single woman was marriage." A third study, which looked at fictional

heroines in Good Housekeeping, Ladies' Home Journal, McCall's, and Redbook during the 1970s, concluded that "large overall differences did not exist" between the heroines and actual women of that decade. Despite this, the researcher observed that the stories did consistently portray women "as ineffective and dependent on their husbands and children for their identities" (Galas, 1982). Finally, in an evaluation of 20 women's magazines sold at supermarket checkout counters during April 1984, Bonner (1985) found the fictional heroine "as likely to be employed as her real-life counterpart." Nevertheless, she concluded,

> work remained of secondary importance to the female character, with her relationship with a man coming first. Thus, some progress is revealed, but the primary message relating a woman's success in life to her ability to get or keep a man remains the same.

By 1982, when Loughlin conducted a replication of Bailey's study, women's employment and level of education had never been higher. In 1940, a scant 29 percent of all women over age 16 worked outside the home, compared to 52 percent in 1981. Given this dramatic rise, Loughlin sought a definitive answer to the question: Is fiction in recent women's magazines finally beginning to reflect changes in women's status?

Using the prototype of the short-story heroine developed by Bailey, Loughlin analyzed 31 short stories in Good Housekeeping, Ladies' Home Journal, and McCall's between 1979 and 1981. Heroines were categorized by traits such as age, marital status, occupation, class, goal, and major problem, and compared both with the heroines in Bailey's study and with actual adult females. Although Loughlin's findings did reflect improvement in the depiction of women's education and employment, women's work outside the home, she discovered, took a decided back seat to domestic issues. Under her updated, dressed-for-success outer image, the women's magazine fictional heroine that Loughlin encountered did not deviate substantially from the homemaker that Griffith unveiled more than three decades earlier. The primary concern of this heroine "was the care, feeding, and nurturing" of her family, Loughlin reported. "Even though the majority of the fictional women had jobs, the insignificance of their work was the louder message" (p. 142). Remarkably, despite the overwhelming rise in the number of women in the workforce and in levels of education among women that took place in

the late 1970s and early 1980s, women's magazine fiction continued to support the same "cult of femininity" that it espoused in the late 1940s (Ferguson, 1982).

Since Loughlin's 1983 study, few researchers have focused on women's magazine fictional heroines. Instead, most have turned their attention to non-fiction content analyses of women's magazines, perhaps to fill a perceived void in this area of research. In general, non-fiction studies of women's magazines in the 1970s and 1980s have documented an increased responsiveness to changes in women's employment and education (Simpson, 1976; Newkirk, 1977; Butler and Paisley, 1978; Geise, 1979; Bonner, 1984). Yet in the world of traditional women's magazines, not even non-fiction content has been immune to the pervasive, conservative mindset consistently found in fiction content.

An analysis of non-fiction articles in Good Housekeeping, McCall's, and Ladies' Home Journal for 1956 to 1970 found that 15 out of every 17 articles about working mothers were unfavorable. Evaluating the underlying themes of the articles, the researchers reported that in the majority of cases, "employment was discouraged as detrimental to women, the family, and society, and the disadvantages were stressed." Moreover, the articles presented resignation from a job as a solution to family problems (Morelock and Kurth, 1971, pp. 50-54).

A second study found that only 7 percent of the non-fiction content in three women's magazines from 1950 to 1977 dealt with the issue of working women "in spite of massive changes in women's working lives" during that 27-year span (Robinson, 1983). A third report revealed that 75 percent of all occupational options discussed in non-fiction articles in Mademoiselle, Redbook, McCall's, and Seventeen between 1962 and 1982 were considered stereotypically feminine (Peterson, 1984).

A 1985 investigation of non-fiction profiles in 10 magazines appearing between 1971 and 1980 discovered a tendency among traditional women's magazines to profile women in traditional occupations such as nursing or clerical work rather than law or engineering (Ruggiero and Weston, 1985). And Barker (1988) noted a trend in recent non-fiction articles away from acceptance of women's employment outside the home:

> Today, in the 80s, where more complex demands have been placed on women, these magazines once again seem to be returning to an even more conservative stance and are rigidly fixed, concluding that a woman's place is primarily at home. Even as recently as 1985, issues of Redbook and Ladies' Home Journal seriously questioned a woman's position outside the home (p. 5).

Clearly, the body of research on women's magazines spanning the last 50 years demonstrates the existence of a cultural lag between contemporary women and their portrayal in women's magazines. Although some signs have appeared in non-fiction content analysis of a narrowing of this gap, the vast majority of women's fiction studies show that the typical magazine short-story heroine of recent years remains:

> essentially similar to the traditional woman in her desire for romance and marriage. The analysis also shows that although fictional women are increasingly depicted in the work force, they are usually located in traditional women's occupations, doing work of lesser importance than the men in their lives (Cantor, 1987, p. 210).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Many researchers have focused on the content of magazine messages targeted to female audiences as significant in the socialization process. Fifty years of research demonstrates that messages in women's magazine fiction pertaining to women's employment and education lag behind actual changes in these areas of women's lives. The present study is designed to investigate recent messages in women's magazine fiction to determine whether or not this cultural lag persists.

Technique

As in Loughlin's research, the method used for this investigation is content analysis. This research technique "allows for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (Berelson, 1952). According to Holsti (1969):

> Objectivity stipulates that each step in the research process must be carried out on the basis of explicitly formulated rules and procedures of content analysis . . . . Systematic means that the inclusion and exclusion of content or categories is done according to consistently applied rules (Holsti, 1969).

Researchers uniformly agree that content analysis requires objectivity, system, and relevance. Yet many dispute the notion that the technique must be limited to quantitative description (e.g. George, 1959; Pool, 1949; Holsti, 1969) and manifest content (Cartwright, 1953; Barcus, 1959; Holsti, 1969). For this study's purposes, content analysis is defined as "any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages" (Stone et al., 1966; Holsti, 1969).

Sample

Drawing from the universe of women's magazines, a sample of three traditional women's magazines--Good Housekeeping, Ladies' Home Journal, and McCall's--was selected for this study. These three well-established service periodicals, each more than 100 years old and the object of fiction content analyses conducted by Loughlin, Bailey, and many others, were chosen to preserve continuity in the research.

While Loughlin investigated the magazines over an 18-month span, the present study increased the period of analysis to the three years between February 1987 and February 1990. The purpose of this increase was to ensure that a significant sampling of heroines with specific occupations, educational levels, and other character traits was obtained, as well as to identify a pattern of change or lack of change over multiple years.

Unit of Analysis

As in Loughlin's research, this study focuses on the short story as the unit of analysis. Selection of stories published in Good Housekeeping, Ladies' Home Journal, and McCall's during the three-year period was based on the following criteria: (1) each featured a well-defined female character or characters age 18 or over; and (2) the female character's actions or decisions directed the primary story line. Stories centering on a male character were rejected unless they also featured a heroine who shared equally in the story conflict. In order to restrict the sample to fiction written specifically for the magazines under study, neither excerpts from novels nor novelettes were considered. The final sample for the study, chosen from the universe of all fiction published in the three magazines between February 1987 and February 1990, consisted of 93 short stories with 100 heroines.

Coding

Although Loughlin and Bailey's hypotheses centered specifically on women's education and employment, they recorded heroine traits under 12 categories: age, appearance, marital status, economic class, education, major occupation, number of

children, residence, housing, marital happiness, goal, and problem (see Table 1). As an update of their research, this study used identical coding categories, with a few minor exceptions. First, because it was deemed irrelevant, the "appearance" category was eliminated. Stories in the present study seldom offered judgments on heroines' physical attractiveness; and making distinctions between "ugly," "average," "attractive," or "beautiful" proved impossible.

In addition, two new coding categories were added. Since 1969, when Bailey created the original coding design, striking changes have taken place in the measure and make-up of the American family. According to United States Census data, half of all marriages begun since the mid-1970s will end in divorce, and up to one third of all children born in the 1980s will live with a stepparent sometime before they reach 18 (Footlick, 1990). Along with its other effects, this breakdown of the traditional nuclear family has resulted in marked increases in single parenthood and stepparenthood. In response to the broader definition of family inspired by these changes, "parental status" was added as a coding category. Classifications within this category include: "mother in traditional two-parent family"; "single mother"; "stepmother to spouse's children"; and "mother to own, plus stepmother to spouse's children."

Race and ethnicity, too, have assumed increasing demographic significance since the late 1960s. Blacks, Hispanics, and other minorities represent the fastest-growing segment of the American population. The U.S. Census Bureau predicts that by 2030 the black population will increase by 68.3 percent, Hispanics by 186.8 percent, and other minorities by 78.7 percent. This compares to a projected increase of only 24.8 percent in the white population (Footlick, 1990). In view of concern over the mass media's underrepresentation of minorities (e.g. Berelson and Salter, 1946; Kotok, 1971; Sentman, 1983) a "race" category was also added to the present study. Within this category, heroines were classified as: "white," "Hispanic," "black," "Asian" or "other."

Occasionally heroine traits proved difficult to determine from the story texts. For this reason, an "unable to determine" classification was also added to each of Loughlin's original trait categories. Table 2 represents the final heroine traits coding sheet used in this study.

Table 1

Heroine Trait Categories Used in Loughlin's Research

Age--18-25, 26-35, 36-45, 46-60, 61 and over.

Appearance--ugly, average, attractive, beautiful.

Marital status--single, married, separated, divorced, widowed.

Economic class--low, middle, high.

Education--grade school, high school, college, above, vocational.

Major occupation--housekeeping, job, study, career, leisure.

Number of children--0, 1-2, 3-5, 6 and over.

Residence--city, country, suburb, small town.

Housing--house, apartment, hotel, room.

Marital status--happy, unhappy, happy to unhappy, unhappy to happy, happy-unhappy-happy

Goal--romantic love, career, personal fulfillment, community betterment, material, family happiness.

Problem--marital, psychological, children, romantic, beauty, health, financial, danger, moral, interpersonal relations, community, no problem.

Table 2

Heroine Traits Coding Form Used in Present Study

Magazine:_____Date:_____

Story Title:_____ Author:_____

Circle the answer under each of the following categories that best describes the primary heroine in this short story:

Age:	18-25	26-35	36-45	46-60	61+	UTD*
Marital status:	single	married	separated	divorced	widowed	UTD
Race:	white	Hispanic	black	Asian	UTD	
Econ. class:	low	middle	high	UTD		
Education:	grade school	high school	college	above	vocational	UTD
Major occupation:	house-keeping	job	study	career	leisure	UTD
Parental status:	mother in trad. 2-parent family	single mother	stepmother to spouse's children	mother to own plus stepmother to spouse's children	UTD	N/A*
No. of children:	0	1-2	3-5	6+	UTD	N/A
Residence:	city	country	suburb	small town		UTD
Housing:	house	apartment	hotel	room	UTD	
Marital state:	happy	unhappy	happy to unhappy	unhappy to happy	happy to unhappy to happy	UTD N/A
Goals:	romantic love	career	personal fulfillment	community betterment	material	family happiness UTD
Problem:	marital	psycho-logical	children	romantic	beauty	health financial
	danger	moral	interpersonal relations		community	no problem

*UTD = unable to determine

In several instances, coding heroine traits required subjective rather than objective judgments. This situation arose when traits such as age or marital status were not stated explicitly and inferences had to be made based on cues within the stories. For example, a heroine who recently graduated from college and who was otherwise depicted as youthful, was considered in her early 20s, while a woman characterized as"retired" was placed in the "61 and over" classification. Similarly, it was assumed that a heroine had achieved a high-school education if she worked in a clerical, retail, or unskilled position which did not require a college diploma. Decisions as to whether a given heroine worked at a "job" or "career" were based on the amount of education the heroine had attained, the type of position she held, and the degree of commitment she expressed toward this position. For example, heroines who worked as attorneys, executives, teachers, accountants, social workers, designers, travel agents or in similar professional or skilled positions were considered career women. On the other hand, heroines who worked as waitresses, secretaries, retail clerks, or in other semi- or unskilled positions were recorded as having jobs. Inferences regarding economic class, goals, and problem faced by the heroine were also occasionally necessary.

