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**FAIR GO. *Cleo* magazine as popular feminism in  
1970s Australia**

**M. J. Le Masurier**

**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy**

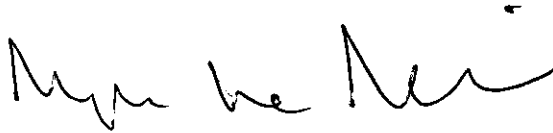
**Department of Media and Communications  
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December 2007**

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Signature of candidate

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mun He Lee". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small mark above the final 'i'.



## ABSTRACT

### **Fair Go. *Cleo* magazine as popular feminism in 1970s Australia**

This thesis investigates the emergence of, and connections between, second wave feminism and *Cleo* magazine in Australia in the 1970s. It argues that a popular feminism was being developed in this new magazine for younger women. The antagonism of second wave feminism towards women's magazines is explored and will be shown to provide one explanation for the invisibility of magazines such as *Cleo* in the history of feminism in Australia.

It will be argued that the resistance of many 'ordinary' women to claiming identity as feminist has one of its origins in the tensions between second wave feminism as an outsider identity politics and the manifestations of popular feminism in the journalism of readers and writers in a mainstream women's magazine such as *Cleo*. Popular feminism will also be seen to develop the optimistic vision of the second wave as incorporating the sexual liberation of women, a vision that disappeared for a time within 'official' feminism.

In short, this is an exploration of a 'hidden history' of feminism in Australia, found in the pages of a popular and mainstream women's magazine and especially through the voices of its reader/writers.

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And most of all to my mother, Phyllis Cronly and my daughter Lucy. You will never understand how much your lives have inspired my understanding of the generations of popular feminism, before and after the seventies. My mother will go to her grave denying it, and Lucy would just roll her eyes. Perfect!

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	4
Prologue	6
Introduction	10
1: Coming to terms	25
2: <i>Cleo</i> in context	52
3: Discursive disgust: The second wave and women's magazines	84
4: Writing the popular feminism of <i>Cleo</i>	123
5: Readers writing the popular feminism of <i>Cleo</i>	153
6: Heterosexy popular feminism	192
7: Just looking? The <i>Cleo</i> centrefold	234
Conclusion	273
Bibliography	279

## PROLOGUE

The germ of the idea for this research project began in the mid-nineties as a rush of publications and media commentary tried to explain young women's disinterest in taking the word 'feminist' as a way to describe their identity. Popular writers gave names to the range of possible positions and rejections that second wave feminist theorising and teaching, living and mediating had bequeathed. A string of adjectival feminisms were coined. There was a veritable publishing boom around the topic in the US whose shock waves reached Australian shores. Susan Faludi's *Backlash* (1991) blamed the media for creating a ... well, a backlash against feminism. Katie Roiphe's *The Morning After* (1993) took issue with a feminism that saw women as victims in need of protection from the predations and violence of men, as did Rene Denfeld's *The New Victorians* (1995). Naomi Wolf's *Fire with Fire* (1993) advocated a 'power' feminism which read like a Nike 'just do it' ad campaign for young, educated middle class white women. These books sold well, garnered widespread media coverage in the West and their catchphrases – the backlash, victim feminism, power feminism – became popularised modes of understanding what had happened to feminism in the wash of the second wave.

In Australia, the debate took on local inflections, stimulated by Anne Summer's new edition of *Damned Whores and God's Police* and its appended 'Letter to the next generation' (1994[1975]: 505-528). A version of this was published as 'Shockwaves at the Revolution' in *The Sydney Morning Herald's Good Weekend* magazine in March 1995. To Summers' questions about why young women found 'the movement' irrelevant to their lives, why they weren't grateful for the activist work of the women of the sixties and seventies that had irrevocably changed their expectations and opportunities, young female journalists responded. Virginia Trioli's *Generation F* (1996) and Kathy Bail's edited collection *DIY Feminism* (1996) argued that young women were doing feminism in their everyday, creative and working lives, they just weren't identifying as feminists. Second wave feminism had an image problem. As Bail put it:

Young women are nervous about associating themselves with feminism, yet once they start talking about what it's like to be a woman, their views often fit a broad

feminist agenda ... Young women don't want to identify with something that sounds dowdy, asexual or shows them to be at a disadvantage. (4-5)

And so, two new adjectives entered the pool for a brief splash. DIY and Gen F joined the noisy debate in Australia and created a feeling that some fresh, generational cultural formation was being recognised. Adjectival feminism was a tempting solution to give a name to the problem of how an individual woman could integrate some feminist ideas into her life without taking on the baggage of feminism past. Second wave feminism was positioned as a monolith that was anti-heterosex, anti-fashion, pro-censorship and more than a little authoritarian about what could be said, worn, fucked, watched and read. It was a massive generalisation about a movement that was highly complex, but indicated how the popular image of feminism had become dominated by a small but noisy number of feminists who certainly held these views. A large umbrella of 'postfeminism' had also been held aloft to cover the younger bodies left playing on the beach as the second wave had rolled in and out. Although I didn't know it at the time, working as a senior editor in the myopic world of women's magazines with no time to read beyond the job description, writers more conversant with academic feminist debate were developing the terms 'post' and 'third wave' as more complex adjectives to explain younger women's relationship to feminism.

Underlying the new adjectival feminists' diverse arguments seemed to be a move away from identity politics as it had emerged in second wave feminism. Identity had become far more fragmented and layered, as had understandings of politics, and the label 'feminist' couldn't cover the terrain for younger women. Mapping itself across an apparent generational divide between second wave mothers and rebellious daughters, the debate intrigued me, as it seemed to intrigue the media. After ten years of full-time writing and editing I moth-balled the suits and began freelancing. I proposed an interview with Catharine Lumby for *Vogue* to coincide with the publication of her book *Bad Girls* (1997a). Lumby's lively crossover style, her engagement with a debate that 'everyone' had been following, and the important fact that she would look good in the photo – and as a feminist, would *enjoy* looking good in the photo – persuaded *Vogue* to run with the story. To have a young feminist who didn't have a problem being in a magazine full of images of beautiful women, surrounded by ads for lipstick, was good for the magazine. And Lumby's take on feminist censorship of the representation of women

and the relationship between feminism and the mass media was one that 'even' *Vogue* readers would find relevant to their lives. Her book, and in particular the following statement, kept me thinking way beyond the writing of the article:

Ironically, the mass media formats which feminists have traditionally opposed and defined their values against have been a critical vehicle for feminism to communicate across gender, class and demographic boundaries. (173)

What might the media and feminism have in common? This final question of *Bad Girls* began a slow percolation that became a broad research question: **what might women's magazines and feminism have in common?**

This question niggled at the 'I'm not a feminist but ...' media phenomenon at the time. Working at the 'upper' end of the magazine hierarchy, in style and fashion magazines from the mid-eighties, I couldn't see anything new or generational about women who responded to feminist ideas, who encountered feminism in popular media, who had integrated aspects and attitudes of feminism into their lives, but remained unsure about the label 'feminist'. I worked with these women, younger and older than myself. I wrote for these women. That was how I understood the readership of many women's magazines of the eighties and nineties. I also understood how much the media loves a 'new' trend, and how the necessity of responding quickly often overrides any sense of history and the asking of a basic question: is this really new? The fake trend story is endemic. What the 'I'm not a feminist but ...' moment 'forgot' was that the non-identity feminism it so excitedly identified under many different names had a history. Forgetting of course requires there being something to remember. And as the history of the relationship between feminism, the readers and producers of popular women's magazines and feminist identity had not been written, repetition could appear as radically new and as a generational response to a style of second wave feminism that no longer seemed relevant.

It took a few years of reading to feel I was anywhere near up to speed with the developments in feminist theory, cultural studies, media studies and the discipline of history, which had been my first academic home. After un-learning academese to be able to write journalistically, I had to re-learn. When I could finally read Meaghan Morris' *Too*

*Soon, Too Late: History in Cultural Studies* (1998) without feeling like I was translating from some mysterious foreign language, I embarked on this PhD research and refined my question.



## INTRODUCTION

*Epic rehearsal of great moments in Theory is not the only resort available to the critic caught analysing an object that has ceased to exist or that everyone else has forgotten. My preference is to turn to history for a context prolonging the life of the ephemeral item or 'case': saturating with detail an articulated place and point in time, a critical reading can extract from its objects a parable of practice that converts them into models with a past and a potential for reuse, thus aspiring to invest them with a future. (Morris, 1998: 3)*

The magazine archive of Mitchell Library is a treasure trove of Australian publications that 'everyone else' seems to have forgotten. Buried with the dust mites, I started reading the magazines that emerged in Australia in the same period as the second wave of feminism, the late sixties and into the seventies. I read before and beyond this period, but the seventies kept drawing me back. It made intuitive sense that there would be an engagement of some kind with the eruption of new ideas about equality for women, especially because the politics of Women's Liberation was steeped in everyday life, a space that women's magazines had colonised for journalistic engagement centuries before.

Indeed, what I found was a clutch of publications designed for the 'new' young women at this time, such as *Pol* (1968- ), *Cleo* (1972- ) and *Cosmopolitan* (1973- ). *Cleo* especially appeared to share an intention to speak to its female readers about the new ideas of women's liberation and to provide a familiar mediated space for those readers to explore the lived experiences of injustice in women's personal and public lives. It was a feminist intent, if not always named as such. This magazine had other intentions as well of course. To sell, to make a profit, to run advertising pages, to encourage a revised 'femininity' in terms of fashion and beauty practices. But in the pages of *Cleo* there was a lively debate and multi-voiced negotiation of many feminist ideas in features, interviews and reader letters. There was enough rich material here to tell quite a different story about the relationship ordinary women in Australia had with the second wave in the seventies, one that could be read as a layer of the possible and so far untold histories of feminism. The research question became: **what might *Cleo* and feminism have in common?**

The scant academic work that had been done on Australian magazines of this period had not prepared me for *Cleo's* enthusiastic engagement with the ideas of women's liberation. Australian feminists in the seventies, like their contemporaries in Britain and America, had either ignored or disparaged women's magazines, new and old. There was an antagonism towards this genre of popular print media and an aggrieved tone in the writing that to this reader, thirty years on, seemed out of proportion to its 'crimes' against the women's movement. No 'revisionist' revisiting of seventies *Cleo* had been done. And the mainly British tradition of work that did refer back to seventies magazines, such as the incipiently global title *Cosmopolitan*, recycled the conclusions of earlier feminists about the tokenistic, 'fake' feminism of the new commercial women's magazines (Ferguson, 1983; Winship, 1987; Ballaster et al., 1991; McCracken, 1993; McRobbie, 1991, 1996, 1999). Angela McRobbie, for example, could confidently generalise that women's magazines in the seventies were full of "deep conservatism" in terms of feminism (1999: 46). But deep conservatism was not what I found.

So a re-investigation of the new women's magazines produced in this period, especially *Cleo*, seemed to be an exercise worth pursuing. My method at this point was to sway between the magazines and the handful of feminist analyses of the time and the disjuncture was disorienting. The object of study doubled. It became clear that I was not just analysing the feminism apparent in *Cleo's* popular journalism in the seventies, I was trying to understand what lay behind the intense antagonism, even the disgust, of second wave feminists with this genre of women's media. I was trying to work out why this feminism in the new women's magazines of the seventies could not be *seen* by the academic gaze, then and now. Part of this project is therefore historiographic. Interpretations are 'facts' of history that need to be historicised. As Foucault has argued, "the emergence of different interpretations ... must be made to appear as events on the stage of historical process" (1977: 152).

The new magazines and second wave feminism both emerged out of a similar context of dramatic social and cultural upheaval, especially for women, as Chapter Two explores. And the editorial philosophy of a magazine such as *Cleo* made its commitment to the liberation of women overt. So it seemed confusing at first that women's magazines were constructed as the enemy by second wave feminists. There are sound historical reasons for this stand-off between feminists and a magazine like *Cleo*, reasons to do with class,

education, the importance of outsider identity politics for second wave feminists, and a strong suspicion of consumer culture, the mass media in general and women's magazines in particular. Exploring this antagonism will be a theme running throughout this thesis, and the particular focus of Chapter Three.

The second wave repeated a particular narrative theme: the 'lightbulb' moment when the darkness of domestic confinement was illuminated by feminist consciousness. In her essay 'Sisterhood', written in 1972, Gloria Steinem developed this trope of moving out of the darkness and into the light to characterise the feminist journey of this time. "The ideas of this great sea-change in women's view of ourselves are contagious and irresistible. They hit women like a revelation, as if we had left a dark room and walked into the sun" (1983 [1972]: 158). Women's magazines had been positioned by Betty Friedan in 1963 as the purveyors of this cloak of darkness from which women had to escape. The feminist journey became one of a dis-identification with a type of woman as well as a type of magazine. It required leaving behind not just the darkened room of women's magazines, but the readers who chose to remain there, 'ordinary' women.

A fresh reading of these tomes of 'oppression' offers the possibility for another layer of the history of second wave feminism to be told, one that was made in popular women's media, and one that avoids the simplistic us and them division of identity politics. Not all women in the period of the second wave were hit by the feminist light like a 'revelation'. Lightbulbs turn on, and they turn off. They may flicker in one room while the rest of the house is in darkness. And in the comforting 'darkness' of the home often lay the security of a husband, the pleasures of children, the ordinary joys and struggles of everyday life. The harsh glare of the feminist lightbulb was not the kind of revelation many women were ready for in the seventies, as Chapters Four and Five establish. In the revolutionary 'with us or against us' call by many second wave feminists to turn the world upside down, to see patriarchy as a system of male domination that had to be culled at the root, many women who had neither the education, the freedoms of youthful middle class privilege, the support networks or the anger of radical feminists, could not – or would not – embrace the 'light'. At least not then, or not in the glow of the radical agenda. Ordinary women were writing their own narratives based on more pragmatic and personal interpretations of feminism, tempered by the many competing demands of their particular life situations.

Influenced by the work of John Hartley (1996), Joanne Hollows (2000), and Hollows with Rachel Moseley (2006), the concept of popular feminism has been developed in this thesis as a way to understand the feminism of this popular women's magazine. This concept will be explored in detail in Chapter One. For now, my usage of 'popular feminism' requires an understanding of media as a cultural space where readers, feminist issues and text can interact. And it requires an understanding of the political that involves issues that have been regarded as 'private' as much as, or even more than, issues that have traditionally been regarded as 'public'. Questioning the relationship between the public and private was one of the main concerns of second wave feminism. But it remains a challenge for many feminists to accept that mass media formats, and especially women's magazines, might provide – and have provided – a space where feminist work can be done. In particular, it is Hartley's idea of contemporary politics occurring in the interaction of popular media and readerships that has influenced my conceptualisation of popular feminism:

At some point (or on some occasions), the popular media must be understood as constituting the feminist public sphere, and media audiences must be recognized not only as the recipients of 'public opinion' formed in an 'independent' critical domain located somewhere over their heads, but as the readership which constitutes the public of the feminist public domain. (1996: 69)

This thesis will argue that *Cleo* was a popular and commercially successful experiment – an historically effective experiment – in helping create a feminist public domain during the seventies. It blurred the boundaries between the private and the public spheres, the personal and the political, as the feminist movement was doing, in a far more deliberate and conscious manner than most women's magazines had in the years since World War II. *Cleo* gendered the Australian desire for democratic equivalence, 'the fair go', and put the feminist catch cry of 'the personal is political' to work in a highly popular women's magazine.

Obviously, *Cleo* was not a feminist journal like *Mejane* or *Refractory Girl* or even *Spare Rib* or *Ms.* At first glance it looked like *Cosmopolitan*. *Cleo* was a mainstream younger women's magazine designed for financial profit, full of a broad range of advertising and less

fashion, beauty and celebrity than you might expect from its current incarnation. Yet, as the feature articles and editorials, vox pops and reader letters reveal, *Cleo* can be read as a popular feminist magazine for the mainstream, as part of a feminist public domain.

In a magazine like *Cleo* in the seventies we can see not simply the unenlightened or recalcitrant 'other' that second wave feminist identity politics necessarily defined itself against. I will argue throughout this thesis that popular feminism can be seen as a forgotten strand in the histories that have so far been written about the second wave. Popular feminism is not a new phenomenon, not simply a generational response to a primary authentic feminism. It has a history. And the lightbulb is not its metaphor. One image of popular feminism in the seventies could be the sister left in the suburbs, reading her magazines, while her more rebellious sibling headed off into the city, taking placards to the streets, turning activism into a career path and theorising her way into the academy.

*Cleo* allows us a glimpse into the lives of these 'ordinary' women. In this magazine's now yellowing pages, readers leave traces of their everyday struggles to integrate and respond to feminist ideas, and this will be explored in possibly obsessive detail in Chapters Four and Five. This "turn to history ... saturating with detail an articulated place and point in time", as Morris suggests (1998: 3), reveals a history of feminism that has been silenced. Not because to acknowledge it is threatening to feminist identity anymore – although I believe this was the case in the seventies and eighties – but more because it seems a little irrelevant now. Who needs to return to the period of the 'dinosaurs' when there are 'sexier' and more current manifestations of feminism in popular media to write about, like *Buffy* or *Ally McBeal*, *Bridget Jones* or *Sex and the City*, or raunch culture? "A critical reading can extract from its objects a parable of practice that converts them into models with a potential for reuse," writes Morris (3). It feels like a grand claim to suggest this study of *Cleo* could operate as a parable of practice. But it's one I use to explore how feminism, women's magazines and their readers can and do connect, and how this form of media has often – and especially in this critical period of women's history – done feminist work.

There is another trajectory important to the development of popular feminism since the seventies, and one I have not yet addressed. *Cleo's* vision of women's liberation was

closely tied to sexual liberation. It was a connection that seemed to disappear in the feminist debates of the later seventies and eighties.<sup>1</sup> For *Cleo*, as for many of the new women's magazines of this time, informing women about the sexual potential of their bodies and providing a regular source of sex education was framed as feminist practice. And ordinary women were given space to write about their struggles and experiences in trying to get a 'fair go' in heterosexual and for sexual independence from male definitions and control of their sexuality. This entwining of women's and sexual liberation was part of the optimistic vision of the early years of the second wave, but it came under dramatic internal critique. The 'sex wars' – as this debate within feminism has been described – did not really interest *Cleo* and its readers. They were developing a quite different trajectory, one that Chapters Six and Seven explore as 'heterosexy popular feminism'. It is a trajectory that provides another reason why many women refused to identify with a feminism perceived to be anti-heterosexual and anti-men, and provides a link to the refusals of feminist identity by younger women then and now.<sup>2</sup> The connections between early women's liberation and sexual liberation will be investigated, as will the almost metonymic figure of Germaine Greer for popular understandings of feminism in Australia. Her idea of 'cuntpower' will be shown to have influenced the quite radical work of *Cleo* in attempting to break down traditional figurations of women as sexually passive and non-desiring. The 'common sense' of heterosexuality was under dramatic reconstruction in this period and, in a way, *Cleo* and its readers could be seen to be doing the practical sexual groundwork that much feminist theory and activism had, for a time, abandoned. This heterosexy popular feminism also existed in fantasy, and *Cleo*'s nude male centrefold will be analysed as a regular practice of the erotic gaze for women.

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<sup>1</sup> Although, see Kath Albury's recent PhD work on the sex-positive feminists of this period and beyond (2006).

<sup>2</sup> For a recent discussion of young women's disinterest in feminism in Australia, based on qualitative research, see Hugh Mackay's *Advance Australia ... Where?* (2007), especially Chapter Three.

## The research process and finding a methodology

The absence of work on Australian magazines made the initial stages of research far more labour intensive than expected. I was too young to have any personal memory of the magazines of this period. Apart from a brief interest in the new girl's magazine *Dolly* as a fresh teenager in 1973, magazines held no interest for me at all until the mid-eighties. In retrospect, I must be one of the few Australian women who entered adulthood without the aid of *Cleo* and *Cosmo*. I had not been *Cleo*'s reading public, so this was not a nostalgic return (Sheridan, 1995b: 98-99). I had been too young for the passionate heights of the second wave, so this was not going to be a search for a personal history of validation or retribution. And working in the magazine industry leaves no time for exploring what had come before; it is a practice grounded in present and future tense. Nor does it even leave time to carefully read magazines that are not considered 'the competition' in the social and lifestyle stratifications of the magazine hierarchy. I literally had barely looked at this magazine over the years. In fact, imbibing the cultural distinctions in play in the magazine industry, I regarded *Cleo* as somewhat 'trashy'.

*Cleo* was hardly my first choice when I began research into this forgotten archive of Australian women's magazines. In fact I went straight to the top and bottom of the hierarchy, to *Australian Vogue* and to *Woman's Day* and *New Idea* and even *True Confessions*. The strange subject categories of Mitchell Library's card catalogue became an obsessional delight. I suffered 'archive fever'.<sup>3</sup> An ironic fever, because this magazine 'archive' could not have been more public when it was produced, and remains readily accessible (minus a few centrefolds and sealed sections) to whatever public might find it interesting now. It was not as though I was summoning documents that had been secret or official knowledge, documents policed by gatekeepers that few had read. The irony was that this highly popular magazine had become secret through the selection processes of academic knowledge. To 'discover' *Cleo* as an object of study was to create it as an object of study. "The 'discovery' of new materials is actually an interpretive intervention that exposes the terms of inclusion and exclusion in the knowledge of the past" (Scott, 1996: 25).<sup>4</sup> The

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<sup>3</sup> This much-used term derives from Jacques Derrida (1995).

<sup>4</sup> "History is in the paradoxical position of creating the objects it claims only to discover. By creating, I do not mean making things up, but rather constructing them as legitimate and coherent objects of knowledge" (Scott, 1996: 9).



reasons behind the terms of this exclusion by official histories of feminism became part of the object of study, as Chapter Three explores.

At this early point in the research, I was trying to record traces of a story I did not yet know, its parameters etched by second wave feminism and/in/as this popular women's magazine. (I had not yet chosen my preposition.) Each day a pile of magazines unknown to me would arrive from the depths, and I would flick through the pages, looking for references to feminism, wondering how these massive piles of print could possibly be tamed and turned into a coherent and plausible if not an eternally true story of the past. At this point my methodology was hardly scientific. Chance and curiosity would better describe the initial approach.

Once I had settled on *Cleo*, the first problem was whether to 'slice' – to read, say, every November issue (*Cleo* had launched in November and that was probably where annual surveys and birthday issues would fall) or every November and April issue to track changes more closely. Slicing had been the method of Susan Sheridan, Barbara Baird, Kate Borrett and Lyndall Ryan in their study of *The Australian Women's Weekly*, where the authors chose to read every fifth year over the decades from 1946 to 1971 (2002: vi). Would I stay focused on the period of the second wave or move through the eighties and into the period of the third? My initial close reading of the first few years was revealing feature articles and reader letters in almost every issue that were worth examining to establish patterns of engagement with Women's Liberation and feminism. The material in *Cleo* over the decade from 1972 was so rich, and so badly served by historians of the second wave and of women's magazines, that a tight focus became the only way I felt I could do justice to this serial text, its producers and its readers.

Ensnared in the seventies, I attempted to establish categories and do a content analysis, using keywords to count the number of times there was journalism about, say, women and work, or Women's Liberation, or child care, or stories on sex that referenced Women's Liberation or feminism.<sup>5</sup> It quickly became obvious that there was journalism

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<sup>5</sup> While "the aggressive use of digital media" in American libraries now (Latham and Scholes, 2006: 517) may help periodical scholars working with collections that have actually been transferred from print to screen, the easy keyword searches of the digital environment are no help to scholars still reliant on print. There is an article to be written about the selection criteria used by various libraries for which magazines or

that could be considered 'feminist' when the word itself was not used. How could I categorise these articles? What version of feminism would I employ to decide whether an article was for or against? And there was journalism that adhered to the rules of objectivity, giving a balanced coverage of both sides of the debate. For example, women who felt pressured and threatened by the women's liberation call for women to work and gain financial independence from husbands were given as much space as women who found the new independence exhilarating. Was that an article for or against feminism? When *Cleo* ran an excerpt from Arianna Stassinopoulos' anti-feminist diatribe in 1974, was that evidence of the magazine's anti-feminist stance or editorial objectivity? And how was I to count ads that, according to seventies feminists, were objectifying women (a tick against feminism?) when the realities of magazine publishing meant editors had no control over advertising content if they wanted to stay in business. Given the complexity of magazines as texts, how would I code stories that might be read against or in conjunction with others? Would one feature for women's liberation be neutralised by one feature against? Might a reader's letter, arguing strongly against a particular feature, have changed another reader's mind? There were all manner of problems with this methodology. As Liesbet van Zoonen concludes:

Content analysis in general suffers from theoretical and methodological problems ... It gives precedence to manifest content as the bearer of meaning at the expense of latent content and form, and it assumes that frequencies of certain characteristics are valid indicators of meaning. It produces results whose relation to the actual media experience of producers and audiences is unclear. (1994: 73)

I abandoned statistical content analysis and tried another method. The reader letters stood out as an extraordinarily vocal engagement with *Cleo's* journalism. Readers engaged with all kinds of stories, but they particularly engaged with stories about feminist issues. If I focused on the issues and articles readers considered important, then that could become a way to organise this immensely complex bundle of print, and it promised to solve another problem. What meaning readers made of *Cleo* was important to my developing argument about popular feminism. If I wanted to know how ordinary women

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periodicals are deserving of the labour-intensive scanning process. Newspapers are universally the first cab off the rank. *Cleo*, like most women's and lifestyle magazines, at this point remains keyword-less in print.

responded to the huge challenge of second wave feminism, then I needed to hear their voices.

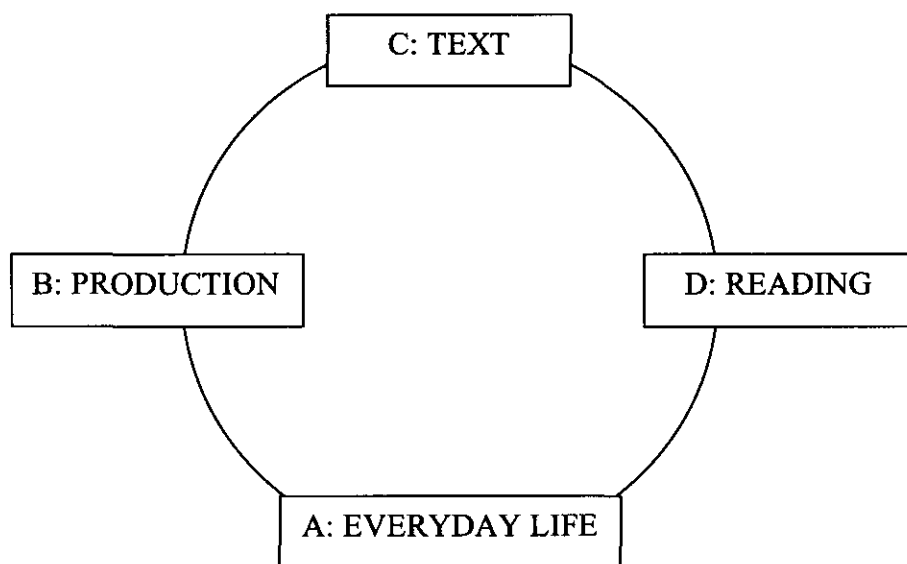
I toyed with the possibility of oral history. It has been an important methodology for feminist historians (see Gluck and Patai (ed.s), 1991), and audience/reader interviews have an important place in feminist media studies. But interviewing people about their meaning-making, especially when that had occurred thirty years ago, is problematic. Memory, forgetting, the loading of even the most neutral question, the limiting of the range of questions, the desire of the interviewee to please the interviewer or to make up an answer, the bias of even the most well-intentioned 'reading' of interviews, all make the methodology of oral history fascinating, difficult, but also no more 'true' than the texts provided by reader letters. As Alan McKee explains so clearly, "audience research actually produces more texts ... It doesn't produce 'reality' – it produces representations of reality" (2003: 84). And the letters gave me the benefit of having been produced at the time. I didn't have to deal with interpreting the layers between a reader's construction of her own life narrative now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, after decades of the successes and common sensing of feminist ideas. Letters were written in a state of immediate engagement with this magazine and its community. Like most magazines, *Cleo* has no archive of unpublished reader letters. The focus of publishers and staff is not on the needs of future researchers. Indeed, I was not given permission to access whatever 'official' archive may exist at Australian Consolidated Press in relation to *Cleo*. So the letters I could use were those published in the magazine. Yes, they were selected, they were cut, but the voices of ordinary women could still be heard here and often they were talking to each other via the letters page. There has been academic debate about the authenticity of reader letters in magazines, and questions raised about who actually writes them – readers or magazine staff. This debate and my decision to use reader letters as evidence of the voices of ordinary women will be examined in far more depth in Chapter Five. The challenge was to suspend scepticism and listen to what these women were saying. I wanted to understand and interpret their stories. The more I heard, the further away from content analysis I moved, and any statistical or numerical claims became impossible (McKee, 2003: 127-130).

Letters provided themes to focus on and directed me to particular articles that I may have missed, but ones that had aroused the ire or enthusiasm of readers: mothers and

work, housewives, child care, the double shift, the gender of housework, men, women's health, marriage, class, Women's Liberation and feminism, lesbianism and sex. So, readers own response to *Cleo's* feature journalism about feminist issues provided a method for isolating themes for analysis. The methodology employed in analysing *Cleo's* feature journalism is not scientific, as much textual analysis in the humanities is not. The approach is based on a quite traditional historical method of careful archival immersion. This involves reading the documents with questions about this magazine's engagement with feminism and feminist issues, and attempting to retain a disciplined independence from the object of study. I read for genre, for use of language, for repetition of arguments and themes, using the model of the circuit of culture (discussed below) as a way to justify and ground my interpretations. The reader letters also led me to *Cleo's* mate of the month. There were so many letters about the magazine's nude male centrefold and how arousing readers found it that I was forced to take it seriously. My initial reaction had just been laughter, then boredom. (Although, to be completely candid, there was one image of a naked surfer staring out across the waves, that was, ah ... arresting.) But the letters (and the questions to doctor's and advice columns) directed me to a world of female sexual desire that I had not imagined existing in this decade, and one that had been rubbished by feminist theorists. Using letters allowed me to include the voices of ordinary women into *my* text, and give them space, perhaps a little too much, to speak now to a popular history of second wave feminism in Australia.

### **The circuit of chapters**

If popular feminism is a name for the way feminist ideas and media interact, and if the media text is understood as part of a flow of communication between producers, readers, everyday life and the historical conditions of a particular time, then this conceptualisation also has implications for methodology. The model of the circuit of culture can help chart this multi-directional flow and provide anchors for the investigation of *Cleo* as a practice of popular feminism.

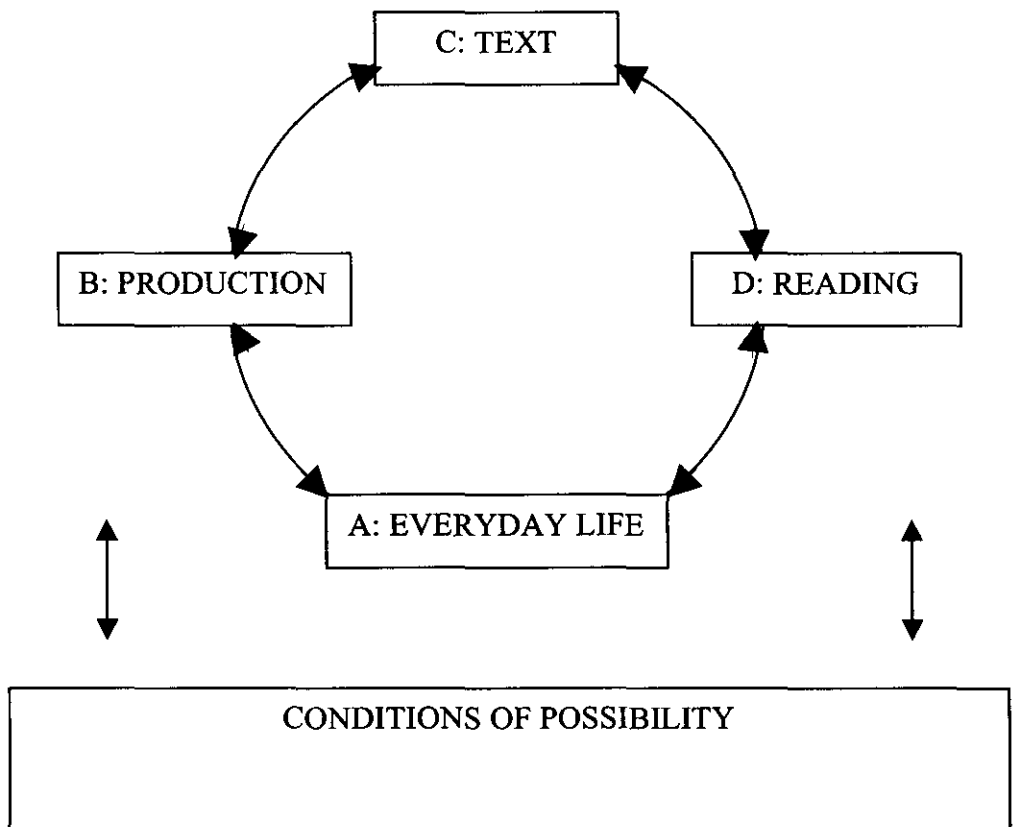


This is a recent diagrammatic model of Richard Johnson's "circuit of production, circulation and consumption of cultural objects", first conceived in a slightly more complex form in 1986 (Johnson, 1986: 284). In a more recent description, Johnson et al. suggest we visualise it more as a spiral than a circle (2004: 38). It must be stressed that the circuit of culture is not a flow chart. Nor is it a model of causation. To answer the questions I had posed about *Cleo* magazine, this model proved useful as a reminder of the complexities of this cultural object and the popular feminism it was making. The circuit of culture allowed me to think about how and why this magazine was produced. It allowed for a closer analysis of this text (or more accurately, series of texts, and in my work here only some of the texts within any issue), and an investigation of who the readers were, how they might have made sense of this magazine, and of how their own 'lived cultures' affected the meanings they brought to and made of *Cleo*. "There are inner connections and some real identities between the moments" (Johnson, 1986: 305). Indeed, as became quickly apparent, the connections between the moments criss-cross the circuit, the arrows flow both ways. Producers are also readers, readers are producers, the everyday life of readers affects the meanings they ascribe to and take from the text. The movement around and across this circuit flows in many directions. The circuit of culture functioned more like a map, to return me to areas of research I considered necessary to analyse the meaning of popular feminism in a particular magazine in a particular historical period.