In view of the subjective nature of this process, reliability was tested by a second coder, who read and coded 10 short stories from the study. Out of a possible 130 category choices, the two coders matched on 114 choices, providing a coder reliability of 87.7 percent. No discrepancies existed between coders in the important areas of "major occupation" and "education." The most frequent disagreement occurred in the heroine "problem" category, where highly subjective choices such as "interpersonal," "psychological," and "marital" tend to overlap. The only other minor discrepancies between coders occurred in the "goals," "housing," "marital status," and "residence" categories.

After coding was completed, responses in each category were totaled and recorded for each magazine. Data collected on fictional heroines was then compared to: (1) U.S. Census data on women's employment and education; (2) data on readers of the magazines under investigation; and (3) heroine traits data presented by Loughlin and Bailey.

In addition, telephone interviews were conducted with fiction editors from each of the three magazines in the study in order to shed light on the fiction selection process. Cantor (1987) contends that an important aspect of media analysis includes consideration of the writers, editors, and other gatekeeepers involved in media production. The interviews, scheduled by telephone in advance, were framed around the following questions: "What do you look for in the fiction you choose?"; "To what extent, if any, are your choices influenced by reader demographics?"; "Why does fiction in your magazine tend to focus on love and romance?"; "Is there any conscious attempt to choose stories that reflect women's real-life social status?"; and "Why do you think the portrayal of women's employment and education in magazine fiction has lagged behind actual trends in these areas?"

CHAPTER IV

MAGAZINES SELECTED FOR THE STUDY

This chapter explores the social and economic genesis of the three magazines in the study, Ladies' Home Journal, Good Housekeeping, and McCall's. The economic history of the magazines is of particular interest because, as Cantor (1987) states, "it is not possible to understand culture, especially popular culture, without also examining the commercial system within which it is created" (p 191). In addition to historical information, audience and circulation data from the 1800s to 1990 are included, as well as results of interviews conducted in 1990 with fiction editors from the magazines. Cantor points out the need "to consider not only the content but also the organization of artistic production, including . . . . its creators (writers, editors, producers), distributors (networks and publishers), and target audiences" (p. 191).

History and Significance of the Woman's Mass Magazine

The economic and social climate of late-19th-century America proved auspicious for the birth of mass magazines. As the country moved from an agrarian to an industrial economy, technological advances in printing, distribution, and production "allowed entrepreneurial publishers to print, sell and distribute magazines in numbers previously unimagined" (Waller-Zuckerman, 1989). Low postal rates, increased literacy, economic prosperity, and urbanization added to the mix that spawned the mass-magazine era (Peterson, 1964).

Of the magazines that ushered in this era, Ladies' Home Journal, Good Housekeeping, and McCall's played important roles. Along with a handful of other early periodicals, they pioneered such industry innovations as low prices, mass distribution, product development, reader service, and marketing and audience research. They were among the first to showcase the period's technological marvels (Waller-Zuckerman, 1989), and they "revolutionized the advertising industry"

(Steinberg, 1979 p. xii). Waller-Zuckerman summarizes their unique contributions in this way:

> What distinguished the women's journals from [the] others was that their publishers and editors employed a combination of innovative marketing tactics sooner than their competitors. This successful early use of aggressive promotional ploys, low price, targeting of a mass (largely female) market, . . . and appreciation of advertising revenue merits these . . . publications recognition in journalism history as pioneers (Waller-Zuckerman, 1989).

Women's mass magazines also helped create what Steinberg calls a "national middlebrow culture." The decades following the Civil War saw sharp declines in illiteracy and rapid spread of education among the masses. For the first time in American history, most citizens could read (Tebbel, 1969). At the same time, "a shorter work week in business and industry" provided the growing middle class both with increased leisure time (Peterson, p. 48) and a keen appetite for "news, comment, and entertainment" (Steinberg, p. xi). But until the mid-1800s and the advent of the mass-circulation journal, only two types of periodicals existed:

> Available . . . at one end of the scale were the quality monthly magazines--so called because they addressed an audience well above average in income and intellectual curiosity--magazines like Harper's and Scribner's, priced beyond [average readers'] means and edited beyond [their] scope of interests. At the other end of the scale were the cheap weeklies, the sentimental story papers, the miscellanies. Between there were few magazines of popular price and general appeal (Peterson, 1964, p. 2).

Women comprised a significant segment of the new literate, information-hungry population. "Industrialization and urbanization greatly changed women's roles, as much productive work shifted out of the home, and increasing numbers of households moved to cities," states Waller-Zuckerman (p. 34). These changes created a desire in women "for information on how to live a proper feminine life." Additionally, as their roles switched from producers to consumers, women sought reliable knowledge of the new appliances and other products bursting onto the marketplace. The mass women's journals moved in to fulfill and exploit these needs.

The circulation figures for Ladies' Home Journal, McCall's, and other giants during this period reflect their enormous popularity (see Table 3). "Before the last

Table 3

Circulation Growth of the Top Six Women's Magazines: 1895-1910

Magazine	1895	1910	% Growth
Ladies' Home Journal	715,000	1,253,000	75.0
McCall's	100,000	1,012,000	912.0
Delineator	550,000	763,000	39.0
Woman's Home Companion	176,110	688,000	291.0
Pictorial Review	*	364,777	--
Good Housekeeping	55,000	237,167	331.0

*founded in 1899

Source: Lord & Thomas, America's Magazines, 1895 and N.W. Ayer, Ayer's Directory, 1910 (chart adapted from Waller-Zuckerman, 1989).

decade of the nineteenth century, publishers had been extremely proud of circulations between 100,000 and 200,000," writes Peterson (p. 13). By 1904, Ladies' Home Journal had far surpassed this standard, becoming the first American magazine to reach the 1-million mark in circulation. By 1910, McCall's had matched this feat, and the circulations of each of the major women's journals continued to spiral upward over the next five decades.

The women's journals provided more than mere entertainment and instruction to the new "middlebrow culture." They initiated health, advertising, education, and environmental reforms. But perhaps even more important, they "interpreted issues and events" for the growing nation. "America was a vast land, a land of sectional interests and rivalries; and unlike some foreign countries, it had no [national] newspapers," Peterson contends. Mass magazines penetrated "deep into the population" in a way that no newspaper--with its regional bias--could. In this way, Ladies' Home Journal, McCall's, Good Housekeeping, and other early periodicals created the first real "sense of national community" (Peterson, pp. 448-450). By 1920, Waller-Zuckerman writes, "[M]ass circulation magazines were an institution in the lives of most Americans. And women's magazines stood at the forefront of this media expansion" (p. 6).

McCall's. Established in 1873, McCall's represents the oldest of the three women's magazines in the present study. In that year, a tailor named James McCall created the periodical to promote his dressmaking-pattern business. Originally named The Queen: Illustrating McCall's Bazar Glove-Fitting Patterns and later simply the Queen of Fashion, it grew into "more of a general magazine for women than a fashion periodical" (Tebbel, 1969). In 1894 it published its first short story and two years later its first photographic cover and full-page advertisement (Peterson, p. 202). Renamed McCall's in 1897, the magazine endured a number of editors, owners, and formats over the years. Yet by 1912, it had developed its own style. "McCall's . . . published a higher percentage of fashions and clothing than the other journals," states Waller-Zuckerman (p. 16). But as a result of its high turnover of owners and editors, writes Tebbel,

> The magazine did not really hit its stride until 1921, when Harry Payne Burton became editor and brought to its pages a generous sampling of the day's best writers of popular fiction and articles . . . . The emphasis was on making it a national magazine, which was done not only by concentrating on material with a nationwide appeal but also by . . . providing its readers with a sense of common identification (p. 161).

Successive editors strived to make McCall's even more attractive to readers, adding separate sections in 1932 "for 'news and fiction,' 'homemaking,' and 'style and beauty,'" and printing full-length novels in each issue starting in 1937 (Peterson, p. 204). By 1956, the magazine's circulation had reached nearly 5 million, and by 1968, it led its chief rivals, Ladies' Home Journal and Good Housekeeping, with a staggering circulation of 8.5 million (Tebbel).

Ladies' Home Journal. Although not the first of America's high-circulation magazines, Ladies' Home Journal, created in 1883, quickly became an industry pacesetter. The Journal "was the first magazine that combined the elements of wide circulation, low price, national distribution, diverse contents, and high volume advertising," states Waller-Zuckerman (p. 8-9). At a time when women faced unsettling lifestyle changes, the Journal led the way in standardizing "certain externals of behavior" (Peterson, p. 449). Steinberg observes that the Journal:

> provided a service model these middle- and working-class women needed to cope effectively with urban problems, and it offered some predictable and reassuring answers to thorny problems at a time when uncertainty threatened the security of familiar customs (p. xvi).

The magazine developed from a column written by Louisa Curtis that was published in her husband, Cyrus', four-page weekly, The Tribune and Farmer. In response to the popularity of his wife's column, Cyrus Curtis first expanded it to a page and then, in 1883, to the Ladies' Home Journal and Practical Housekeeper, a monthly eight-page supplement on gardening, fashion, childcare, cooking, needlework, and handicrafts (Wood, 1949, p. 105). The new supplement, which attracted 25,000 subscribers in its first year, was immediately successful. Curtis abandoned his ailing weekly to focus his full attention on what became The Ladies' Home Journal (Steinberg, p. 2).

In 1889, with its circulation well over 400,000, "Curtis made the move that elevated the Journal to preeminence" (Tebbel, p. 183). He hired as editor the egocentric but brilliant Edward Bok, in whose hands the Journal expanded the frontiers of women's magazines. "Edward Bok regarded his editorship as a calling in the Calvinist sense," Steinberg states. "His mission was not only to fulfill the needs of his audience but to mold and shape it in a moral and forward-looking direction" (p. xv). In the course of carrying out this mission, Bok:

> advised women on how to raise babies, how to play the piano, how to understand and appreciate the Bible, how to improve the interiors of their homes. He campaigned against French fashions, killing birds to adorn women's hats, public drinking cups, venereal disease. He published the best and best-known authors he could attract. And in doing so, he broke with the sentimentality, the moralizing and piety which had long characterized the women's magazine; he helped to make the women's magazine an organ of service to its readers . . . . (Peterson, pp. 11-12).

Ironically, according to Tebbel, Bok "had no particular fondness for women except his mother, whom he adored. A bachelor, he seemed to have little feeling for the other sex except a kind of idealization" (p. 183). Peterson adds that, "[Bok] was a man who understood women but disdained most of them . . . . " (p. 183). And in a period when economic changes had shaken women's lives and self image as never before in history, "Bok was confused about women's roles," asserts Steinberg. "He had misgivings about suffrage for women . . . . He wanted women to stay at home and mind their households . . . . " (p. 144).

Despite his feelings toward women, Bok succeeded in fostering "an air of intimacy" among his female readers, making them "feel that by purchasing [the magazine], they were privy to exclusive information, that they had entered a special circle" (Waller-Zuckerman, p. 15). Like McCall's, the magazine swiftly developed its own style and tone: "both homey, yet wide ranging in content, edited for the socially conscious, intelligent homemaker." The magazine also published more fiction that its competitors, "reflecting its popularity with advertisers, which translated into dollars to pay for high-priced stories" (Waller-Zuckerman, p. 15).

Bok's true genius lay in devising methods for increasing readership. By the turn of the century he had pushed the Journal's circulation to 900,000--surpassing every

other magazine in publication (Tebbel, p. 185). At the same time, Curtis continued to lure "quality advertisers" to the magazine (Steinberg, p. 2). Like other publishers of the period, he began to regard readers almost strictly as consumers of goods and services provided by the magazine's advertisers. By this time advertising had gained "a key position in the structure of magazine publishing. [Its] revenue was necessary to keep prices down so circulation could stay up, and to pay the growing fees demanded by contributors" (Waller-Zuckerman, p. 8). By 1919 each issue of Ladies' Home Journal carried up to $2 million worth of advertisements (Tebbel, p. 186). The magazine, along with a handful of other mass publications, "initiated the practice of placing ads next to related editorial material." And Bok "is credited with being the first editor to run editorial material through the ads traditionally clumped together in the back of the magazine" (Waller- Zuckerman, p. 25).

Bok served as editor of the Ladies Home Journal for 30 years, earning phenomenal success for the magazine. After he retired in 1919, the Journal suffered a period of stagnation and decline that ended only after the arrival of co-editors Bruce and Beatrice Gould in 1935 (Tebbel, p. 208). Inheriting a magazine with a circulation of 2.5 million in 1935, they built it to 6 million over the next 18 years (Kelly, 1979). By 1947, the magazine's advertising gross exceeded that of its two major competitors, Good Housekeeping and McCall's, combined, "and some readers were complaining that the thick magazine was so heavy they had trouble reading it in bed" (Tebbel, p. 209).

During the Goulds' tenure, the Ladies Home Journal adopted the slogan, "Never Underestimate the Power of a Woman." Rather than referring to the personal empowerment of women, however, the phrase, as Bruce Gould confessed, "was designed to persuade Madison Avenue that advertisements of cake mix, household applicances, [and] Beauty Rest mattressess would be more effective in a woman's magazine than in general weeklies claiming a 'dual audience'" (Gould, 1968).

Good Housekeeping. First published in Holyoke, Massachusetts in 1885, Good Housekeeping was designed as a paean to household duties. Its founder, Clark W. Bryan, published the magazine, as he described it,"'to produce or perpetuate perfection, or as

near unto perfection, as may be obtained in the household'" (Wood, p. 121). Bryan died in 1898, and the magazine passed through a succession of owners. At the turn of the century, with its circulation still well under 100,000, "it was advising homemakers on preparing Sunday dinners, canning fruits, simplified housekeeping, fashions, and rearing children" (Peterson, p. 216).

The magazine may well have perished along with Woman's Home Companion, Delineator, and other early women's journals, if not for an innovation engineered by Phelps Publishing Company. Soon after the company took over the magazine in 1901, it created the Good Housekeeping Institute "as an editorial department which could provide detailed and accurate information on home economics subjects" (Wood, p. 121). In doing so, Phelps wrote a new chapter in the concept of reader service. The Institute conducted tests on foods, appliances, and other products in its own laboratories and kitchens. Results were reported in Good Housekeeping, and the Institute issued the "Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval" to manufacturers "whether or not they advertised in the magazine" (Peterson, p. 216).

From its inception, Good Housekeeping cultivated a distinctly conservative style, favoring homemaking topics and emphasizing fiction (Waller-Zuckerman, p. 15). In the mid-1930s, "a typical issue carried eight stories, three of them serials," writes Peterson (p. 216). The magazine lagged behind its competitors, Ladies' Home Journal and McCall's, throughout most of its history, professing "to stand aloof from the battle." But Good Housekeeping gradually gained on its rivals, growing to 5.2 million in circulation by 1963 (Peterson, p. 216) and eventually surpassing both Ladies' Home Journal and McCall's (see Table 4).

Updated Circulation Data

Although McCall's, Ladies' Home Journal, and Good Housekeeping continued to lead the women's service magazine field in 1990, they no longer enjoyed the massive circulations and advertising revenues typical of their heydays. From 1968 to 1990, for example, McCall's circulation slipped from 8.5 million to 5 million. Good Housekeeping lost nearly half a million in circulation over the past 15 years, while

Table 4

Circulation Figures for McCall's, Ladies' Home Journal, and Good Housekeeping: 1941-1990

Year	McCall's	Ladies' Home Journal	Good Housekeeping
1941	1.3 million	1.6 million	.3 million
1948	3.6 million	4.6 million	3.0 million
1958	4.9 million	5.4 million	3.8 million
1968	8.5 million	6.9 million	5.5 million
1975	7.5 million	7.0 million	5.6 million
1978	6.5 million	6.0 million	5.0 million
1985	6.2 million	5.1 million	5.2 million
1987	5.1 million	5.1 million	5.2 million
1988	5.0 million	5.1 million	5.2 million
1989	5.0 million	5.2 million	5.2 million
1990	5.0 million	5.1 million	5.0 million

Source: Gale Directory of Publications (formerly Ayer Directory of Publications) and SRDS, Consumer Magazine & Agri-Media Rates and Data, 1941, 1948, 1958, 1968, 1975, 1978, 1985, 1987, 1988, 1989, 1990.

Ladies' Home Journal dropped nearly 2 million in the same period (Table 4). Beginning in the 1970s "the big three" found themselves in a hotly competitive, fading mass-magazine market. New women's special-interest magazines such as Working Woman, New Woman, Savvy, Working Mother, and Self took a toll on their circulations. At the same time, specialized lifestyle magazines such as Gourmet, Vogue, and Country Home continued to draw readers away from the venerable women's mass magazines (Fannin, 1989).

Determined to halt its circulation losses, McCall's was totally redesigned in April 1990 to attract both new advertisers and "a somewhat better educated, younger reader" (Garry, 1990). The New York Times Company purchased the magazine in 1989, installing a new publisher and editor-in-chief. According to new editor, Anne Mollegan Smith, the revamped McCall's will attempt to move away from its rivals in several key ways. Along with a more sophisticated, upscale look, plans for the magazine include fiction of greater quality and quantity, more controversial articles, and a "more journalistic element" (Denaton, 1990). In addition, the magazine "will speak less to reader insecurities" (Kauchak and Lasek, 1990). "[W]omen's magazines have a tendency to talk down to women as if they were children needing endless reiterations of basics," she stated (Carmody, 1990).

Ladies' Home Journal and Good Housekeeping have also attempted to combat their shrinking circulations. Purchased by the Meredith Corporation in 1986, Ladies' Home Journal has tried to modify its strict "home and family" image by featuring more celebrity profiles than the other two magazines and adopting a "more personal, timelier, and warmer" tone (Fannin, 1989). And with its "New Traditionalist" advertising campaign launched in 1988, Good Housekeeping has attempted to take advantage of the shift in America during the 1980s toward more conservative values (Sloan, 1988). Although the campaign attracted national attention, Good Housekeeping suffered a 3.8-percent drop in circulation between 1988 and 1990 (See Table 4).

Updated Audience and Content Information

McCall's average reader in 1988 was female, married, employed, and a parent. However, the magazine's audience proved slightly older and less educated than that of the other magazines in the study (see Table 5).

During the 1980s, McCall's began targeting itself to "working women, either married or divorced, with children" (Katz and Katz, 1986). As a result, the magazine expanded its non-fiction content beyond "fashion, beauty, health, fitness, psychology, and parenting" to serious issues of concern to working women and single mothers (Katz and Katz, 1986, 1989).

McCall's fiction content, during the period of this study, tended to focus on romantic love, although heroines were frequently single or married mothers. A story in the August, 1989 issue called "Surprise Ahead" proved typical of the genre. At the story's opening, the heroine, a divorced mother of a 10-year-old daughter, meets an "agreeable looking" man "in his early 30s." She rebuffs his advances in order to spare her daughter the pain of yet another broken relationship. Undaunted, he continues to pursue her, and in the end, the daughter manipulates events to bring the two adults together. The theme, voiced by the story's hero, involved "accepting whatever surprises . . . may come, good or bad" (p. 116).

Like McCall's, the typical reader of Ladies' Home Journal was female, married, employed, and a parent (see Table 5). Ladies' Home Journal readers, however, were slightly better-educated than those of the other two magazines.

By 1986, Ladies' Home Journal had begun to make "some concessions . . . to women's changing roles" in its non-fiction content (Katz and Katz, 1986). And by the late 1980s, in response to growing competition and in order "to inject some flash into its venerable image," the magazine also began to emphasize articles on celebrities. Articles on "parenting, family life, and women's changing roles" also appeared frequently. According to Katz and Katz (1989), "Ladies' Home Journal believes that women today are living on a dual track, and appears to be reaching for an updated, intelligible philosophy . . . . [Yet] interest in the home and family endures."

Table 5

Audience Characteristics, McCall's, Ladies' Home Journal, and Good Housekeeping: 1988

Audience Characteristic	McCall's %	Ladies' Home Journal %	Good Housekeeping %
Females	90.5	88.8	85.1
Employed	60.5	60.3	62.6
professionals/ managers	13.5	15.1	15.1
technical/ clerical/sales	28.3	28.5	27.7
precision/craft	1.9	3.1	2.9
Parents	74.2	75.5	71.5
Education:			
high school	42.8	45.6	43.0
1-3 yrs. college	21.8	22.5	23.3
college grad.	17.2	18.2	17.8
Age:			
18-24	10.3	10.3	10.3
25-34	22.1	22.3	22.6
35-44	19.6	21.4	23.4
45-54	17.0	14.7	14.1
55-64	15.7	15.5	14.7
65+	15.3	15.9	14.8
Marital Status:			
single	14.6	14.0	14.8
married	65.2	66.9	67.6
divorced/sep.	10.7	10.0	9.3
widowed	9.4	9.0	8.2

Source: "Multi-Media Audiences: Adults," The 1988 Simmons Study of Media & Markets, volume M-5, September, 1988.

Unlike McCall's, the fiction content of Ladies' Home Journal during the period of analysis focused on family happiness more often than romantic love. Most heroines were married, and children figured in the plots of a number of stories. Award-winning and well-known writers such as Doris Lessing and Joyce Carol Oates also wrote more frequently for Ladies' Home Journal than the other magazines in the study.

Somewhat typical of the magazine's fiction was a story called "A Passing Fancy," which appeared in the October, 1989 issue. The story's theme--"tried and true is better than new and uncertain"--was a recurrent one in the fiction of all three publications. The story's heroine, a married housewife in her 30s and the mother of three small boys, falls in love with her children's pediatrician. Bored with her "good" but "predictable" husband and starved for romance, she begins meeting the young doctor every Wednesday night. During these secret trysts, the two do nothing more daring than holding hands, but she builds a romantic fantasy around him. One night he ends the relationship, and she returns home. There, at the sight of her sons lying asleep in her husband's arms and the cat curled up at the foot of the bed, she feels suddenly content with her secure, reliable marriage. "Gazing at her family," the story concludes, "she feels the unbidden solace of something tried and true" (p. 230).

Good Housekeeping's 1988 readers, as the data in Table 5 indicate, were similar to those of the other two magazines in the study. In the 1980s, the magazine maintained its reputation as an "all-purpose guide to homemaking success" (Katz and Katz, 1986). The magazine's Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval, "enshrined in American experience and folklore," continued to direct homemakers on products (Katz and Katz, 1989). And in keeping with its traditional image, the publication continued its non-fiction focus on cooking, money, beauty, fashion, crafts, and celebrities. "General articles are investigative, based on nostalgia, or personal accounts." Good Housekeeping continues to publish far more short stories than Ladies' Home Journal or McCall's and also runs frequent novel excerpts (Katz and Katz, 1989).

Good Housekeeping's fiction, during the period of this research, relied heavily on formula, with plots often centering on romantic relationships between single men and women. A story called "The Better to Know You" in the February, 1989 issue was

prototypical. Its heroine, a single woman from a small Midwestern town who has recently moved to New York, feels alone and alienated in her new surroundings. In a struggle to overcome the city's aloofness, she begins reaching out to strangers on the bus, in her bank, and on the street. In the process she encounters a "tall and attractive" architect: "It seemed to Kerry that everything about him was perfect. A Class Act. Each time their eyes met for prolonged, silent intervals, she could feel the man-woman voltage rise and knew that he felt it, too" (p. 117). In the company of this new man, she is transported in her imagination back to her friendly home town.

Fiction Editor Interviews

In September, 1990, telephone interviews with fiction editors from the magazines were conducted in order to address what Cantor (1987) refers to as a fundamental question in fiction analysis: "Who creates the fiction and under what circumstances?" (p. 192). Editors interviewed included Lee Quarfoot of Good Housekeeping, Sara McCraw of Ladies' Home Journal, and Jane Ciabattari of McCall's.