As will be discussed in Chapter One, the studies of magazines usually isolate one or two moments of the circuit for investigation. What is the relationship between producers and text? Between text and reader? Between reader and everyday life? I found myself moving around the circuit, unable to stop the flow of questions, and added another stage to do with historical context, which could be called the 'conditions of possibility'. It is a term I have loosely borrowed from Roger Chartier, although many historians work within this approach:

[relating] the meaning of texts to the context in which they were elaborated ... inscrib[ing] them within the specific repertory of the genres, questions, and conventions proper to a given time, and concentrat[ing] on the forms of their circulation and their appropriation. (1997: 6)

If we were to add this to Johnson's model, it would sit right along the bottom, with arrows connecting to each moment of the circuit above.



The conditions of possibility (or historical context) are not all-determining of course, but understanding the social, cultural and political environment out of which producers, texts and readers emerged, helps the imaginative and interpretative leap towards an explanation of what popular feminism might be doing in this magazine and the meanings readers could make of it.

The structure of this PhD loosely follows this circuit. **Chapter One** surveys the literature about feminism and women's magazines, particularly within the tradition of feminist media and cultural studies. Understanding the way women's magazines have been positioned as a problem for feminism provides a basis from which to re-think the relationship between the two as 'popular feminism'. The uses of this term will be traced and, building on the work of Hollows and Hartley, a theorisation will be sketched. **Chapter Two** explains the historical context out of which *Cleo*, its readers and second wave feminism emerged. This forms a background which further chapters draw on to answer questions about why ordinary women might resist or embrace feminism and what kind of feminist ideas and practices they could respond to. The background of the producers of the text, the constraints (or lack thereof) of ownership by the Packer family, the editorial philosophy of *Cleo* and its working practices become important in understanding the magazine that was made. As do other generically similar magazines in circulation at the time *Cleo* was conceived and produced. This context of the production of *Cleo* is also the subject of Chapter Two.

The reaction of second wave feminist readers to *Cleo*, and to women's magazines generally, is investigated in **Chapter Three**. Here, once again, the circuit comes into play. Critical feminist readers did not produce letters to the magazine; they produced critical texts. And their 'conditions of possibility' were quite different from those of most of *Cleo's* more ordinary readers. It became important to explore the historical background of these feminist critics of *Cleo*, and to place their response within a tradition of feminist hostility to women's magazines. Understanding the 'lived culture' of Australian feminists at the time helps us to understand their disgust with this genre of print media.

The journalism of *Cleo* is closely tied to understandings and imaginings of the readership, and readers also helped to write this magazine. To separate the analysis of *Cleo's* journalism from the written responses of readers is somewhat artificial. The resulting



chapter, however, would have been far too long. **Chapter Four** is a close analysis of some of *Cleo's* feature journalism, the texts that evidence engagement with feminist issues. These texts can be analysed for linguistic devices, for content, for repetition, and as an intimate style of journalism that includes the voices of ordinary women along with that of experts and the journalist. The letters written in response to *Cleo's* popular feminist journalism become the subject of **Chapter Five**.

**Chapters Six and Seven** deal with sexual liberation and its relationship to both women's liberation and to *Cleo*. In these chapters I move loosely around the circuit of culture again, from conditions of possibility, to the text, to the readers, and the meanings their letters suggest they took from this magazine into their everyday life – as much as the evidence permits this leap of faith. These chapters also draw together the tensions between the developing feminist movement's theorisations about female sexuality and more popular understandings of the sexual liberation of women in *Cleo*. Chapter Six looks at *Cleo* as an important site of sex education for ordinary women and how its journalism about female sexuality drew from different feminist visions of sexual liberation and orgasm, and from popular sexology. Chapter Seven explores the *Cleo* male centrefold and the very different ways that feminist critics and regular readers responded to it. Ordinary women overwhelmingly found the images of naked men sexy. Feminist theorists at the time insisted just as overwhelmingly that women could not possess an erotic gaze, especially in the commercialised format of the male centrefold. These chapters will shed more light on why this woman's magazine has been rendered invisible by historians of the second wave and why popular feminism has remained 'hidden' as one of many meanings of feminism.

# 1. COMING TO TERMS

The literature on women's magazines is now vast, stemming from work in fields as diverse as history, media studies, gender and women's studies, cultural studies, sociology, sexology and linguistics. Any attempt to survey its extent in a literature review would be foolhardy.<sup>6</sup> In this chapter I will focus on the mainly British tradition of analysis of women's magazines within feminist media and cultural studies as the debates and methodologies are ones I engage with throughout this thesis. The small amount of literature around the concept of popular feminism will also be reviewed, and the beginnings of a theorisation sketched. The terms 'postfeminism' and 'third wave' feminism will be explored in order to explain why 'popular feminism' is a more useful concept through which to understand *Cleo* in the seventies.

When beginning this research into magazines made in Australia in the period of the second wave, the shelves were almost bare. There are no generalist histories of magazines in Australia after World War Two. No work has been written about the state of Australian magazine publishing during the late sixties and seventies, years that saw the beginnings of a proliferation of local and imported niche lifestyle magazines, and certainly of magazines for women. The few curt and cursory critical analyses of women's magazines written by Australian feminists in the seventies will be examined in depth in Chapter Three. Since then however, there has been almost nothing written about women's magazines in this period and no work at all done on *Cleo* in Australia, apart from a chapter in Humphrey McQueen's *Gone Tomorrow* (1982) which focussed on the

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<sup>6</sup> There are generalist histories of women's magazines of the 'births, deaths and marriages' kind (White, 1970; Barrell and Braithwaite, 1988[1979]; Braithwaite, 1995), but no general overviews of women's magazines in Australia. There are more close analytical studies of women's magazines in particular historical periods (for example, Adburgham, 1972; Shevelov, 1989; Ballaster et al., 1991; McCracken, 1993; Beetham, 1996; Gough-Yates, 2003), and detailed profiles of particular magazines such as *The Saturday Evening Post* (Damon-Moore, 1994), *Ladies Home Journal* (Scanlon, 1995), *Ms* (Farrell, 1998), the Canadian magazine *Chatelaine* (Korinek, 2000), *Australian Women's Forum* (Vnuk, 2003) and *The Australian Women's Weekly* (Sheridan et al., 2002).

There has also been a proliferation of more tightly focused thematic studies on, for example, coverage of health in women's magazines (McKay, Bonner and Goldie, 1998; McKay and Bonner, 1999; McKay, 2003), celebrity in women's magazines (Turner, Bonner, Marshall, 2000), love (Illouz, 2001[1991]), self-governance (Tait, 2003), body image and beauty (Cusumano and Thompson, 1997; Tebbel, 2000; Fraser, 2003), mothers and work (Keller, 1994); gender difference and sex roles (Eggins and Iedema, 1997; Farvid and Braun, 2006; Caidas-Coulthard, 1996; McMahon, 1990), sexual rhetoric (Krassas, Blauwkamp and Wesselink, 2001), and globalisation (Machin and Thornborrow, 2003; Machin and Lecuwen, 2005). This listing barely scratches the surface of the work done on women's magazines.

magazine as a means to court the female consumer in a context of increasing part-time and full-time work for women, and a few pages in Keith Windschuttle's broad study of the media in Australia (1985) where he blames the 'liberated' outlook of *Cleo* (and *Cosmo*) for "elevat[ing] sexual pleasure to an end in itself", and for promoting cultural decay (255).<sup>7</sup> Susan Sheridan et al.'s more recent study of *The Australian Women's Weekly* (2002) stopped in 1971. Bridget Griffin-Foley's work on the house of Packer (1999) stopped with Sir Frank Packer's death in 1974 and did not focus on the new titles for women that emerged in the seventies. The historical work is so minimal that the few analyses offered by second wave feminists can still stand as the 'truth' of the new women's magazines in the period when second wave feminism emerged.

While the relationship between *Cleo* magazine, feminism and feminist identity in the seventies has not been investigated before, the problematic relationship between feminism and popular women's genres, including magazines, has been the question behind much of the academic work in this field. In the tradition of feminist media and cultural studies the politics of the analyst are upfront and overt. All the writers in this tradition situate themselves as feminists; just as the women's magazines under the microscope are positioned as a problem for feminism. Therefore, much of the writing about women's magazines can be seen to trace a history of feminist thought as much as it has created various knowledges about these magazines. As Angela McRobbie has noted, "so established is this interest that it can be read in its own right as part of the history and development of feminism in the academy" (1999: 46). This situated knowledge has been highly productive. But it has relied on an understanding of feminism and the feminist as existing outside of women's popular media, scrutinising magazines as more or less but always a problem for feminism.

Charlotte Brunson has identified the feminist work on women's genres over the past thirty years as moving unevenly through phases of 'repudiation – reinvestigation – reevaluation' (2000: 21). This broad schema can also serve as a way to trace methodological movements: from reading magazines for their operative ideologies focusing on the analysts' decoding of the text (McRobbie, 1991[1978]; Ferguson; 1983; Winship, 1987; Ballaster et al., 1991; McCracken, 1993), to the pleasures of magazines for

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<sup>7</sup> Helena Studdert's impressive PhD thesis on gender in Australian women's magazines (1996) does not go beyond the sixties.

feminist critics and readers (Coward, 1984; Winship, 1987; Ballaster et al., 1991) and more ethnographic investigations of how and what meanings readers might make out of these complex and contradictory texts (Frazer, 1987; Ballaster et al., 1991; Hermes, 1995). As the dates of these works indicate, the methodological shifts are not strictly chronological, nor does one methodology necessarily exclude another.

The predominant interest has been in analysis of texts and readers, but there have also been a few studies of the practices of the producers of magazines (Ferguson, 1983; Johnson, 1993). Anna Gough-Yates recent work *Understanding Women's Magazines* (2003) is a particularly sophisticated analysis of the construction of the 'new woman' in glossy magazines of the eighties and nineties focusing on their production. She is less interested in magazine content analysis or reader responses, and more in the discourses produced about the 'new woman' by the media industries of advertising and marketing and by magazine producers themselves, and in situating these magazines in the economic and political context of post-Fordist enterprise culture.

The polarity of feminism versus femininity has framed most of the critical analyses of women's magazines and women's genres, a polarity noted by Andrea Stuart (1990) and explored in depth by Charlotte Brunsdon (1997[1991]; 1997; 2000), Angela McRobbie (1996; 1999) and Joanne Hollows (2000). In almost all of the work on women's magazines, feminism has been conceptualised as an oppositional political movement, existing outside of popular culture. Women's magazines have thus been assessed by the degree to which they reinforce understandings and practices of traditional femininity, and how much they impede feminist politics.

## **Repudiation**

The repudiation phase began with Betty Friedan's concern over the post-World War Two socialisation of women into a dissatisfied domestic femininity in her seminal study, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). Women's magazines were seen as primarily responsible for constructing and reinforcing a type of femininity that undermined women's potential to become fully-realised human beings who could take an equal place with men in the world outside of the home. Friedan's book strongly influenced the work of second wave

feminists during the later sixties and seventies, making an opposition to commercial women's magazines almost a credential for feminist identity. This period of repudiation of women's magazines is complex and the reasons behind the intense antagonism of feminist critics towards this genre will be explored in depth in Chapter Three.

By the later seventies there was a shift from analysing 'images of women' in popular media as positive or negative stereotypes and their assumed effect on female readers, to an interest in how magazines worked as sites of ideological power over women. Within the emerging work of the Centre for Cultural Studies in Birmingham, the influence of Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model (1980) and Louis Althusser's theory of ideology (1971) both influenced one of the earliest analyses of magazines in the emerging feminist media and cultural studies tradition, Angela McRobbie's study of the teen magazine *Jackie* (1991[1978]). Her aim was to critique this magazine "as a system of messages ... a bearer of a certain ideology ... which deals with the construction of teenage femininity" (81-82). In the pages of *Jackie*, capital and patriarchy worked to reproduce themselves by normalising as common sense the ideologies of heterosexual romance and love, feminine beauty practices and strict gender roles. Her method focused on decoding the ideological meanings of the text. As McRobbie herself wrote later about this early work, "it created an image of *Jackie* as a massive ideological block in which readers were implicitly imprisoned" (1991: 141).

Marjorie Ferguson's work on women's magazines took a different methodological tack by investigating the producers of these magazines alongside a content analysis of the texts. In a way, the choice of method didn't matter. Her intention was to prove that women's magazines operated ideologically to instil readers in the 'cult of femininity':

The oracles that carry the messages sacred to the cult of femininity are women's magazines; the high priestesses who select and shape the cult's interdictions and benedictions are women's magazine editors; the rites, rituals, sacrifices and oblations that they exhort are to be performed periodically by the cult's adherents. All pay homage to the cult's totem – the totem of Woman herself. (1983: 5)

In this work, Ferguson focuses on the power of the editors and the willing suspension of critical faculties of their adherents, the readers. Curiously, feminism is not called in as a cult-breaker, as it too can be read as an ideology full of cultish qualities. Where women's magazines defined feminine women positively, and snaring a man was positioned as the aim of the cult, feminism "defines women negatively in terms of their common oppression by men". In a sense, she argues, feminism is "an extension of the cult" (187). Reading for ideology had reached breaking point in this work.

### Reinvestigation

In 1987, Elizabeth Frazer re-visited *Jackie* with a broader aim of questioning the role of ideology in young women's acquisition of femininity and sexual identity. The analyst's reading of the meaning of the text was not, she argued, necessarily the meaning readers made. Theories of ideology had assumed the passivity of the reader. Frazer interviewed a small group of *Jackie's* readers and found they took "a critical stand vis a vis texts" (407). The young readers displayed an ability to engage with a "multiplicity of discourse registers" when discussing the themes of the magazine, and one of these registers was 'feminism'. Frazer's article was a short but important move away from the mechanistic application of theories of ideology and towards an acknowledgement of the complexity of reading practices. It was not only the feminist critic who read these magazines as complex and contradictory. Her work was part of the shift in feminist magazine studies in the eighties towards a 'reinvestigation', to use Brunson's schema.

Another step in this direction was the development of a more self-reflexive recognition that it was possible to be a feminist and actually find some pleasures in engagement with women's popular media. The feminist response to magazines became more layered under the influence of psychoanalysis. Women's unconscious investments in femininity worked against rational feminist argument; psychic change was difficult. This recognition was behind Rosalind Coward's exploration of the feminist's 'guilty pleasures' in many forms of popular culture for women in her book, *Female Desire* (1984). The essays in this collection are an attempt to resolve the antagonism between the feminist and more 'ordinary' readers and viewers of popular women's culture by positioning herself as far from immune to the courting of female desire for pleasure and perfection in

conventionally feminine pursuits and representations. And accompanying her pleasure was guilt. Moreso because as a feminist Coward knew that the pleasures on offer, the pleasures she succumbed to, were indeed desirable – but this desire proved impossible to satisfy. “The pleasure/desire axis appears to be everything women want but it may involve loss – loss of opportunity, loss of freedom, perhaps even loss of happiness” (14). The cultural representations and practices she analyses are not simply the imposition of false ideologies and limiting stereotypes. But they are, she argues, productive and sustaining of a kind of femininity that may not be good for women. Female desires for female pleasures are underwritten by “discourses which sustain male privilege” (16). In the end, Coward was searching for a new definition of female desire that could be released by feminist thinking and practice. “So many of the promises tell us that women can improve their lives without any major social changes” (15). There is, however, the beginning of an attempt at rapprochement between the moral high ground of the feminist critic and the ordinary woman’s investment in femininity.

Janice Winship too was motivated by an acknowledgment of the powerful and contradictory pleasures inherent in women’s magazines for both feminist critic and ordinary reader, and tried to incorporate her “simultaneous attraction and rejection” of these texts to analyse the seductions of “the nexus of femininity-desire-consumption” (1987: xiii, 162). *Inside Women’s Magazines* is a mix of broad historical sweep through centuries of women’s magazines and close textual analysis, particularly of the contemporary magazines *Cosmopolitan*, *Woman’s Own* and *Spare Rib*. Winship was dismissive of the prevalent view of women’s magazines as simple evidence of patriarchal oppression and ideological dominance. Importantly for my work, Winship did acknowledge an engagement by some of the new magazines in the eighties with feminism, but considered their coverage and solutions as too pragmatic and individualistic. With the dissolution of a unified or recognisable women’s movement, feminist ideas lose their “oppositional charge” and risk “becoming whatever you, the individual, make of it” (149-150). However pleasurable, whatever feminist content they may contain, women’s magazines leave women to their own atomised devices, argued Winship, which was not a politics that could bring about significant social change. Although the reader was now beginning to be seen as ‘us’ as well as ‘them’, the response of the ‘ordinary’ reader was still assumed as readable from the text. The methodology behind Winship’s work – which had taken many years to complete – was developed



before the reader had assumed such importance in theoretical approaches to popular media.

The tension between wanting to acknowledge the pleasures of reading magazines for feminist analysts and non-feminist readers, between acknowledging the ideology of femininity operative in the text but not according it dominating power over readers, also marks the work of Ros Ballaster, Margaret Beetham, Elizabeth Frazer and Sandra Hebron in *Women's Worlds* (1991). The authors surveyed women's magazines from their inception in the late seventeenth century to the present, insisting (in the end) on the genre's conservatism. "It cannot conceive of economic, social, cultural or political change as a means of resolving the gender contradictions and inequities it addresses" (173). The authors utilise a mixed methodology of textual analysis and focus group interviews with readers of a range of women's magazines published in 1988. Their conclusions echo those of Frazer's work in 1987. The readers "were clearly capable of negotiating the complexity of the representations and messages they read ... and [they were] aware of the normative and ideological effects" (4). Indeed, the readers made "critical assessment" of the magazines and were quite aware of them as "bearers of particular discourses of femininity" and that their reading practices were often motivated by escapism and fantasy (126-137). Like Winship, the authors bemoan the magazines' reliance on individual rather than collective modes of problem-solving. "Women's magazines are so structured, ideologically and formally, that they cannot offer political resolutions to what they consistently define as 'personal' problems" (174). What this political resolution might look like, apart from the nostalgic appeal to feminist collectivity, is not explained.

Although Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance* (1984) was an analysis of popular romance fiction, it marked an early and critical shift in feminist media and cultural studies away from the highly textual focus of earlier work on women's genres and the emphasis on reading for dominant ideologies and constructed subject positions. The original work did not engage specifically with British cultural studies, but in the 1991 edition Radway placed herself within this tradition. Her methodology was to interview passionate readers of romance fiction, individually and in groups, to discover not just what meanings they made of these texts, what pleasures they offered, but also what reading meant as a cultural practice. *Reading the Romance* also investigated the role of the publishing industry in producing the reader. It was a complex and influential study in its recognition of the

negotiations individual readers have with these texts, the knowledges they bring to their reading, and how practices of reading function in women's lives as a respite from domesticity and a fantasy of relationship needs that were not being met under patriarchy. Radway's conclusion however was that the practice of romance reading "insulates [women] from the need to demand that such behaviour change" (1991: 151), and that her work as a feminist researcher was to raise the consciousness of the readers she interviewed, and of romance readers more widely. As Ien Ang commented:

Radway, the researcher, is a feminist and not a romance fan, the Smithtown women, the researched, are romance readers and not feminists. From such a perspective, the political aim of the project becomes envisaged as one of bridging this profound separation between 'us' and 'them'. (1988: 183-184)

The end result is feminism as the answer to the problems women were trying to address through reading the romance. Even so, Radway's methodological contribution was that "she looked not just at what texts say but at what they do, and how they function in the lives of women as readers" (Altman, 2003: 13).

Radway's investigation of reading practices was an influence on a challenging study, Joke Hermes' *Reading Women's Magazines* (1995). Hermes interviewed readers of magazines in the context of their homes over repeated visits. Her focus was on how these texts were used and read in everyday life. The text almost disappeared in her analysis of the many repertoires of reading practices that women (and some men) engaged in. Reading was integrated into the routines and fantasies of everyday life. By the end of her study, the response of readers led Hermes to take issue with what she called "the fallacy of meaningfulness" about media use, and particularly about the meanings readers made of women's magazines. Readers were not resistant. They barely paid attention. "General, everyday media use is not attentive and meaningful," she concluded (15). The pragmatic everyday context of reading dominated any lasting meaning readers made. Hermes' conclusions about magazine texts and readers are sobering for anyone trying to ascribe meaning to the reading of this mass of print that women consume. (After reading her book, the temptation was to just pack up and go back to making magazines instead of researching them.) Hermes does acknowledge however that her "interpretation of how readers interpret women's magazines" was her own, and not necessarily a model for

others to follow (6). And her interviewees *did* recall content, which suggests something got through. *Reading Women's Magazines* was also a study of gossip magazines, and the way readers read this genre may not translate to reading practices of other types of magazines.

Apart from Hermes work, all of the above studies retained an oppositional stance between feminism and femininity, between the feminist analyst and the ordinary woman reader. Even gesturing towards the pleasures the feminist too might find in these texts, even talking to readers and discovering how complex, critical (or meaningless) their interpretations of magazines were, did not break through the opposition.

### Revaluation

By the nineties, Angela McRobbie's reading of the new magazines for young women signalled a major shift, a more thorough revaluation. "The old binary opposition which put femininity at one end of the political spectrum and feminism at the other, is no longer an accurate way of conceptualising young female experience. Maybe it never was" (1993: 409). This early suggestion of the dissolution of the feminism versus femininity polarity was further developed a few years later in her close study of the British magazines, *Just Seventeen* and *More*. Her work throughout the nineties suggested a rapprochement between feminists and the producers and readers of this difficult genre, promising recognition by the feminist intellectual of the feminism possible in these texts.

McRobbie seems to have been building on the tentative insights made by Janice Winship in an earlier article on the new breed of young women's magazines appearing in the UK in the mid-eighties, such as *Just Seventeen*, *Etcetera* and *Mizz*. Winship noted that these magazines assumed some of the second wave concerns were now common sense for their readers, "but carefully don't use the label of feminism" (1985: 37). The pop cultural play around gender and heterosexuality was a new cultural space, a legacy of "fifteen years of the women's movement and organized feminism" (42). Winship was clear that these playful representations did not equal feminist politics, but she did pose a question that demanded an answer: "What can we learn from these magazines to enrich a feminist politics?" (42). To "recruit" younger women, feminists may need to understand the cultural shifts and ask whether "the politics we created in the 1970s ... the stark

confrontational style ... appropriately address the needs and demands of a young generation of women in the 1980s" (43). Winship was asking how the enlightened feminist could draw younger women to the cause. Might women's magazines know something about popularising politics that feminists could use?

Winship was one of a handful of feminists in the later eighties who were beginning to wonder what kind of relationship feminists and feminism could forge with popular culture and media. In the introduction to their edited collection *The Female Gaze*, Lorraine Gamman and Margaret Marshment posed the problem: "We cannot afford to dismiss the popular by always positioning ourselves outside it" (1988: 2). The editors asked questions about how feminists could engage with popular culture without being "co-opted by being harnessed to other discourses which neutralise its [feminism's] radical potential" or "co-opted for consumerism" (3). In an essay in this collection, Shelagh Young asked if it was possible to give popular culture a feminist 'make-over' by an "effective feminist intervention in mainstream culture" (1988: 175). Feminism is still considered as an oppositional movement outside of popular culture, fears of co-option and commercialisation are still active, but questions about the relationship between the two were being posed.

Andrea Stuart took a brave step in 1990 with her questioning of the pertinence of old-style 'professional' feminism for younger women, and her provocative suggestion that they might be finding more relevant images of feminism in new magazines such as British *Elle* during the late eighties:

It was both radical and instinctively in tune with those times, in its recognition of how key issues like pleasure, consumerism and most importantly the exploration of cultural diversity had transformed what it was to be modern, to be liberated, to be the New Woman. (31)

Stuart noted the appeal of *Elle's* avoidance of self-help advice. "The assumption is that if you're an *Elle* girl you are already improved. Instead of reassuring us that we're all the

same, with the same problems, *Elle* stressed difference” (31).<sup>8</sup> She described this magazine as “postmodern”. While professional feminism was theorising ‘fragmentation’ and ‘identity’, *Elle* was already playing with the concepts in glossy images, “parodies of femininity, racially varied and sexually amorphous. Our unpleasant confusions about our identities (what it means to be black or white, gay or straight, male or female) melted into a pleasurable, seductive ambiguity” (31). It was quite a rap for a woman’s magazine coming from a young feminist in the academy at the time, and it clearly influenced McRobbie’s work on magazines in the nineties.

McRobbie argued that feminist content and attitude in magazines had become almost inevitable as the magazine staff had “studied aspects of feminism or women’s issues as part of their education ... they attempt to integrate at least aspects of these political or feminist discourses into their place of work” (1996: 183). Her earlier work on *Jackie* served as a point of comparison for just how far magazines had travelled *because of* second wave feminism. It was a cause and effect model. Magazines were changing under the influence of the second wave. McRobbie was identifying a kind of ‘feminist femininity’, one she, and Stuart, identified as ‘popular feminism’.

It was a critical and, for my work here, a promising shift. Instead of feminism being seen as a mode of thought and activism that must always exist outside of women’s magazines, McRobbie gestured towards the possibility that magazines might now be doing feminist work, popularising feminist attitudes and ideas amongst their readers. To make this argument, however, McRobbie needed to position second wave feminism as the persuasive outsider, finally reaching the mainstream common sense of this popular woman’s genre by the nineties. And women’s magazines of the seventies had to remain positioned as the bastions of “deep conservatism” in terms of feminism (1999: 46). “It was a completely claustrophobic world,” argued McRobbie:

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<sup>8</sup> I could speak from experience here to explain that *Elle*’s insistence on the ‘already improved’ woman was a strategy to identify and appeal to the class of its readers. *Elle* exists at the upper end of the magazine hierarchy, in competition with *Vogue*. Part of its differentiation from magazines ‘below’, such as *Cosmopolitan* and *Cleo*, is that it does not offer advice to readers, a practice assumed to encourage reader insecurity and anxiety (considered a lower middle class trait). *Elle* and *Vogue* assume a pre-existing confidence. As I was instructed when starting work at Australian *Elle* as Deputy Editor in 1990, “we don’t do how-to – our readers already know”. The working assumption was that readers were not desperately aspiring, they had already arrived. *Elle* readers were indeed represented as comfortable in their middle class diversity, as Stuart noted. Her glowing description of diversity was sadly peculiar to British *Elle* which had radically included representations of women from different ethnic (non-white) backgrounds.

There was no interest in changes in women's position in society, only within the already established parameters of conventional femininity. The *Cosmopolitan* brand of liberation throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s only meant better or more sex for women. (46)

While McRobbie importantly identified this collapsing polarity of feminism versus femininity as 'popular feminism' – and this concept will be explored further in the following section – the edifice of her argument is built on the presumption of a deeply anti-feminist world in seventies magazines. In the persistent contemporaneity of much cultural studies work, no one had looked back to see if the claims about the anti-feminism of women's magazines in this period would still hold thirty years later. While feminist media and cultural studies has engaged in a self-reflective and historical critique of its own intellectual and methodological traditions, its objects of study – such as seventies women's magazines – have not been subject to any new historical gaze. And yet, as many historians would argue, it is impossible to "fix" the past: "one past, an infinity of histories" (Jenkins and Munslow, 2004: 3). These objects, women's magazines, have suffered interpretive closure, even if the theories that produced them have been opened to interrogation. As a result, the anti-feminism of women's magazines of this period can function as an unquestioned truth upon which the story of the success of the radical outsiders of second wave feminism can be built. Beyond women's magazines, the effect of continuing the mythology of feminism as *only* the work of the radical outside perpetuates a limited and singular history of feminism in the period of the second wave and affects the way the history of feminism in popular media can be understood.

The limitation of this conceptualisation has now rebounded in McRobbie's recent writings about contemporary popular culture. It brings us to a strange twist in the tale. McRobbie now sees the "cultural space of post-feminism", which includes women's magazines, as a place where "feminism is routinely disparaged":

Why is feminism so hated? Why do young women recoil in horror at the very idea of the feminist? To count as a girl today appears to require this kind of ritualistic denunciation. (2004: 258)

As evidence she cites *Bridget Jones, Sex and the City, Ally McBeal*, the "ironic normalization" of pornography in the lad mags and by young women themselves in their desire to be pin-up girls and their enthusiasm for raunch culture. The self-reflective irony of this engagement that McRobbie had noted and appreciated in the nineties is now cast as politically naïve. "We are witness to a hyper-culture of commercial sexuality, one aspect of which is the repudiation of a feminism invoked only to be summarily dismissed" (259). The new 'cool' is to withhold critique of sexual objectification and gender inequities, "to endorse a new regime of sexual meanings based on female consent, equality, participation and pleasure, free of politics", the language of personal choice taking the place of feminism as a political movement (260). Indeed, to be postfeminist is to summon up second wave feminism, only to denounce it with "utterances of forceful non-identity" (257).

By holding onto a vision of 'real' feminism as an 'autonomous' politics outside of popular culture, and interpreting contemporary popular culture through the lens of the defensive second wave feminist, McRobbie has returned us to the repudiation phase. It is as if we have circled back to the 1970s. After all the work towards rapprochement, the irony is heavy.

But if we conceive feminist politics as being made within cultural representations and practices, a space as 'real' as the activism of grassroots organisation and activism that (I assume) is McRobbie's vision of a political movement, then her concern over young women's refusal of feminist identity and the limitations and dangers of feminism as cultural representation is, I believe, misplaced. If the gambit is now to see some forms of media, such as women's magazines, as sites for the making of a particular and popular kind of feminism, then the very meaning of feminism, and where feminist history was made, has to broaden. This mediated feminism needs a name, a theorisation and a history.

Before I explore the uses and meanings of popular feminism, it seems important to make sense of the major adjectival feminisms that have currency now. Postfeminism and third wave feminism are both utilised to explain the contemporary relationship between popular culture, feminism, and feminist identity in different and often confusing ways. Because they are chronological terms that can have no application historically, they leave

popular feminism as a more useful concept to explain *Cleo's* feminist practice, especially (and perhaps obviously) in the seventies.

### **Post and Third Wave Feminisms**

Of all the terms in play during the nineties 'third wave' and 'postfeminism' have become the descriptors left in use after the wash of adjectival feminisms came and went. The territory is far from simple. Reading the various collections and articles designed to explore these terms only makes clear how much postfeminism and third wave feminism are still in definitional dispute and flux. Indeed, when it comes to postfeminism, it seems that escaping definition is one of its characteristics.

"What is most telling ... is postfeminism's resistance to being named ... its willingness to circumvent the naming process is founded on a deep resistance to the label of feminism" (Nurka, 2002: 3). For postfeminism there is a problem in taking the word 'feminist' as a satisfactory or sufficient descriptor for the multiple identities of many young women. After the 'Interrogating post-feminism' conference at the University of East Anglia, UK, in 2004, Joanne Hollows and Rachel Moseley noted:

While post-feminist identities were being negotiated within the popular, there was no equivalent post-feminist identity that people were willing to identify with themselves. The act of distancing from feminism ... does not translate into the claim 'I'm a post-feminist'. (2006: 12)

Postfeminism expresses a relationship to popular culture and media. Some commentators see this as a positive relationship. "Postfeminism is first and foremost a popular phenomenon: its currency lies within popular culture where it has come to embody a general feeling of dissatisfaction with feminism" (Nurka, 2002: 22). Others see postfeminism as it manifests in media and pop culture as evidence of backlash (see Faludi, 1991). And it is this older meaning of postfeminism that we have seen Angela McRobbie recover for her article of disenchantment with the contemporary popular culture of young women. She argues:



Post-feminism draws on and invokes feminism as that which can be taken into account, to suggest that equality is achieved, in order to install a whole repertoire of new meanings which emphasise that it is no longer needed, it is a spent force. (2004: 255)

But in Ann Brooks' explanation of postfeminism, the 'post' refers to a feminism that had to take into account the effect of postmodernism, post-structuralism and post-colonialism. It was not so much denunciation of the second wave as a necessary "process of ongoing transformation and change" (1997: 1). Many authors "have taken post-feminism into account in order to reassert the relevance of feminism" while acknowledging that postfeminism is "a force that must be recognised – for better and/or for worse" (McLaughlin and Carter, 2006: 125).

Third wave feminism is perhaps not quite as difficult to pin down, and tends not to have roused the ire of the grande dames of the second wave, although this term too has been used inconsistently in different locations. Some third wave writers also want to "render problematic an easy understanding of what the third wave is" (Dicker and Piepmeier, 2003: 5). Others are insistent on the difference between postfeminism and the third wave. "Let us be clear: 'post-feminist' characterises a group of young conservative feminists who explicitly define themselves against and criticize feminists of the second wave" (Heywood and Drake, 1997: 1).

Third wave feminism seems to have less of a problem with taking the identity 'feminist' and acknowledges the legacies as well as the limitations of second wave feminism for contemporary young women. But this identity embraces hybridity and contradiction. Rebecca Walker was one of the first to articulate the third wave of feminism as based on a rejection of what were perceived as the rigid identity politics of the second wave. "Constantly measuring up to some cohesive fully down-for-the-feminist-cause identity without contradictions and messiness and lusts for power and luxury items is not a fun or easy task ..." (1995: xxxi). Stacy Gillis, Gillian Howie and Rebecca Munford argued that the third wave emerged at a time in the early nineties when it was clear that second wave feminism had failed to account for the many differences within the category of 'woman':

The concept 'woman' seemed too *fragile* to bear the weight of all contents and meanings ascribed to it. The elusiveness of this category of 'woman' raised questions about the nature of identity, unity and collectivity ... What we now understand as the 'third wave' emerges from these contestations – and the responses to them. (2004: 1)

The third wave has also realised the potential of popular culture for feminist activism, where the distinction between the political and the cultural collapse (Bailey, 2007: 89). Munford argues that third wave feminists re-think "the relationship between feminism and popular culture" in regard to female subjectivity. Popular modes of femininity are celebrated, foregrounding the "instability and contradiction of patriarchal definitions of femininity" (2006: 144). But postfeminists use popular culture to question dominant definitions of femininity too (Brunsdon, 1997: 85-86).

Like postfeminists, many third wavers identify themselves by age. They did not live through the period of the second wave; they inherited both its successes and its limitations. The issue of generational conflict is present in both post and third wave feminisms. Heywood and Drake argue that the third wave is effectively the feminism of Generation X (specifically born between 1963 and 1974) who missed living consciously through the second wave (1997: 4). Although Gillis et al. argue for a third wave that is "not owned by any one generation" (2004: 3), others see generational conflict as "very much at the heart of feminism's third wave" (Pilcher and Whelehan, 2004: 171).

Confusing? It does make it clear however that neither post nor third wave feminisms can provide a concept to help explain the historical existence of feminism in and as popular culture. Both third wave and postfeminism embrace the political potential of popular media/popular culture for representing and experiencing a kind of feminism and both can argue that naming oneself as a feminist is no longer a necessary or sufficient descriptor of the multiplicity of a woman's identities. The periodisation of both, however, marks the concepts as distinctly post-second wave.

Popular feminism promises to be the most useful concept to describe the feminist content of popular culture, the interactions audiences/readerships have with it, and the way feminism is lived in the everyday without women necessarily identifying as feminist.

Popular feminism does not lock into a particular time, place or generation. It allows for a history to be traced or historical episodes to be explored.

## Popular feminism

*... serious engagement with popular culture must eventually accept to take issue with it and in it, as well as about it, and I think this means writing seriously about popular theories as well as (or even rather than) writing 'popular' spin-offs from academic theories. (Morris, 1988: 8)*

In academic literature, the term 'popular feminism' is a shape-shifter. Many feminists appear to have staked their credentials on the subject of popular feminism. The fault-line seems to run down the same binaries that broadly divided feminism in the seventies: radical versus liberal reformist; collectivism versus individualism; the oppositional outside versus the co-opted de-politicised inside; feminism versus femininity. In this section I want to track some of the uses of the term popular feminism since it first appeared (to my knowledge) in the literature in the late eighties. It is a mobile concept. Lynne Segal, for example, used popular feminism to describe the kinds of feminist writings that received high media coverage and had 'crossed over' to become best sellers. In *Is the Future Female?* Segal devoted a chapter to the themes of popular feminism explained as "the feminist writing which is now most popular in this country [UK]" (1987: 3). At the time, this was the 'cultural feminist' argument about the natural superiority of women counterposed against the inevitability of male violence, put forward by feminists such as Adrienne Rich, Susan Griffin, Andrea Dworkin and Robin Morgan. Segal also briefly uses popular feminism to refer to the "soft-focus feminism" of women's magazines that had replaced women's subordination of self to men and children with a self-focused narcissism (9-10).

More despairing feminists have used popular feminism as a shorthand to bemoan the co-option of a 'real' feminism into the consumerist discourses of popular culture. For clarity, I will track these uses of popular feminism first, then explore the theorists who have found popular feminism a productive way to understand the relationship between feminism and popular media. Beverley Skeggs, for example, has criticised popular feminism, which she also calls 'post feminism', as the product of "the many magazines

that reduce feminism to the entitlement rhetoric of consumerism, looking good, having lots of heterosex and being entitled to education and work" (1995: 477). These magazines "adopt a pragmatic and street-wise language" and refuse the label feminist or feminism. For Skeggs, popular feminism lacks political commitment. And by 'political' she pits the vision of collectivity, the residue of the left and seventies sisterhood, against the hegemony of individualism and the passivity of consumption. "The *Cosmopolitan* representations of feminism are limited and individualistic ... Feminism is promoted as an individual 'rights' and 'entitlement' discourse" (477).<sup>9</sup>

Bonnie Dow is another who has found popular feminism politically weak. In *Prime-Time Feminism*, Dow analysed the kind of feminism represented in popular television programmes from the seventies onwards, such as the *Mary Tyler Moore Show*, *Murphy Brown*, and *Dr Quinn Medicine Woman*. "Pop culture feminism is not always and inevitably antifeminist," but this kind of feminism "is simply very limited" (1996: 214). The danger, she argued, is that this lifestyle feminism can be confused with the hard feminism of political and intellectual work. The feminism available in popular culture suits the needs of television (and thus, the media generally), "not the needs of a feminist politics committed to the future of all women regardless of race, class, sexuality or life situation" (214). It is a much older vision of feminist politics in operation here. For Dow, there is a feminism of the hard activist slog and a feminism of the image. One is tough, the other is fluff. One is real, the other is misrepresentation. Dow's argument is essentially based on an idea of real politics as "hard choices, hard work and a commitment to collective action" (215). The thought that politics may happen in other ways, in other places, even possibly within and through the media, is not conceivable here.

Chilla Bulbeck offers another clear example of the problems some feminists have with the representations of feminism in the media. In *Living Feminism*, Bulbeck interviewed different generations of Australian women, using their stories to write a social history of the second wave. She asked 'ordinary' women how feminism had affected their lives, and used the terms 'living feminism' or 'mainstream feminism' to refer respectfully to the beliefs of these women. The term 'popular feminism' is used to refer specifically to

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<sup>9</sup> Skeggs' more recent work (1997) takes the class of women more into account in understanding their resistance to feminism and the kind of 'feminist' activities they can be engaged in. This work will be drawn on in Chapter Five.

"women who have come to their understanding of feminism through its representation in the popular media" (1997: 143-144). This representation was never a positive thing for feminism or for ordinary women's understanding of what authentic feminist politics might be.

The media, she argues, has "done a disservice to feminism" by perpetuating stereotypes, such as "butch dykes with short hair and hairy armpits ... rather than spreading the word beyond those who read *The Female Eunuch*, attend consciousness raising groups, enrol in women's studies or join women's organisations" (144). Bulbeck blames the media, especially in the seventies, for turning women away from the feminist movement; for popularising the more extreme images that feminism (it must be said) did offer; for not presenting accurate representations of feminism's radical message. Many of the women Bulbeck interviewed for her book approved of the victories of feminism but rejected a feminist identity. To be a feminist was to be aligned with "bra-burning, radical lesbians and Germaine Greer". These *misrepresentations*, acquired via the 'popular feminism' of the media, "have hidden from view 'those women who were always there', turning the majority of women away from feminism, the word, even as they endorse feminism the practice" (122). But there is no re-investigation of this 'media' to support her claims.

The blind-spot in this analysis is that many of Bulbeck's interview subjects refer to the *importance* of the media – television and magazines and especially the symbolic figure of Germaine Greer – in providing that 'click' of recognition around the oppression of women and information about the women's movement, and in awakening their interest in feminist issues. It is difficult to see how the media can both inspire ordinary women to feminism and turn them away from feminism at the same time. There is an implicit question here that is not addressed: if the majority of women endorsed 'feminism the practice', does it really matter if they do not take the word? Is this practice in everyday life not feminism?

Bulbeck's concern with the kind of feminism apparent in the media is that it does not utilise the concept of patriarchy and is mired in the politics of liberal democracy. "Popular feminism seems to shy away from such a concept [patriarchy], not only because it appears to construct all men as the enemy but because we live in a society where *liberalism is the hegemonic discourse*" (216, original italics). Bulbeck's concern is that inequality

is not only gendered it is also classed, and it is only a radical feminism that can address both:

... when women brand feminism as 'radical' it might not only mean they reject it as 'man-hating'. They also seem to refuse its understanding of women's structural inequalities based both on their gender and their class location. (216)

Her vision is of a feminism that can dismantle capitalism and the gendered inequalities entwined with it.

Popular feminism, as I will develop the term throughout this work, is indeed concerned with extending the liberal concept of democratic equivalence to women through the pleasurable media of women's magazines. A thorough analysis of patriarchy and capitalism fed by a desire for their overthrow is not part of popular feminism's remit. For Bulbeck however, this is a compromised and weakened form of feminist politics, if indeed it could qualify as politics at all. Permeating her analysis is "pessimism about the political potential of popular media", an "anti-democratic leftism" as John Hartley would put it (1999b: 119). As he argues, democracy should not be equated with defeat.<sup>10</sup>

Susan Douglas offers a slightly different take on the representation of feminism in popular culture. While she doesn't employ the term, through her survey of popular cultural representations of women since the fifties Douglas argues the importance of the media in making women aware of feminist ideas. In being exposed to the contradictory images of women as alternately "equal" and "subordinate", the tensions "became unbearable, and millions of women found they were no longer willing to tolerate the gap between the promises of equality and the reality of inequality" (1994: 9). The media made feminism inevitable – but by default. "Growing up female with the mass media helped make me a feminist and it helped make millions of other women feminists too, whether they take on that label or not" (7). The 'I'm not a feminist but ...' position taken by many women in the nineties is, she argues, a way of resolving this tension. Real feminism, however, remains something separate from the media to be represented either positively or negatively. And Douglas finds women's magazines a particularly

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<sup>10</sup> The phrase 'democracy as defeat' is the title of Chapter Nine in Hartley's *The Uses of Television* (1999b).

“schizophrenic landscape”. The contradiction between the editorial content urging women to be “strong, no-nonsense feminists” and the fashion and beauty layouts “insist[ing] that we be passive, anorexic spectacles whose only function is to attract a man and who should spend our leisure time mastering the art of the pedicure” is impossible to resolve (272). I will return to this common feminist concern with ‘contradiction’ throughout this thesis.

It was Andrea Stuart’s 1990 essay ‘Feminism: dead or alive?’ that first gave recognition to the possibility that women’s media may actually *be* a kind of feminist practice. For Stuart, the term popular feminism referred to the feminist content apparent in all levels of popular culture, especially in women’s magazines, but also the way feminist ideas are taken into women’s everyday lives:

Popular feminism, the errant daughter of capital F feminism, is all around us. It has everything to do with our day-to-day lives. We hear it on the radio, read it in the newspapers and watch it on TV. Though it significantly does not name itself ‘feminist’ it is precisely here [through the media] that the vast majority of women learn their feminism. (30)

Stuart argued that the gulf between what she called “Professional feminism, feminism with a capital F” and the majority of women who were equally aware of the importance of feminist issues but “have not chosen to make feminism their career” had “widened into a yawning chasm” (29). The opposition between professional and popular Stuart identifies still has much currency, in both domains. However, identifying opposing poles of feminism serves to discursively reinforce a division that does not capture the reality of dialogue, the to-and-fro-ing between the popular and the ‘professional’. As Meaghan Morris warned:

To state that a given activity has ‘no existence’ outside one’s own immediate sphere of operations is to accept and reinforce as absolute, rather than to challenge and transform, prevailing local conventions about the available places from which people (and in this case, feminists) can be allowed to be saying something. (1988: 9)

And often, as in the case of best-selling feminist books and celebrity feminists and academy-trained journalists and other makers of popular culture, these domains converge. The oppositional sense is unfortunate because Stuart's vision is that "a women's movement should genuinely get to grips with all its manifestations, from the popular to the professional" (42).

Stuart's definition does not include any sense of history. Popular feminism here is 'the errant daughter', a now-familiar description of generational rebellion, as daughters of the boomers came of age striking out against their mothers and refusing the label feminist. As I will explore and explain in this thesis, popular feminisms – as the errant sisters perhaps – accompanied the second wave from the beginning. Popular feminism is not necessarily generational. It may have come to academic notice in the late eighties and nineties, but the existence of feminism in popular culture and everyday life, I will argue, has been around from the start.

As we have seen, inspired by Stuart's article, McRobbie began to use the term 'popular feminism' as "a password for the diverse, uneven and contradictory femininities now advocated in [young women's] magazines" (1996: 176). Popular feminism was both an expression of generational distance from second wave 'mothers' and the result of feminist pedagogy. The evidence was in the new magazines. "Popular feminism has permeated every sector of the female population" (1996: 189).

By the time of publishing *In the Culture Society* in 1999, McRobbie argued persuasively that popular feminism had become one of the discourses of contemporary media culture. And she was using the term 'popular feminism' to describe the ironic femininity and sexual confidence of younger women: "Female assertiveness, being in control and enjoying sex, now recognized as entitlements, and the struggle for equality with men and boys that starts young" (1999: 124). Popular feminism was not exactly theorised here nor was it historicised. Indeed, McRobbie's insights rely on a particular narrative of feminist history, where the radical outsiders of the second wave had worked to change entrenched inequalities based on gender – and decades later a younger generation of women were reaping the benefits. The revolutionary ideas of the avant-garde 'mothers' had become the hegemonic common sense of their mainstream 'daughters' who often dispensed with the term 'feminism' and the identity 'feminist'. Her understanding of popular feminism at



this point did not require its making the second wave ‘unpopular’, as we have seen McRobbie was later to argue.

A number of writers during the nineties were recognising the feminist potential of women’s magazines. Julia Hanigsberg explored random issues of the up-market American style and fashion magazines – *Glamour*, *Allure*, *Elle*, *Mademoiselle*, *Vogue*, *Essence*, *Self* and *Harper’s Bazaar* – over twelve months, 1993-1994. She concluded that “a dynamic and exciting feminism is ubiquitous” in these mainstream forums (1997: 73). “Popular women’s magazines, a genre not generally known for radical thought, are in fact a repository for a significant amount of feminist thinking, although not always under that name” (73). Hanigsberg did not use the term popular feminism, and nor did Naomi Wolf before her. Wolf too recognised that women’s magazines “have popularized feminist ideas more widely than any other medium – certainly more widely than explicitly feminist journals”:

It was through these glossies that issues from the women’s movement swept out from the barricades and down from the academic ivory towers to blow into the lives of working-class women, rural women, women without higher education. Seen in this light they are very potent instruments of social change. (1990: 71-72)

In her work on *Ms* magazine, Amy Erdman Farrell used the term to note that “popular feminism [is] widespread, common to many and one that emerges from the realm of popular culture” (1998: 5). For Farrell though, the extent of this feminism remained compromised by *Ms* magazine’s reliance on advertising. “The commercial matrix sharply curtailed its ability to be explicitly political,” she argued (1996). And yet, when *Ms* stopped running advertising pages in 1990, the cover price inevitably rose, its circulation fell, and it could only speak to the converted. “The elitism of the alternative rather than the censorship of the commercial now constrains *Ms*” (1996). In Farrell’s pessimistic analysis of the feminist potential of women’s magazines, it seems the genre can’t win, no matter which way it turns. And yet, without the anti-commercial frame of Farrell’s argument, there is evidence here that *Ms* did indeed create a broad awareness of feminism amongst women who were not otherwise involved with activist feminist organisations.

The term popular feminism was employed by David Gauntlett in his chapter on recent women's magazines in *Media, Gender and Identity*. He used it to mean simply this: "the mainstream interpretation of feminism which is a strong element of modern pop culture even though it might not actually answer to the 'feminist' label" (2002: 252). Women's magazines "now speak the language of 'popular feminism' – assertive, seeking success in work and relationships, demanding the right to both equality and pleasure" (193). His understanding of popular feminism relied on McRobbie's conclusion that feminism has now become the individualist common sense language of popular women's media.

In all of the above work, popular feminism is seen as a response to and popularisation of second wave feminist activism. The work of Joanne Hollows offers the most productive development so far of the concept of popular feminism. In *Feminism, Femininity and Popular Culture* (2000), she noted that while there was little consensus about the meaning of popular feminism, "feminist critics shared the belief that feminism could no longer position itself outside and against popular culture, but instead had to see popular culture as a site 'where meanings are contested'" (2000: 194). And importantly, Hollows suggested that popular feminism might have a history that "may not be directly indebted to feminism and, indeed, may have existed prior to [second wave] feminism" (202). Such an insight promises to break through the long-standing antagonism between the feminist and the ordinary woman. For my work, this suggestion about the historical nature of popular feminism was a critical insight.

In her more recent edited collection *Feminism in Popular Culture*, Hollows with Rachel Moseley opened the terrain of popular feminism to make stronger claims about a popular feminism in the period of the second wave:

Apart from women actively involved in the second wave of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s, most people's initial knowledge and understanding of feminism has been formed within the popular and through representation. (2006: 2)

That feminism was being made in popular culture and in the lives of ordinary women, without necessarily identifying as feminist, and that this process was occurring alongside more theoretical and activist feminisms, provides the beginnings of a theoretical framework in which to read the new women's magazines of the seventies. Second wave

feminism, the authors argue, “was partly constituted through the popular, and ... feminisms – in diverse and fragmented forms – remain part of the popular” (15).

Their crucial contribution is to insist on the preposition ‘in’: we need to think of feminism *in* popular culture, not feminism *and* popular culture. This prepositional shift indicates that feminism is being made within popular culture, not just in response to a real feminism that exists outside of the popular. It promises to break down the opposition between the feminist as critical outsider and the ordinary woman trapped by the co-opted and consumerist feminism of mainstream popular media.

The framing of the collection undoubtedly breaks new ground, but for reasons which are clearly related to the paucity of historical research into earlier relevant genres, the only sustained examination of the historical existence of feminism in popular media in the seventies comes from the work of Susan Sheridan, Susan Magarey and Sandra Lilburn on representations of feminism in Australian print media (newspapers), 1970 to 1995. Their investigation was founded on a premise that has also informed my work on *Cleo*:

... despite repeated complaints that the media, as a public and therefore patriarchal institution, misrepresents feminism, the movement and its ideas have always existed, in part at least, *in* the media. It is impossible to draw a firm line between feminism ‘in actuality’ and feminism in the media-sphere. (2006: 26)

The authors do not use the concept popular feminism, but their analysis challenges the myths of both a monolithic second-wave feminism and that ‘the media’ was monolithically opposed to it. Importantly, they found that feminism has been partly constructed in the popular media as well as outside it. This is an insight Catharine Lumby too has touched on, both in *Bad Girls* and in her essay, ‘Nothing Personal: sex, gender and identity in the media age’. “Despite persistent claims on the part of some feminists that the media continues to oppress women and ignore feminist views, the opposite is demonstrably true” (1997b: 13). The persistent coverage of feminism in mainstream media has offered a multiplicity of representations of feminism, and in the process new meanings of what feminism might be and what it means to be a feminist are continually being made:

The media is rendering the social body and its competing identities increasingly unstable ... The current problem for feminism is not oppressive patriarchal misrepresentations of women, but how to maintain a sense of identity in the face of a flood of competing images of feminism itself. (13)

Lumby does not name this mediated process as 'popular feminism', nor does she locate it historically, but her observations are very much at the heart of the terrain the concept popular feminism might cover.

My work on *Cleo* suggests that holding onto a secure identity for 'the feminist' or a singular meaning of feminism has been a problem for feminism all along. The fear of dissolution into the mainstream via mass media accompanied the development of second wave feminism. The desire for a politics of the radical 'outside' meant that any feminist politics that might be at work 'inside' was seen as a threat to not just the women's movement but to feminist identity. Indeed, the definition of the feminist as only the critical outsider is thrown into question by the operations of popular feminism in mainstream women's media.

The work that follows reads *Cleo* in the seventies through the lens of popular feminism. Having said that, *Cleo* does not offer itself quite as a 'case study'. That would imply popular feminism as a fully elaborated concept that provided an a priori frame through which to read this magazine. This is not how my work developed. The conceptualisation of popular feminism developed out of the reading of *Cleo* alongside the academic texts about feminism and women's magazines. The Hollows and Moseley essay on popular feminism, which comes closest to the theorisation I had been developing, only appeared in 2006. In this thesis I build on their critical insights to argue that popular feminism should be seen *as* part of popular culture.

This prepositional move is reliant upon a conceptualisation of media texts as not simply a thing onto which representations are inscribed; nor does it see media texts as a discrete, separate thing from which readers make their own meanings. The media text is more usefully thought of as a flow of possible meanings between producers, texts and readers, all circumscribed by the interpretational limits set by particular historical conditions. The meanings of a media text then are made as much by the practice of reading in particular

contexts as they are by producers' intent. And meanings are made over again as readers may, or may not, integrate what they read into everyday lives. These lives are constrained by age, class, education, religion, ethnicity, all the usual suspects that make generalisation about the 'mainstream' or the 'masses' or the 'ordinary woman' so difficult.

My development of the concept popular feminism is indebted to John Hartley's *Popular Reality* (1996):

Popular reality is what happens when producers, texts and readers, in the integrated unity of the semiosphere, are in virtual touch with each other, kissing.  
(29)

In the 'kissing' of producers, texts and readers, there is no dominant partner. The popular feminism of popular reality is a relationship of informed consent – not the sado-masochism or date rape of some theories of media reception. *Cleo* was produced by media workers (journalists, designers, editors) who often saw themselves *as* their readers. And readers helped make this magazine, literally by writing letters, by vox pops, and by critiquing content. This text was as much a practice of reading as it was a discrete object to be read. As Hartley writes, "popular culture is another name for the practice of media readership in modernity" and "reading is a social, communal, productive act of writing, a dialogic process which is fundamental to (and may even be) popular culture" (47,51). It is through reading that the public constitutes itself. "Out of what they read, the public decide who they are, what they believe, what the common world is like, what idea of the fair go to pursue" (Wark, 1999: 135).

If we imagine popular feminism as a form of popular reality, the term then describes the flow of feminist ideas between readers and their magazine, between producers and readers, and in that flow a very Australian kind of popular feminism was being created in this counter- public sphere in the seventies. Based on the idea of democratic gender equivalence rather than a revolution against patriarchy, *Cleo* and its readers were creating what could be called 'popular' or 'fair go' feminism. The conditions of possibility for a fair go for Australian women and the appearance of a magazine that could speak this desire will be explored in the following chapter.

## 2. CLEO IN CONTEXT

Magazines are not conceived and produced in isolation, out of time and place. They do not appear simply as the inspired visions of one extraordinary publisher or editor, although an extraordinary editor helps. Nor are they written and read that way. *Cleo* as a text is part of a circuit of culture – of producers, readers and the limits and possibilities of this period in history, especially for women. This chapter explores the historical conditions that allowed a magazine like *Cleo* to be published in Australia in 1972.

Successful new magazines develop from a blend of broad ‘editorial philosophy’, capital investment, market research for potential readership, gut instinct for the gap in the market, a gathering of the right staff who can implement the vision in words, images and graphics and sell the idea to advertisers, and owners who will indulge the magazine without too much interference in editorial decisions. The new magazine is produced in an often conservative industry, reared on often mythological tales of what readers do *not* like in a magazine, and what advertisers too will demand and reject in terms of content. The new magazine is at the mercy of market researchers’ interpretations of focus groups of target readers’ reaction to a ‘dummy’ (prototype) (Morrish, 2003: 28-40). And then there are the readers themselves.

This process of making a new magazine is one of creativity and guess-work as much as it is of market ‘science’. No amount of demographic or ‘lifestyle’ market research can guarantee that a magazine resonates with its readership. If a positive reader response could be assured in advance then every new magazine would find its target readership and be profitable. That is not the history of magazine culture, where titles fail more often than they succeed (Kobak, 2002: 46). When all the elements come together, a new magazine can be a powerful cultural medium. It can become a generic map for other magazines to follow. The routes laid down on the map gain cultural currency with repetition, like a road driven so often it is barely noticed. To read the map – as a cultural interpreter at a distance of thirty or so years – it is necessary to understand the social and cultural forces acting upon the map-makers and those who follow and help define its contours (producers and readers). Before a new magazine is launched, the conditions of possibility are not wide open. They are circumscribed by broader social and economic forces, and by the traditions of magazine culture itself. Understanding the broader

context in which *Cleo* was produced also involves examining what magazines influenced its creation.

The first issues of any new magazine are when radical ruptures with the past can occur. This is where new directions for a particular culture of readers and producers can be made. A new magazine becomes both a statement of intent and a promise between producer and reader – a generic social contract. “Genres are essentially literary institutions, or social contracts between a writer and a specific public, whose function is to specify the proper use of a particular cultural artefact” (Jameson, 2000: 268). Once established over the first handful of issues, dramatic change becomes difficult. There are many masters/mistresses to please, not least the readers. To deviate from the original routes laid out is never an easy decision within a particular magazine. In fact it is downright risky business, usually only undertaken when an editorial formula seems a little stale, when circulation drops (Morrish, 2003: 22-23). This is when magazines will re-vamp and re-launch, replace editors or fold – because the original map does not make sense to producers and readers anymore (and thus advertisers) and has stopped making profit for owners. The culture has changed, the circuit of meaning is broken.

What makes a magazine mean – and matter – is how well the elements of the circuit segue with each other, how smoothly they flow, and how well they intuit the possibilities for representation offered by the culture in which they operate. And here, the ideas of Paul Ricoeur and his hermeneutics of mimesis, in *Time and Narrative*, can be useful. Not, I must stress, as a theory to be slavishly followed, more as an idea for flight. Ricoeur argues that what is possible to represent at any particular time is already present in the everyday life of a culture, in the “forms of living”. “Hermeneutics is concerned with reconstructing the entire arc of operations by which practical experience provides itself with works, authors and readers” (1984: 53). Ricoeur’s proposal is not that there is a pre-existing reality which finds expression in a text – and not that texts are mere reflections – but that there is a connection between everyday life, “the opaque depths of living, acting, and suffering”, the text, and the way readers may respond.

There is a clear analogy here with the circuit of culture – the conditions of possibility and everyday life, the production, the text and reading are all part of a ‘mimetic’ flow, Ricoeur’s ‘arc of operations’. For *Cleo* – and indeed for the second wave – this is a

fruitful idea. There were tensions, experiences, “forms of living” in the everyday life of women that found resonance in the texts of this time (be they street demonstrations, consciousness-raising groups, theoretical tomes or commercial magazines) and the readers of these texts could “revise it and thereby change their acting” (53). The text is as much a practice of reading as it is a self-contained object. It must be stressed that there is no causal principle at work here, no necessary effect that can be traced to the power of the text. The elements of the ‘arc’ or circuit are contingent, not causal.

The somewhat grandly titled ‘editorial philosophy’ “explains what the magazine is intended to do, what areas of interest it covers, how it will approach those interests, and the voice it will use to express itself. It is highly specific” (Johnson and Prijatel, 2007: 135). In planning the editorial philosophy, producers (publisher, editor, and sometimes other members of staff) have to literally become readers, of both contemporary society and of other magazines in circulation, the current competition on the newsstands within their genre. To make a magazine that will be recognisable within a particular category (and indeed, be able to be categorised by the institutions that measure circulation and readership and by advertisers who categorise market segments via genre), producers need to read the genre they operate within – and devise ways of adding new content or formats for features, even stretching the generic boundaries to mark their point of difference. So, understanding *Cleo*’s editorial philosophy becomes a matter here of looking for intertexts (McKee, 2003: 95-99), texts that were generically similar, and of looking at how the producers of *Cleo* made editorial choices that positioned their magazine both within a recognisable genre (women’s magazines) and stretched the traditional limits of that genre. Genre analysis “must inevitably focus on intertextuality because the effective organization of the tension between sameness and difference is how generic belonging is understood and defined” (Johnson et al., 2004: 162). While the producers of *Cleo* read other magazines for generic differences, they also read for sameness. Operating in a competitive media environment is also a matter of making what could be called ‘intratexts’ – incorporating editorial elements from other magazines, indeed sometimes a blatant copying of ideas and formats. Finding inspiration in other print media in terms of design and layout, potential advertisers and especially editorial content (as ideas, not exact words), is a mode of creation recognised under Australian copyright law (Pearson, 2004: 284). Reading other magazines is critical not just in analysing a magazine text or series of texts (such as *Cleo*) but also in *making* a magazine.



In high-stake situations, journalists do not reveal their sources. Nor do media texts acknowledge their influences. A new magazine does not appear with an editorial letter paying tribute to the magazines that inspired it, or those whose content and format it has pillaged. Unlike academic texts, magazines do not come with footnotes. And the print media generally does not like to give any credit to their competition. (We rarely see, for example, Sydney's leading broadsheet, *The Sydney Morning Herald* crediting the national broadsheet *The Australian* with breaking a story. We never see *Cosmopolitan* acknowledging *FHM* for the idea for a story on the 'trigasm'). So tracing generic influences, especially when working with the past, requires time in the archives, glancing through myriads of magazines, tracking generic similarities and differences. Magazines are poachers. They borrow and reconfigure and sometimes cook up something quite fresh. To understand the impact of *Cleo* in the seventies, the 'radical' nature of its feminist content for readers used to tamer fare, we have to look back to see where its editorial philosophy might have come from. And in the exploration of the context of production, we also need to look to broader historical conditions that allowed this particular text to emerge in the early seventies in Australia. The confluence of historical forces that allow influential new magazines to emerge tells us much about the circuit of desire between producers, text and readers.

By looking at the context in which *Cleo* was produced, it becomes clear that feminist ideas – however inchoate and without analysis that would cement them as a clearly delineated politics or philosophy – were already circulating in popular print culture. As we will see, *Cleo* did not just co-opt the radical marginality of feminist ideas for the mainstream, but used feminist language to describe the “opaque depths of living, acting and suffering”, as Ricouer puts it, which ordinary women were already experiencing. And giving a name to these experiences – as women's liberation and then as feminism and sometimes with no name at all – within the safety of the reader's contract with a popular genre such as a woman's magazine, blurred the distinction between the resistant inside and radical outside, the distinction that will be seen to be so important to second wave feminist identity.

## Around 1972

*The popular media are effective – sometimes historically decisive – when their producers, texts and readers are ideologically, politically and semiotically in touch with each other. When that happens, as for example in America in 1775-6, France in 1789, and even in Britain for a while in the 1640s, the 1800s and again in the 1940s, then the results can be quite startling, and not at all reactionary.*

(Hartley, 1996: 8)

In the history of popular media, some years are more startling than others. If I were to ask Australians of a certain age what they were doing towards the end of 1972, the answers would probably coalesce not around the fact of *Cleo's* launch in November of that year, but around memories of Gough Whitlam and the then radically left-leaning Labor party's ascendancy to power. But the two had more in common than might be imagined. Meaghan Morris described 1972 as "a symbolic threshold year in modern Australian history. The first Labor government since 1949 was elected in a climate of euphoric political radicalism and desire for social change" (1998: 8). McKenzie Wark recalled that "when Gough Whitlam won office in 1972, it felt a bit like Australia was finally catching up with the world, and that the radical optimism of the 60s had finally reached the colonies" (1999: 13).

With an urgent catchcry of 'crash through or crash', the Whitlam government attempted to redress the failures of twenty years of conservative rule, expanding the concept of participatory citizenship into something far more inclusive than the privileges of wealth. "With a wild ecstasy and relish, Whitlam plunged into the task of proving that a social-democratic government could achieve equality without promoting either servitude or mediocrity" (Clark, 1987: 277). For Manning Clark, who was writing the third volume of his *History of Australia* at the time, it was "the end of the ice age" (Macintyre, 1999: 232). During the sixties and seventies a generation of young people, the post-war baby boom, came to adulthood during years of sustained affluence and very low unemployment. The baby-boomers were the first Australian generation to experience their formative years as teenagers, a category that had not existed prior to the fifties, with their own forms of popular culture – rock music, personal stereos, television programs, fashion and subcultures. The boomers had not lived through scarcity. Nor had they experienced war

until Vietnam – a war that was manned by conscription and by the end of the sixties met increasingly popular resistance (Macintyre, 1999: 226). One of Whitlam's first actions as Prime Minister was to end conscription and withdraw troops. Boomer children had the privilege of more education and the affluence and security to experiment with challenges to the assumed careful conservatism of their parents. Education and affluence met Australian egalitarianism in the popular ideology of 'the good life' and 'the fair go', and young women and men aspired to more expansive futures than most of their parents had ever dreamed of. Even though Whitlam was not a boomer, the years he presided over felt youthful and optimistic.