As in past interviews with fiction editors from the three magazines in the study, reader identification was cited as the most important element in fiction chosen by Good Housekeeping (Tilghman, 1972; Galas, 1982; Loughlin, 1983). "Basically we buy what we know our readers will like, and that's fiction about the emotional life of middle-American women," Quarfoot stated. "We do extensive reader research and have for many years." In defense of the magazine's almost exclusive focus on romantic plots, she contended that Good Housekeeping would like to publish stories exploring other themes, but lacks writers who create them. This problem is exacerbated, she added, by the magazine's tendency to run extremely short fiction complete on two pages. "Writing the short-short stories is very difficult," she said. "Often the material [that we receive] is too downbeat, too young or too old . . . . I'm not seeing a lot of material that's suitable." Additionally, Quarfoot feels that she must remain sensitive to the magazine's conservative image and audience. "My problem [in selecting fiction] is partially a morality issue," she said. "My readers don't accept the woman who's leading the adventuresome life if it's also a sexually active life. I receive a lot of negative mail if I

run stories of that kind." And although more than half of Good Housekeeping's readers work, "They still look to the magazine as a keeper of traditional and family values. They don't mind reading about educated women or ambitious women. They just don't like graphic sex or violence."

While Sara McCraw described Ladies' Home Journal's fiction as "fairly traditional," she made a point of distancing her magazine from Good Housekeeping. "We are certainly not as traditional as they are," she said. "We run much less formulaic fiction and we run a much wider range of fiction." In choosing stories for Ladies' Home Journal, its editors have no predetermined agenda. According to McCraw:

> We don't plan ahead of time. We see what comes in and we get writers to do stories, but we don't tell them what to do. In general, we look for stories about relationships--mothers, daughters, husbands, and wives. That's what our readers want to read about. We look for stories that as many people as possible can relate to.

Of particular interest were McCraw's perceptions of the working women in Ladies' Home Journal's audience: "Although most of our readers work, they don't want to hear about careers," she stated. "They have jobs because they have to work, but they're not necessarily on the fast track." Like Good Housekeeping's fiction editors, McCraw stated that Ladies' Home Journal's fiction staff is "fairly involved with reader statistics." Yet deciding what the magazine's readers want, she stressed, "is really more of an intuitive activity."

She also asserted that the magazine's fiction editors do not consciously attempt to match short story plots and themes to events and issues occurring in the real world. Subscribers do not read fiction to gain insights on the problems and issues facing them in the real world, but "because they're looking for escape."

The redesign and editorial overhaul of McCall's magazine beginning with the April, 1990 issue does not affect the present study, which analyzed fiction in the magazine published between February 1987 and February 1990. Because of the sweeping changes that have occurred on the magazine since February 1990, results of an interview with Jane Ciabattari, who was hired as fiction editor in late 1989, will also have fewer direct implications for the present study. Yet Ciabattari's statements on the steps

McCall's has taken to correct its approach to fiction should provide valuable insight into what the magazine's staff considered negative about its past orientation toward fiction.

Ciabattari stated that her predecessors on the magazine "did not have a strong commitment to using fiction." In contrast, the revamped McCall's plans not only to increase its number of short stories, but to improve both the quality of writing and the level of sophistication and intelligence of the magazine's target audience. According to Ciabattari:

> We believe in approaching the people who read the magazine with a sense of their having dignity and intelligence. We want to offer material that we think has subtlety, texture, and drama. People respond to good writing. Yet while I'm looking for literary quality, I also want stories to be accessible to a mainstream audience-- women in all parts of the country.

She cited a story named "The Nickel Plan" in the October, 1990 issue of McCall's as an example of both the magazine's commitment toward literary quality and its commitment toward publishing stories that reflect issues facing real women. Written by novelist Jane Smiley, who was twice nominated for a National Book Critics Circle Award, the story focuses on the painful refusal of the heroine's two daughters to accept their new stepfather. "We're coming closer to some of the real-life dilemmas happening in women's lives," Ciabattari stated. She also described a story that she purchased for McCall's whose heroine fails to get a promotion at work. "It's about a woman who's 42 years old who has several kids, an ex-husband, a woman's group, and a life in which she's still expecting to grow and change. She's passed up for a promotion by a 24-year-old." Finally, Ciabattari said that she seeks fiction in which women's roles stretch beyond the conventional, romantic model found in most magazine short stories. She provided the following as an example of this type of fiction:

> A story I bought for our August, 1990 issue called 'Thinking West' is about a woman who gets in a car and drives from Key West through Texas and New Mexico because she wants to feel what it's like to be in the West. She stops at a ranch and meets an older woman who takes her out to shoot rattlesnakes. She doesn't want to kill a rattlesnake, but she does learn how to shoot a gun and a lot of other things.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS

The heroine who emerged from short stories in McCall's, Ladies' Home Journal, and Good Housekeeping from February 1987 through February 1990 was similar in many respects to the typical heroine found in the Loughlin and Bailey studies. Like their average heroines, she was 26-to-35 years old, married, employed, middle-class, and the parent of no more than two children. Hers was a traditional nuclear family, and she resided in a house in an urban area or small town (see Table 6).

Yet upon closer scrutiny, a number of significant differences appeared between this heroine and her predecessors.[1] One of the most important changes involved her primary goal: 62.5 percent of the heroines pursued romantic love as a goal. This was a striking departure from Loughlin's study of 36 heroines, which reported family happiness (44 percent) and personal fulfillment (39 percent) as the most common heroine goals (see Table 7).

Interestingly, in the type of problems faced by heroines, the present study had more in common with Bailey's 1957 research than with Loughlin's 1979-1981 findings. The present study's typical heroine encountered romantic problems far more often

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[1] As described in Chapter III, an "unable to determine" classification was added to each of the present study's heroine traits categories. Although not included in Bailey or Loughlin's research design, this classification was deemed important in increasing coding accuracy. However, because Bailey and Loughlin did not provide this classification, comparisons proved difficult between this study's findings and their results. This was particularly true in this study's education and employment categories, where information was omitted in a large percentage of stories. To make comparisons possible, samples in each category of this research consisted only of those heroines for whom trait information was provided. For example, out of the 100 heroines in this investigation, education level was provided for only 54. Hence, data presented in the education category was based on N = 54 rather than N = 100.

Table 6

Percentage Distributional Analysis of Characteristics of Fictional Heroines in McCall's, Ladies' Home Journal, and Good Housekeeping: February, 1987-February, 1990

Age:	18-25	26-35	36-45	46-60	61+
(N = 99)	30.3	43.4	17.2	6.0	3.0

Marital status:	Single	Married	Separated	Divorced	Widowed
(N = 99)	33.3	43.4	2.0	13.1	8.1

Race:	White	Hispanic	Black	Asian and other
(N = 97)	96.9	1.0	2.1	--

Economic Class:	Low	Middle	High
(N = 100)	2.0	95.0	3.0

Education:	Grade School	High School	College	Above College
(N = 54)	--	50.0	40.7	9.3

Occupation:	Housekeeping/Leisure	Job	Study	Career
(N = 80)	37.5	25.0	3.7	33.8

Parental Status:	Mother in Trad. 2-Parent Family	Single Mother	Stepmother to Spouse's Children	Mother to Own plus Stepmother Spouse's Children
(N = 48)	64.6	25.0	6.2	4.2

No. of Children:	0	1-2	3-5	6+
(N = 100)	49.5	41.2	9.3	--

Table 6 (Continued)

Residence:	City	Country	Suburb	Small Town
(N = 55)	38.2	10.9	18.2	32.7

Housing:	House	Apartment	Hotel	Room
(N = 74)	70.3	29.7	--	--

Marital State:	Happy	Unhappy	Happy to Unhappy	Unhappy to Happy	Happy to Unhappy to Happy
(N = 43)	62.8	14.0	4.7	14.0	4.7

Goals:	Romantic Love	Career	Personal Fulfillment	Community Betterment	Material	Family Happiness
(N = 80)	62.5	1.3	10.0	3.8	1.3	21.3

Problem:	Marital	Psychological	Children	Romantic	Health	Financial
(N = 100)	14.0	14.0	16.0	38.0	3.0	2.0

Danger	Moral	Interpersonal	Community	No Problem
3.0	--	6.0	--	3.0

Note: The original sample consisted of 100 heroines. However, stories frequently omitted information on employment, education, and other heroine traits, resulting in smaller sample sizes in these categories.

Table 7

Comparative Analysis of Selected Characteristics of Fictional Heroines from Bailey's, Loughlin's, and the Present Study

	Bailey's Study 1957 (N = 167) %	Bailey's Study 1967 (N = 167) %	Loughlin's Study 1979-1981 (N = 36) %	Present Study 1987-1990 * %
Age:				(N = 99)
18-25	45.0	13.0	25.0	30.3
26-35	(na)	(na)	47.0	43.4
36-45	14.0	30.0	14.0	17.2
46-60	(na)	(na)	11.0	6.0
61+	(na)	(na)	3.0	3.0
Employment:				(N = 80)
Housekeeping/Leisure	(na)	(na)	43.0	37.5
Job	(na)	(na)	50.0	25.0
Study	(na)	(na)	1.0	3.7
Career	9.0	4.0	6.0	33.8
Education:				(N = 54)
High School	(na)	(na)	36.0	50.0
College	(na)	(na)	56.0	40.7
Above College	(na)	(na)	6.0	9.3
Marital Status:				(N = 99)
Single	(na)	(na)	22.0	33.3
Married	(na)	(na)	69.0	43.4
Separated	(na)	(na)	--	2.0
Divorced	(na)	(na)	6.0	13.1
Widowed	(na)	(na)	3.0	8.1
Happy Marriages[1]	81.0	93.0	92.0	81.5
Number of Children:				(N = 100)
None	31.0	18.0	29.0	49.5
1-2	47.0	66.0	61.0	41.2
Goals:				(N = 80)
Romantic Love	(na)	(na)	11.0	62.5
Career	(na)	(na)	6.0	1.3
Personal Fulfillment	(na)	(na)	39.0	10.0
Family Happiness	(na)	(na)	44.0	21.3

Table 7 (Continued)

Bailey's Study	Loughlin's Study 1957 (N = 167) %	Loughlin's Study 1967 (N = 167) %	Present Study 1979-1981 (N = 36) %	Present Study 1987-1990 * %
Problems:				(N = 100)
Psychological	12.0	24.0	33.0	14.0
Romantic	30.0	20.0	8.0	38.0
Marital	16.0	15.0	11.0	14.0
Children	(na)	(na)	6.0	16.0
Interpersonal Relations	(na)	(na)	14.0	6.0
Financial	(na)	(na)	3.0	2.0

*The original sample consisted of 100 heroines. However, stories frequently omitted information on employment, education, and other heroine traits, resulting in smaller sample sizes in these categories.

(na) = not available.

[1]This category was based on married heroines only: In Loughlin's study, N = 25; in the present study N = 43.

(38 percent) than conflicts involving children (16 percent), marriage (14 percent), or psychological issues (14 percent). Similarly, 30 percent of Bailey's 1957 heroines grappled with romantic problems, compared to only 8 percent in Loughlin's study. As in Bailey and Loughlin's research, problems featured in the stories were seldom serious, regardless of their type. Two exceptions dealt with death as the major problem: one heroine in the study was forced to come to terms with her husband's cancer, while a second faced the tragedy of a dying child.

The most significant differences between studies occurred in the employment category. In 1957 Bailey identified 9 percent of heroines as having careers, a figure which slipped to 4 percent during the next decade. In Loughlin's replication of Bailey's work 10 years later, the number of heroines with careers had increased to 6 percent. The present study, in contrast, identified almost 34 percent of heroines as having careers. This nearly sixfold increase demonstrates a substantial improvement on the part of the magazines in reflecting women's actual labor force participation.