The Whitlam era took the ideology of the fair go – the vernacular of social democracy – into new and unmapped territories. As Donald Horne wrote in *The Lucky Country*, "the fair go is what happened in Australia to the ideals of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity" (1964: 20). Of course, the idea of the fair go was gendered. It was clear in 1972 that a lot would have to change before women could feel that the fair go applied equally to the fair sex.

Anne Summers was one of many second wave feminists who did the arduous work of compiling statistics and arguments about Australian women's exclusion from the fair go. For Summers and other radical feminists, the hard facts revealed a situation that inspired a demand for revolutionary change. The percentage of married Australian women at work had increased dramatically in the decade 1961 to 1971, from 9.6 per cent to 18 per cent, with 39.7 per cent working by 1975 (Summers, 1994 [1975]: 477). Most of these women worked part-time and were badly paid (183). In the late sixties, 94.2 per cent of working women remained in the lowest income brackets (164). "The vast majority of the 'poor' are women" and any woman who could not "procure for herself a male provider/protector" risked a life of poverty (163). The attempt to construct a life without the financial security of a partnership with a man was a huge risk for ordinary women. Wages were not equal to men's in real terms. And even after the 1974 National Wage decision granted women an equal minimum wage, in practice women still earned less than men (185). There was a growing conflict between an ideology that still saw women's place as in the home and the economic demands of a consumer culture that increasingly required two incomes for most families to survive. Nor had the infrastructure caught up with the childcare needs of working women.

In 1971, the median age for first marriage was 21 with the first child born within two years. In the mid sixties, Australian journalist and social commentator Craig McGregor had noted that one in three women were pregnant when they married (1966: 69). Illegitimate births increased from 7.88 per cent in 1966 to 9.77 per cent in 1973 (Summers, 1994 [1975]: 226), with many of these children forcibly given up for adoption. The teenage birth rate in 1971 was 55.5 per 1000 of population, the highest on record (Summers, 2003: 29). Contraception was heavily taxed, not allowed to be advertised and prescribed by often paternalistic male doctors who would refuse prescriptions or advice to single women. Abortion was illegal, expensive and dangerous. And before the 1975 Australian Family Law Act established irretrievable breakdown as the ground for divorce it was difficult to leave abusive or unhappy marriages.

The future visions of young women were still focused on husband, family and home. In his study of young Australians in 1969-1970, R.W. Connell found that 72 per cent of young women only expected to work until they had children, nine per cent expected never to work (quoted in Summers, 1994[1975]: 475). By 1972 this discrepancy between expectation and reality had been brought into sharper focus by the activities of many groups of women around Australia (and the West) in the name of 'liberation'. "The range and vitality of Women's Liberation activism in the early 1970s were remarkable, as if years of pent-up energy were being released" (Lake, 1999: 224).

The variety of groupings of women and demands of these years of the second-wave in Australia have been well discussed (see, for example, Lake, 1999; Kaplan, 1996; Burgmann, 1993; Curthoys, 1992). The meaning of liberation was unclear and much debated both within and outside of the burgeoning women's movement. Did it mean equality with men? Recognition of gender difference? Could liberation be achieved via the processes of liberal democracy or through revolution? Could you be part of women's liberation by responding to a few issues – like equal pay or the right to abortion or free child care – or did being a 'Women's Libber' apply only to those who identified with women as a class and subscribed to the whole package of demands? For 'ordinary' non-activist women, did identification with the arguments of women's liberation mean they had to abandon the family and the wife-mother role and the accoutrements of traditional

femininity? The range of arguments and demands were vast and confusing for women not actively involved in the movement, and even for those who were.

In the early years of Women's Liberation there were a number of core demands that could be captured under the umbrella of women's desire for democratic equivalence. The early feminists wanted equality in education, work and pay. They argued about inequalities of gendered labour in the home, and the lack of childcare support that made work outside of the home difficult for mothers. They demanded the right to control pregnancy through readily available abortion and contraception. And the right to legal and economic independence without necessary dependence on a man – the gendered right in effect to the good life. Sexuality was also an early feminist issue. Women demanded the right to determine their sexuality without inevitable presumptions of heterosexuality, the right to safety from male violence in public and private, and the right to sexual pleasure. As we will see, *Cleo* engaged positively and repeatedly with every one of these demands.

Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* was released in Australia over the summer of 1971-1972, and Greer toured to promote the book with much media publicity (Lilburn, Magarey, Sheridan, 2000). Her passionate arguments about the sexual liberation of women and her strong condemnation of the ordinary woman as complicit in her own oppression, "galvanized many women, both feminist and non-feminist" against her (Spongberg, 1993: 412). But it can also be argued that Greer was "the most popularly influential feminist of the entire second wave, at least when it came to inspiring women's delinquency" (Wallace, 2000 [1997]: 284). It wasn't the book so much as the celebrity (Lilburn et al., 2000: 335). Greer turned the characteristics that had defined the female castrate – "timidity, plumpness, languor, delicacy and preciousity" – on their heads, and enacted the opposite (Greer, 1999 [1971]: 17). The ubiquity of her presence in Australian media at the time ensured that some version of feminist ideas were up for popular debate. As Lilburn et al. conclude, "Her presence challenged media representations of women and thus disrupted cultural meanings normally associated with 'woman'... [opening up] a public space in which feminist ideas could be discussed" (336). Greer, 'the saucy feminist even men like' as *The Australian* described her, also cemented the conflation of the liberation of women with sexual liberation in the popular imagination, at a time when feminists were interrogating exactly what sexual freedom for women

might mean under patriarchy. (The connection between Greer, sexual liberation and popular feminism will be discussed further in Chapter Six.)

“It was abundantly clear that society as a whole cared little for women and catered for almost none of their needs” (Kaplan, 1996: 34). Kaplan describes the years 1972 to 1975 as the ‘honeymoon’ years of the women’s movement and the Australian government (34). And Marilyn Lake sees the election of Gough Whitlam as “a sign of the impact of the women’s movement in setting a new political agenda” (1999: 225). During 1972, the Women’s Electoral Lobby (WEL) had campaigned, using mainstream media, to defeat the Liberal Party.

The Whitlam government began to respond to some of the more blatant gender inequalities that could be addressed through policy. In the public service, women were granted equal pay and twelve weeks paid maternity leave. The luxury tax on the contraceptive pill was lifted. In 1973 women’s health centres and refuges were funded. In 1974 Australian women finally received the full adult minimum wage. The no-fault divorce laws were introduced in 1975 and the expansion of the welfare system meant that divorced women (and single women with children) could have a semblance of a financially independent life without financial dependence on men. In 1973, a Prime Ministerial Adviser on Women’s Issues, Elizabeth Reid, was controversially appointed to merge the ideals of social democracy with those of the women’s movement. And so evolved a peculiarly Australian word, the femocrat, as feminist women moved into governmental roles (Dowse, 1988[1983]). Affirmative action policies were introduced within the Labor Party to increase the number of female parliamentarians who, in 1972, comprised just two per cent of members (Kaplan, 1996: 37).

Is it chance, synchrony or one of Hartley’s historically decisive moments that allowed Gough Whitlam and *Cleo* to appear in Australian public life within a month of each other? The Australian Labor Party was elected to office on December 2, 1972. The first issue of *Cleo* came out in November. To make a link between the two may seem to be a movement from the sublime to the ridiculous. But there are convergences between the social democratic ideals of both the Labor Party and *Cleo* magazine under Ita Buttrose – ideals of the fair go given a popular gendered feminist spin. And *Cleo* openly supported Labor, in editorial gestures of overt party political bias that are quite rare in women’s

magazines (especially when they are owned by the Packer family). In her commentary on the nude centrefold of Jack Thompson in that first issue, for example, Buttrose wrote about liberation, permissiveness and double standards, concluding that “It’s time” for a nude male pin-up. “Clever how advertising gets to you isn’t it?” (n/a, 1972a: 82).<sup>11</sup> And curiously, the tenures of Whitlam and Buttrose at their respective helms lasted for almost the same time:

*Cleo* was born during that phase of the women's liberation movement when most women were all for 'liberation' but were not too sure what that meant nor, if achieved, what it would mean for us as women. (Buttrose, 1985: 108)

Many of *Cleo's* potential readers were already embroiled in marriage and motherhood, and the majority had not received the education necessary to make full-time work a fulfilling and meaningful choice. And many, too, were happy with the pleasures of domesticity as either future vision or contemporary reality. There was a collision of discourses in the seventies between the old Australian ‘way of life’ that Horne had written about and the emergent ‘lifestyles’ of consumer culture under post-Fordist capitalism (see Bell and Hollows, 2005: 3-7). The media were full of competing images of how one could ‘be’ a young woman, but to choose the radical embrace of women’s liberation was only one option – and one, we shall see, that was not easy or comfortable for many young women to make. It was within this context of clear inequality, demands for social, cultural and political change, and the domestic and romantic heterosexual fantasies and realities of a woman’s life that *Cleo* had to create a magazine readership.

### Competing for *Cleo*

In her first autobiography, *Early Edition: My First Forty Years'* (1985), Ita Buttrose tells the story of how *Cleo* began. She had been working in England as a 'creative sub editor' for

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<sup>11</sup> ‘It’s time’ was the catchy slogan of Labor’s run for power in 1972. This commentary on Thompson has no by-line in *Cleo*, but in her two autobiographies Buttrose references this column as her own (1985, 1998).

the traditional magazine, *Woman's Own*,<sup>12</sup> one of many educated, intellectual or simply adventurous young Australians who had made the exodus to London in the sixties. In June 1969, Buttrose received a telegram from Sir Frank Packer. "When are you coming back? Eileen Westley leaving." Westley had been the Women's Editor of the *Daily* and *Sunday Telegraph*, Buttrose's old job in Sydney. The telegram continued. "Want you. Don't show this to your husband or my wife. Regards. Frank Packer" (Buttrose, 1985: 85).<sup>13</sup>

By Christmas 1969 Buttrose was back in Sydney, ready to take up whatever offers Packer may have had in mind. The first was to edit the women's sections of the two *Telegraph* newspapers. Buttrose was determined to make the women's pages less trite, "a forum, a place where women could air their views on public affairs affecting their lives and careers and also be entertained and informed" (Buttrose, 1985: 98). The traditional content of the women's pages had been known as the 'four Fs' – family, food, furnishings, and fashion (Harp, 2006: 199).<sup>14</sup>

Having been exposed to the Women's Liberation movement during her time in England, although not actively involved, Buttrose's ideas about women's rights "were more advanced than those of my Australian female colleagues – and a million light years ahead of my male colleagues who wrote off the movement as rat-baggery" (Buttrose, 1985: 98). Although a little dismissive about the female journalists who were struggling to be taken seriously in the pages of Australian newspapers at the time, she was part of a movement in the early seventies to end the 'purdah principle'. Women's issues (the soft news) had traditionally been marginalised and often trivialised in a few tight pages (distinct from the hard news), the separation of the spheres finding graphic embodiment in the lay-out of the papers (Pearce, 1998: 189, Harp, 2006: 199).

Buttrose effected a change in the content and design of the women's pages of the *Telegraph*. Her work impressed Packer and, after proving herself as the Editor of the new

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<sup>12</sup> Not unlike the *Australian Women's Weekly* or *Woman's Day*, Janice Winship refers to *Woman's Own* as being "stuck in the traditional backwoods" of the domestic trade magazine until its transformation in the mid-seventies (1987: 83).

<sup>13</sup> In her second autobiography *A Passionate Life* (1988), Buttrose makes no mention of the telegram.

<sup>14</sup> Donald Horne provides some amusing excerpts about the triteness of the women's pages in the sixties: "A dinner that was just teeming with atmosphere was given by artistic L and A to say 'goodbye, return soon' to R, who leaves Friday for her charming Chelsea house and pet poodle Buttercup" (1964: 75).



*Sunday Telegraph Magazine* (launched in November 1970), Buttrose was lined up to be the inaugural editor of the Australian edition of the successful American young women's magazine, *Cosmopolitan*, just beginning its global expansion. While business negotiations for the licensing rights were underway between Packer's Australian Consolidated Press (ACP) and the publishers of *Cosmopolitan*, the Hearst Corporation, Buttrose gathered a team together to practice their magazine skills by creating 'dummies' (prototypes) for various market segments – teens, men, pictorial and one for women which they called *Cleopatra*.

The late sixties saw the beginnings of niche publishing in the Australian magazine industry, a move away from the generalist titles that had dominated the market. This was especially the case with women's magazines where the differences between women became more closely targeted in the editorial philosophy of the new magazines. As fifties girls became sixties young women in a culture of affluence, rising consumer spending and generational antagonism, and with an emergent post-Fordist manufacturing sector, the identification of differing clusters of readers prompted an explosion of magazine titles designed to appeal to them. Identifying and responding to the social and cultural changes was the new challenge for the magazine industry in the seventies. Creating a readership for the new magazines, one that could be intelligible to the industry, required new modes of categorisation.

Print media publishers had relied on the old A-E socio-economic system of categorising readers, which originated in the UK in 1946. Broadly, an A reader refers to the highest level of income and E refers to the lowest (McKay, 2000: 191). While still used (then and now) as a general pyramid-shaped diagram of the class and income of readers and a broad predictor of their reading and consumption tastes, the A-E system needed refining. Women had been classified by the occupation of the head of the household, who was usually male. The concept of 'market segmentation' was developed as a way to divide these broad socio-economic categories into homogeneous groupings of people connected by particular needs or interests (Smith, 1956). But the segments were still not specific enough to explain the increasing fragmentation of consumers under what some commentators have termed a post-Fordist economy – the shift from standardised mass production to more specialised modes of production – from the late sixties onwards (Aglietta, 1979). Don Slater explains the effect of this shift on marketing practices, away

from standard demographic categories as predictors of consumer taste. "Post-Fordist marketing disaggregates markets and consumption into 'lifestyles', 'niche markets', 'target consumer groups', 'market segments' ... [defined by] cultural meanings which link a range of goods and activities into a coherent image" (Slater, 1997: 191). Within the industries associated with magazines (advertising, marketing, fashion, publishing) the concept of 'lifestyle' entered industry discourses in the sixties as a more precise way to understand and target categories of readers/consumers (Gough-Yates, 2003: 2).

This is not to argue that lifestyles did not exist before this period. The recent collection *Historicizing Lifestyle* (2006), edited by David Bell and Joanne Hollows, provides convincing evidence of how lifestyle "as a concept and as a set of practices has evolved over time, progressively over-writing 'tradition'" and that lifestyle did not "explode onto the social scene" in the 1970s and 1980s because of post-Fordism (Bell and Hollows: 2-3). What I would suggest here is that *the term itself* was put to work in the magazine industry as a way of understanding the social shifts and the demographic niches of potential readerships emerging at this time.

Within the consumer industries 'lifestyle' was, and remains, an umbrella term. Under it lie dozens of different methods for trying to understand consumer behaviour, each vying for influence over the decades. In the seventies, in response to the marketing and advertising need to "put more psychological flesh on the purely geodemographic bones" (Vyncke, 2002: 447), 'psychographics' became a popular concept to help identify the particularities of emergent new lifestyles and identities. Psychographics at this point was based in the personality profile, and refinements beyond it such as AIO measures (activities, interests, opinions) acquired through detailed consumer surveys (448). In magazines at this time we see clear attempts to profile an ideal reader in editorial letters and in advertising campaigns: 'I am that *Cosmo* girl', '*Dolby* is a girl like you'. "We had a lot of fun trying to find out who you are," as Buttrose wrote in her opening editorial for *Cleo* in November 1972 (4).

The Packer empire at Australian Consolidated Press (ACP) was slow to respond to the changes of the sixties. As owners of the most financially successful magazine publishing house in Australia, the Packers were taking a conservative approach to new titles. They sat back and watched, letting imported magazines and local launches from small

publishers do the market research for them. It has been a popular business strategy throughout Australian magazine history to allow imported magazines from Britain or America determine the level of local interest before embarking on the huge investment of launching a new title (Ellis et al., 1971: 15,17). The most influential of these imported magazines for the younger women's market was *Nova*.

*Nova* has been described as “dazzling, impudent, restless ... a magazine of its era” (Grant, 1994: 107), an expression in print of the erotic, cultural and political possibilities offered by sixties London. The background of this magazine lay in a massive report on the state of contemporary society and women's magazines written in 1964. IPC, the large magazine publishing group in the UK, had commissioned Ernest Dichter, from the Institute of Motivational Research in New York, to do the research. Dichter predicted a social and sexual revolution for women and suggested that women's magazines should respond to these changes. The Dichter Report, as it became known, was considered the Holy Grail by the publishing industry in the UK (Barrell and Braithwaite, 1988: 90). Although IPC had commissioned the research for use in their stable of women's magazines, Dichter's insights into the ‘new woman’ were put to most influential use by the Newnes publishing house with the launch of *Nova*. (Within a few years, Newnes was taken over by IPC.)

*Nova* did not have a large circulation. At its height, *Nova* sold only 166,000 in 1966 (Barrell and Braithwaite, 1988: 91), although for an upmarket magazine competing with *Vogue* and *Harper's and Queen*, this circulation was high enough to be profitable. *Nova* was billed as “the new magazine for the new kind of woman”, the woman Dichter had identified as one “with a wide range of interests, an inquiring mind and an independent outlook” (quoted in White, 1970: 223). *Nova*'s design was innovative and the content appealed to ‘class’ advertisers. As elite magazines such as *Vogue* and *Harper's* had long proven, mass circulation was not necessarily the key to profit as long as enough of the right advertisers could be enticed to buy pages. *Nova* appealed to an emerging new category of women who were educated and affluent, had probably married young, were dissatisfied with the limitations of their lives and responsive to the new social movements of the sixties (Grant, 1994: 99). *Nova* applied its progressive politics to issues such as contraception, Vietnam, adultery, homosexuality (as a cover story), the realities of childbirth (with cover photograph), living with men before marriage ... In short, the

kind of popular feminist and socially aware editorial content that *Cleo* was to run throughout the seventies. And Buttrose was working in London at the height of *Nova's* popularity.

*Nova* was designed to shock and it attempted to articulate early the ideas of both sexual and women's liberation. One cover, in May 1968, had a photo of a kohl-eyed young woman, attached to the railings of the Houses of Parliament in London by black leather fists, with cover lines in block capitals: 50 YEARS AFTER THE VOTE; ONLY THE CHAINS HAVE CHANGED (cited in Grant, 1994: 101).<sup>15</sup> The 'condition of women' was a constant in *Nova's* editorial content. In the early days of the women's movement, the magazine was not quite sure what to call this discontent with the position of women and the desire for equality. In February 1968, *Nova* ran a feature by Irma Kurtz entitled 'Mrs John Bull, you stand here today accused of cowardice in the face of emancipation. How do you plead?'<sup>16</sup> The accompanying photo was of another black-eyed beauty, this time handcuffed to a pole (cited in Winship, 1987: 50).

Like an early prototype of *Ms* magazine, "without the energy of the American women's movement behind it" (Grant, 1994: 105), *Nova* was an early example of second wave popular feminism in women's print media. It attempted to explain the dissatisfactions of women with their unequal status in society, without a fully developed feminist analysis to guide it. By 1970 *Nova's* circulation began to drop and the magazine folded in 1975. Janice Winship concluded that *Nova's* failure was 'too much, too soon'. "If the New Woman existed at all in the 1960s she was still at the chrysalis stage ... *Nova's* New Woman did not really exist" (1987: 49,51). For Winship, the truly feminist magazine required an organised feminist movement, and at that point in the UK, organised second wave feminism was in its very early stages. But if she did not exist, the new woman's dreams and dissatisfactions were certainly finding a home in *Nova* and there were enough women who 'did not really exist' in the UK and in Australia to support this magazine and, indeed, to write for it for ten years. Linda Grant concludes that *Nova* was "excavating the foundations for a radical restructuring of the lives of middle class

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<sup>15</sup> This was the same catch-cry that the Women's Liberation Group used on a leaflet to announce their inaugural meeting in January 1970 in Sydney (Lake, 1999: 221).

<sup>16</sup> Irma Kurtz was to be US *Cosmopolitan's* advice columnist from the mid-seventies.

women” (104). Popular feminism in the women’s media was developing alongside the organised women’s movement from the start.

*Nova*’s influence went far beyond its immediate circulation in Britain. For *Cleo*, there were strong influences as well as lessons to be learned from this magazine. Although it is impossible to get figures on the circulation of imported magazines – they are not audited by the Audit Bureau of Circulations which independently records magazine and newspaper sales, and the distributors of imported magazines, Gordon and Gotch, do not keep an archive – *Nova* had a reputation as the magazine of choice for the Australian ‘bad girl’ of the sixties. Sue Rhodes, a Melbourne social columnist insisted that *Nova* was the only magazine for the young ‘bad girl’ to read. In her best-selling 1967 book, *Now You’ll Think I’m Awful* (sub-titled *The Most Outrageous Book*), Rhodes advised:

For your own protection ... treat yourself a subscription to *Playboy* or *Nova* or any other glossy which doesn’t specialise in romantic fiction or ask you to write in and tell what revolting things your kids or husband have said lately. (Rhodes, 1967: 75)

For Rhodes, *Nova* was the ideal reading material for the sexually active, socially questioning, proto-feminist young Australian working woman.<sup>17</sup>

The impact of *Nova* on the Australian magazine market inspired a local imitator four years before the launch of *Cleo*. Gareth Powell, an ex-patriate Welshman, was determined to publish magazines that captured the spirit of ‘swinging London’ in Australia. Powell’s company had published Sue Rhodes’ book as well as *Squire* (1964-1968), an ambitious but under-funded mix of *Esquire* and *Playboy*, and *Chance International* in 1967, an Australianised version of *Penthouse*. In 1968, he launched *Pol*.

*Pol* looked very similar to *Nova* in terms of graphic design. It read like *Nova* with its commitment to ‘star writers’ and lengthy articles on socially provocative issues. Charmian

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<sup>17</sup> The censors found some of the articles in *Nova* disturbing enough to pull out the knife. The June 1966 issue, carrying a feature by Alma Birk entitled ‘The Don Juan Syndrome ... men with Compulsive Sexual Appetites’ was raggedly censored. Not by the Customs Department, but by the distributors Gordon and Gotch who decided to remove pages 65-70. The problem was apparently not the feature so much as the accompanying illustration, a cartoon of a couple lying in bed (Hall, 1970: 74).

Clift, for example, was a regular contributor until her death in 1969. It was glossy, with as many colour pages as the budget would allow and fashion pages clearly pitched at 'groovy' twenty somethings. *Pol* aimed for an educated affluent readership, inner urban rather than suburban, that would appeal to upmarket advertisers. It positioned itself as critical of the traditional domestic magazines that were on offer to Australian women (Smith, 1968: 16-17).

Richard Walsh was *Pol's* first editor, a celebrity radical intellectual within independent publishing circles after his involvement with the controversial *OZ* magazine and its censorship battles a few years before. Walsh wrote that *Pol* would be "a magazine relevant to the changing times, of a standard that has previously only come from overseas. *Pol* is an intelligent magazine which believes that Australian women are interested in more than babies, flower arrangements and the Royal family" (Walsh, 1968: 88).

Powell had realised early that the demographic push of baby boomer women, with more jobs, education and income than ever before, were not being satisfied by the women's magazine titles available at the time. But these were the early years of niche lifestyle publishing and advertisers resisted buying space in magazines with tiny circulations appealing to market fragments. Without the financial backing to carry the costs until a large or clearly defined circulation and readership is established, most small publishers get swallowed. This is what happened to *Pol*. But it was not Packer's ACP that stepped in to take over.

In the 1970s, the Sydney-based magazine publishing house Sungravure had embarked on an expansion to become a major publisher of women's magazines in Australia. At the start of 1970, it published just four titles, *Woman's Day*, *Pix*, *People* and *Electronics Australia*. After research into the as-yet untapped female teenage market, being serviced by imports such as *Honey* from the UK and *19* from the US, Sungravure launched the highly successful *Dolly* magazine later that year.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> After an initial target of 75,000, *Dolly* quickly settled at a circulation (sales) of 140,000 (Mason, 1973: 31).

Sungravure acquired *Pol* early in 1972. Philip Mason, its Marketing Director at the time, was very aware of the new concept of 'lifestyle' and its potential for magazines. Mason called it "the lifestyle pay-off", and explained to the readers of *B&T*, the advertising and marketing industry weekly, the potential of the dramatic social changes for young women and for the magazines they might want to read. There was "a new kind of woman emerging all over the world ... the emancipated feminist was beginning to show her feathers. She was not yet accepted by the world at large, although there was little doubt in our view that she was going to be pretty soon" (Mason, 1973: 30). *Pol* became the vehicle. With the coup of enticing Germaine Greer to edit the re-launch issue in May 1972, Sungravure quadrupled the circulation of *Pol* from 16,000 to 80,000. As Mason wrote, "who better to place us firmly in this market but the most famed feminist of all – Australia's very own Germs" (30). *Pol*'s remarkable rise in circulation clearly proved that feminist content was going to resonate with readers. For an editor like Buttrose, well aware of her competition and its sales, the success of *Pol*'s feminist issue could not but be integrated into her vision for Packer's new magazine, still in the early months of planning. At this point, early in 1972, Packer was still in negotiations with Hearst for the licensing rights for an Australian version of *Cosmopolitan*. ACP was not yet aware how tough the competition from the upstart publisher, Sungravure, was going to be.

Not content with *Pol* as the only Sungravure title to appeal to young Australian women, Mason oversaw the launch of *Belle* in May 1972. His strategy was to capture those aspirational readers for whom *Pol*'s wordy mix of high and counter-cultural gloss did not appeal, for whom *Vogue* was too staid and upper class, and for whom the traditional service magazines of their mother's generation, such as the *Australian Woman's Weekly*, *Woman's Day* and *New Idea* were simply irrelevant.

*Belle* used psychographics to profile the young woman who "wanted to lead a smart, elegant, sophisticated life", who was "aware of the good life". She was not that concerned about her own career. Her life "revolved around a good marriage or partnership (she wouldn't be too fussed by the legalities of her association) and good looks for her home, herself and her family" (Mason, 1973: 31). *Belle* was described as a lifestyle magazine, full of fashion, interior design, food, wine, travel, personality profiles and the odd feature about social issues. Basically, the *Belle* woman had money via her partner and she wanted to express her affluent identity by spending it.

Although *Belle* launched with a healthy (that is, profitable) circulation of 70,000, it was not to last; not with this editorial brief. The niche Mason had identified – the woman less concerned with her career and independent identity than with defining herself via a lifestyle financed by her partner’s income – was not an appealing fantasy for young women for very long. It seems that Mason’s “emancipated feminist” was showing her feathers sooner than anticipated. *Cleo* and *Cosmo* were about to address a slightly different take on this niche, with far more emphasis on female independence in work, income, sexuality and identity and in *Cleo*’s case, more overt feminism. By the mid-seventies *Belle* had to change its editorial pitch to continue in the marketplace.<sup>19</sup> Psychographics was showing its limitations as a marketing methodology as readers resisted their definition by *Belle* (Vyncke, 2002: 447).

Within the space of a few startling years, the landscape of women’s magazines in Australia had transformed dramatically. For decades, options had been limited to the traditional big three service magazines (and their imitators) and the upper class fantasies of *Vogue*. By 1973, the young Australian ‘new woman’ could begin her magazine reading with *Dolly*, then move on to a choice of new local titles such as *Cleo*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Belle*, *Pol*, *Flair*, or *Beaut*, all vying for her loyalty. Or she could follow the reading habits of her mother, with *Vogue*, *AWW*, *Woman’s Day* or *New Idea*. This decade saw the beginnings of a proliferation of women’s magazine titles that has not stopped, always trying to articulate specific ways of being female rather than a generalised vision of womanhood. Differences within the category ‘woman’ were what the market – and readers – demanded, although the differences that could be represented on the page were usually limited by the possibility of advertisers seeing the consumer potential there. Magazines learnt early – before, in fact, the women’s movement – that it was becoming impossible to speak for all women. And in the rapidly expanding women’s magazine market, Sungravure showed itself to be responsive to the changes and a rival to Packer’s ACP. So it was perhaps not a surprise that Hearst should choose Sungravure as the publishing house best equipped to make a success of *Cosmopolitan*.

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<sup>19</sup> To continue, the magazine had to become a more specifically aspirational consumer lifestyle guide focused on the designer home, in the manner of *Vogue Living*.



At ACP dreams were going up in smoke. Kerry Packer (and Clyde Packer too for a short time) had taken over many of their father's responsibilities. Sir Frank Packer was to die in 1974. But the plan to license *Cosmopolitan* for the Australian market had been Kerry Packer's vision for a modernised magazine company. It was an angry Mr. Packer that Buttrose met with in mid-1972:

His office was filled with nicotine fumes. Having broken the news of the disaster to me he sat silent, glaring into space and smoking away like an incinerator. I waited ... dismayed and disappointed. Kerry broke the silence. "Have you got a magazine upstairs that we can do?" I got the *Cleopatra* dummy and showed it to him. Smiling for the first time that day he said, "Right. We'll publish this one. I want it on the streets six months before the first Australian edition of *Cosmo* comes out." (Buttrose, 1985: 107)

It was a huge financial risk for a readership that was far from certain. J. Walter Thompson, the traditional advertising agency for ACP at that time, had conducted focus groups based on the dummy magazine, *Cleopatra*. The "progressive women" gathered together as representatives of the potential target market (aged between 20 and 45), were not impressed. They didn't even like the name. The agency's advice was not to go ahead. Buttrose tells the story:

Kerry gave me the bad news in his office. Again he was smoking. I couldn't speak: was my dream of being a magazine Editor over? Finally I managed to ask, "What do we do now?" He said, "Nothing. Take this upstairs and hide it." He handed me the research report and added, "Don't tell anyone ... especially my father". (108)

The only advice Buttrose and Packer did take from the market research was to change the title. Thus *Cleo*.

To make matters worse, a new report from the George Patterson agency was in circulation during 1972, informing manufacturers, publishers and marketing industries about the "opinions, attitudes and experiences of women living in every social condition" in Australia. Australian women were the main shoppers and consumers, representing 80

per cent - 100 per cent of their business (Patterson, 1972: 1). The main conclusion of the report was that the Australian woman was "average" and more than a little nervous about Women's Liberation:

Average is an important and deeply emotional Australian word; it is a word they use a lot. To be average is to belong to a 'club' whose members share the common bonds involved in simply being a wife and mother. (Patterson, 1972: 1)

The average Australian woman was a mother "and her whole life revolves around this basic role". Her home and security were other identifiers, "expressed as the desire for a steady income, a husband and his life insurance, children, and the symbol of security, one's own home" (3).

In the section of the report on Women's Liberation - a subject that received recurrent mention throughout this conservative portrait of the female nation - the general consensus was negative:

A lot of housewives feel that they would be better off without Women's Lib. They would like to dismiss it as a passing fad but they can't ... it is like a tide overtaking them ... resentment is a widespread reaction ... a threat to their right to find fulfilment as housewives and mothers ... making them feel guilty and inadequate. (239-240)

Packer and Buttrose chose to ignore *The Patterson Report* as well. But the research did suggest that *Cleo* would have to be cautious with its feminism and not ignore its "average" housewife/mother readers. In this, *Cleo* had done its homework. Despite, or perhaps because of, the sexual revolution of the sixties, the marriage rate for women in the early seventies was one of the highest in Australia's history and occurring on average at the age of 21. Most women were having their first child within two years of marriage (Matthews, 1984: 112). Feminist-inspired editorial had clearly worked for *Nova* and *Pol*, but those magazines were targeting a much smaller segment of the potential female readership. *Cleo's* ambitions were bigger and more mainstream. So were *Cosmopolitan's*.

## “You need iridescent gold eye shadow”: the *Cosmopolitan* challenge

While *Cleo* may have offered itself on the newsstands as a separate entity, this text is far from closed. It took shape within a particular genre and carried elements of other magazines – formats for stories, concepts, content (intratexts) – between its covers. Magazines are conceived and made with a clear awareness of the content and target market of their competitors. This is part of the job description of not just the marketing and advertising arms of a magazine, but also of editorial staff (McKay, 2006: 50). Just as *Cleo* was conceived with a knowledge of the appeal and failings of *Nova* and *Pol*, it was also planned under pressure, knowing that *Cosmopolitan* was about to launch in Australia, that it had to beat it to the newsstands – that *Cleo* could have been *Cosmopolitan* if Hearst had not given the license to Sungravure. *Cleo* had to imagine itself as the main competition to a magazine it had only seen in imported form, not knowing exactly what shape Australian *Cosmo* would take.

It is a delicate art to conceive a new magazine, especially so in the early seventies when many women’s expectations of the genre woman’s magazine had been dominated by the content and look of traditional titles. The sixties in Australia had been a time of cultural and social ferment, and *Cleo* wanted to speak to the young women who had been affected by these changes without alienating their more conservative readership. How far could the editorial team go with feminism before mainstream readers would rebel? How could *Cleo* mark its territory amongst a similar reader demographic about to be bombarded by the *Cosmopolitan* juggernaut? How could it pre-empt *Cosmo* without looking exactly like *Cosmo*?