Yet such gains are tempered by the fact that no mention of either job or career was made for 20 of the 100 heroines in the study. Hence, while the statistics make a statement on the growth of women's employment, the omission of occupational data in such a large number of stories makes an equally emphatic statement on the relative insignificance of women's work in the magazines' fiction.

The education category produced a mixture of results. On the positive side, a 14-percent increase took place in the number of heroines with a high-school education. Yet the number of heroines with at least one year of college fell from 62 percent in Loughlin's research to 50 percent in the present study. For a high percentage of heroines, no educational information was provided in the stories: a sizable 46 of the 100 heroines in the study floated through their fictional lives without a hint of having gone to college, high school or even grade school.

Marital status represents yet another category in which findings differed from Loughlin's. More heroines in the present study were single than Loughlin reported; conversely, the number of married heroines dropped by almost 40 percent from Loughlin's results. An increase in the incidence of divorced heroines was also observed;

divorced heroines more than doubled in the present study, while widowed heroines rose from 3 to 8.1 percent.

Less notable was the change in the number of heroines with happy marriages (or marriages that ended happily). Bailey found 93 percent of the heroines in 1967 to be happily married, a figure which she felt supported Friedan's charge that the three magazines promoted a "happy housewife" mentality. And in spite of the escalating divorce rates that characterized the 1970s and 1980s, Loughlin found a 92-percent incidence of happily married heroines. In the present study, 81.5 percent of heroines were happily married.

The last two areas in which the present study diverged from Loughlin's research include heroine age and parental status. As in Loughlin's study, the average age of heroines was 26-35 in this research. Yet the number of heroines in the 18-25 age bracket increased by about 20 percent from Loughlin's results. At the same time, the number of heroines in the 46-60 age group declined by nearly half. This suggests a continuation of a trend first noted by Friedan (1969) toward younger heroines in women's magazine fiction. These youthful heroines did not continue to bear children with their former enthusiasm, however. In the present study, almost half of heroines were childless, an increase of about 70 percent over Loughlin's findings.

Comparison of Results with U.S. Census Data

The present study was designed to test the following research question: How has women's magazine fiction responded to changes in women's work and education? The study's data produced conflicting answers to this question. On the one hand, as the quantitative data in Figures 2 and 4 show, the fiction overrepresented actual numbers of educated and employed women. Yet, based on the high percentage of stories which ignored heroine education and employment altogether, it may be argued that the fiction underrepresented women's status in these areas.

The most striking change in the magazines' portrayal of women's status appeared in the quantitative data on education. As the United States Census data in Figure 5 illustrate, in the past three decades the number of women completing 4 or

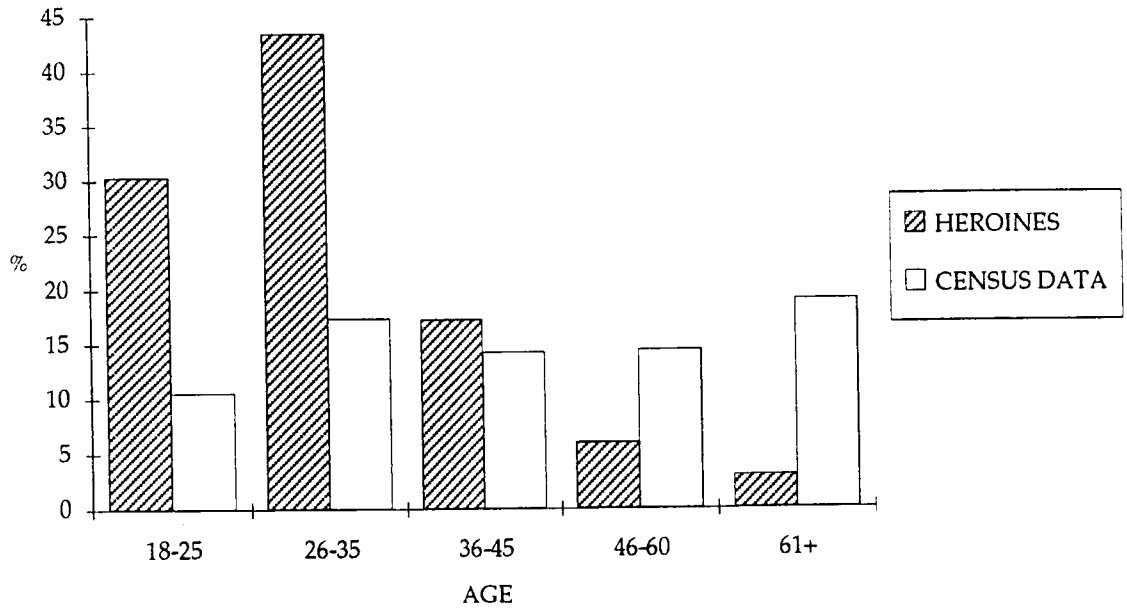

Figure 1. Comparison of age of fictional heroines in McCall's, Ladies' Home Journal, and Good Housekeeping with 1988 United States census data. Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1990.

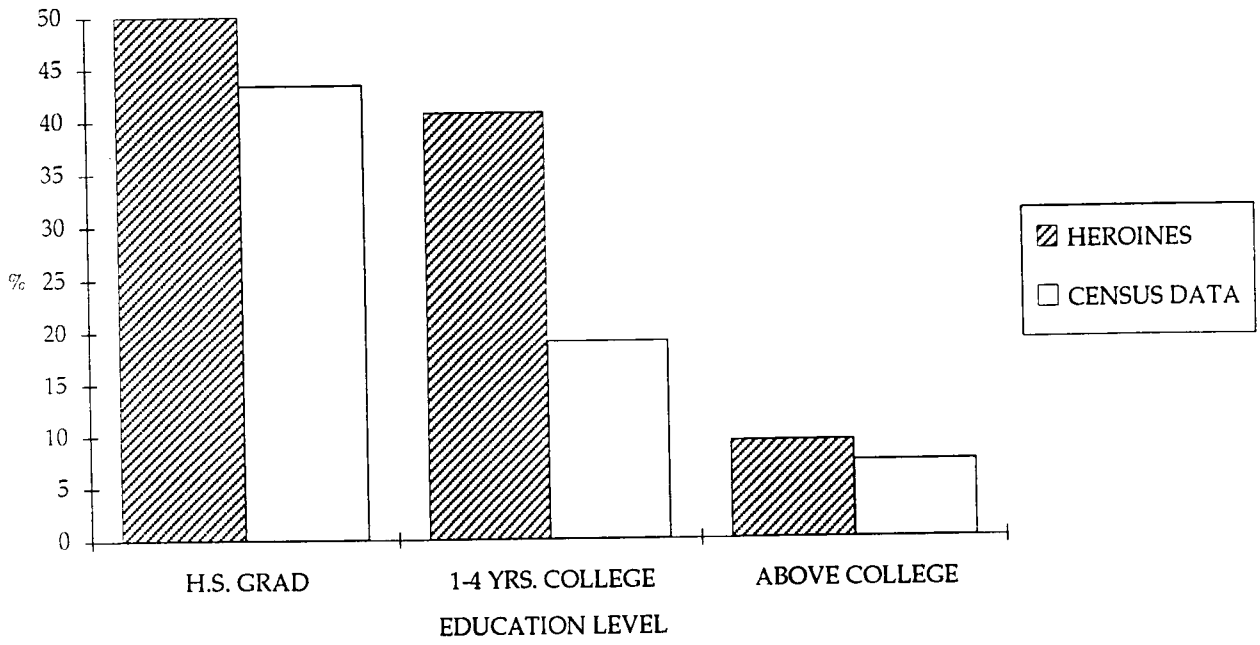

Figure 2. Comparison of educational level of fictional heroines in McCall's, Ladies' Home Journal, and Good Housekeeping with 1988 United States census data. Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1990.

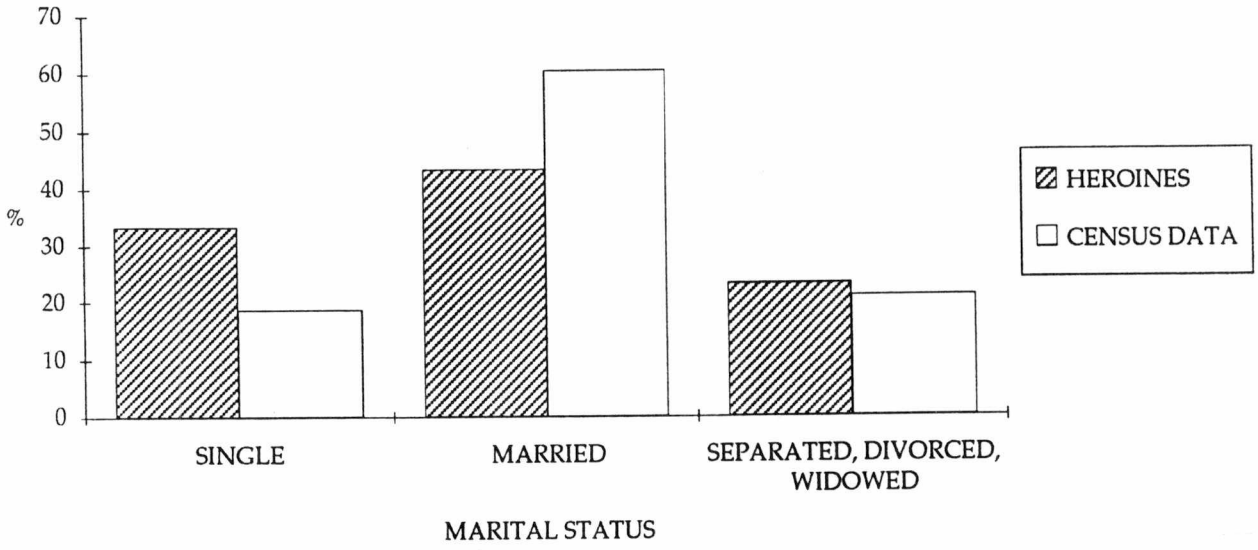

Figure 3. Comparison of marital status of fictional heroines in McCall's, Ladies' Home Journal, and Good Housekeeping with 1988 United States census data. Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1990.

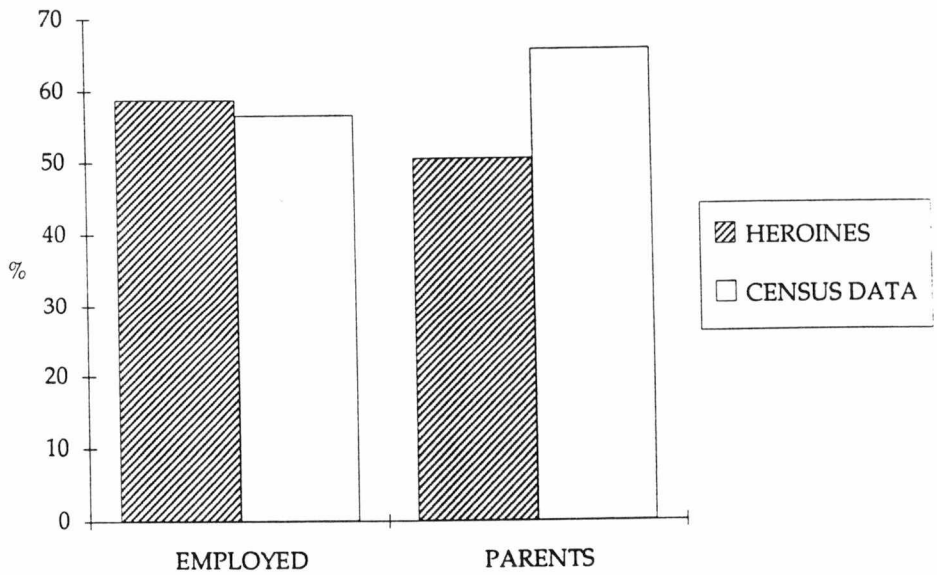

Figure 4. Comparison of employment and parental status of fictional heroines in McCall's, Ladies' Home Journal, and Good Housekeeping with 1988 United States census data. Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1990.

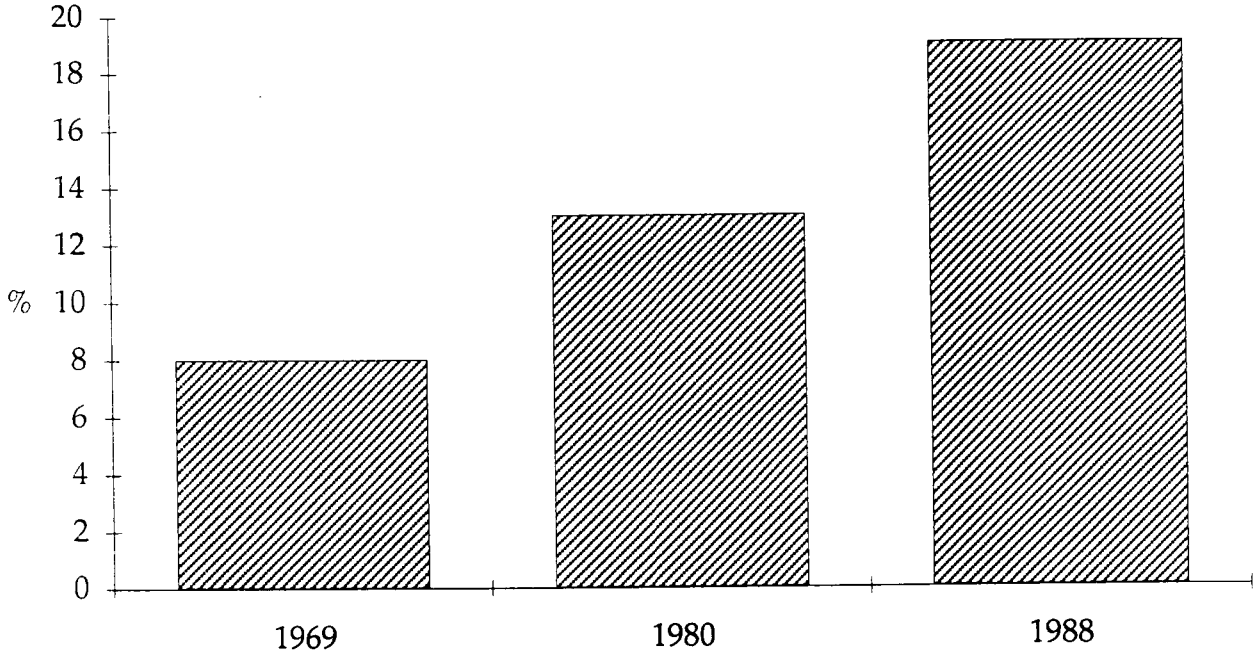

Figure 5. Percentage of United States females completing four or more years of college: 1969-1988. Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1970, 1981, 1990.

more years of college has more than tripled. By the conclusion of Bailey's study, the number of women attending college hovered around 8 percent. By Loughlin's 1979-1980 research, this figure had risen to more than 13 percent. And by 1988--the mid-point of the present study--the number of women with some college had reached 19 percent. Yet fictional heroines in the study far surpassed these achievements: almost 41 percent of heroines had at least one year of college. Heroines also spent about 27 percent more post-graduate years in college than their real-life counterparts. And they graduated from high school with more frequency than actual women; half of the heroines finished high school compared to about 44 percent of the adult female population.

Before presenting the findings on heroine employment, it is necessary to sketch some of the changes in the status of working women that have occurred since Loughlin's study. Adult women, who comprised about 40 percent of the United States labor force in 1989, represent the fastest-growing segment of employed Americans (Monthly Labor Review, Bureau of Labor Statistics, February, 1990). In 1960 only about 35 percent of adult females worked. This increased to 52 percent by 1981, when Loughlin conducted her analysis. In 1988, nearly 57 percent of women worked outside the home--an almost 10-percent increase since Loughlin's analysis (U.S. Bureau of Statistics, 1988).

In the decade since Loughlin's study, women have also made important strides in other areas of employment. As Table 8 demonstrates, the number of women working as lawyers rose by almost 56 percent, managers and administrators by nearly 60 percent, physicians by almost 87 percent, and college professors by about 14 percent. From 1960 to 1989 the number of female lawyers and judges ballooned from 7,500 to 180,000, and the number of female engineers rose from 7,404 to 174,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 1989). Factors responsible for these changes included: (1) a rise in the average age at which women married; (2) a decrease in the size of families; and (3) continued escalation in divorce rates (Wallis, 1989). Table 9 reveals a nearly 4 percent increase in the number of divorced working women between 1970 and 1980 and an almost 2 percent rise from 1980 to 1988.

Two additional changes affecting working women in the last decade involved their average age and the age of their children. Table 10 illustrates the gradual aging of

Table 8

Percentage of Women in Selected Professional Occupations: 1950-1988

Occupation	1950	1960	1970	1980	1988
Lawyers	4.1	3.3	4.7	12.4	19.3
Accountants	14.9	16.4	25.3	32.9	49.6
Managers/Administrators	13.8	14.4	16.6	24.6	39.3
Physicians	6.5	6.8	8.9	10.7	20.0
Sales Representatives	5.2	7.3	7.2	12.4	19.2
College Professors	(na)	(na)	28.0	33.8	38.5
Engineers	(na)	(na)	.8	2.8	7.3

(na) = not available

Source: Perspective on Working Women: A Databook, Publication 2080 (October 1980); U.S. Bureau of the Census, Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1990.

Table 9

Percentage of Married, Separated, and Divorced Women in the Workforce: 1960-1988

Year	Married	Separated	Divorced
1960	30.5	(na)	(na)
1970	40.8	52.1	71.5
1980	50.1	59.4	74.5
1985	54.2	61.3	75.0
1986	54.6	62.2	76.0
1987	55.8	61.4	75.4
1988	56.5	60.9	75.7

(na) = not available

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1990.

Table 10

Distribution Rate of Females in the Labor Force, by Age:
1970-1988 and Projections, 2000

	1970	1975	1980	1985	1987	1988	2000
Total Females:	43.3	46.3	51.5	54.5	56.0	56.6	62.2
Age:							
18-19	53.5	58.1	61.9	61.7	62.2	62.9	69.0
20-24	57.7	64.1	68.9	71.8	73.0	72.7	77.9
25-34	45.0	54.9	65.5	70.9	72.4	72.7	82.4
35-44	51.1	55.8	65.5	71.8	74.5	75.2	84.9
45-54	54.4	54.6	59.9	64.4	67.1	69.0	76.5
55-64	43.0	40.9	41.3	42.0	42.7	43.5	49.0
65+	9.7	8.2	8.1	7.3	7.4	7.9	7.6

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1990.

the female workforce: between 1980 and 1988, the average age of employed women rose by as much as 20 years. At the same time, since Loughlin conducted her analysis, the percentage of married working mothers with children under 18 shot up from 62 percent to about 73 percent, while the number of working women with pre-school children grew from 45 to 57 percent (see Table 11). In 1988, only one-third of all mothers with children under 18 were housewives (U.S. Census Bureau, 1990).

For the most part, fiction in the present study mirrored these changes in women's employment status. For example, 58.8 percent of the heroines analyzed had jobs or careers, compared to 56.6 percent of the United States female population. Moreover, of the jobs heroines held, nearly 34 percent were categorized as "careers"--professional or skilled positions requiring either a college education or long-term commitment. Based on these figures alone, it would be difficult to conceive of a more accurate reflection of women's real-life employment status.

A look beyond the hard data, however, yields a markedly different picture. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the stories under investigation provided no occupational information for a full 20 percent of heroines. With half of all plots focusing on the heroine's pursuit of a romantic relationship with a man, it is not surprising that female characters were typically one-dimensional figures devoid of histories, educations, or meaningful employment. Even when stories did mention a heroine's work, they all too often went nameless. Heroines went to "the office," a generic, empty destination; not one of the 93 stories revealed what a female character actually did, once there. The fact that only 1.3 percent of heroines in the study focused on career goals underscores the overall absence in the fiction of substantive attention to women's work.

Clearly, although the fictional women worked, they evinced little interest in their professions. Moreover, despite the fact that women's real-life experience in the workplace results in both fulfillment and conflict, no sign of either of these appeared in the fiction. In several stories, the workplace was utilized strictly as a narrative device--the backdrop where heroines met and won their Prince Charmings.

Table 11

Percentage of Married, Separated, and Divorced Mothers in the Labor Force with Children Under Age 18: 1960-1988

Year	With Children 6-17			With Children Under 6		
	Married	Separated	Divorced	Married	Separated	Divorced
1960	39.0	(na)	(na)	18.6	(na)	(na)
1970	49.2	60.6	82.4	30.3	45.4	63.3
1980	61.7	66.3	82.3	45.1	52.2	68.3
1985	67.8	70.9	83.4	53.4	53.2	67.5
1987	70.6	72.6	84.5	56.8	55.1	70.5
1988	72.5	69.3	83.9	57.1	53.0	70.1

(na) = not available

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1990.

This attitude carried over to heroine education, as well. As stated earlier, no hint of educational attainment was provided for 46 of the 100 heroines investigated. In the vast majority of stories, information on education, when not omitted altogether, had to be inferred from the type of job held by a heroine. Only one story out of 93 presented a plot in which a heroine's college education played a central role. With women representing 54 percent of all college graduates (U.S. Census Bureau, 1989), it seems significant that women's magazine fiction should ignore the topic of education to such an extent.

When compared to United States Census data, fiction in the study also failed to reflect women's age, marital status, and race. As Figure 1 illustrates, the fiction grossly exaggerated the number of heroines aged 18-25 while severely underrepresenting the number of older women in America. Those over 61 years old proved particularly invisible: While almost 19 percent of the actual population fits into this age group, only about 3 percent of heroines were 61 or over.

Marital status was distorted in the fiction in a similar way (see Figure 3). Almost twice the number of single women existed in fiction than in the population, and married heroines appeared 28 percent less frequently than their real-life counterparts. Yet, interestingly, divorced heroines outnumbered divorced women in the population by about 10 percent.

Finally, the short stories also underrepresented minorities. While blacks comprised about 12 percent of the United States population in 1988, only 2 percent of heroines were black (U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports). Hispanics were equally ignored: only 1 percent of heroines were Hispanic, compared to more than 8 percent of the population in 1988 (Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1990).

Comparison of Results with Magazine Audience Data

As in Loughlin's study, fictional heroines were younger, better educated, and had fewer offspring than the magazines' readers (see Figures 6-9). For example, heroines in the 18-25 age group were three times more plentiful than audience members of that

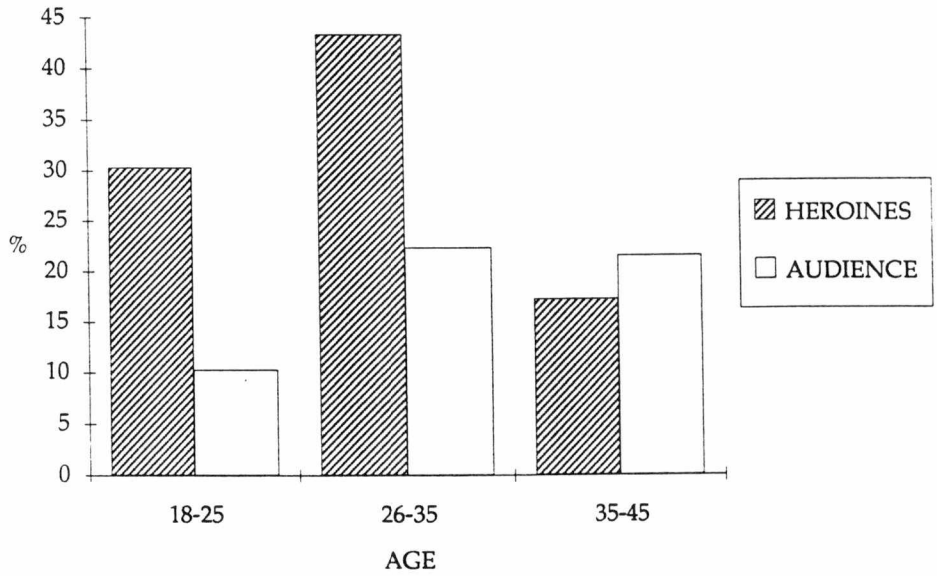

Figure 6. Comparison of age of fictional heroines in McCall's, Ladies' Home Journal, and Good Housekeeping with audience data from the magazines. Source: "Multi-Media Audiences: Adults." The 1988 Simmons Study of Media & Markets, volume M-5, September, 1988.