All the *Cleo* editorial team had to go on were imported copies of American *Cosmopolitan* and a glimpse of the extraordinary success of the launch of the British version in March 1972. There the magazine had sold out its first print-run of 350,000 copies in a single day. The second issue of 450,000 copies sold out within two days (Grant, 1994: 124). The editorial recipe was closely modeled on Helen Gurley Brown’s US *Cosmopolitan*, a dated title revamped under her editorship in 1965 in dramatic contrast to traditional women’s magazines. Brown’s 1962 bestseller, *Sex and the Single Girl*, the blueprint for *Cosmo*, pointed to one of the differences. Where the *Ladies Home Journal* was still advising young women to say no to sex until marriage, Brown’s advice was to say yes (Brown, 1962:

203). In fact, she referred to the magazines that were still extolling the appeal of virginity then early marriage, domesticity, children and no paid work as “a right royal pain in the ass” (5). The sexual double standard made Brown fume and she spent the next thirty years as editor of *Cosmo* fighting against it.

*Sex and the Single Girl* was a manual “not on how to get married but how to stay single in superlative style” (11):

You may marry or you may not. In today's world that is no longer the big question for women. Those who glom [sic] onto men so that they can collapse with relief, spend the rest of their days shining up the status symbol and figure they never have to reach, stretch, learn, grow, face dragons or make a living again are the ones to be pitied. (267)

Brown's ‘philosophy’, repeated in books, columns and media interviews, suggested that the aim of sex was *not* to force a man into marriage. Nor was it something a woman only indulged in when she was in love. Romantic love barely got a mention in *Sex and the Single Girl*. In 1962, it was a radical move to stake space for sex in the mainstream as a pleasurable amusement for women, rather than sex as a means or precursor to marriage. Indeed, in America in the sixties, sex before marriage could still be a way to ruin a girl's reputation and spoil her exchange rate on a marriage market that prized virginity, or a semblance of it. It was a difficult negotiation for many women, lasting well beyond the sixties. “Even as the erotic seemed to permeate American life, white middle class America struggled to maintain sexual boundaries” (D’Emilio and Freedman, 1988: 277). Susan Douglas suggests that Brown's book “created a sensation because it put the words sex and single girl in bed together in the very same phrase, in direct violation of 1950s legion of decency morality ... even married people on TV had to have twin beds ...” (1995: 68).

In Australia, the situation was similar. Shifts away from sexual puritanism and the sexual double standard were underway in both countries, but as Craig McGregor wrote at the time:

This sexual Puritanism is breaking down and nowhere more so than among the modish, affluent generation ... the very young, especially, are throwing off the moral restrictions of adult society and replacing them with a far more easy-going, less guilt-ridden attitude towards sex. (1966: 66)

The sexual landscape was changing. While Brown's manifesto met with much resistance, she was also articulating a shift in the everyday life of American sexual culture. The power of her books and her magazine, was to break down the connections between sex/shame, sex/love and sex/marriage in extremely clear language.

Brown has been accused of simply providing willing playmates for the new playboys. "Men in search of sex free of the obligations of matrimony found a welcome ally in Helen Gurley Brown" (D'Emilio and Freedman, 1988: 303). It was a philosophy that fitted perfectly with a strong current that flowed through the fifties and sixties. Barbara Ehrenreich has explained the appeal of *Playboy* at that time as a fantasy expressing many men's resistance to the breadwinner role and their resentment at being the sole source of the 'family wage'. *Playboy* exhorted its readers to "enjoy the pleasures the female has to offer without being emotionally involved – or, of course, financially involved" (Ehrenreich, 1983: 47). A round table discussion at *Playboy* in 1962 after the publication of Brown's best-seller, published as 'The Womanization of America', revealed a large degree of anxiety about this sexual fantasy made flesh. Alexander King, an editor at *Life* magazine, argued:

The assumption that a woman is supposed to get something out of her sexual contact ... has been carried too far. I haven't the slightest doubt that this absolute, unquestioned equality is a great mistake and in violation of all natural laws. It is a mistake because democracy is all right politically, but it's no good in the home. (quoted in Allyn, 2000: 21)

Helen Gurley Brown regarded the woman whose main focus in life was to exist off a male income, avoiding the challenges and rewards of the workplace, as a parasite. By working hard, not just on her beauty and her sexual allure but for financial independence through paid employment, the *Cosmo* girl could shatter the image of the girl with her "nose pressed to the glass" (quoted in Ouelette, 1999: 360). This was a recurrent motif in

Brown's work – teaching women how to 'pass' through the glass into the middle class world of the American Dream.

The *Cosmo* girl seemed to be *Playboy's* fantasy woman – except that the *Cosmo* girl was an active subject with plans of her own. Joan Didion described *Sex and the Single Girl* as a self-help guide “for the girl who doesn't have anything going for her ... who's not even pretty, who maybe didn't go to college, and who may not even have a decent family background” (quoted in Ouelette, 1999: 361). The *Cosmo* message was not for rich girls or counter-cultural girls or intellectuals of the sexual revolution, this was a message for those Brown called the “mouseburgers”, the poor girls from Arkansas transformed as Brown herself had been through hard work, beauty and fashion regimes and saying a pleasurable 'yes' to sex. *Cosmopolitan* promised to lift its readers if not beyond class, at least into that middle class world where the markers of class were no longer something to escape from. It was a map of the signifiers of middle class success – Bourdieu's 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1984). We are in the murky territory of the lower middle class, that awkward non-identity, full of the “messy, contradictory amalgam of symbolic practices, structures of feeling, and forms of life” that Rita Felski describes so eloquently (Felski, 2000: 35). It is the social and cultural space no one wants to occupy and no one, left or right, defends (Hartley, 1996: 161). *Cosmo* offered this girl a way out of the “mingy decency” (Felski, 2000: 35) of her class position, the respectability and frugality coloured by a fear of shame and the struggle to keep up appearances.

The appearances the *Cosmo* girl struggled for were the signifiers of the successful, glamorous, sexy young woman. “Nobody likes a poor girl,” wrote Brown:

She is just a drag. It does take money to be successfully single ... to create an aura of seductive elegance about you so no one will ever be able to feel sorry for you ... Don't spend a sou on anything you don't need. But you *need* iridescent gold eye shadow. (Brown, 1962: 104, 106)

Brown was serious. After spending her disposable income on beautification and an apartment of her own, the working girl was encouraged to find multiple men to date. For lunch, dinner, holidays, men – and not necessary single ones – would pay. Going dutch

was out. Richer men could help a girl on her way up in a way that poorer men could not. “She prefers a tycoon to a truck driver no matter how sexy the latter looks” (227).

The *Cosmo* girl was not encouraged to have sex with just anyone. “Brown’s promotion of sex was discursively linked to her mobility credo” (Ouellette, 1999: 370). *Cosmo*’s sexual liberation wasn’t a pursuit of unrepressed sexuality as a Marcusean escape from the control of eros under capitalism – this was sexuality in the service of capitalism. For the single working girl, good sex required technical knowledge and a loss of shame, but it also required high consumption. To be sexually desirable to classier men, the *Cosmo* girl had to spend her hard-earned income on the classed signs of beauty and culture.

“I am a materialist, and it is a materialistic world.” No, not Madonna, but Helen Gurley Brown to *Time* magazine in 1965 (quoted in Ouellette, 1999: 359). The sexually liberated *Cosmo* girl was bound up in consumer culture. She was not the self-sacrificing woman. The *Cosmo* girl put herself first, enjoyed consumption and the pleasures of self-creation and re-creation through beauty and fashion practices and the attentions of men this would bring. The *Cosmo* girl was not her mother. It was not just second wave feminists who were rejecting the traditional femininities of their mother’s generation but for the *Cosmo* girl these rejections were self-focused and actively heterosexual. And she was crafting her rejection outside of a collective politics of the fight against gender inequality. Her ‘liberation’ was individualistic and segued perfectly into an environment of accelerating post-Fordist consumer capitalism.

The appeal of *Cosmo*’s discourse was that its aspirational reader was encouraged not just to open the window and claim the lifestyle on the other side, but to look up as well. Using hard work and sexual wiles, the *Cosmo* girl was encouraged to smash the glass ceiling of the workplace. Even more than she valorised sex and the company of men, Brown valued work, ambition and success for women. In *Sex and the Office* (1964), the sequel to the 1962 bestseller, Brown cajoled her readers into the economic independence and personal satisfaction that work could bring – and the bonus of the range of quality men they could come into contact with. Because Brown made no distinction between married and unmarried men as potential targets for sexual affairs, the book terrified married women reliant on their husband’s financial and marital commitment (Berebitsky, 2006: 112-113). If men could use the workplace as a site for sexual conquest, so could

women. It was Brown railing against the sexual double standard once more. In her open acknowledgement of the erotics of the workplace – and her advice that women exploit this to their own advantage – women were no longer the God’s police of workplace respectability, controlling the wayward sexual desires of men. Before sexual harassment was recognised legally or discursively, Brown blithely ignored the suffering many women endured at work and devised her own solution. Women could play men at their own game. Female sexuality could be powerful, and Brown encouraged women to use it during working hours:

In a work culture that presumed the subordination of women was not only natural but essential to the smooth running machinery of capitalist enterprises Brown’s visions of ambitious sexual women threatened to reorder the office in a way that possibly benefited women. (Berebitsky, 2006: 95)

In Berebitsky’s analysis, Brown was also advocating something more deeply provocative. She “redesigned the sexual landscape of the white-collar world, troubling the line that divided public and private behaviour and dismantling the obstructions that constrained women’s sexual agency” (95). And it was this book, not *Sex and the Single Girl*, which was classified under the Dewey system in America as pornography (Ouelette, 1999: 375).

Helen Gurley Brown developed a kind of popular feminism, a tactical response before theorists of the second wave could strategically explain the workings of patriarchy and the structural bases of women’s oppression. And Brown actually identified as a feminist, much to the disgust of the movement. In 1965 Betty Friedan called Brown’s oeuvre “obscene and horrible” (quoted in Ouelette, 1999: 361), although the pair were apparently to become friends and Brown joined NOW, marching in the Strike for Equality in 1970 (Scott, 2005: 248). Ironically, even though Brown was marching, the organisers demanded a boycott of four consumer products whose advertising was deemed degrading to women: Silva Thins cigarettes, Ivory Liquid, Pristeen (the feminine hygiene spray) and *Cosmopolitan* magazine (Douglas, 1994: 177). This was the second time *Cosmopolitan* had been publicly targeted as a symbol of women’s oppression, having been thrown into the freedom trashcan along with *Playboy* at the 1968 demonstration against the Miss America Pageant (Bailey, 2004: 110-111). Brown remained an outsider for contemporary feminists.



Rather than providing a structural analysis of patriarchy, Brown advocated a good dose of optimism, liberalism and individual hard work. Janice Winship, for example, argued that *Cosmo* “is about ‘I’ rather than ‘we’” (1987: 120):

It is as though personally solving sexual problems provided the panacea to women’s equality: a ‘sexual liberation’ ideology still has its echoes. It is an element of individual effort also which, whether on the sexual or work front, centrally characterises *Cosmo*’s feminism. (114-115)

Brown’s magazine was accused of playing into patriarchy’s hands, encouraging women to consciously construct themselves as sex objects skilled in the arts of pleasing men. While “redefining what is desirable in a woman [*Cosmo* still offered] the reader an idea of femininity as a goal to be worked for and understood women as objects of male desire” (Ballaster et al., 1991: 124). *Cosmo* encouraged women’s insecurities and idealised a femininity based in consumerism and sexism (McCracken, 1993: 13). Winship also found *Cosmopolitan* full of “contradiction”, that “real life is constantly thought through ‘dream’ images” (110). But as Catharine Lumby has argued, “When we read magazines, we consume images ... our desires – our very sense of self – are increasingly modelled on the logic of images” (1997a: 80). This apparent contradiction, this positing of real life against the image, may well not be a contradiction at all. It may be the way we *experience* reality.

There are other ways to read *Cosmopolitan*, beyond the familiar arguments of second wave-inspired critics. For Brown, the lottery of birth was not fate, in terms of either class or physical appearance. There was no essence to the self; the surface was all. Brown was making articulate something women had sensed if not consciously known all along – that femininity was nothing if not cultural, a performative construct of potential exchange but also a site of self pleasure. In a way, Brown was advocating the democratisation of beauty, making explicit the tricks and tactics for any woman who cared to read her magazine, a model for the makeover format that saturates television screens and magazines now.

Hilary Radner has argued that the ever-changing feminine identities advocated by *Cosmo* provided a pleasure for women that existed *outside* of the masculine gaze:

[It is a] narcissistic investment that produces the moment of pleasure ... generated outside the scene of heterosexuality ... The woman reproduces, not another, or for another, but herself for herself. (1995: xi,xiii)

There may well have been self-pleasure in the construction of a self as beautiful subject/object. But having men notice, and benefiting from their largesse (as well as enjoying the sex) was part of the pleasure too.

When it came to female sexuality, critical feminists have argued that the uber-heterosexuality of *Cosmo* was simply liberating women for easy availability to a male definition of female desire (Ballaster et al., 1991: 38). Ouelette suggests that this male sexual gaze was classed as wealthy, so that the sexual desire of the *Cosmo* girl “was linked to what the male object represented socially and economically”, encouraging her to almost prostitute herself as a means to upward mobility (1999: 371-372).

Brown’s motivations were completely in synch with consumer capitalism and with the *Playboy* desire to avoid matrimony and financial responsibility for a family, but this does not erase the radical challenge to the double standard and the imperative to marry early and reproduce that were normative for women at the time. The genius of *Cosmo* – as evidenced by its successful global expansion in 47 titles at the time of writing – was to make a magazine for the girl with not much money, teach her how to earn it and spend it on the creation of a self that would make her feel glorious and be sexually appealing to men, to remain in control of that self as ‘sex object’ – indeed, to gain subjective and shameless pleasure from her performance as sex subject/object.

It was a fantasy discourse as much as it was grounded in real social and economic changes for women. In the decade from 1962 in the US, there was a 45 per cent increase in the number of working women and the majority of these entered the relatively low-paid pink collar (secretarial and clerical) industries (Ouelette, 1999: 362). Life for the *Cosmo* reader in the sixties and seventies was not going to be easy without a financial partner, nor was remaining gloriously single forever a desire many women shared.

Women also had to negotiate the contradictory discourses of sexual freedom and sexual purity:

If, as most believed, a woman's future status and material well-being depended on marriage to a successful man, she was in a difficult position. She must be sexually alluring ... while maintaining her marriage-ability through a 'good reputation'. (Bailey, 2004: 116)

And in fact, a large percentage of *Cosmo's* readers were already married (Ouelette, 1999: 379), which bolsters the reading of *Cosmo* as a fantasy space as much as a how-to guide. Children were absent from the pages of *Cosmopolitan*, but not absent from its readers' vision of their future lives. For young single women in the sixties and seventies, without equal pay or an education that allowed them a career with a clear path to the top, trying to make an independent life in a culture based on consumption and the ethos of success, not to mention expectations of motherhood, the full *Cosmo* philosophy was going to remain a fantasy for most. It suited advertisers and appealed to millions of women at a time, but the 'sexy, single girl' was a phase, even a dream or a fantastical solace, not a life plan. Magazines, to state the obvious, are not a map of reality. They are the projections of desire. When Joke Hermes conducted her study into how women use magazines, she concluded that their stories "do not necessarily reflect what they do with magazines, but rather what they may wish to do or what they have fantasies of doing" (1995: 40).

Gloria Steinem argued in 1992 that *Cosmo* was "the unliberated woman's survival kit, with advice on how to please a man, lover or boss under any circumstances and 'in a metaphysical sense' how to smile all the time" (quoted in Siegel, 2002: 6). But it was a survival kit devised at a time before feminism had begun to fight for the social and legislative changes that could provide many ordinary women with a life that looked more like liberty, equality and a chance at the pursuit of happiness on their own terms. In any case, aspirational lifestyle magazines almost always smile, that is part of the fantasy they provide and their mechanism for communicating with readers. This type of media is an example of what John Hartley has called the "smiling professions" (1992: 10). He argues that "the very existence of the supposedly trivial, corrupting, sensationalist media" provokes a continuing moral outrage amongst those in institutions of education, government and within the hierarchies of media itself (120). The next step in this

argument for those who suffer such moral outrage, and as Steinem's critique goes on to develop (and as *Ms*, the magazine she edited, attempted), is a demand for radical overhaul to remove the incessant smiling and get some serious frowning back into the pages.

*Cleo*, however, was caught in the middle. Magazine staff are not immune from the discourse of moral outrage that permeates the 'higher' reaches of the journalistic profession. Indeed, Buttrose did her journalistic training in newspapers. She wanted *Cleo* to be regarded as promoting serious journalism as well as attracting and holding readers by lighter-hearted 'smiling' images and features. In its mixing of serious and lighter journalism, *Cleo* challenged the perpetual smile of *Cosmo* as the first point of difference in its struggle to mark a distinct space in the market. Beneath the glossy (and sometimes) smiling cover, the magazine Buttrose and her staff were devising was not afraid to frown. Even leisure and pleasure, the reading space of consumer magazines, are not without their serious moments. Disturbing the boundaries – private and public, soft and hard, personal and political, smiling and frowning – is a cross-genre media brew that women's magazines have had in their cauldrons from the beginning (Shevelow, 1989; Conboy, 2004: Chapter Seven), the early decades of the *Australian Women's Weekly* being a relatively recent example (Sheridan et al., 2002: 3-4). Indeed, the belief that magazines are soft and newspapers hard is without much historical weight. The influence of the furrowed brow came from a long tradition in women's magazines, but directly for *Cleo* from the socially critical and culturally engaged journalism of *Nova* and *Pol*. These magazines showed how it was possible to package serious journalism in glossy layouts that spoke to a new readership of young women.

*Cleo* borrowed as well from the lighter, sexier fare of *Cosmopolitan*. As will be explored in the following chapters, *Cleo* too catered for the 'sexy single girl' and it even pilfered the concept of the nude male centrefold that US *Cosmo* had pioneered. But there were a number of differences. Sex as overt social mobility was not on the *Cleo* agenda. Nor was being 'on the make', using sex as a form of gold digging. *Cleo*, like *Cosmo*, wanted to remove the shame from unmarried sex, and even separate it from romantic love, but there was a feminist intent as well, as Chapter Six will explore.

*Cleo* remained aware that half its readers were married and provided editorial content that would speak to their interests. Like *Cosmo*, it encouraged its readers to work, although

with little emphasis on the men to be seduced there. There were enough beauty and fashion pages to satisfy advertisers, but in the seventies at least, nowhere near the amount of thinly-disguised advertorial and product placement apparent in *Cosmo's* editorial. The major point of difference for *Cleo* was its coverage of overtly feminist issues. The private sphere had always been the editorial domain of women's magazines. But *Cleo* politicised many of the inequalities and oppressions to be found there, as we shall see, and with a depth and questioning that *Cosmo* did not match.

If *Cosmo* was "liberation with the politics sucked out of it" as Linda Grant has argued (109), *Cleo* was liberation with the politics installed. And in the marketplace of the seventies, *Cleo* was the magazine young Australian women found more appealing. But for second wave feminist readers in the seventies, the two magazines were identically glossy evil twins.

### 3. DISCURSIVE DISGUST: THE SECOND WAVE AND WOMEN'S MAGAZINES

*Whenever the cultural tastes and practices of some people disgust and offend others, there can be little doubt that we are in the presence of the political.*

(Glynn, 2000: 9)

Most second wave feminists didn't much like women's magazines, new or old. Distaste is almost too polite for some of the opinions they expressed. In fact, disgust would not be too strong a term. Given the argument that will be developed throughout this thesis, that the new women's magazines emerged as a media site where feminism developed concurrently with the second wave, this disgust needs to be investigated. The intention is not to cast more slurs upon second wave feminism as wilfully blind to the feminist possibilities of popular women's culture, as something "horrible" as Charlotte Brunson puts it (2005: 112), but to ask why this standoff occurred.<sup>20</sup>

This chapter will explore the discursive and historical bases of the anti-magazine arguments of the second wave. Discourses are not free-floating. There was a convergence of historical conditions that allowed Women's Liberation to coalesce around discourses opposed to consumer culture, to the excesses of capitalism and its co-optive ideologies, and to the seductive power of advertising. Commercial women's magazines were seen to encapsulate all of these forces of 'oppression'. They were, I will argue, seen as the representative genre of not just traditional femininities – the 'mother' who had to be disavowed, inside and out – but of the dangers of 'mass culture'.<sup>21</sup> This convergence of discursive soundtracks in more radical second wave arguments made it difficult to regard women's magazines as a potential ally or as a media genre to

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<sup>20</sup>Brunson has identified what she calls the "Ur feminist article" that submits a text from popular women's genres, which would normally "fail" the test of an "obvious feminist reading", to a fresh postfeminist reading. The analyst reveals "the complex and contradictory ways in which the text – and the heroine – negotiate the perilous path of living as a woman in a patriarchal world". Her adversary lies not just within the text but also with the censorious second-wave feminists "who will not let her like the story and ... the accoutrements of femininity" (Brunson, 2005: 112-113).

<sup>21</sup> There is a substantial literature on right and left fears of mass culture. See, for example, Carey (1992), Goodall (1995) and Hartley (2003). This fear will be explored further on in this chapter.

communicate the new ideas of liberation. It didn't matter how much the new magazines broadcast (or narrowcast) feminist ideas, the channel was always going to be wrong.

The second wave of feminism was partly forged in the crucible of hostility towards women's magazines and their readers. Despite many of the internal differences within the groupings of the second wave, there was almost a consensus formed in a shared antagonism towards traditional femininities and their expressions in popular media. As Brunsdon explains:

The most 'movement' moment of second-wave Western feminism in the late 1960s/early 1970s is a moment partly formed in and through a repudiation of conventional and traditional femininities and their appropriate genres. (2000: 21)

There was, however, a particular focus on commercial women's magazines. The irony – and perhaps this is what grated with feminist activists so much – was that feminism and women's magazines shared a potential demographic. In many ways, women's magazines were the ideal media genre for communicating feminist ideas, as the eruption of the independent feminist periodicals of the seventies attest.<sup>22</sup> For a movement that wanted to speak to and for all women, the magazine was the media vector above all others with the potential to engage specifically and directly with this constituency. After all, women's magazines had been one of the channels of communication for the feminist ideas of the first wave (Sheridan, 1995a). Because of their traditional potential to engage with issues of the private and public sphere, because of the intense and loyal female readerships magazines created, using this media format would seem to be an obvious strategy for spreading the word. Instead, the second wave responded to commercial women's magazines with extreme antagonism. There was a "structure of feeling" at work (Williams, 1977: 131-132), not just ideological disagreement but felt disgust. It is a highly charged response that calls for exploration.

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<sup>22</sup> Gisela Kaplan counted 200 independent feminist magazines and journals that were published in Australia between the 1970s and 1990s (Kaplan, 1996: 37).

## 'She's leaving home' (The Beatles)

Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) had laid down the template. Friedan identified women's magazines as a primary force perpetuating "the problem with no name" – women's dissatisfaction and their invisibility in the public sphere. Magazines like *McCall's*, *Redbook* and *Ladies' Home Journal* in the United States of the fifties had narrowed "women's world down to the home" and "truncated women's minds" (1963: 58). The fact that Friedan had written for these magazines (and that early article versions of *The Feminine Mystique* submitted to magazines had been rejected) gave her insights the glow of almost religious conversion:

I helped to create this image. I have watched American women for fifteen years try to conform to it. But I can no longer deny my own knowledge of its terrible implications. It is not a harmless image. There may be no psychological terms for the harm it is doing. But what happens when women try to live according to an image that makes them deny their minds? What happens when women grow up in an image that makes them deny the reality of the changing world? (59)

In almost every chapter, the spectre of the women's magazine and its advertisers haunts Friedan's arguments:

... it is their millions which blanket the land with persuasive images, flattering the American housewife, diverting her guilt and disguising her growing sense of emptiness ... If they are not solely responsible for sending women home, they are surely responsible for keeping them there. (200-201)

It was not that Friedan rejected the home entirely – "Love and children and home are good, but they are not the whole world, even if most of the words now written for women pretend they are" (59) – but that a life spent in care for others had stunted women's identity, keeping them "in an immaturity that has been called femininity" (68). Young women needed better images and better role models to help them form a mature identity as self-actualised women (61-70).



Recent historical work has questioned just how successfully hegemonic these fifties magazine discourses of the happy housewife heroine actually were. Surveying a broader range of American mass-circulation magazines in the fifties, Joanne Meyerowitz found that “domestic ideals co-existed in ongoing tension with an ethos of individual achievement that celebrated non-domestic activity, individual striving, public service, and public success” (1993: 1458). She argued that there were contradictory discourses in play in the very magazines Friedan blamed for the perpetuation of the feminine mystique. The magazines were evidence of the *tensions* women were experiencing between the private and public, not a singular celebration of domesticity. In fact, Friedan “drew on mass culture as much as she countered it. The success of her book stemmed in part from her compelling elaboration of familiar themes” (1458). The research of Eva Moskowitz came to a similar conclusion. “[Friedan’s] discovery of ‘a strange discrepancy between the reality of our lives and the image to which we are trying to conform’ was one women’s magazines had been making for years” (1996: 73). Indeed, she argued that magazines had often presented the domestic home as “a deadly battlefield on which women lost their happiness”.

In Australia, John Murphy’s work on magazines in the fifties also notes a persistent subcurrent of the “more chafing limits to domesticity, often described under the rubric of ‘suburban neurosis’ as women’s dissatisfaction, fragmentation, boredom and loss” (2000: 45). He cites an article in a 1953 issue of *Woman’s Day and Home*, where author Nan Hutton writes of “the homemaker’s complaint”. She was sick of “the heroine of [her] housekeeping manual”, a creature of “grim perfection” (46). Murphy argues that by the late 1950s, Australia had achieved a kind of stability with economic prosperity, low inflation and unemployment that lasted until the early seventies. It marked “the limits of domesticated citizenship”. Good times allowed many to focus on “discontent within the private realm” (199), and of course provided the safer ground from which a demographic bulge of baby boomers could explore their discontent throughout the sixties and seventies. As one of many examples, Murphy cites a 1957 article in *Woman’s Day* which tried to explain the loneliness and isolation many women were experiencing. There were cracks in the laminex dreams.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> The phrase “laminex dreams” comes from the title of an article by Jean Duruz (1994).

Every normal woman today needs outlets other than domesticity ... an increasing number of women are not willing to sacrifice themselves. It's part of women finding themselves. They don't give their lives over entirely to their husband and children, as so many of their mothers did. (200)

Even in the fifties, women's magazines did not conform to Friedan's portrait of women utterly seduced by an uncontested ideology of domestic bliss. The historical accuracy of her argument against women's magazines is clearly made problematic in the light of new research about this period. The gendered separation of public and private spheres, the retreat into domestic femininities, was not the only story to be told about women's magazines – or women – in these pre-second wave decades. In a sense, the inaccuracy doesn't really matter. It increased the rhetorical power of her book. In the sixties, *The Feminine Mystique* was hailed as life-changing and has often been cited as one of the influential texts for the beginnings of second wave feminism (see Scutt, 1987). Friedan cemented the idea that women's magazines should be held to account for the imprisonment of women in the concentration camp of the family home, and her book became one of the main bases from which second wave feminists began to develop their critiques of this genre of print media.

Leslie Johnson and Justine Lloyd argue that the happy housewife myth was “a myth – a myth of a myth” (2004:11):

[*The Feminine Mystique*] appeared to resolve the tensions that women experienced between public achievement and domesticity and it provided an apparent solution in suggesting there was a straightforward journey in which all women should participate. In this narrative, the housewife represented the past self – the quintessentially prescribed self – who was to be left behind as bowed down by tradition and authority. (14)

Friedan's solution was for women to develop a new life plan. The modern woman would leave the home of the depressed and unsatisfied housewife/mother and through education pursue a career outside of the home and find “full human identity” (68). This discourse is part of what Rita Felski has identified as the gendered vocabulary of modernity:

... a vocabulary of anti-home. It [modernity] celebrates mobility, movement, exile, boundary crossing. It speaks enthusiastically about the movement out into the world, but is silent about the return home ... Home, by contrast, is the space of familiarity, dullness, stasis. The longing for home, the desire to attach oneself to a familiar space, is seen by most theorists of modernity as a regressive desire. (1999-2000: 23)

In this beautiful essay about everyday life, Felski questions the pervasive feminist assumption “that being modern requires an irrevocable sundering from home” (26).

Friedan’s solution remained an individual one that could resonate more readily with women for whom the advantages of class and education made such fulfilling lifeplans possible. As bell hooks observed, Friedan’s analysis of the problem that had no name derived from her own position as a tertiary-educated “upper class” married, white woman. It did not speak to the lives of non-white or poor white women (1984: 1-2). It was a feminism “elaborated from well within her culture’s comfort zone” (Altman, 2003: 15). Friedan did not offer an analysis of patriarchy or call for collective struggle. Indeed, there is a sympathy for the men tied to their dissatisfied sex-hungry mates (231-244), although within three years Friedan had expanded her analysis to incorporate the need for legislative as well as individual change and began the liberal reformist women’s organization NOW.

*The Feminine Mystique* was written before the upheavals of the sixties and seventies and the growth of movements for identity politics outside of the party political framework. Identity politics was based on affiliation through shared oppressive experiences and common group characteristics such as race (in Black Power in the US and Aboriginal rights in Australia), sexuality (gay and lesbian liberation), student revolt, anti-nuclear and environmental concerns, and gender (women’s liberation). For women, the desire to attain identity as a fully human subject required an identification with each other to work out why they, as a sex, had been categorically excluded from full humanity.

Identity for a second wave feminist came to mean, amongst other things, a commitment to the pursuit of the ‘real’ woman, untainted by media or indeed by patriarchal society.

“Women’s Liberation routinely denounced femininity in all its manifestations especially women’s use in advertising as ‘sex symbols’, their treatment as ‘sex objects’ and their position as stay-at-home mothers” (Lake, 1999: 227). In response to these images, “what second-wave feminism said was ‘We’re not like that’ and that kind of femininity is impossible” (Brunsdon, 2005: 112). The ordinary woman – and her reading material, women’s magazines – became an antagonist, what Brunsdon has described as “the disavowed”, and second wave feminists constructed their identities in opposition to her and her media. “The early feminist response to what were called ‘the mass media’ was suspicion and contestation. Against those images and fictions was posed the demand for ‘real women’” (2000: 22). Ironically, in at least some second wave discourses, the desire for the ‘real’ woman meant the abandonment of the ‘ordinary’ woman. She would appear once the false trappings of femininity (and the control of patriarchy) had been dismantled. This feminist desire was not just to *see* the real woman represented in media but to *be* the real woman. There was a lot at stake. The new feminist self could only be made real once false ideologies and false consciousness were stripped away.

### **‘The real thing’ (Russell Morris)**

In Australia, ten years after *The Feminine Mystique*, Patricia Edgar and Hilary McPhee were putting Friedan’s ideas to the test. They searched in vain for the real woman in Australian media and instead found evidence of the feminist keywords of the time – sex objects, sexism, stereotypes and socialisation. The result was *Media She*, “a book about the distortions perpetrated on women by those employed in mass media organisations” (1974: 1). Their survey found that all the “old stereotypes” of women remained in the media – women as sex symbols, “misrepresentations” and “inferior human beings”. Images and articles were either representing a glossy lifestyle that was “unattainable and undesirable” or they were “degrading or exploiting women”. The only exception was *Ms*, the avowedly feminist US publication that occasionally represented “real women with real intelligence doing real tasks” (1-2).

Shirley Samson’s study of *The Australian Women’s Weekly* (henceforth *AWW*) was also underwritten by the desire for more representations of ‘real’ women in the pages of magazines. Samson investigated girl’s educational aspirations via the concepts of

stereotypes and sex roles, finding that the “women’s magazines will emphasise the female role stereotype of woman as sweetheart-housewife-mother, and will not encourage girls to see themselves in other, more realistic roles” (1973: 14). Courtship, domesticity and maternity were not real; the new feminist reality apparently lay outside of loving men, children and home.

One of the early criticisms of the second wave desire for the ‘real’ woman came from two Australian feminists, Helen Grace and Ann Stephen in 1981. “Underlying much early feminist work is the notion that there is an essential female self which has been suppressed by socialisation” (15). They asked what the real woman might look like without social context. How could the layers of conditioning be peeled away to reveal the real woman? She was a desire outside of history. At which layer of removal would the real woman reveal herself? Without make-up? Without dresses? Without shaving her legs? With what size body? With or without DOVE firming cream? The assumptions underlying the questions are with us still.

Grace and Stephen pointed to a new way of thinking about the self that was emerging under the influence of post-structuralism:

We are dissatisfied with this [old] notion of the ‘self’ since it is static and provides no way forward in terms of political change and the relations between men and women. This notion [of a self constructed within the social] sees femininity and masculinity as categories constantly undergoing change ... (15)

They were asking, in effect, about the construction of the self and its relationship to cultural representation. They questioned the assumption that there could even *be* a real woman beyond the interpellations of ideology and media representation. “Separating real women’s bodies from their fake media-endorsed clones is not that easy,” argues Catharine Lumby. “... anyone who claims to be able to make the distinction between real women and false media images of them is claiming they’re able to view things from outside the media-reality loop” (1997a: 12). There are few experiences we can have that come unmediated by culture and the ‘I’ who has those experiences is already ‘tainted’. Where does the self stop and culture begin? Elspeth Probyn explains the idea clearly:

Reality cannot be posed as existing outside human practices: it is made and remade through our interactions with cultural practices, institutions and the relationships we form with them and with other individuals. Through our engagements with cultural representations we find the grounds for alternative self-representations and identity. (1998: 60)

Grace and Stephen's article in *Scarlet Woman* was short but insightful. They were two of the first to pose a question that was to preoccupy feminist media studies throughout the eighties: "How do we account for the appeal which women's magazines continue to have for most women (including most of us)?"(15).