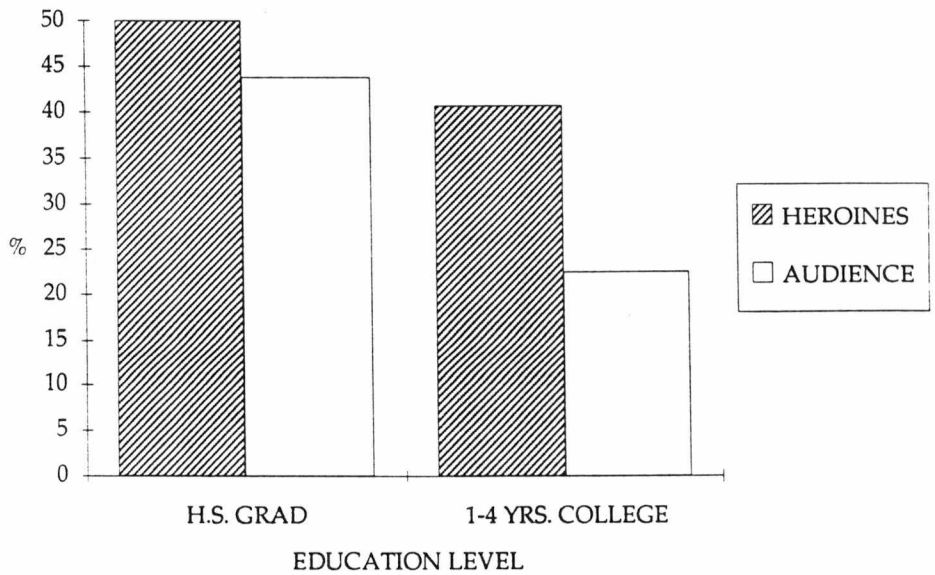

Figure 7. Comparison of educational status of fictional heroines in McCall's, Ladies' Home Journal, and Good Housekeeping with audience data from the magazines. Source: "Multi-Media Audiences: Adults." The 1988 Simmons Study of Media & Markets, volume M-5, September, 1988.

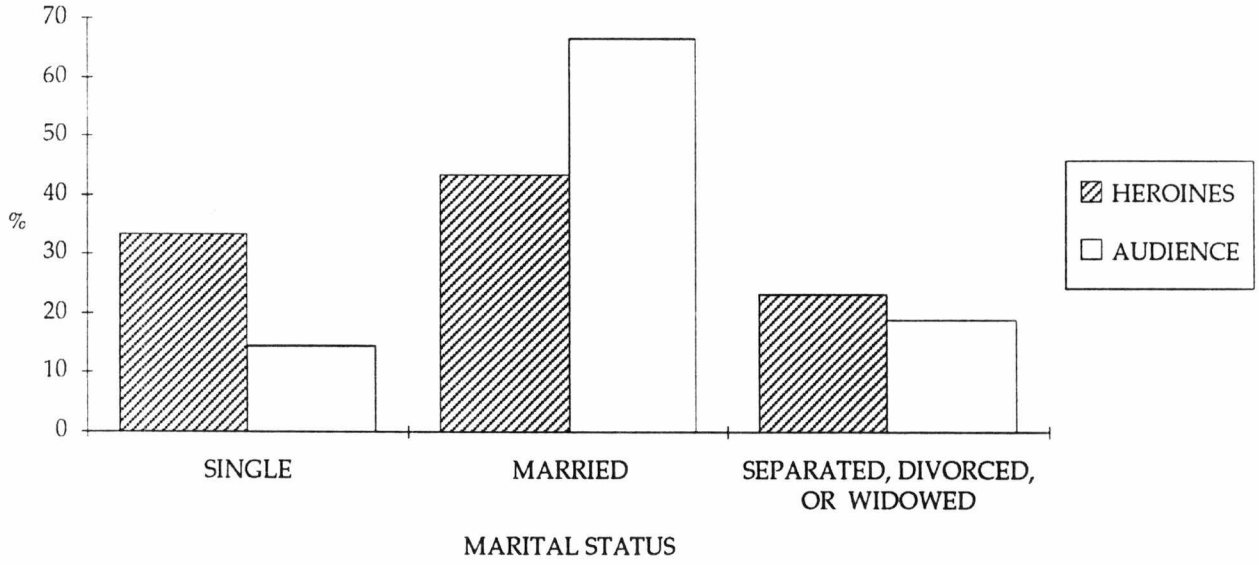

Figure 8. Comparison of marital status of fictional heroines in McCall's, Ladies' Home Journal, and Good Housekeeping with audience data from the magazines. Source: "Multi-Media Audiences: Adults." The 1988 Simmons Study of Media & Markets, volume M-5, September, 1988.

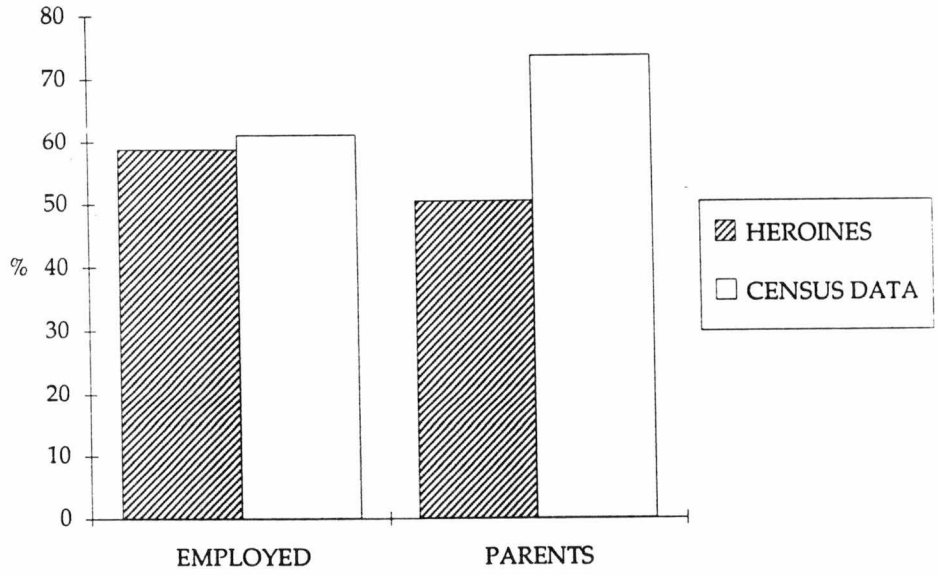

Figure 9. Comparison of employment and parental status of fictional heroines in McCall's, Ladies' Home Journal, and Good Housekeeping with audience data from the magazines. Source: "Multi-Media Audiences: Adults." The 1988 Simmons Study of Media & Markets, volume M-5, September, 1988.

this category. Gaps also existed between heroines and magazine readers in marital status (Figure 8). Heroines were single in the stories more than twice as often as their real-life counterparts, while married heroines appeared 35 percent less often than married readers. The fiction came closer to reflecting its audience in the "separated, divorced, and widowed" category. About 23 percent of fictional heroines were separated, divorced, or widowed, compared to about 19 percent of the magazines' audience.

Disparities appeared between heroines and magazine audience members in two additional categories: parental status and education (Figure 9). In keeping with their exaggerated youthfulness, married heroines were childless half of the time. This presents a dramatic contrast to the almost 74 percent of audience members who were parents. The fiction did better at mirroring the number of high school graduates among the audience. Fifty percent of heroines finished high school, compared to about 44 percent of readers. When it came to college, however, heroines proved far better educated than their counterparts. While almost 41 percent of female characters attended some college, only about 23 percent of the magazines' audience did so.

Comparison of Fictional Heroines in the Three Magazines

Good Housekeeping produced the most fiction, with 50 short stories and 52 heroines. McCall's followed with 29 heroines from 26 stories. And over the three-year period of the investigation, Ladies' Home Journal published 17 stories with 19 heroines. This is a departure from Loughlin's 1979-1981 survey, which found McCall's to have the greatest number of stories and heroines.

The results in Table 12 demonstrate a number of differences between fiction in the three magazines. Loughlin observed that Good Housekeeping featured a disproportionate share of heroines with romantic love as their goal. This trend persisted in the present study: 76 percent of all Good Housekeeping heroines sought romantic love. The majority of heroines in Ladies' Home Journal, on the other hand, favored family happiness as a goal. As might be expected, heroines in Good Housekeeping were also most frequently beset by romantic problems: almost 54 percent of the magazine's female heroines faced dilemmas involving love. Heroines in Ladies' Home Journal, in

Table 12

Distributional Analysis of Selected Characteristics of Fictional Heroines from McCall's, Ladies' Home Journal, and Good Housekeeping, by Individual Magazine

	McCall's %	Ladies' Home Journal %	Good Housekeeping %
Age:	(N = 18)	(N = 19)	(N = 52)
18-25	10.3	5.5	50.0
26-35	48.3	55.5	36.5
36-45	31.0	16.7	9.6
45-60	3.4	16.7	3.8
61+	6.9	5.5	--
Education:	(N = 16)	(N = 10)	(N = 29)
Grade School	--	--	--
High School	62.5	40.0	44.8
College	37.5	50.0	41.4
Above College	--	10.0	13.8
Occupation:	(N = 23)	(N = 14)	(N = 43)
Housekeeping/Leisure	43.5	49.9	30.2
Job	17.4	7.2	34.8
Study	--	--	7.0
Career	39.1	42.9	27.9
Goal:	(N = 19)	(N = 15)	(N = 46)
Romantic Love	52.7	33.3	76.0
Career	--	--	2.1
Personal Fulfillment	21.1	13.3	4.3
Family Happiness	21.1	46.6	13.0
Problem:	(N = 29)	(N = 19)	(N = 52)
Marital	6.9	26.3	13.5
Psychological	17.2	5.3	15.4
Children	13.8	31.6	11.5
Romantic	31.0	5.3	53.8
Financial	--	5.3	1.9
Interpersonal Rel.	3.4	21.1	1.9
No Problems	10.3	--	--

Table 12 (Continued)

	McCall's %	Ladies' Home Journal %	Good Housekeeping %
Marital Status:	(N = 29)	(N = 18)	(N = 52)
Single	20.7	5.6	50.0
Married	48.3	55.5	36.5
Separated, Divorced, or Widowed	30.9	29.4	62.7
Number of Children:	(N = 29)	(N = 17)	(N = 51)
None	37.9	29.4	62.7
1-2	37.9	58.8	37.2
3-5	24.1	11.7	--
Happily Married[1]	40.8	31.4	32.7
Race:	(N = 29)	(N = 18)	(N = 50)
White	93.1	100.0	97.9
Hispanic	--	--	2.0
Black	6.9	--	--
Asian	--	--	--

[1]Marital state based on married and separated heroines only: N = 13 for McCall's; N = 11 for Ladies' Home Journal; and N = 19 for Good Housekeeping in this category.

contrast, struggled most often with child-related, marital, and interpersonal-relationship problems. McCall's heroines pursued romantic love more than half of the time, but also sought personal fulfillment and family happiness. Career goals were notable for their absence in the fiction of all three magazines.