In an illuminating chapter in *Bad Girls*, entitled 'Beyond the real woman', Lumby argues that the second wave demand for the removal of 'bad' idealised images of women and their replacement by 'good' real ones was "reactive and moralistic" and still remains in circulation, dominating popular debate. It presumes that feminists know the truth of 'woman' and what is good for her – and that the women who don't identify as feminist cannot read images (or words) in ways beyond their presumed 'bad' effects. In short, Lumby argues that it's a patronising approach that begins to look a lot like the oppressive authority of the patriarchy feminism was meant to be undermining:

The idea that media images need to be edited or critiqued by any group of experts – feminist or other – is an authoritarian one, which denies women the power to negotiate images on their own behalf. (1997a: 23)

This sustained focus on media representations of women as 'sexist' has also, as Grace and Stephen pointed out, "made it difficult to analyse such material and to recognise the changes which have taken place within the mass media's representation of women (and there have been significant changes, even though much remains the same)" (16). These authors all believe that educating readers about textual analysis is far more important than censoring images.

What is striking now about the seventies feminist readings of women's magazines is the inability to see the changes that were occurring within women's media even as they wrote. Editorial content in women's magazines *had* changed dramatically and often

discussed many of the issues raised by the feminist movement. Looking in more detail at the second wave response to women's magazines can yield some insights into why it was blind to the popular feminism being made there.

### **'(You make me feel like) a natural woman' (Carole King)**

In Australia, Tania Birrell's 1975 essay on 'Women and the Australian Media' noted, "the content of the Australian mass media, both locally produced as well as imported, not only includes choice misogynist bits but in fact has little else" (280). After a brief excoriation of *Dolly* and *Belle*, Birrell dismissively concluded, "Little has been said about the other glossies *Pol*, *Cleo* and *Cosmopolitan*; their overall ethos does not differ from the rest" (283). Her entire section on women's magazines ran for two pages. In an essay for *Dissent*, a left-wing journal, Fay Chambers and Marthe Scott focused on *Dolly* magazine and concluded with a similar generalising flourish: "This magazine, like its counterparts for older women, *Women's Weekly* or *Woman's Day* allows only one rigidly defined role for women in Australian society, that of the complete sex-object" (1972: 22).

By 1979, Janet Jones, writing in *Refractory Girl*, wanted to see if Australian women's magazines like the *AWW* "were still presenting a traditional stereotype of women" and whether the glossies were "still confused and sexist in their approach" (26). After examining three issues of *Cleo* and *Cosmo* in late 1978, Jones decided there was no point in reading any further. She counted but did not read or analyse any content beyond the fiction (as had been Friedan's methodology). "I did not continue a study of the glossies as women who identify with them probably consider themselves trendy and/or liberated, and find it very difficult to distinguish between trendiness and radical change" (27). Jones considered these magazines "reprehensible" (26). Anne Summers acknowledged that the new glossies did mention feminism but that they just "mouth support":

Their aura of 'liberation' appears to offer a way out of the old double-binds of the female role. But what they offer is an illusion, the myth that modernisation is a substitute for the revolutionary changes that are necessary. (1994 [1975]: 487)

Edgar and McPhee were also aware that magazines like *Cleo* did write about women's liberation but it was "pretence" and they were "written in a flippant pseudo-liberated style. Looked at objectively, it is quite ludicrous to see articles on women's rights surrounded by ads saying Tampax 'will give her the confidence a good hostess needs'" (22). In America, Gaye Tuchman et al.'s 1978 survey of the (by their admission) limited and dated research on sex roles in women's magazines in America, concluded "how much they too [like television] engage in the symbolic annihilation of women by limiting and trivializing them" (18).

An underlying theme in these critiques is that the advertising and promotion of consumer goods in women's magazines contaminated every element of their content and meanings. It is an argument that doesn't make much commercial or even logical sense. In consumer publishing, advertising pages are essential to profitability. This has been the case since the late nineteenth century, when Cyrus Curtis' *Ladies Home Journal* and Frank Munsey's *Munsey's Magazine*, experimented with the shift from reader-funded publishing (where profit came from cover price) to advertiser-funded publishing (where profit came from advertising sales and cover prices could be reduced) (Morrish, 2003: 6-10). This combination of editorial and advertising pages is an artful balance, recognising the different boundaries and needs of competing agendas. If the editorial content was entirely driven by advertisers, if editorial simply became advertorial or veiled product placement, readers – depending on the magazine – would rebel.<sup>24</sup> That magazines simply "deliver quality audiences to the advertisers who sustain the publications" (McCracken, 1993: 216) is a common critique of this genre of media, given extra feminist credibility through Gloria Steinem's recounting of her frustrating experience at the commercial feminist magazine *Ms* in attempting to "break the link between ads and editorial content" (1994: 133).

In practice, advertisers can indeed make demands about ad placement, and about being near 'supportive editorial'. The role of an editor, however, is to balance the needs of both

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<sup>24</sup> There is now a term for these magazines: magalogs. Readers are happy to buy magazines that are basically shopping catalogues when it is clear this is the intention – the 'philosophy' – of the magazine. A current example would be the Australian 'magalog' *Shop til You Drop* and the American *Lucky*.



advertisers and readers – and the most successful and ethical way to do this is to insist on editorial independence:

Editors know that the way to make the advertising-based model work is to produce compelling independent journalism. Nothing else will produce the degree of commitment and attention in readers that advertisers require in a media-saturated age. (Morrish, 2003: 9)

Readers are also quite as capable as critics in determining the difference between advertising and editorial and how the needs of one might affect the other, and how editorial content can also exist quite separately from the needs of advertisers. The meaning of an article on women's rights is not necessarily compromised by its proximity to an ad for Tampax giving a hostess confidence. And if the reader does detect a contradiction, the effect may well be productive of thought, not an inevitable neutralising of critical capacities.

What became apparent in reading *Cleo* alongside the contemporary feminist responses, was the utter disconnect. From a current perspective, the amount of overt feminist content in *Cleo* was extraordinary, as the rest of this thesis will demonstrate. Yet many second wave critics could see only symbolic annihilation, misogyny, traditional sex roles, sex objects, gullibility, commercial exploitation and co-option of 'authentic' feminist ideas. As a researcher, this disjunction was disorienting. It suggests, of course, the power of ideology in framing our ways of seeing and reading and to the fact that all interpretation is historically contingent (including mine). The point is not to rationally argue with seventies feminists – straw women now after decades of cultural and media studies work on texts and audiences, reality and representation – but to ask what was at stake in the passionate investment against this genre of women's media.

The conclusions of feminist 'readers' of the new women's magazines were not based on 'reading' at all. Tuchman didn't open any, Birrell considered the subject not worth more than two pages and decided the word 'misogyny' could stand in for analysis, Jones concluded that feminism was non-existent in *Cleo* (and *Cosmo*) by reading the fiction in three issues. And Summers' passionate discourse about the illusion of liberation and the fake feminism on offer was based on a reading not of the magazines but their launch

promotional brochures. Edgar and McPhee did a cursory survey of only two months of all mass media that represented women in Australia in 1973 and selectively chose articles and images for brief critique. There were three paragraphs on *Cleo*; two pages on women's magazines. It is not as though there was a shortage of readily available research material. There was a clear resistance amongst feminist critics to actually *read* these magazines. Was it that to really engage with the material would be a betrayal of feminism? Was it soiling? Or just that the meanings of these magazines was so obvious as to make reading unnecessary? They had already been thrown in the freedom trashcan in 1968, the offices of the US *Ladies Home Journal* had been occupied in 1970, was there anything left to say?<sup>25</sup> Or could it have been that too much immersion in the material of the repressed feminine Other was too disturbing?<sup>26</sup>

What was striking about the feminist response was the structure of feeling on display. In 1977 Raymond Williams explained the difference between ideology (“formally held and systematic beliefs”) and feeling (“meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt”). In practice, ideology and experience connect, one reinforces the other:

For what we are defining is a particular quality of social experience and relationship, historically distinct from other particular qualities, which gives the sense of a generation or of a period ... We are talking about characteristic elements of impulse, restraint and tone; specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships; not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought ... (1977: 131-132)

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<sup>25</sup> The occupation of the *Ladies Home Journal* (henceforth *LHJ*) in March 1970 occurred in two stages. The first group of Women's Liberationists was led by the well-behaved Susan Brownmiller (who had written for the *LHJ*) accompanied by a television crew. Brownmiller read the demands to the editor-in-chief, John Mack Carter. The demands included that all males on staff be replaced by females, that objectionable advertising be dropped, that the emphasis on family and home be changed. The group also wanted “an immediate stop to the publication of articles that are irrelevant, unstimulating, and demeaning to the women of America”. There was little reaction until another group of more radical liberationists entered the office, led by Ti-Grace Atkinson, and threatened to throw the editor out the window. “If you don't deal with them,” said Atkinson pointing at Brownmiller's group, “you get us.” After eight hours, Carter caved in and the group wrote a supplement for the magazine (Scott, 2005: 281-282). Ironically, Gloria Steinem had written one of the articles in the very issue they were protesting against (Altman, 2003: 15).

<sup>26</sup> Of her long-term project on women's magazines Janice Winship wrote that she feared feminist friends were thinking, “surely we all know women's magazines demean women and solely benefit capitalist profits. What more is there to say?” I experienced myself as a misfitting renegade who rarely dared to speak up for magazines, however weakly” (1987: xiii).

Structures of feeling would have been all too apparent in the passionate identity politics emerging during the decade before he was writing. Within second wave feminism the connection between the experiential and the theoretical was vitally important. Williams' insight into affective embodied thinking has a particular resonance for the emotions (and repressions) invested by feminists in their response to women's magazines, the domestic maternal home and the ordinary feminine woman. Is it too strong to describe this structure of feeling as disgust?

The aversion to women's magazines, the refusal to even read them, and the strength of the language of rejection, suggests a level of psychic conflict, even the internal violence of repression, and a need to back away from this object. These magazines were a reminder of the woman who had been rejected. The concept of psychic splitting and Othering has been influential for analyses of identity politics. Meaghan Morris was among the first feminist scholars to raise the possibility that to acquire the identity of feminist might necessarily require the construction of its opposite. "Certain philosophical discourses produce their own identity by projecting an image of an Other who lacks the same identity (thus creating the Other in the process)" (1988: 43). Iris Marion Young too observed that when identity is conceived as having closed boundaries that form around an essential core that determines authenticity, the "merely different" becomes the "absolutely other" (1990: 99). The boundaries became even more locked down when those who policed them could not quite define or represent what that essential core of woman would look like. It was as if to really look at women's magazines would force a confrontation with the impossibility of the feminist desire for the real woman: that there is no pure space outside of representation, no pure self outside of fantasy, that representations and selves are historically contingent.

Charlotte Brunsdon has spent decades writing about the relationship between popular women's genres and feminism. She recently concluded that there is "a disidentity at the heart of feminism. Disidentity – not being like that, not being like those other women, not being like those images of women – is constitutive of feminism..." (2005: 43). And Judith Butler, commenting on this psychoanalytic process, explains that "no subject emerges without a passionate attachment to those on whom he or she is fundamentally dependent" (1997: 7). What is more, this dependency is necessarily invisible and needs to be denied for the subject to take shape.

In recalling her involvement with early second wave feminism, Phyllis Chesler described this feeling of disidentity as formed in a desire to annihilate the mother. "Like the goddess Athena, newly-hatched from her father Zeus's brow, we, too, wanted to experience ourselves as motherless daughters ... psychologically, we committed matricide" (1997: 55). Could it be that the strength of disidentity was because the other woman shared psychic space in the new feminist body, to be treated with the anger, disdain and, even the disgust that seems to accompany repression? As Foucault has argued, repression is productive (1998[1974]: 3-13). Given this psychic investment, the extreme and, at the time, productive antagonism of the second wave towards women's magazines and their ordinary readers is perhaps easier to understand.

Many critics of identity politics have pointed out that the essentialism inherent in affiliation with a group because of one similar characteristic leaves out those with different, conflicted or more primary affiliations (see Ryan (ed.), 2001). Stuart Hall, for example, has argued that the dynamics of power and exclusion necessarily accompany such a politics. These groupings "are more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion than they are the sign of a naturally constituted unity" (1996: 4-5). The identity politics of second wave feminism were soon to reveal the problems within the claim that all women suffered a similar and over-riding oppression because of the shared commonality of their sex:

Second-wave feminism has often assumed that all women share something: a common nature (an ontological moment), common experience (a narrative moment) or a common developmental trajectory (a psychological moment). It is what women share that is presumed to form the unifying basis of feminist politics. (Lloyd, 2005: 13)

The dissent from those excluded by the early second wave – by women of colour, of different ethnicities and religions, of different class and education and sexuality – forced feminism to interrogate itself, to ask questions about the category of woman, to examine the privileging of personal experiences of whiteness, class, education and sexual preferences, and feminism's own engagement in structures of domination.

There was another large and varied group of women, however, who were not included in the identity politics of second wave feminism, nor have they been recognised as dissenting voices. They were the ordinary women, the ones who found pleasure, reassurance and indeed a mode of feminism in the pages of their magazines, who were not entirely opposed to some of the ideas of women's liberation but for whom radical feminism's attack on the family, the state, motherhood and men, was too extreme. The pervasive feminist discourse of leaving home to find a life and an identity less 'ordinary' did not appeal. If becoming a feminist required agreement with the agendas of radical feminism then this was an identity that ordinary women could not embrace. As will be explored in the following section, without the privileges of class and education that most second wave women shared, the risk was too great. Although not particularly sympathetic to these women, Greer noted that "to the average confused female they [Ti-Grace Atkinson's "most radical" group, The Feminists – A Political Organization to Annihilate Sex Roles] must seem terrifying" (1999 [1970]: 335). Not half as terrifying as coming across this poem from Robin Morgan re-printed in the *Sydney Women's Liberation Newsletter* in September 1974:

We can pity the terror and comprehend the threat  
To her of a women's revolution  
We can understand that, until yesterday  
There were no other options. [...]  
How she hates us in herself;  
How we detest her in our mirror

She refused to understand she was doomed from the start,  
And she still doesn't like being reminded  
Too bad, sister.  
And there's less and less time for her  
To find her own way at her own speed. [...]  
She will be the ultimate weapon in the hands of the boys,  
And I've just begun to realize  
That I must not only destroy what she is,  
But if I have to, kill her.

And then cradle her skull in my arms  
And kiss its triumphant grin  
And not even cry for us both  
(Morgan, 1974: 11)

'The one that got away' or 'the woman who made it', the title of Morgan's poem, was a reference to the ordinary woman "who constructed herself to male images", who would not embrace the feminist revolution. This is psychic disavowal of the most violent kind and shocking to read even now. Sisterhood was forged in this disgust with the ordinary. How could an ordinary woman with little education, in love with a man, perhaps ensconced in a suburban nuclear family and finding pleasure and satisfaction in the "heart-deadening rewards" of home (and her magazines) read this poem as a call to join the movement? Robin Morgan wanted to kill her!

When some members of a Melbourne Women's Liberation group "went like missionaries to convert unliberated masses in the suburbs", in this case to a Watsonia Mothers' Club meeting in 1973, the reaction was "indignation and hostility" (Lake, 1999: 236). Even though the WLM insisted their discussion was of the "the least controversial of feminist ideals", the mothers took it personally and were insulted. Many non-feminist women were aware that their investments in femininity, family and even heterosex were the source of more radical feminist disgust:

Feminism gained limited support from these women who identified with the domestic sphere. Mistaking its attack on structural inequalities for an assault on their interests and preoccupations, they felt doubly devalued: both by dominant ideology and by a movement purporting to support them. (MacDonald, 1995: 96)

Myra MacDonald argues these ordinary women were mistaken in taking the attacks personally. But we have just explored how much personal and psychological investment feminists had in their attack on the domestic sphere and the women who found identity there. As Joanne Hollows suggests, "If the historically produced identity 'feminist' positions 'ordinary women' as its inferior other, it is not surprising that feminism should be refused" (2000: 203).

As long as feminist politics required a self-identifying feminist subject, women who did not claim identity with feminism had to be 'other'. In the binary logic of identity politics, ordinary women had to be the "women who don't" or the "women who won't" as the title of Robyn Rowland's edited collection of feminist essays made clear (Rowland, 1984). However, the second wave rejection of the textbooks of the feminist Other cannot be completely explained by the inner and outer operations of identity politics. As important as this was, a number of critical discourses and historical conditions converged in second wave feminism to make mass media, consumer culture, the ordinary woman – and thus women's magazines – the object of not just disgust but of potentially 'counter-revolutionary' activity.

### **'Children of the revolution' (T. Rex)**

The soundtrack to this section is, with perfect synchrony, the sound of T. Rex, early seventies British glam rock, coming from the turntable in my teenage daughter's bedroom. The door opens and Lucy asks, "What was this revolution thing?" It's a great question. I don't know where to start, so I start with 1968, the year of the barricades, guessing she might be able to relate more to angry students rebelling against authority than an explanation of revolutionary theory. Students made graffiti: "I take my desires for reality because I believe in the reality of my desires." "The revolution is incredible because it's really happening." "In the décor of the spectacle, the eye meets only things and their prices" (Knabb, 1981). A poster on the wall of the Sorbonne stated:

The revolution which is beginning will call in question not only capitalist society but industrial society. The consumer society is bound for a violent death. Social alienation will vanish from history. We are inventing a new and original world. Imagination is seizing power. (quoted in Quattrocchi and Nairn, 1998 [1968]: 105)

Students across the West occupied universities, demonstrated against conscription and the Vietnam War. Police were violent in response, part of the 'repressive state apparatus'. Four dead in Ohio. (She knows her Neil Young too.) Revolution was a kind of by-word

for a complete social and cultural upheaval that would liberate everyone from inequality and oppression. There was a stew of 'anti-establishment' discourses bubbling away that the word 'revolution' seemed to cover. Some from the New Left and in Women's Liberation took the word seriously; for others it was more like a pop sensibility. 'Revolution' was as much a structure of feeling, a lived experience of rebellion nourished by sustained affluence, low unemployment and a demographic bulge of young adults, by an extended period of 'youth' as more teenagers entered tertiary education, by the rebellions of counter-cultural lifestyles, fashions, drugs and popular music, and by the horror of Vietnam beamed into suburban lounge rooms ... "Wasn't Marc Bolan being ironic? They didn't really believe that stuff did they?" Irony. Of course. You can't fool the children of the revolution. By the early seventies, pop culture generally couldn't take 'the revolution' with anything but a big dose of salts. For the New Left and radical students in the sixties and indeed for the Women's Liberation Movement that emerged out of those groups, 'revolution' was a far more serious proposition.

In the politics of Cold War paranoia and the seemingly endless run of conservative Liberal governments since 1949, the Australian New Left was emerging in distinct contrast to the more disciplined organization of the old (Birrell, 1971: 58). Younger student radicals were associated with this loose grouping, but they were also developing a more self-conscious and separate identity as student activists influenced by the American New Left and the student movement there. As Berkeley student leader Mario Savio put it:

America is becoming ever more the Utopia of sterilized, automated contentment ... an intellectual and moral wasteland ... But an important minority of men and women coming to the front today have shown that they will die rather than be standardized, replaceable and irrelevant. (quoted in Mortimer, 1967: 24)

Savio and his comrades were prepared to die rather than have their individuality submerged in the material, soul-less comforts of mass society. Rhetorical yes, but the disgust and contempt were powerful. In the writings of Guy Debord, one of the celebrity Situationists of 1968, this contempt gained a different inflection, a "passionate condemnation of everyday repetition, the stultifying drudgery of the already known, the docile conformity to oppressive routine" (Felski, 2002: 609). Felski argues that in



Debord's work, and in that of many intellectuals of the time, there was an "often imperious" dismissal of the masses, their lack of political awareness, their denial of their alienation. Against them was "the iconoclastic vision of a small and embattled minority [who defined] its mission with a militant, quasi-messianic fervour; everyday life must be rescued, redeemed, saved from its own regressive tendencies" (610).

In what appeared to be a 'post-scarcity' economy developing in Australia, the younger New Left and student activists were in conflict with the materialism of the emerging consumer society throughout the sixties. Their sympathies were no longer with the working class, which they saw "as relatively affluent but yet apparently uninterested in anything but further increases in income" (Birrell, 1971: 59). Pessimistic about the revolutionary potential of the class that had justified the political passions of the old left, young radicals developed a restless and generalised oppositional stance against 'the system', one that was readily aroused by evidence of injustice and ideologies of revolution (59). Student politics developed "a new independence within Australian society, which was based in a distinct subculture, albeit of a highly privileged and padded kind" (Gordon, 1970: 22). With the movement against conscription and Australia's entry into the Vietnam War in 1965, with the police violence that accompanied demonstrations, student politics became increasingly radicalised. The struggle of the Vietnamese for liberation was one students identified with, stimulating a wider revolutionary critique of capitalism and imperialism. It was out of this background of New Left, revolutionary ideologies and student politics that Women's Liberation emerged.

The leaflet announcing the first meeting of the Women's Liberation group in Sydney in January 1970 was distributed at a Vietnam moratorium march, denouncing the ideology of femininity and pointing out that women were being exploited not just by capitalism (as unpaid home-workers) but by men in the New Left, the anti-war movement and student politics. For the women involved, the experience of sex and sexism crystallised their emergent understanding of sexual politics:

Women were second class citizens, or less. The leaders were nearly always men, and women rarely had the confidence to challenge the unbounded sexism of New Left men. The contradiction between intense political commitment on the

one hand, and being in a subordinate role in your own political movement on the other, was a recipe for rebellion. (Curthoys, 1992: 430)

As women formed groups around the recognition of their oppression as a sex-class, feminist writers such as Shulamith Firestone, Kate Millett and Shelia Rowbotham were arguing for revolution. There were many interpretations of what 'revolution' might mean and much debate within the broad umbrella of the women's movement:

On the one hand the movement called for an end to the inequalities of capitalism, on the other for the overthrow of 'patriarchy', but the transformation had to begin with oneself. 'We are the revolution now'. (Lake, 1999: 231)

The revolution most had in mind was not based on a model of violent and rapid overthrow of the state. As Ann Curthoys explained in 'The Theory of Women's Liberation' in 1971:

If a revolution is not a quick seizure of power but a long social revolution with a political aspect ... the means are the ends. Immediate behaviour constitutes the revolution itself. For women's liberation this means that the daily attack on sex roles is one of the most fundamental ways in which the liberation of women will occur. (1988[1971]: 12)

Women's Liberation "routinely denounced femininity in all its manifestations", especially in advertising and mass media (Lake, 1999: 227). In this highly charged environment, the possibility that a commercial women's magazine could be seen as doing feminist work was almost non-existent.

The New Left had bequeathed to the emergent movement for women's liberation a rejection of consumer culture. In an influential essay on 'Media Images', US Women's Liberationist Alice Embree wrote of the "mass-media created woman" as "the object not the subject of her world", as not the controller of technology but the one controlled, "her thoughts must be in terms of commodity" (1970: 212). Consumer culture was conformist and politically quieting. Friedan, as we have seen, had a similar fear about the effect of advertising and media manipulation in providing women with a false sense of

identity and satisfaction they were unable to resist. “I suddenly saw American women as *victims* of that ghastly gift, the power at the point of purchase” (1963: 182, original italics). This was another legacy from the intellectual New Left – contempt for mass culture and for its subjects, ordinary people, who were its passive victims. The Australian journalist Craig McGregor observed at the time:

Two qualities which many Australian intellectuals have in common are a sense of disillusionment with Australian society today and a profound contempt for the ordinary man ... an unspoken philosophy of denigration of the Common Man, which denies everything the Left stands, or should stand, for. (1968: 158-159)

It was 1968 and the term ‘men’ could still be used to encompass women as well. The point McGregor made however was the connection between highbrow intellectuals on the left and the disdain for the vacuity of mass culture, everyday life and ordinary people.

The left literature of the sixties and seventies was brimming with Marxist critiques of mass culture and media. The Frankfurt School for Social Research was a dominant strand of Western Marxism centring in the work of Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, George Lukacs and Herbert Marcuse. Their theories were complex and influential, based around the idea that culture was being commodified via capitalism.<sup>27</sup> Although Theodor Adorno’s essay on the culture industry in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is usually quoted in discussions of this period to illustrate the deep pessimism and elitism of the left about popular culture such as cinema, radio and magazines, this work was not translated from the German and published in English until 1972 (US edition) and 1973 (British edition). Radical students and women’s liberationists in Australia were not wading through Adorno in the sixties and early seventies. The Frankfurt School’s fears about the manipulated society of mass consumption were made more accessible by that staple of student bookshelves, Herbert Marcuse’s *One Dimensional Man* (1964). Marcuse was a popular left intellectual for the radical student movement. He famously argued against the “false needs” being created by consumer capitalism, and was concerned about the inability of the ‘masses’ to resist. “People recognise themselves in their commodities, they find their soul in their automobile, hi-fi set, split-level home ... social control is anchored

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<sup>27</sup> See John Hartley (2003: Chapter Four) for a detailed critical account of The Frankfurt School, and Martin Jay (1984).

in the new needs which [the consumer society] has produced” (24). The pervasiveness of consumer culture was deeply troubling for left politics. Martin Jay, one of the key scholarly chroniclers of the Frankfurt School, describes the intensity of their critique:

With a passion that had previously been expressed only by right-wing critics of mass culture, they denounced the insidious ways in which popular entertainment demeaned and cheated its consumers. (1984: 38)

The ideas were debated on campus, in beds and in left journals. Leafing through the Australian Marxist journal *Arena*, various detailed debates about capitalism and the mass media appear and re-appear. As early as 1963, there were connections being made between the oppression of women, capitalism and the mass media – an association that was to develop into socialist feminist theory over the coming years:

The spit and polish futility and the status ideology disseminated by the mass media – not to mention demanding husbands – do much to explain [the length of time women spend on domestic tasks]. They continually stimulate a stream of wants, and, insofar as the wife occupies herself in meeting them, she is cut off the more from the chance of a genuinely human existence ... Is it not a fact that the evolution of modern suburbia has further impoverished wives' social relations and so left them relatively defenceless before the increasing blare of the mass media. (Blackburn and Jackson, 1963: 11)

In Australia in the sixties and into the seventies, a higher education, especially in the humanities, was a training in high culture and modernist beliefs. And that often meant an education that not only excluded popular culture but was steeped in theorists who were actively opposed to it. One way to particularise this generalisation about the high culture emphasis of university education at the time is to look at the influence of F.R. Leavis on the humanities, and especially on the study of English, that central discipline of the humanities in the sixties. Authors and literary genres were ranked according to their capacity to nurture “rich, complex, mature, discriminating, morally serious responses” (Eagleton, 1983: 33). Indeed, his wife Q.D. Leavis, pointedly referred to the “looking through newspapers and magazines” as one of the “substitute or kill-time interests” of the dehumanised masses (quoted in Hartley, 2003: 41). This cultural practice of the

poorly educated did not even qualify as “reading”. Eagleton describes the Leavis mission as “a moral and cultural crusade” that came to dominate the teaching of English in schools and universities from the mid-century onwards. Inherent to the project was a fear of mass and popular culture and the passivity and mindlessness it was assumed to create. The intent however (and this is where the right-wing critique of mass culture differed from that of the left) was not to stir people to political action but to stave off resentment by a “high-minded contemplation of eternal truths and beauties” (Eagleton, 1983: 25).

In Australian universities, Leavisism laid down strong roots. Andrew Riemer taught English, that central discipline of the humanities at the time, at the University of Sydney in the sixties and seventies. In *Sandstone Gothic*, he writes of the power of the Leavis ideology within the curriculum. “Leavis’s insistence that one must always be discriminating, vigilant against the second-hand, the shoddy, the vulgar and the merely diverting or entertaining appealed to the sense of pride, the hubris latent in all academics” (1998: 118). In his short story ‘Among Leavisites’, Michael Wilding writes amusingly of teaching in the same department as it was being stacked with Leavisites by the new head Sam Goldberg, recently arrived from the University of Melbourne in 1963. Germaine Greer was employed as a Leavisite tutor in 1963/64. “An aura of opposition” was being created via an aesthetic training in the refinements of Literature and resistance to the temptations of mass culture:

Leavis and the Leavisites saw themselves as oppositional ... what they stood for was harder to define. Their stress was on having the critical perceptions, developing a responsiveness, sensitivity, discrimination. This involved a lot of rejection ... the devastating dismissals of the unworthy were what stuck in the mind. (1999: 69-70)

When the issue-based politics of the sixties took off and this aura of opposition could get more politically focused than refusing to read Shelley and Milton, the residue of distaste for mass culture remained. You could be a right-wing Leavisite or a Left-Leavisite, but whichever way your politics dressed, the development of taste, literacy and identity was still found through the techniques of distancing oneself from mass culture. “An inevitable consequence was a growing ignorance among those trained in literary culture

as to how the culture of everyday life actually works” (Wark, 1999: 65). Andrew Ross too has analysed the relationship between an intellectual background in high culture, the appeal of radical politics and an accompanying disdain for popular culture: “For many of the students who participated in the culture of dissent in the sixties, it was the high idealism of a bourgeois, humanist education – with its preachy disdain for technology, popular culture, and everyday materialism – which directly inspired their resistance ...” (1989: 211).

In studies of the class background of student radicals in the sixties Denis Altman noted that the student radicals were drawn largely from families with an upper middle-class professional background. “This makes the student revolt something unique in history; a revolt of the favoured against the system that increasingly favours them” (1970: 130-131). Altman’s observation was drawn from American studies. Within the Australian radical student body the background was similar. Bob Birrell conducted two surveys at Monash University (Melbourne) in 1970 and concluded “they come disproportionately from the upper middle class and in particular from the professional intelligentsia” and most congregated in the arts and social sciences (1971: 63, 61). The number of women attending university over the decade of the sixties had increased from 23.3 per cent of the student population in 1961 to 31.5 per cent in 1971 (Pearce, 1998: 200), but only a small minority came from working class backgrounds (Roper, 1970: 21).

To be female and attend university was an extraordinary pathway into adulthood, especially when less than 40 per cent of 17 year old girls remained in school to complete their secondary education (Roper, 1970: 51). Indeed, in 1968 the community average for males and females who had completed secondary education was only ten per cent. The social expectations of parents, and of most girls themselves, was of a future as full-time mother, with little need for further education (51). Higher education was not something most ordinary young women desired at this time – and the young women who did were fuelled by a reactive desire *not* to be ordinary. Indeed, they appeared to be energised by their contempt. Elspeth Probyn recalls her younger self at this time:

Who’d want to be ordinary anyway? Certainly I never have. Flashes from school of being hauled in front of the headmaster and rebuked: ‘You’ll never be

anything but an exhibitionist'. It didn't faze me. Of course I wanted to be extraordinary. (Probyn, 2005: 243)

In Rita Felski's examination of everyday life, which she defines as "synonymous with the habitual, the ordinary, the mundane", there is a reminder of how far feminism has travelled in its revaluation of the quotidian beyond this earlier intellectual disdain for those women who did not desire a life less ordinary (1999-2000: 15, 17).

In the early years of the second wave however, this aversion to being doomed to everyday life, trapped like their mothers in the ordinary, was shared by the extraordinary young women who founded and joined the movement for women's liberation. These women came primarily from the radical ranks of a small and privileged segment of young, female university students. Throughout Marilyn Lake's detailed investigation of the early years of second wave feminism in Australia, this shared background underlies most of the stories of radical action and organisation.<sup>28</sup> Germaine Greer too noted the early profile of women involved with the movement as "more or less academic, working with reading lists, research projects, discussion groups ... the membership is mostly educated middle-class women who have rebelled against male chauvinism in the new left" (1986 [1970]: 27). In an article Anne Summers wrote for the women's magazine *Pol* in 1972, what is telling – apart from the irony that Summers was actually writing for the very glossies she decried – is the importance she placed on the university education of Women's Liberationists and their angry reaction to attempts to thwart their ambitions:

[They] were almost without exception women who had had some university education, who had had exciting intellectual vistas opened up to them with university life or radical political activity, only to find these cruelly snapped shut when they tried to act on them. They learned quickly and bitterly, that the rest of the world considered them women first of all and expected them to fulfil the traditional feminine roles. (1972: 30)

Whether women had been immersed in the oppositional critiques of Leavis, Marcuse, the New Left, in the direct action politics of anti-Vietnam and student demonstrations or

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<sup>28</sup> In her introduction to the origins of Women's Liberation in the US, Sara Evans makes a similar point: "The young are prominent in most revolutions. In this case in particular it seemed logical and necessary that the initiative should come from young women who did not have marriages and financial security to risk or years invested in traditional roles to justify" (1979: 22).

perhaps just well-educated in the aesthetics and tastes of high culture, 'mass media' and 'mass culture' were seen as more than problematic – they were a potentially counter-revolutionary force. It was not difficult for many of the women radicalised through this background to transfer concerns about the mass media and consumer culture specifically to commercialised women's media. And women's magazines were at the bottom of the pile of mass mediated culture, the trashy feminised end of the print hierarchy. The generalised distaste got specific with women's magazines. They were seen as the repository of the very markers of the oppressed feminine that were under critique. As we have seen, this disgust towards women's magazines was tied to a process of dis-identification that was part of the development of feminism as an identity politics, and keeping distance from these disturbing objects was amplified psychologically by the need to construct a self as an (extraordinary) feminist through a rejection of the (ordinary) feminine. Now, however, we can build a little on this insight.

The hostility towards women's magazines could be seen as an attempt to make those pervasive and privileged objects of dominant women's culture the culturally abject. And here the work of Stallybrass and White is resonant. The quote below is from *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, where the authors are concerned with analysing the formation of aesthetic and social hierarchies and the interdependence of the categories of high and low culture, and in particular the ways in which the low can trouble the high. But we must ask while reading this passage, who or what is "the top"?

The 'top' attempts to reject and eliminate the 'bottom' for reasons of prestige and status, only to discover ... that the top includes that low symbolically, as a primary eroticised constituent of its own fantasy life. The result is a mobile, conflictual fusion of power, fear and desire in the construction of subjectivity: a psychological dependence upon precisely those Others which are being rigorously opposed and excluded (at the social level). (1986: 5)

If we read this as the feminist movement adopting the familiar moves of high culture ("the top") to reorganise the social and cultural world according to its own desires, we are indeed left in an ambiguous space of a "mobile, conflictual fusion of power". This attempt to construct women's magazines as the culturally abject of feminism is made more complex by the curious 'double' position of the feminist movement. It both was



and was not socially and culturally privileged – and part of the power of its radical identity came from a proud perception of its *own* abjection within the dominant culture, that pride that seems to accompany politicised groupings that form out of a perception of shared injury and injustice. As Wendy Brown has argued about identity politics:

In its emergence as a protest against marginalisation or subordination, politicised identity thus becomes attached to its own exclusion ... [it] installs its pain over its unredeemed history in the very foundation of its political claim, in its demand for recognition as identity. (Brown, 1995: 73)

And yet, in terms of class background, higher education in the aesthetic hierarchies and the moral authority of revolutionary desire to end oppression, second wave feminists were speaking from a position of privilege, not the pain of exclusion.<sup>29</sup> This background gave these women the opportunity to create an historically powerful political movement – and a cushion of support should their courage, and their revolution, fail. In terms of their gender, however, feminists were obviously *not* privileged. And in this they shared the oppression of ordinary women, and it was on their behalf that much activism and research was conducted. Feminists were therefore ‘psychologically dependent’ upon the ordinary woman as much as they held her apparent resistance to feminism in contempt.

Feminist hostility to women’s magazines now makes a little more sense. The low is not utterly and irrevocably separate from the high, just as identity requires an Other (at least, in this historical period of identity politics). And when magazines like *Cleo* demonstrated their capacity to “slither over the border that separates low from high” (Glynn, 2000: 106), to contaminate real feminism with their glossy aura of liberation, intense anxiety and repudiation, indeed disgust, was the result. Radical feminists needed dis-identification from the low to form identity as the high, but when the boundaries between the two began to blur, the only response to maintain a pure feminist identity was disavowal. As a result, the new women’s magazines were left as the discursive space of less radical, less intellectual, and often less educated women, interested in feminism but not prepared to identify as feminists.

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<sup>29</sup> Indeed, increasingly throughout the seventies the power of second wave feminists was to grow within the state, bureaucracies and within the academy (Dowse, 1993; Curthoys, 1997; Lumby, 1997a: 154-167).

In the context of this background of high cultural and class-based contempt for commercialised popular cultural forms, radical feminist anxiety over the representation of women's liberation in magazines such as *Cosmo* and *Cleo* was compounded by their lightweight packaging. Feminist *struggle* over gender inequality was presented in a magazine that packaged life as a *pleasure*. For many feminist critics at the time (and since), this mixture of serious feminism amidst the glossy pages of beauty, fashion and consumption was a contradiction that could not be tolerated or even comprehended. Revolution was a *serious* business. A few fresh examples of the anxiety this contradiction produced can illustrate the point.

In her study of seventies women's magazines in Australia Janet Jones was disturbed by the audacity of *Cleo's* inclusion of feminist topics within a context of consumer culture, sex and a fascination with "appearance". Jones found that both *Cleo's* and *Cosmopolitan's* "understanding of 'liberation' [was] a perversion of the concept"; their "preoccupation with sexual performance" were new "chains to bind women", not real liberation (1979: 26). So, not popularisation but *perversion*. Concern with this alleged contradiction between feminist content and consumer pleasures resurfaces in much academic work on women's magazines. Ros Ballaster et al. found the coverage of feminist issues in contemporary women's magazines "undercut" by representations of more traditional femininities:

What is questionable is the impact of such pieces within the overall context of the magazine. Even when the writers explicitly declared their feminism, they rarely deviate from the model, personified by the editor herself, of being feminist but suitably feminine. (1991: 157)

This apparent contradiction "fails to *embarrass* either editors, writers or readers" (7, emphasis added). In her discussion of seventies *Cosmopolitan*, Laurie Ouelette indulges a revealing aside as she writes about *Cosmo's* inclusion of a long excerpt from Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* in 1970. The feature following the excerpt was a fashion spread: 'Be His Fortune Cookie in our Gala Gypsy Dress'. Ouelette exclaims, "it was *shockingly* out of place" (1999: 377, emphasis added). Coming across the awkward rubbing of seriously feminist critique next to the light-hearted sex object-ism of a fashion spread caused an exclamatory outburst in her otherwise sober analysis.

Perversion, embarrassment, shock ... These are strongly emotive words that can guide us towards the anxiety produced when genres and boundaries collide or blur. Stuart Hall draws on anthropologist Mary Douglas' famous description of categorical anxiety, 'dirt is matter out of place', to suggest that:

What really disturbs cultural order is when things turn up in the wrong category; or when things fail to fit any category ... symbolic boundaries keep the categories 'pure', giving cultures their unique meaning and identity. What unsettles culture is 'matter out of place' – the breaking of our unwritten rules and codes. (1997: 236)

*Cleo* integrated the modality of current affairs journalism, highly inflected with the personal and anecdotal, to write about feminist issues. And it placed these feminist features within the pleasurable fantasy spaces of a magazine containing fashion, beauty and the trappings of consumer culture. For some critics, it was apparently too much discursive contradiction. Even for feminists who were insisting on the political relevance of private and personal issues, categorical purity still obviously mattered. This was 'matter out of place', generic blurring, the 'contradiction' that critics like Jones, Ballaster and Ouelette were so disturbed by. But it is only a contradiction if we insist on generic purity defined by the very categorical distinctions being challenged by the second wave: the distinction between appropriate matter for discussion in the public sphere and the 'dirt' of the private sphere. Second wave feminists wanted to shake private matter out of place, but who could speak feminism, how and where it could be spoken were still boundaries to be policed. This contradiction was – and may well still be – a problem for some kinds of feminism. The placement of overtly feminist content in an environment of consumer pleasure produced a visceral unsettling and blindness to the popular feminism that was developing in the pages of *Cleo*.

In *The Politics of Pictures*, John Hartley traces a history of the opposition of journalistic truth versus pleasure (and scientific reason versus desire). Pleasure is "the opposite of truth" and reason becomes "destitute the moment desire walks in" (1992: 161). Turning the pages of *Cleo* (and *Cosmo*), flicking from truth to desire, is too disturbing. Truth will be sullied by desire. These contradictions are "inherent in journalism" (145-146), and not just the journalism of magazines. Anxiety over blurred boundaries, over the status of this

contradictory text, is tied to fears about the effect such a mixture of pleasure and reason will have. The fear of Jones, Ballaster, Ouelette, and many other critics, is that pleasure (the gypsy) wins, that pleasure has more corruptive power than rational feminist argument (Millett). The effect on readers, apparently unable to hold both frowning and smiling in mind, is assumed. The result was to damn this contradictory, glossy genre of women's media and deny that feminism could indeed be packaged in pleasure. What were the rational and serious arguments of feminism doing in a magazine that dared to run the subject as a light-hearted *quiz* – “Are you a good feminist?” (Petersen, 1976). Is it possible that a pleasure machine like *Cleo* could actually have produced ‘good’ feminism?

**‘You don’t own me ... I’m not just one of your many toys’  
(Lesley Gore)**

One of the early mythologies of the second wave was that if the mass media was not stereotyping women as sex objects, maternal madonnas or domestic drudges, it was misrepresenting the alternative, the feminist. Early and sensational reporting on television and in newspapers, emphasising the visually dramatic features and the provocative soundbites that the public protests of the Women’s Liberation movement certainly provided, had set up a vitriolic antagonism. In the Australian Women’s Liberation journal *Shrew*, Janet D’Urso captured the distaste that the movement had for the mainstream media and its reinforcement of the caricature of ‘Women’s Libbers’:

The Women’s Liberation Movement enjoys the distinction of having more bull-shit talked about it than the Indo-Chinese war. Cartoonists, comedians and newspaper editors hard up for copy find it a real boon. Occasionally the press gets hold of one of the sisters and carefully misrepresents everything that she says ... The only more or less accurate local reportage (Bill Peach TDT) I have encountered on the subject got well and truly slammed by the ABC brass. As everybody who reads *Time*, *Newsweek* or the Sunday papers knows, the supporters of [the] Women’s Liberation Movement are a weird bunch of bra-burning, man-hating, promiscuous, frigid, neurotic, strident, castrating, lesbian, scruffy, husband-murdering spinsters. (1971: n.p.)

The common perception amongst radical feminists at the time was that the mass media were either demonising the women's movement or ignoring it.

While the representation of the feminist as the 'monstrous outsider' has remained in circulation as the 'truth' of mediated feminism in this period (Rhode, 1995; Hinds and Stacey, 2001), recent research has questioned the monolithic nature of such representation. In their close look at the coverage of feminism as politics in Australian newspapers in the seventies, Sheridan, Magarey and Lilburn found that while there was the expected evidence of hostility, there were also "instances of favourable reporting". What they discovered, in short, was "that media representations of particular events were often unpredictable and unstable" (2006: 26).

Examining the press representations of Germaine Greer's tour in 1972, for example, Greer emerged "as much a darling of the media as a critic of its sexist practices – and of the marginalization of women journalists" (29-30). While many would argue that this was due to the way the media had sexualised Greer to make feminism palatable (Genovese, 2002: 156) and that Greer herself encouraged this treatment (Spongberg, 1993), it could also be argued that Greer understood implicitly that feminism was going to be made in the media as much (or moreso) as outside it. Writing about celebrity feminism, Jennifer Wicke has observed:

Feminism does not stand outside that culture, either in a privileged autonomous space or on an exalted moral or political, or even theoretical plane. Feminism is not exempt from celebrity material, and more and more, feminism is produced (or feminisms are produced) and received in the material zone of celebrity. (1994: 753-754)

It could be argued that Greer was simply an early manifestation of this process.

To take a less contentious example of more cordial relations and positive representations of feminism in the media during the seventies, we could look at the way the Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL) utilised the media in the build up to the 1972 election. Although WEL was a reformist feminist movement, happy to use and work with the state to achieve equality for women within a liberal democracy, and although many involved in

more radical feminisms found WEL's politics far too conciliatory towards patriarchy, "for many, WEL was provocative ... and there were crossovers between Women's Liberation and WEL" (Genovese, 2002: 152). WEL was strategic in the way it used the media, publishing a 'form guide' in local and national papers about political candidates' attitudes towards women's issues. It was successful. Marilyn Lake surveyed the representation of WEL during 1972 and found that of the 174 articles on WEL in Australian newspapers only three of these were unfavourable (Lake, 1999: 238). "The mainstream media seemed to embrace WEL ... reassured that some feminists, at least, looked familiar and sounded reasonable, not posing a threat to the family or men's sexual prerogatives" (238). The conclusion Sheridan et al. draw from their revisionist work on the representation of feminism in the media in the seventies is that feminism has always existed, at least in part, in the media as much as outside it (2006: 26).

More radical feminisms at the time did not see the media as a space where feminism might indeed be made rather than just (mis)represented. While the mass media was recognised as being enormously important in the socialisation of women, for many feminists of the second wave the uncompromised sites of independent publication were preferable as a way to communicate feminist ideas and avoid 'contamination'. Adrienne Rich, the American feminist poet and activist, made this dilemma quite clear:

How shall we ever make the world intelligent of our movement? I do not think that the answer lies in trying to render feminism easy, popular and instantly gratifying. To conjure with the passive culture and adapt to its rules is to degrade and deny the fullness of our meaning and intention ... For many readers the feminist movement is simply what the mass media says it is, whether on the television screen or in the pages of the *New Yorker*, *Psychology Today*, *Mother Jones* or *Ms.* Wilful ignorance, reductiveness, caricature, distortion, trivialisation – these are familiar utensils, not only in the rhetoric of organised opposition. (1980: 14)

Rich feared the misrepresentation that comes with the popularisation of ideas and radical politics in the mass media, that "passive culture". She also desired popular understanding, to make "the world intelligent" of the feminist movement. Wanting to be recognised by the mainstream and yet fearing immersion and loss of a feminist identity that had been so freshly and painfully formed is a contradiction Rich ponders, and it was one that stymied

the movement. But this can only be a contradiction when feminism and mass media are viewed as polar opposites, 'real' transformative feminism versus the presumed false representations of the media.

Second wave feminism was caught in a paradox – as an agent of social transformation, it needed to speak, as often and as much as it could. The aim was to reach as many women as possible. In this process, the mass media and popular culture provided many of the channels through which information, polemics, anger and visual representations had to flow, with all the attendant risks of popularisation and misrepresentation. Yet so much of feminist discourse and, as we have seen, the formation of a feminist self, was bound up in opposition to the mass media, and especially to women's magazines. The paradox was the desire to be both inside and outside. It is the polarity again between the real and the false: the real feminist woman versus the feminine woman of false consciousness, pure uncompromised feminism versus sullied mediated feminism. Second wave feminism saw the media as a place of representation where its reality could only be misrepresented, not as a place where reality (and feminism) could be made. "In fact," argues Alan McKee, "being 'misrepresented' is actually a quality of being represented in the media at all. A public representation is a loss of control. It's a consensual representation – how a variety of people agree the world should be seen, not your own vision of it" (2005: 12). Even within the women's movement there was no consensus on what feminism meant or how it should be represented.

This contradiction is one that Rita Felski explores in *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics*. Within the movement, the desire for a gender-specific identity and for feminist women "to define themselves against the homogenizing and universalizing logic of the global megaculture of modern mass communication" created a counter-public sphere in the 1960s and 1970s (1989: 166). But because second-wave feminism wanted to speak for all women, because it contained universalising tendencies, "the feminist public sphere also constitutes a discursive arena which disseminates its arguments outwards through such public channels of communication as books, journals, the mass media, and the education system" (168). As John Hartley notes of her analysis, "it strains to breaking point the critical-outsider approach to the mass media" (1996: 69). The question second wave feminism posed for itself was thus almost impossible to answer: To utilise the mass

media or reject it? To be inside or outside? It was a debate that mirrored the positions on reformism versus revolution, and, for a time, divided the movement.

Margaret Jones, a journalist for left-leaning weekly *The National Times*, wrote about the “paranoia” of the women’s movement when it came to the mainstream press:

One of the dilemmas of the women’s movement today [is that] the sisters long to express their points of view and to proselytise but are too suspicious of the orthodox media of communication to allow free reportage. (Jones, 1973: 14)

Closed sessions at the Women’s Commission of 1973 made even potentially positive coverage via *The National Times* impossible. Jones concluded that the movement was in danger of only “preaching to the converted and remaining caged within their own elitist circles”. Germaine Greer had pointed out at the time how this strategy was backfiring. In “The slag-heap erupts’ for *London Oz* she argued, “the karate experts want to censor their meetings, regarding all female journalists ... as Aunt Tomasinas who capitulate to the enemy”. Excluding the press simply meant “the accounts of the meetings read more like descriptions of witches’ covens than ever” (1986 [1970]: 26).

Greer distanced herself from many other radical feminists by choosing the strategy of hoisting the mass media “on its own petard”:

After the first rush of derisive publicity women’s liberation has adopted a suspicious and uncooperative attitude to the press, a tactic which has in no way improved their public image or even protected it from figuring so large in Sunday supplements and glossy magazines. In fact, no publicity is still bad publicity ... It is to be hoped that more and more women decide to influence the media by writing for them, not being written about ... In any case, insulting and excluding reporters is no defence against them; censorship is the weapon of oppression, not ours. (1999[1970]: 348)

True to her anarchist-libertarian background, Greer regarded a boycott of the mass media as a form of inverse censorship. As a journalist-provocateur she wrote for *Oz*, the *Sunday Review* and *Sunday Times*, *Playboy*, *Esquire*, *Harper’s* and in Australia wrote for the sex



research journal *Forum* and edited the re-launch issue of *Pol* (May 1972). She was not the only second wave feminist to use the mass media as a vector for feminist communication. Gloria Steinem too dared to be attractive and media savvy, and she too suffered the slings and arrows of the movement for her celebrity feminism. As Tom Wolfe charmingly explained the success of her 'Radical Chic':

At times the press is really looking for people to embody a trend the way fashion magazines look for women who actually wear the clothes they put out ... And the press would rather have Gloria than the other trolls working under the bridge. (quoted in Scott, 2005: 297)

Steinem had been an 'It' girl in the sixties, a journalist for the *New York Times* and *Esquire*, contributing beauty editor of *Glamour*, then celebrity feminist and editor of a magazine that attempted to 'do' feminism in a commercial environment. *Ms* magazine was similarly criticised as 'sleeping with the enemy' because it needed paid advertising to survive and was thus inevitably compromised (Farrell, 1998: 196). Friedan accused Steinem of "ripping off the movement for private profit" (quoted in Scott, 2005: 301). Both Greer and Steinem were seen as shameless self-promoters at the expense of a movement that wanted no leaders or stars.

In the early seventies in Australia another solution to media misrepresentations of feminism was explored with the beginnings of the independent feminist press. Libertarian-anarchist publications, such as *Tharunka* and *Thor*, included articles by Greer, Wendy Bacon and Liz Fell, but were not univocally focused on feminist issues. (In the early years of the second wave, many women of a libertarian background resisted identification with the feminist movement, partly because of its pro-censorship stance when it came to images of women, partly because they saw themselves as already liberated (Lumby, 1997a: 41-42; Coombs, 1996: 258).) *Mejane* was launched in March 1971 as the women's movement's own newspaper. "All over the country women's groups appeared, newsletters and magazines were started" (Curthoys, 1992: 434). By the mid-seventies a debate had developed within Women's Liberation over the best strategy for using media to reach women beyond the core of the organised movement. The problem was that far too few women had become involved with Women's Liberation. *The Sydney Women's Liberation Newsletter* noted in July 1974:

In the past two or three years a fraction of one per cent of all the women in NSW have come in touch with Women's Liberation ... Why are we not reaching out to share what we have experienced with all our sisters, with those to whom Women's Liberation means very little or nothing at all? (Shayne, Miriam, Joan, Pat, Esther, Joy: 6)

Of the ten main independent feminist periodicals in Australia, only 2,000 copies of each were printed, usually quarterly. The 'Beyond the Radical Belt' conference of September 1975 had prompted suggestions for the need to create "a national mass magazine" that could "communicate with a wider range of women outside the movement" (n/a, 1975d: 3). The plan for a national mass magazine did not eventuate but a Feminist Distribution Co-operative for Women's Media was established in October 1975.

The radical desire to separate feminism from the mass media could not be sustained for long. With or without celebrity many feminists chose to work in the commercial media and to work for change within it. Groups were formed such as Media Women's Action Group (1972) to gain more equitable representation in the Australian Journalists' Association (AJA) and to consider the image of women given by the mass media. Women Media Workers was formed in 1976 to fight discrimination within media organisations. Through an International Women's Year (IWY) grant, the federal government funded the 'Coming Out Show' on ABC radio in 1975, run by avowed feminists and designed to counter negative stereotypes of feminism in the mainstream media (Genovese, 2002: 158; Lumby, 1997c: 217). *The National Times* began in 1971 and made a point of employing female reporters. "As the 1970s progressed the *Times* took almost a proprietorial interest in issues affecting women ... [its approach was] unapologetic, brash and proselytising" (Pearce, 1999: 190, 203). Anne Summers worked there from 1976 until 1979 writing stories predominantly about feminism and social justice, as did Adele Horin who worked for the *Times* as a US correspondent and then on staff in Australia from 1978.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> For a thorough exploration of the work of Summers and Horin during this period, see Sharyn Pearce, *Shameless Scribblers* (1999), Chapters 8 and 9. It could be noted that Horin also contributed briefly to *Cleo* from the US.

In reciting this history, it becomes apparent that the print media hierarchy has asserted its presence once more. Commercial women's magazines don't figure in these stories except as adversaries. Writing for newspapers, especially if they were left-leaning like *The National Times*, or for independent feminist papers or magazines, was acceptable and documentable feminist practice. But writing for women's magazines? As the next chapters will explore, a magazine like *Cleo* became a home of sorts to women who wanted to engage with feminist issues for a female readership, but these editors and writers, and indeed, these readers, have gone unremarked in the histories of media and second wave feminism in Australia. Even the recent print media research on this period mentioned above (Sheridan et al.; Lake; Genovese) focuses on newspapers not magazines.

This chapter has investigated the grounding of this invisibility of the feminism of a commercial women's magazine such as *Cleo* in a particular historical period and in very particular practices of education, class and the inner and outer mechanisms of feminist identity as it emerged out of the New Left and student politics. The second wave, as we have seen, inflected the high culture pessimism about popular journalism, and especially commercial women's magazines, in passionate and highly invested ways.

In a recent textbook on feminism, Jane Pilcher and Imelda Whelehan unintentionally highlight one of the paradoxes of feminism and its relationship to the media:

For modern feminists it became important to make feminist ideas legitimate by circulating their ideas as widely as possible and inviting the contributions and responses of other women. It was also important that other women would not encounter boundaries in terms of gaining access to feminist ideas, especially by feeling they lack the entitlement to call themselves 'feminist' for any reason. (2004: 48)

The opposition between inside and outside, however, between popular women's media and radical feminism, between femininity and feminist identity, reinforced the very boundaries that the second wave ideally did not want. And these boundaries made it difficult for many ordinary women to embrace feminism or to call themselves 'feminist'. For the women who came across feminism in the new women's magazines, there was an

awareness of a competing feminist discourse of the *illegitimacy* of this media. Was it that these women felt they 'lacked entitlement' to the title 'feminist' or that their engagement with women's magazines (and the pleasures of femininity) marked them as lacking? Within these competing discourses, 'ordinary' women found it difficult to choose 'feminist' as an identity that represented their experience, and second wavers encountered a boundary they experienced as 'misrepresentation' by the mass media.

Popular feminism exists across these boundaries. While it is true that feminists could be represented in some examples of seventies media as the monstrous outsiders, when it came to a woman's magazine like *Cleo*, those outsiders could also be represented 'inside' and indeed feminism was being *made* there, challenging the very boundaries of outsider politics. The feminism *Cleo* made was never the representation that radical feminists wanted, but it was often a politically effective translation, as will be explored in the following chapters.

#### 4. WRITING THE POPULAR FEMINISM OF *CLEO*

*We have to quit thinking that a qualitative gap exists between the act of reading and writing. No line of difference separates passivity from activity, except the line that distinguishes different ways or styles of socially marking the gap opened up by a practice in a given form.* (de Certeau, 1997[1974]: 145)

This chapter and the next explore the feminist content of *Cleo* in the features produced by journalists and in the letters written by readers throughout the seventies. There is an artificial division – for ease of reading and because of length – between these textual forms. Artificial because the distinction between writers and readers is not at all clear. Readers literally become writers in letters and quizzes, in submitting questions to the problem and doctor's page and in competitions. Partly in response to reader concerns, *Cleo's* editors and journalists developed content and wrote in a style that included the voices of ordinary women (readers). The relationship between producers and readers is dialogic, involving complex acts of industrial and imaginative engagement, made easier because the *Cleo* staff saw themselves as much like their readers.

Journalists and readers both tried to make sense of many of the new and challenging feminist arguments about gender discrimination in public and private. In the seventies, these women were struggling between the older imperatives of a caring, self-sacrificing, privatised femininity and the new demands for an autonomous female self in both private and public realms. Within the narrative of the second wave, the former was the 'housewife', the latter was the 'feminist'. But leaving one vision of womanhood completely behind to embrace the risks of a new and unknown mode of being a woman was an either/or journey many women could not or would not make. This narrative journey has been the dominant story of second wave feminism, but we will hear that it is not the only story to be told about feminisms at the time.

Although *Cleo* did not give much editorial space to the extremes of radical feminism – those Buttrose was later to describe as the “rampaging street-demonstrating feminists” (1985: 156), and Pat Dasey, editor from the mid-seventies, called the “militant” and “radical forces” of the women's movement (1976: 4) – this did not entail a rejection of less radical feminist arguments. It will become apparent that feminist ideas were not

completely 'other to' or 'outside' the parameters of ordinary reader's lives. The narrative of outsider identity politics as the 'true' story of the second wave comes under question when seen through the lens of popular feminism in *Cleo's* pages.

If "journalism is the cultural mechanism in modern societies for translating texts of an alien semiotics (literally, culturally or politically foreign) into 'our' language" (Hartley, 1996: 107), then this is the project *Cleo* was engaged with, making feminism 'our' language. But this alien semiotics of feminism was not a pre-established given, not a closed text that *Cleo's* writers and readers had to translate. They were involved in making the meanings of feminism too.

Before I descend into a saturated exposition of *Cleo's* popular feminist journalism throughout the seventies, I want to explore the difficult concept of the reader and the distinctive relationship a magazine such as *Cleo* can develop between reader and writer.

### 'We' are 'you'

Readers remain the great unknown, and not just in magazine publishing. The category is produced from a number of industrial gazes according to differing needs – marketing, advertising, publishers, producers (editors, writers, designers), academics and, indeed, readers (who are, in a sense, producers as well). Reader behaviour is unpredictable, causing peaks and troughs in circulation figures. The readers abandon or adopt a magazine in ways that cannot be forecast or even thoroughly explained. Market research focus groups, as we saw in Chapter Two, predicted that *Cleo* would not resonate with young Australian women. But the sales target of 80,000 for its first issue was not only reached, it was over-run. The entire print-run of 105,000 was sold in the first two days. Circulation hit 150,000 by the fourth issue (February 1973), 200,000 by the end of that year, and settled around 234,000 by 1974, a circulation figure it maintained for the rest of the decade.<sup>31</sup> In one of the most respected practical books on magazines, John Morrish argues, "nothing you learn from research will guarantee you a successful editorial

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<sup>31</sup> Figures cross-checked from Buttrose (1985: 110) and Australian Audit Bureau of Circulations (1974-1979). These readers were not the same women across the decade; readers are mobile. The reach of *Cleo* was therefore beyond this number.

direction. Publishing history is littered with the corpses of magazines which researched well but failed to sell to real people” (2003: 37). Or, in *Cleo's* case, researched badly and sold extremely well. Many editors would argue that an intuitive connection with the reader is more important than market research (Johnson and Prijatel, 2007: 249).

Readership figures, that loose pass-on factor, are another publishing industry methodology. The term readership refers to independently audited circulation/sales figures multiplied by a readers-per-copy factor of, in *Cleo's* case, two. Readership figures are an approximation based on the lifespan of a magazine. If it tends to be read by other members of the household and by friends, if its life extends beyond the cover date to be read in waiting rooms and homes, its readers-per-copy factor will be higher (McKay, 2000: 191-192). An expensive magazine such as *Vogue* has higher readers-per-copy, around six times the sales figure, because its glossy life is assumed to be longer. Readership is a curious concept. The questions asked by the researchers really only reveal recognition. For McNair Anderson, the print media readership researchers at the time, ‘reading’ was defined by the answer to a question based on the sighting of a cover: “How many different issues of... (PUBLICATION), if any, have you personally read or looked into in the last four weeks? ...By ‘looking into’ a publication, we mean that you must have opened the publication, either at home or away from home, and glanced at or read at least one item or article” (McNair Anderson, 1974: 129).

Readers are not quizzed on memory of specific content or meanings they might have made. It is quite justifiable to be cynical about the value of magazine readership figures in terms of reading/meaning-making (but equally cynical about what book sales or borrowing figures can tell us about the actual reading and meaning-making of *those* readers). What these figures do indicate is that the ‘public’ or more-than-individual reading of one copy of a magazine is incorporated into an industry measure. The focus on recognition also gestures towards the practice of how people read magazines: flicking and scanning, stopping momentarily on a double page spread, glancing first at images, then headline, stand-first, pull-quotes, captions and finally, if at all, the body text, and apparently in that order (Ryan, 2004: 499). Some readers will stay to read the complete story, others will not. This is not the linear page-by-page reading practice of ideal analytic concentration we might assume for books or even newspapers. When Joke Hermes conducted an ethnographic investigation of readers and their use of women’s gossip

magazines, she found that use fell into a number of repertoires, one of which was that magazines are “easily put down” (1995: 29). “Women’s magazines are read more for their adaptability than for their content”, fitting into the rhythms of everyday life (34). Magazines were dipped into, picked up and put aside. It is a reading practice of interruption. We can imagine magazine reading as guided more by domestic time and spaces, commuter imperatives or shared ‘girlie’ moments in hairdressers, lounge rooms, shopping queues or bedrooms than by a time-pressured need to be informed NOW! or by serious, sustained attention.

The breakdowns from McNair Anderson’s survey into magazine readers across Australia in 1974 do however provide a demographic insight into readers. 72.5 per cent of *Cleo’s* readers were married/widowed/divorced; 27.5 per cent were single (McNair Anderson, 1974: 12). The figure initially seems astounding. Given, however, that the average age of marriage in the early seventies was 21, these figures make more sense. Only 37 per cent of *Cleo’s* readers categorised their occupation as ‘home duties’ (26), which implies the majority of its readership were in the paid workforce in some capacity. *Cleo’s* readers were mainly lower to middle class (based on average income) and aged mainly under 35. 80 percent of readers were born in Australia, 10 per cent were born in the UK (34). The gender of the readership was mainly female, but *Cleo* was also read by men. They didn’t buy the magazine, but close to one third of *Cleo’s* readers were male. *Cleo* was ‘read’ by more than 30 percent of women aged between 13 and 24, and 16.7 per cent of women aged between 25 and 39 (6). In terms of magazine publishing, this was an impressive penetration into the target demographic. *Cleo* was aiming to be mainstream but not mass. By contrast, the highest circulation, highest readership mass women’s publication, *The Australian Women’s Weekly*, was read by 50 per cent of women under 24 and 41.7 per cent of women 25 to 39.

At base, all that publishers want from circulation and readership figures is proof of accurate demographic targeting that results in profit. In turn, these figures satisfy advertisers that a particular magazine will provide a suitable environment for their consumer strategy. For magazine editors and writers, the gaze upon the reader is slightly different again. The more detailed research methodology of focus groups of readers may (or may not) discover what they like about the text, what they want and don’t want to read. There is, however, always an imaginative gap between what research has revealed



and what readers might desire. Magazines trade in futures. The long lead-times of magazines, anywhere between weeks to months between production and sale, embody this timeframe. The editorial skill is not just in fulfilling the needs of readers as they might have been (as revealed by reader research, the more direct response of reader letters or even by the editorial interpretation of reader displeasure indicated by a fall in sales) but in anticipating and creating desires. This imaginative engagement with 'becoming' is not the traditional skill of a journalist trained in news reporting. As Tim Holmes has recently argued:

In many important respects magazines are not like newspapers, for whom the concept of 'the reader' is a relatively new discovery. The mantra of magazine publishing is always to pay attention to the needs, desires, hopes, fears and aspirations of 'the reader'. (2007: 514)

The new women's magazines of the seventies continued the tradition of advice journalism that women's magazines had developed since the late seventeenth century (Shevelov, 1989), where readers were encouraged to trust the assumed expertise of the journalist. The 'expert' voice here is not always one of disembodied unfeeling authority but often one of a writer who shares the readers' problems, who inserts her (or his) own experiences and feelings into the subject. The voice of ordinary readers too is incorporated through the use of anecdotes, and features are often structured around their stories. The distance between writer and reader is blurred. Writing about lifestyle television (which has drawn heavily from magazine formats), Frances Bonner has called this technique "conversationalization" (2003: 50). It is a linguistic mode that creates an atmosphere of intimacy and virtual friendship encouraging loyalty and membership of an "imagined community" (Ballaster et al., 1991: 125). There is a "bond of trust" forging "community-like interactions" between a successful magazine and its readership (Holmes, 2007: 514). Almost every analyst of magazines notes the capacity of this genre of print media to both reflect and make a specific community. With the decline of the mass-market general interest titles in the late sixties and seventies, and the rise of what have been called "narrow-casted" publications (Abrahamson, 2007: 669), magazines increasingly focused on readership communities that could form around special interests, lifestyles, and clearly differentiated formations based on class, age, gender and taste.