Ladies' Home Journal appeared the most balanced of the magazines in several categories. While most of Good Housekeeping's heroines were a youthful 18-25 years old, Ladies' Home Journal had the fewest number of very young heroines and seemed to cater to a broader range of readers. Most of the magazine's heroines (55.5 percent) fell into the 26-35 age group, but about 33 percent ranged in age from 36 to 60. McCall's, with a 7-percent rate of heroines over 61, featured the most older female characters.

The magazines demonstrated inconsistencies in the employment category. For example, Ladies' Home Journal led the magazines in number of heroines with careers, but also led in percentage of heroines who were housewives. Good Housekeeping also generated mixed signals. The magazine scored lowest in number of heroines with careers, and featured the greatest number of heroines in blue-collar or unskilled jobs. Yet its heroines were also the least likely to be housewives and the only heroines in the study depicted as college students. This represents an improvement from Loughlin's results, which found Good Housekeeping to lead the others in number of housewife heroines. McCall's held the middle ground in the heroine occupation category: about 45 percent of its female characters were housewives, while 39 percent had careers.

Since Loughlin's study, Ladies' Home Journal has made significant strides in its portrayal of heroine education (see Table 7). Half of its female characters attended college (compared to about 41 percent of Good Housekeeping's heroines and about 38 percent of McCall's heroines). In addition, 10 percent of Ladies' Home Journal's heroines obtained at least some post-graduate education. Good Housekeeping featured the fewest number of college-educated heroines and was the only magazine in which no heroines reached above-college levels of education.

While few of Ladies' Home Journal's heroines were single (under 6 percent), the majority of Good Housekeeping's female characters had never been married (50 percent) and were childless (about 63 percent). This finding is consistent with the magazine's focus on youthful heroines who are inordinately intent on romantic relationships. Ladies' Home Journal led the way in percentage of married heroines, number of children, and percentage of separated, divorced, or widowed heroines. Considered together, these findings suggest that the magazine has positioned itself to attract an older, more settled audience. Once again, McCall's appeared to straddle the fence, resisting emphasis on either single or married heroines.

The data yielded no real surprises in the two categories added to the study: race and parental status. In all three magazines, heroines were overwhelmingly white. In fact, in Ladies' Home Journal, all of the heroines fell into this category. McCall's displayed the most racial balance, offering one unusual story that focused on two black heroines--an elderly woman in pursuit of adventure and her watchful niece. Good Housekeeping also published one story involving an Hispanic heroine.

The parental status category was added in order to gauge whether women's magazine fiction reflected the dismantling of the traditional, nuclear family that began some three decades ago. Only modest evidence of this transformation in the structure of American families appeared in the magazines' fiction. Nearly all heroines who were parents were portrayed in traditional, two-parent families. Still, about a third of the fictional heroines were single mothers or stepmothers. In both Ladies' Home Journal and Good Housekeeping, roughly 6 percent of heroines were stepmothers. Ladies' Home Journal also led in number of single mothers; more than 22 percent of its heroines fit into this category, compared to about 17 percent for McCall's and about 6 percent for Good Housekeeping.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The last 50 years of research on magazine fiction has demonstrated that McCall's, Ladies' Home Journal, and Good Housekeeping have repeatedly failed to reflect women's education and employment status. Consequently, the assumption was made at the onset of the present study that these magazines would once again underrepresent women's social status in these areas.

Yet, as the quantitative results show, this was far from the case. Not only did the magazines fairly accurately reflect the number of women in the population with jobs and careers, but they actually overrepresented the number of college-educated women in society. Only 19 percent of women in the United States population in 1988 received some college education, compared to a full 41 percent of fictional heroines. While exaggeration of heroine education represents a failure on the part of the magazines to reflect women's actual educational status, the data in Figures 2 and 4 nevertheless signify a dramatic increase in the fiction's responsiveness to women's changing social roles.

Results in other areas, however, indicate that the magazines' portrayal of women's work, education, and status has actually deteriorated since Loughlin's study. An important example of this decline concerned the magazines' failure to provide employment information for 20 percent of the heroines in the study. This omission, noted by neither Loughlin nor Bailey, makes a strong statement on the insignificance of women's work.

Apathy toward women's work was further demonstrated by the fact that in almost 15 percent of the cases, no name was given to heroines' occupations. In many stories, a female character's generic "job" seemed designed solely to aid in plot development or to serve as the setting where she pursued her true interest--romantic

relationships. None of the 100 heroines studied was portrayed as involved in her work or even seen in the act of carrying out her job responsibilites.

A story published in Good Housekeeping in January, 1988, entitled "Second Chances" proved typical of the superficial treatment given heroine occupations. In this story, the heroine, "a tall, quite stunning blonde," was identified by the third paragraph as an "executive trainee." No further details were provided about her position except that it placed her in close proximity to a young male executive described as "Dream Material." After a series of events that included a lost valise and a thick fog at the airport, the two fell in love.

The types of jobs held by heroines also distorted women's actual accomplishments. Seventy-six percent of heroines held positions identified by researchers as stereotypically feminine (e.g. Peterson, 1984, Ruggiero and Weston, 1985). Most heroines were clerical workers, school teachers, or nurses. And although about 19 percent of women in the United States population work as attorneys and 20 percent are employed as physicians, only about 6 percent of the fictional heroines were lawyers and none were depicted as physicians.

Employment was not the only category in which the magazines' presentation of women faltered. For 46 percent of heroines, information on education was also omitted. In addition, the magazines portrayed women as disproportionately young, white, single, and childless. Most significant of all, however, was the result that almost 63 percent of heroines pursued romantic love as their primary goal--an almost sixfold increase over Loughlin's findings in this category.

Regarded as a whole, the results of the study confirm the persistence of what Bailey described in 1969 as the "basic conservatism" of the three magazines. Impressive progress has been made in their fictional representation of the numbers of employed and educated women in America. Yet as Loughlin found in 1981, the insignificance of heroines' work remained the magazines' louder message. Through their fictional female characters, the three magazines continued to send a signal to their combined circulation of 15 million that real success for women may only be measured in romantic relationships and in the care of their families.

Several explanations exist for the continued failure of magazine fiction to reflect the spirit and scope of women's social achievements. Of these, audience influence is among the most frequently cited. The notion that audiences affect media content has garnered support from numerous communications scholars (e.g. Riley and Riley, 1959; Berelson, 1960; Bauer, 1963; Hancock, 1968). Wilson (1981) states that lack of change in women's mass magazines results from the fact that "the mass media represent conservative interests in society." Because of their dependence on "a large and heterogenous audience, and an audience interested in familiar images, the content cannot 'move ahead of' public opinion" (p. 242). Historians such as Peterson (1964) contend that magazine editors select only material that they believe will be acceptable to the magazine's audience. Wilson (1981) adds that editors regard fiction readers as "the most traditional part of the mass audience" (p. 240).

These views are supported by results of interviews with fiction editors of McCall's, Ladies' Home Journal, and Good Housekeeping conducted for this study. In choosing fiction for Good Housekeeping, Lee Quarfoot admitted to being influenced by the moral standards of her magazine's readers. In addition, Sara McCraw of Ladies' Home Journal expressed a belief that although most members of her magazine's audience held jobs, they did not "want to hear about careers." This certainly provides one clue as to why the magazine continues its superficial treatment of the subject of women's employment.

If audience attitudes do shape the content of women's magazines, it follows that changes in these attitudes will eventually force changes in the publications. Indeed, evidence of increased responsiveness to women's changing social roles has already been demonstrated in studies of the non-fiction content of women's magazines (e.g. Simpson, 1976; Newkirk, 1977; Geise, 1979; Bonner, 1985; Ruggiero and Weston, 1985). Additionally, McCall's redesign and editorial overhaul in early 1990 may signal the beginning of substantive changes in the magazines' fiction content as well. According to both McCall's editor-in-chief and fiction editor, the magazine plans to upgrade the quality of its fiction by: (1) publishing stories that reflect issues facing real women; and (2) abandoning its traditional, romantic-fiction formula. This shift in the magazine's

approach to fiction is highly significant, particularly in view of the extensive use of audience surveys by women's mass magazines (see Chapter IV). Obviously, those responsible for McCall's survival consider a move away from stereotypical portrayals of women in fiction an important step toward recapturing lost circulation.

A second explanation for the lack of change in the magazines' fiction involves the time-honored and complex relationship between women's mass magazines and advertising. As Fishburn writes:

> [P]ublishers and advertisers since the nineteenth century have generally assumed, one, that women read more magazines than men; two, that women buy most of the commodities for the home; and three, that women can be induced to buy more by a careful manipulation of their self image (p. 129).

As Chapter IV demonstrated, all three magazines in the present study originated as advertising vehicles. In fact, it was Edward Bok of Ladies' Home Journal, an editor who "wanted women to stay at home and mind their households" (Steinberg, 1979), who pioneered the practice of placing advertisements next to editorial copy (Waller-Zuckerman, 1989). By manipulating feminine roles, according to Friedan (1963), magazine editors and advertisers "sold" consumerism to women. Marketing researchers pegged homemakers early on as the group of women most likely to purchase goods (Waller-Zuckerman, 1989). As a result, advertisers and editors began encouraging women to adopt this role.

Although advertising's influence on editorial content may be less overt in 1990 than during the magazines' early histories, it is possible that a subtle encouragement of women as homemakers persists in the magazines' fiction content. Assuming that the promotion of "the feminine mystique" indeed became the economic foundation of these magazines, it would be illogical to expect such a tradition to die easily. Additionally, if a subtle bias toward women as housewives does persist, it is most likely to linger in the magazines' fiction, which has been shown to express social changes at a slower rate than non-fiction content.

An explanation for the continued "cultural lag" between women's magazine fiction and women's real-life social status is likely to involve a combination of complex factors. Whether gatekeepers, audiences, or advertisers are responsible, one important

question remains: Why do millions of female readers accept stereotypical, limiting, and false portrayals of themselves--not only in magazine fiction, but in popular romance novels? Although the answer is likely to involve psychological elements beyond the scope of this research, many feminists believe that women have been socialized to accept negative images of themselves through centuries of subordination to men. Women accept fiction that reinforces their dependence on men, Ferree, Hess, and Cantor (1987) write:

> because they provide substitute satisfactions for other, less attainable ideals. Women's actual subordination creates the demand for fantasies to obscure this reality, while producers of media products for this market are shaping their wares to meet this demand (p. 21).

Hence, despite the massive changes in female's social status, some women remain tied to mythologies about themselves that were forged during times of great oppression. Considering that American women were, in most states, still the legal property of their husbands a mere 23 years ago (Cherow-O'Leary, 1987), it is understandable that they have yet to relinquish many of the myths that they created to survive in this patriarchal system. Looked at in this context, the "cultural lag" demonstrated in women's fiction is a logical result of the dizzying speed at which women have donned new roles in society.

The closing of the gap between women's real-life and fictional roles will eventually be substantiated in the most traditional of women's magazines. As time passes and women continue to sculpt out expanded roles for themselves in the social order, new mythologies will replace antiquated ones. As Cantor (1987) concludes, "all popular cultural products will change as the social and material conditions of their audiences change" (p. 211).

Recommendations for Further Study

An intriguing future study might involve analysis of McCall's fiction before and after the magazine's revamping. Such a project would assess whether post-redesign fiction in McCall's produced fewer sexual stereotypes and outmoded mythologies about women's goals and issues than the older fiction. A study that compared fictional images

with advertising images of women in McCall's, Ladies' Home Journal, and Good Housekeeping would also prove valuable. This type of research could shed light on the ongoing debate about the forces responsible for the cultural lag between women's fiction and social reality.

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VITA

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In 1980, she obtained a B.F.A. in studio art (drawing and painting) from The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Two years earlier, she traveled to Holland and France on a fellowship to study Impressionist paintings in Europe. After graduating, she moved with her husband and son to Las Vegas, Nevada.

In the fall of 1984 she entered The University of Tennessee at Knoxville to obtain a Master of Science degree in journalism. In 1986, after completing her coursework, she began work initially as an intern and later as a magazine editor at Whittle Communications in Knoxville, Tennessee. She has also worked extensively as a magazine freelance writer, editor, and researcher.