Hartley has famously described audiences (and by implication, readers) as 'invisible fictions':

[They are] produced institutionally in order for various institutions to take charge of the mechanisms of their own survival. Audiences may be imagined empirically, theoretically or politically, but in all cases the product is a fiction that serves the needs of the imagining institution. In no case is the audience 'real', or external to its discursive construction. (1987: 125)

He is not suggesting that audiences/readers do not in fact exist, but that they exist through discourses produced through the gaze and representations of various institutional bodies. Of course readers are real in the sense that they live and breathe, but they are also always more (and perhaps less) than any one discursive gaze can know (Hartley, 1999a: 491). Magazine producers are quite aware that their readers are an "invisible fiction". This fictionalising becomes an overt tool in journalistic imagining of readerships and in modes of address. A magazine like *Cleo* is not written for the anonymous reader of 'mass media' newspapers. Newspaper journalists "actually know very little about their readership" (Allan, 1999: 109). The 'you' being addressed in magazines is not the generalised reader of the rational or sensational public sphere of newspapers, but a much more specific 'you'. Editing and writing for magazines is an exercise in imaginative specificity, of making choices about content and style of writing from a clearly defined social and cultural space that (it is imagined) readers too imagine themselves as occupying. Producing, and especially editing and writing for magazines, can literally be a training in seeing oneself as another. This requires a creative and relational engagement with what is called 'the ideal reader'. Morrish observed that editors devise "a notional or imaginary reader as a tool for focusing the efforts of the entire editorial team":

Sometimes you will need more than one ... so you will end up with something more like the researchers' 'types' ... You are inventing readers you can think about, discuss, argue with and, above all, speak to. (2003: 41)

In *Cleo's* first editorial letter the process of getting to know the fictional construct of the ideal reader was shared and made overt:

We had a tremendous time working out just what you, our reader, is like. We decided that you're an intelligent woman who's interested in everything that's going on, the type of person who wants a great deal more out of life. Like us, certain aspects of Women's Lib appeal to you, but you're not aggressive about it. And, again like us, you're all for men – as long as they know their place! (Buttrose, 1972: 3)

The personal tone of a magazine such as *Cleo* is inclusionary and intimate, especially in the editorial letter. *Cleo* wanted to draw its readers into a shared project of popular feminism. And it used the traditional linguistic device of women's magazines – the blurring of pronouns – as one way of achieving this construction of a shared community (McLoughlin, 2000: 68-70). This linguistic technique has been described as “synthetic personalisation” (Fairclough, 1989). The plural first person ‘we’ flows neatly into the ‘you’. The ‘you’ manages to combine the individual reader and the community of readers in the same pronoun. ‘You’ (the reader) becomes ‘like us’ (the staff). There is a power differential of course between producer and reader, but the power does not simply flow one way. Women's magazines more than any other form of print media understand this flow of identification.

Using this grammatical voice of connection, ‘we’ were embroiled in this struggle to make sense of feminist challenges to traditional conceptions of the female self as much as ‘you’. Seen in this light, the imaginative connection between writer and reader is potentially much more than a mere rhetorical device or a cynical commercial strategy. It is a utilisation of a traditionally feminine mode of address that women's magazines have developed over centuries (Shevelov, 1989: 196; Ferguson, 1983: 164-166; Beetham, 1996: 187) now put to work in popularising feminism.

Often in magazines, the connection between staff and reader is more than imaginative. In terms of background and interests, “in many cases, the editor *is* the reader” (Johnson and Prijatel, 2007: 150). And *Cleo* staff members literally regarded themselves *as* their readership, as do the staff of many magazines (Gough-Yates, 2003: 118-131). The demographic correspondence between staff and readers can be vitally important. “In most cases, the editors and writers of magazines share a direct community of interest

with their readers. They are often, indeed literally, the same people” (Abrahamson, 2007: 669). Unlike newspapers, the ideal of ‘journalistic distance’ between producer and consumer dissolves. Anne Woodham, a *Cleo* staff writer during the 1970s, explained this connection:

We worked on the not illogical premise that anything that interested us would interest our readers, assuming ourselves to be a fair cross-section of *Cleo’s* target audience. (1982: 122)

The staff was a cluster of women who represented the anticipated demographic: three women under 20, three university graduates, three mothers, one engaged and one divorced. ‘We’ are ‘you’. Woodham recalled that the all-day editorial meetings involved the entire office and came to resemble monthly consciousness-raising sessions:<sup>32</sup>

Those story conferences were practically therapy sessions, the pride we took in lowering our inhibitions. Orgasms? We described them in poetic detail. We laid them as on an examining table and picked them over. Frigidity, impotency, homosexuality, lesbian mothers, menstruation. Nothing, but nothing, was taboo. (122)

The new women’s magazines were written and edited by women who had not been as steeped in the New Left or student politics in the sixties as the feminist activists of the second wave. Nor had most of them been exposed to university education – three, as noted above, of the entire staff of 11. They were baby boomer women who had lived through the sixties as teenagers, determined to work in the media, primed to embrace the ideas around the liberation of women by the beginning of the seventies as a subject of interest and debate for readers much like themselves. For women at this time, a career in the print media still basically meant women’s magazines or the social pages of the newspapers (see Pearce, 1998: Chapter Eight). While this decade saw dramatic changes for women working in the highly masculine world of newspapers, the desire to be a

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<sup>32</sup> Here I use the broader definition of consciousness-raising as defined by Meryl Altman: “... a belief in the liberating potential of speaking openly about women’s lives, starting with one’s own and moving outward to connect with others” (Altman, 2003: 2).

journalist in any role – editing, production, sub-editing, writing – was more readily fulfilled by joining the staff of magazines where women had always been accepted, than by going into battle on the daily press and find oneself covering the races for the women's pages.<sup>33</sup> In the early seventies female journalists were still campaigning for full membership of the Sydney Journalists Club. Of 120 journalists in the Canberra press gallery, there were only two permanent women journalists. Suzanne Baker wrote an article for *The Bulletin* in 1973 after she had recently “resigned in disgust” as women's editor of *The Sydney Morning Herald*. “The plain and simple fact is that the Press is failing women as readers ... [there is a] growing chasm between what all the mass media is giving its audience and what people actually want” (26). Her experience as women's editor was, she wrote, “an amazing revelation and a radicalising one”:

These things to do with the male world are volatile, ever-changing and are to be examined and criticised; these things to do with the female world are static, trivial, unquestioned and right-as-they-are. This is one of the explanations why the majority of women's pages in Australian newspapers still read as if they were written for women in the 1950s. (26)

In Gaye Tuchman's exploration of the problems newspapers in the seventies had in covering the women's movement, she isolated the “craft consciousness of newswork [which] identifies events, not issues, as the stuff and substance of hard news” (1978: 139). Liesbet van Zoonen's research into the Dutch press coverage of feminism in the seventies revealed a similar problem. Feminism's radical idea of politics as including the personal posed a major challenge to ‘hard’ news values (1992). The refusal of the women's movement to have leaders also made it difficult to find ‘experts’ who could speak as representatives of a feminist position, and the more radical feminists refusal to speak to the media at all made news representation difficult for journalists trained in what Tuchman called the “logic of the concrete” of hard news (133-155).

And yet, the magazine format has always offered the possibility of escape from the agenda of daily news and the logic of the concrete. Women's magazines do not deal with

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<sup>33</sup> *The National Times* (1971-1988) was an exception in employing female journalists to write for its leftist, socially critical pages. But it was still only the talented and assertive few who found work writing news and feature journalism there (Pearce, 1998: 189).

daily news and editorial philosophies are not usually based on the watchdog and agenda-setting function of newspaper journalism (although magazines sometimes take on this role). Their occupational ideology is not “founded on violence ... [where] truth is violence, reality is war, news is conflict” (Hartley, 2000: 40). To write for women’s and lifestyle magazines is to step out of the frame of news journalism (see Gitlin, 1980; Allan, 1999: 60-64) and into pages framed in “the name of pleasure, entertainment, attractiveness, appeal” (Hartley, 2000: 30). The distinction between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ stories disappears – one reason why feminist issues could easily fit into the editorial frame of a women’s magazine. Because of their longer lead times and (usually) monthly publication, magazines can afford to look at issues behind the news. And because of their specifically gendered readership and staff, they can give voice to issues that concern women. In Australia in the seventies, if a young woman wanted to write and engage with contemporary issues, and especially those issues relevant to women, the new women’s magazines provided a far more appealing and progressive environment than newspapers.

### Democratising feminism

If “the teaching of new political philosophy to millions of non-philosophers, making the ‘logic of democratic equivalence’ available, is a job for journalism” (Hartley, 1996: 110), then *Cleo*’s job was to teach and democratise feminism. The aim of the rest of this chapter and the next is to prove beyond doubt, to boredom perhaps, that feminist issues were very much alive in this popular women’s magazine. We will see how *Cleo* fulfilled at least part of the ambition of the second wave, “to make the world intelligent of our movement” (Rich, 1980: 14).

*Cleo* was simply utilising the obvious media genre for the task. The female staff found themselves on this magazine and found it possible to do feminist work there. Women’s magazines had taught women feminism before, in the first wave of the late nineteenth century through Louisa Lawson’s *The Dawn* (1888-1905), amongst other magazines that briefly appeared at the time. *The Dawn*’s editorial letter for the May 1889 issue noted, “one of the special features of modern development is the rapid increase of papers for women ... What a varied vision looms over the feminine horizon today!” (Falconer,

1889: 3). As Susan Sheridan's research into *The Dawn* has revealed, "the strength of *The Dawn's* feminism surely lay in its dual focus on public and domestic concerns" (1995: 79). This pedagogic method, mixing the public and the private, was *Cleo's* strategy as well.

*Cleo's* feminism was not radical. There was no analysis of patriarchy or call for the dismantling of the family and the state. There was no overarching need to question "the sum total of the cultural, social, economic, and political traditions" of society, as Ann Curthoys explained the mission of women's liberation at the time (1988 [1971]: 9). The editorial agenda was recognisably that of liberal feminism with a wash of the less revolutionary ideas of Women's Liberation. While Buttrose claimed she did not want to rush her readers, the feminism of *Cleo* was difficult to miss by the end of the first year. Every month there were long and positive feature articles covering many of the issues identified by the nascent women's movement as focal points for discussion and personal and social change.

The first issue trod softly. *Cleo* could not risk alienating the 'invisible fiction' of those 'average' readers by initially staking too overt a position on women's liberation. Even so, there were features on Women's Lib in Russia, women with careers, the pros and cons of living together (as distinct from marriage), life insurance for women,<sup>34</sup> a comprehensive guide to contraception,<sup>35</sup> and a cheat's guide to housework.

*Cleo* was "all for men" as Buttrose had written, and the first issue revealed a strong heterosexual stance, indeed a compliantly romantic femininity, with a battery of stories: massaging your man, thirty brief love stories of how young Australian women 'got their man'; 'Going It Alone – the moving story of a woman without a man'; a light-hearted guide to the appeal of 'Bastard men' (to become a perennial women's magazine story); a quiz to discover how much your man loves you and a pop psychology story on men's secret fears. Until the special men's issue in June 1975 *Cleo* never repeated quite this level of male bias in its features, and the compliant femininity was to disappear quickly. The magazine needed to define its editorial turf – pro-Women's Lib and pro-men – and gauge

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<sup>34</sup> Before superannuation and without careers to fall back on, life insurance was an Australian obsession for women's future financial security. *Cleo* was encouraging women to ensure their future financial independence in this feature.

<sup>35</sup> The high-oestrogen Pill had been causing undesirable side-effects and an ANU survey had revealed that 31 per cent of women had never heard of the diaphragm.

the reader response. Its editorial philosophy was already promising to be provocative on two fronts: overt support of women's liberation and a confronting directness about sexuality.

Fears of how Frank Packer would react initially bothered the team. "We equipped the rebels with knowledge and thus stoked the fires of revolution," wrote Buttrose later, but staff initially held back out of concern that Packer would "rein us in" (1985: 151). Publishers are often closely involved with the first handful of issues until success in the marketplace is established. Frank Packer was no different and he had "grave doubts" about *Cleo* (152). He insisted on seeing content lists and abstracts of stories and sometimes the full copy until high sales allowed him to leave the staff alone. Buttrose tells a story about being summoned to Packer's office for one particular feature, 'What Turns A Man On'. "That article ... where did you get the information that kissing a man's armpits turns a man on?" said Sir Frank. 'It doesn't.' " Buttrose dutifully deleted the passage (151). A story about masturbation had to be justified to Packer senior as a medical story before it could go to print (Buttrose, 1982: 120). The editor also had to pre-empt the launch of *Cosmopolitan* six months later, by covering what she assumed would be the same super-heterosexual territory exhibited by the American and British editions.

Advertisers were initially wary of *Cleo*. There were few ads, which remained the case for the first nine issues. Advertisers are notoriously conservative about new magazine launches, but this was especially the case when the environment of women's magazines in Australia had been dominated since the fifties by the big three – *AWW*, *Woman's Day* and *New Idea* – the 'trade magazines' of the professional housewife (n/a, 1972b: 10). Industry research had also insisted "a lot of housewives feel that they would be better off without Women's Lib" (Patterson, 1972: 239). *Cleo's* first issue sold out within two days and had to be re-printed. As did the first five issues (Buttrose, 1998: 40). By the ninth issue *Cleo* was self-supporting on the basis of cover sales alone, a highly unusual performance in a market as far-flung and numerically small as Australia (Buttrose, 1985: 153). This seemed to give the staff a burst of courage. Whether advertisers came on board or not, reader support meant the magazine could continue in profit. The coverage of women's liberation issues increased steadily as readers responded enthusiastically via letters and sales. By the end of the first year, advertisers were buying around one quarter



of the total pages (Wilson, 1980: 18). This advertising/editorial ratio was not high for Australian magazines. In a small and widely dispersed population, magazines traditionally need from a third to a half of their pages as advertising to remain profitable, unless the magazine is a mass title that can draw most of its revenue from cover price (McKay, 2006: 193). *Cleo's* profitable revenue mix allowed the publishers to withdraw from direct supervision and gave the editorial team room to move.

Over the decade, *Cleo* covered much of the social and cultural ground unearthed by second wave feminist activists. But there was at least one important difference. Where the more radical feminists “exhorted women to ‘leave home’ and find their fulfilment in the world of work” (Johnson and Lloyd: 154), and to cast this older domestic femininity out of their lives and their psyche, *Cleo* could not – and would not – make this move so vehemently. “The WLM represented a revolt against domesticity; it made little appeal to those whose subjectivities were tied up with home and children” (Lake, 1998: 141). In the early months of publication, *Cleo* had to work out where its readers might stand and how far the editorial could go. The magazine had to summon its readers into being and to test their reactions to content. One unusually hostile feature against women’s liberation, for example, ran in February 1973, opening with the phrase “eat your heart out, Germaine Greer”. It gave voice to the women “who are happy with their role, who enjoy being pampered and protected, who like the safe refuge of being cared for, who want to be wives and mothers and are happy to stay firmly feminine, retaining all the privileges it brings from men” (Nelson, 1973: 112). Entitled ‘Strike One against Women’s Lib’ the reaction from readers made sure there would be no strike two in *Cleo's* pages. “This article reveals an ignorance of the fundamental and basic issues of Women’s Lib,” wrote Lorraine Sidey of St Kilda, Vic.. “I think that before these women denounce Germaine Greer and other supporters they should become informed on the ideas involved” (April 1973: 146). A letter from Ms M. Schweizer and Ms M. Staley of Grafton, NSW sums up the published reaction:

I was appalled at the article ... Not one woman quoted showed the slightest inkling of the problem ... For most of us, it is dishonest to use our feminine wiles to get what we want. Some of the ladies quoted seemed to regard their husbands as morons who had to be placated by kind words, easy sex and a helpless attitude so that they would produce an endless supply of \$200 dresses.

That is prostitution of the worst kind. At least the professional prostitute is honest about what she is doing. (May 1973: 162)

The response to 'Strike One' made it clear that many of the arguments of women's liberation were making sense to its readers. By March 1973 *Cleo* felt more secure. The overtly feminist pace picked up and it was not to stop until the eighties.

A much-repeated feature theme throughout the seventies was the dilemma of how to develop the new independent public self without abandoning and belittling the more traditional caring feminine self. In 'Liberation, Mother and Me', Susan Andrews wrote about the conflict between women who worked in the home and those who worked outside it, a result of the "radical social changes" brought about by the "Liberation issue":

The feminist movement has made every woman conscious of alternatives. For the first time wives and mothers feel obliged to defend their decision to stay at home and rancor [sic] has developed ... Housewives do not like working mothers. Working mothers, on the other hand, plagued with guilt and apprehension over possible consequences to their children and home life, feel obliged to reassure themselves and everybody else of the necessity, the desirability, the superiority of working. They look askance at women who confess to being housewives and pass scathing comments about coffee mornings and pottery classes. (1975: 11)

This tension was experienced not just within a generation of women but across the generations. "These 'new' women" constituted a threat to the older generation who had devoted years "to simply mothering and housekeeping" (10). Andrews' mother felt "negated" by her daughter's choice to do both. This feature suggests a different angle on the generational disavowal of mothers by their feminist daughters. Many young women in the seventies, like Andrews, wanted to *retain* connection and respect for their housewife mothers, just as others were driven to reject them and the kind of femininity they embodied. In the pages of *Cleo*, as in the women's movement, there was no easy answer.

One writer admitted that in the attempt to become the type of new woman who could work and run a home, she could not escape the 'mother' in her head. In the confessional mode, Polly Wilson explored the conflict in her article 'Mother doesn't live here anymore...or does she?'. "It's now almost mandatory to spill the beans about all our past foibles and the sacrifices we made before the Women's Movement showed us the way to a More Meaningful Life" (Wilson, 1976: 144). In a kind of public consciousness-raising style, Wilson confessed to having ironed socks and underpants, to a regimental laundry regime, habits she has abandoned. But this domestic 'mother' could not be completely repressed. "Somewhere, somehow, there's a little of mother in all of us, even if it's just a nice clean ghost in our moth-balled and paper-lined closets" (147). The story is very similar to those relayed by Charlotte Brunsdon when she explains the complicated process of 'coming to consciousness' as a feminist in the seventies: "... this distancing from conventional femininity was contradictory, partial and painful as well as vehement and disciplining" (Brunsdon, 2000: 23).

A feature on the double shift, 'What are you trying to prove?', called in the experts to comment. Sydney psychologist Greta Goldberg spoke of the drug addiction and alcoholism that were apparently more common amongst stay-at-home wives than working women and provided a list of feminist demands for social change: maternity leave, parental leave for fathers, tax deductions for working mothers, more child care centres, school canteens with quality food, "and acceptance of the woman as a person in her own right, not just a cog or an all-purpose domestic" (Cameron, 1976: 18).

The subject of the tensions between work and motherhood was approached from slightly different angles in *Cleo* over the decade. The need for maternity leave provisions for working women was a platform of Women's Liberation. While the Whitlam government had granted 12 weeks maternity leave for women working in the public service, *Cleo* argued the need for its expansion in 'The case for maternity leave' (Woodham, 1973a). Readily available quality childcare was another Women's Liberation demand, but it had been a public issue since the early 1960s (Curthoys, 1992: 436). There was an active childcare lobby and with its large concentration of readers with children *Cleo* jumped on board. In response to the Labor party's \$45 million commitment to day care, the magazine ran 'At Last: a child care scheme' (Johnson, 1975). It was not enough. In 1976,

childcare was 'Still a burning issue', especially for migrant women doing shift work (Porter, 1976).

'My child or my career' was the title of another feature about "the dilemma of the working mother" (Woodham, 1973b: 96-100). The necessity of even having children was debated: 'Who needs kids?' (Woodham and Player, 1976). In an editorial letter that would not be out of place in contemporary women's magazines, Pat Dasey wrote of the practical and emotional problems of trying to mix public and private lives – the work/family gender balance that remains unresolved in everyday life and still preoccupies social policy: <sup>36</sup>

If you're a working mother in your 30s today, you can't help feeling guilty about your children; and if you're not at work you may be feeling guilty too. If you've put off having children you worry and wonder if you've left it too late. (1977: 3)

January 1977 was almost a special issue on the subject of women and work. *Cleo* ran a number of features: 'The pros and cons of a part time job', 'Work: a question of choice', 'Have we done the right thing going back to work?' and 'Are Working Women Sexier?'. The answer was yes. There was even a quiz on the topic.

As health reports were revealing, women were exhausted trying to fill all the roles now demanded of them. "What would happen if women everywhere downed tools and went on strike?" asked *Cleo*. "A feminist fantasy perhaps, but certainly well worth some thought" (McDermott, 1976: 58). In the jostling of selves, "supermum, superwife, superwoman, superlover", women were painted as exhausted and in conflict about the transitions from one mode of being to another:

Perhaps one of the greatest problems a working woman faces is this: that in the process of discovering herself as a separate, independent, important human being, she has not learned how to relinquish the heavy burden or responsibilities she became so accustomed to carrying while she was a housewife. (Porter, 1975: 16)

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<sup>36</sup> See HREOC (2005), *Striking the Balance. Women, Men, Work and Family*.

The question recurs like a leitmotif in features throughout the decade. How could women reconcile an older femininity of domestic familial care with an emerging identity of separation and independence?

The fact remains that many women are now doing two jobs. It's all very well to find that being a breadwinner and a housewife, an equal competitor in the marketplace and a mother of three, makes your spirit soar like J.L. Seagull. But, dear heaven, on down days, on fraught and frail days, the sheer volume of decisions, the simple fact of having to be in three places at once can reduce you to jelly. (Knight, 1977: 86)

Despite Knight's assertion, *Cleo* was well aware that women were not equal competitors in the marketplace. How to survive as a working woman without equal pay and often in the systematically underpaid fields of traditional women's work was another running theme. *Cleo* focused on the discriminations in nursing: "It has been called the last bastion of women's subservience. Low pay, long hours and poor conditions are all part of the job. A new deal for nurses is long overdue" (Gare, 1976c: 170). There was a feature on secretaries in the office as an underpaid female ghetto (Benet, 1973), and one on the irony that "women can be cooks but only a man may be a chef" (Gare, 1976a: 100).

The magazine addressed sexual discrimination against women and the new laws coming into effect in various Australian states to challenge it. In 'South Australia. Superwomen State', Kirsten Blanch explained the new Sex Discrimination Act in detail to *Cleo* readers, in the context of South Australia's string of firsts when it came to gender equality. "Out in the suburbs many mums are sleeping easier because, in spite of their living arrangements, the legitimacy of their children or their sexuality, they are protected by law from persecution and discrimination on the grounds of sex" (1976: 74). And *Cleo* lobbied against sexual harassment, giving advice, feminist analysis and explaining women's legal rights (Taylor, 1978).

The masculinisation of women by the independence found in the workplace was a popular fear of those wary of the feminist challenge to the gendered private/public

divide. It came up in *Cleo's* pages, addressed here by an excerpt from the book *Getting Yours* by Letty Cottin Pogrebin, a writer and editor at *Ms* magazine in the US:

Those who occupy positions of power and authority are held up to special scrutiny – depending on her style, the woman is either accused of ‘acting like a man’ or ‘acting just like a woman’ – both assessments add up to a put down. (1976: 57)

The excerpt addressed the tensions female success could cause amongst other women. “Because we have not developed a tradition of self-pride, or sisterhood, one woman’s triumphs are seen as an affront to another woman, rather than a cause for celebration or a happy sign that doors may be opening for all women” (57). It was a theme *Cleo* returned to. ‘The problems and privileges of the woman executive’ interviewed five women about the personal and professional tensions of being the boss, including resentment from other women (Nigra, 1973). Stories addressed inter-female antagonism directly. “Isn’t it about time we cut the cattiness and started trying to LIKE each other?” asked Nikky Campbell (Campbell, 1973b: 28). The question was posed again in ‘What do women think of other women?’ (n/a, 1974) and ‘The Myth of Female Competition’ (Klein, 1977). The catchcry of ‘sisterhood is powerful’ was core to the early second wave, a way to counter the competitiveness and jealousy between women that hindered building collective strength (Mitchell and Oakley, 1986). And ‘sisterhood’ was recurrent in *Cleo*:

There is a sense of sisterhood in the air, even among those who are backpedalling fast away from fist-up feminism. Women like each other and they’re full of spirit and emotional generosity and fun and they have an earthy honesty with each other. (Knight, 1977: 85)

If women were seen to be linking arms, men had become more problematic. As the oppressions of the private sphere came to attention in public, domestic violence became an issue of concern in the seventies in many women’s magazines. *Cleo* ran a long feature on domestic violence, opening with personal anecdotes in the feature style typical of the genre, followed by a detailed explanation of women’s shelters in Britain and Australia. The story ended with a page of practical advice, ‘what a battered wife can do in Australia’

(Woodham, 1974c: 138-144). It was the first of many articles, a campaign in *Cleo's* pages that has continued well into the twenty-first century.

There were guides to women's physical self-defence, 'How to pick up a man – and throw him against the wall' (n/a, 1975a), and to female-focused assertiveness training, 'Why do women always take the burnt chop?' (Nash, 1976). The May 1975 issue included an eight-page lift-out Women's Action Booklet sub-titled 'All you need to know about helping yourself'. The booklet covered the feminist terrain of political action, child care, the law, inflation, making money and starting a business, single motherhood and homosexuality, film making for women, getting a job, women's health and contraception, rape and assault.

Women's health had become a feminist issue, an early concern of the Women's Liberation Movement. "Women's right of sovereignty over their bodies had long been espoused as a fundamental feminist principle" (Lake, 1999: 223). But there was a shift with the second wave analysis of medicine as an institutional site through which men exerted power over women (Schofield, 1998: 123-128). Apart from the monthly doctor's column where women wrote to *Cleo* for advice about specific health problems, the magazine ran monthly features on women's health. In terms of women's right to control their own bodies, "most significant were the constraints women experienced in regulating their own fertility and gaining access to birth control technologies such as contraception and abortion" (Schofield, 1998: 124). *Cleo* ran stories informing women about various forms of contraception every few months, and non-judgemental features about abortion. In response to the letters from "hundreds of readers" *Cleo* explored women-only health centres (Blanch, 1974c). Quoting liberally from the leaflet issued by the Leichhardt Women's Health Centre in Sydney, which had opened on International Women's Day in 1974, the feature argued "one of the major problems facing women today is the communication gap between patient and doctor". After exploring the politics of abortion and the fact that only 33 per cent of women were taking the Pill, Blanch concluded "until women regain control over their own bodies they cannot regain control over their own lives" (129).

The desire for independence and "control over their own lives" were two of the explanations offered for 'Why wives leave home' (Nigra, 1973: 54-60). Even though an

increasing number of Australian women had been filing for divorce, an increase of 30 per cent since 1971,<sup>37</sup> The Family Law Act of 1975 made it much easier for women to leave unhappy or violent marriages and the numbers skyrocketed in the years afterwards (Brook, 1998: 454). Divorce, the problems of child custody and the challenges and delights of living alone were constant features throughout the seventies. *Cleo* even addressed the institution of marriage itself:

Marriage often is restricting for women. Even the most liberated men are apt, if pressed, to respond: 'Yes, I think women should be free; but don't start with my wife'. Others will permit their wife to work provided she (a) does not earn more money (b) still prepares meals and keeps the house clean and socks washed and (c) is responsible for all child-minding arrangements. (Woodham, 1975: 34)

In researching her story 'Would you marry again?', Polly Wilson interviewed scores of women. The responses varied, of course, but Wilson noticed that many women had lost interest in the institution once they had experienced "freedom":

They saw marriage as a projection into endless role-playing and responsibilities, a form of moral blackmail which conditioned their behaviour and responses. Their biggest complaints were with the daily grind of keeping a house clean and making meals. (Wilson, 1977: 125)

It was a feminist argument. In *The Politics of Housework* (1980), Ellen Malos wrote "there will be no true liberation of women until we get rid of the assumption that it will always be women who do housework and look after the children – and mostly in their own homes" (1980: 7). (The gender of housework will be explored further in Chapter Five.)

But women were also leaving marriage because of a non-specific dissatisfaction, one they could now articulate and act upon. Women's Liberation had stressed the importance of 'self-activity' and 'self actualisation'. "Change began with oneself. Hundreds of women took the advice and walked out on their marriages, changed their names, formed new households and began their lives anew" (Lake, 1999: 229). Wilson relayed the story of

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<sup>37</sup> Figure from Summers, 1994 [1975]: 239



'Anna'. "Her marriage, to all outward appearances, was happy but Anna herself felt stifled and inhibited. She walked out suddenly and unexpectedly..." (1977: 125). In a feature on "The woman alone", Patricia O'Brien noted the self-questioning amongst married women, "realising now the extent to which they live their lives through their husbands" (1974: 121). An article by Sandra Hall explained how feminism had given women a language to speak of their dissatisfactions, and the effect this was having on marriages:

... serious questions are being asked about the family and its flaws. The issue is not new but the labels are and for many women these labels have pinpointed what they instinctively knew to be wrong with their lives. Once they wondered if it was normal to be feeling such discontent; now they are convinced that it is and some teetering marriages have been pushed over the edge because of that realisation. (1976: 106)

*Cleo* ran a first person feature story written by one of three affluent housewives, 'the fraternity' who met for lunch every week and developed such a bond that "our husbands were merely on the periphery of our lives" (Williams, 1976: 10):

We had our priorities right. We were vaguely sympathetic with Women's Lib groups and agreed that our first responsibility was to ourselves and wasn't it wonderful that we could enjoy the company of other women with none of the competitive feelings of our teens. We talked often about society's changing attitudes to sex roles while exchanging recipes and crochet patterns. (11)

Within a year all three had "walked out of 'good' marriages to 'good' men". Williams' fraternity had evolved into a consciousness-raising group, another subject that *Cleo* featured throughout the first half of the seventies. Quoting liberally from the guide to consciousness-raising (c-r) in the *Notes from the Third Year* collection from the New York women's movement, Myrna Kostash wrote an experiential how-to guide. Step One: opening up; Step Two: sharing; Step Three: analysis; Step Four: abstraction:

It's about women talking together about being women ... the special problems and questions we all face. Every woman can do c-r because this is one subject where every woman is an expert. (1974: 46)

In a page of suggested topics to discuss at 'your' c-r meeting was point 13, Women's Liberation: "your notions about it, its aims, and strategies; your hopes and aims; the idea of sisterhood, who is interested in it and why?" (50). There were also study group suggestions to discuss "images of women in the media".

*Cleo* did not consider the feminist critique of women's magazines as outside the editorial brief. The choice of Patricia Edgar as the subject of a three-page feature to coincide with the launch of *Media She* would seem counter-productive. Why alert readers to the possibility that the liberation they were reading about in the pages of *Cleo* was a "put-on"? Edgar spoke at length about the exploitation of women in the mass media to a highly sympathetic journalist, Anne Yuille. "The magazines come on in the guise of attempting to do something for Women's Lib," said Edgar, clearly including *Cleo* in the job lot, "while in fact they're reinforcing the same old stereotypes, offering a more sophisticated way to get your man ... while some of our magazines do publish good individual articles, mostly their orientation is a put-on" (Yuille, 1974a: 51). The belief that the support for women's liberation apparent in the new women's magazines of the seventies was a commercial con-job, developed by women under the thumb of male publishers, was a common second wave argument. Because commercial women's magazines were published by large corporations run by men, the women editors "are answerable" and therefore "they cannot take any real risks" (51). To run a feature 'demystifying' the 'put-on' women's liberation of *Cleo* is a curious editorial move, risking turning readers away from the magazine. And it was a move *Cleo* made again in 1975. In a feature on Shirley Sampson and her critique of the education of girls, Sampson pointed to women's magazines as one of the causes for girl's lack of ambition:

Most couldn't see that at 30 they just might want to be more than a housewife and mother. I couldn't work out why this was. Then I watched them at recess. Out would come ... one of the women's magazines ... I see one of its basic messages to girls and women as; you're not good enough the way you are; you

have to do a lot with your appearance or you won't attract a man. (Yuille, 1975: 137)

Again, this was not a wise commercial move unless *Cleo* staff and its readers saw their philosophy and position in the market as a different, indeed as a feminist, kind of magazine.

When it came to profiles of women, the 'celebrities' *Cleo* chose to interview were women who had succeeded in politics, business and culture: "they were our stars, and we sold them to our readers as objects of adulation" (Woodham, 1982: 122). In the seventies, *Cleo* was not ridden with celebrities and the choices the editors made were selective and often based on feminist credentials. There were profiles on the Irish political activist Bernadette Devlin about civil rights and women's liberation; an interview with anthropologist Margaret Mead, and one with feminist Eva Figes about religion as a male plot. There were profiles on Betty Friedan, Helen Reddy and Patti Smith; on the feminist lawyer Helen Coonan and aboriginal activist Bobbie Sykes; and on Australian women in the media such as Caroline Jones, Gwen Plumb, Margaret Throsby and Claudia Wright. There were profiles of women in politics such as Elizabeth Reid, adviser to Whitlam on women's affairs; Eve Mahlab of the Women's Electoral Lobby and Kathy Martin, the Liberal Party's 'kissing senator'.

From the tame story of the sadness of a woman without a man in the first issue, by 1974 *Cleo* was painting celebratory portraits of the financial and emotional independence of both well-known and ordinary women. In the feature interviewing 'Women who live on their own', Cope Jenkinson concluded:

None considers or wants to consider men as emotional or economic crutches. They make their own decisions and take the consequences, good and bad. They rely on themselves 100 per cent, emerging fuller and more complete people. And still feminine ... (1974: 102)

For *Cleo*, independence and femininity were not opposites. But the connection had to be stated, an indication of the power of mythologies about spinsters, loneliness and the failure in terms of traditional femininity if a woman chose to live alone. The real struggle

for *Cleo*, and for its readers, was how to reconcile femininity with feminism. Did wanting one mean you had to abandon the other? In 1974 the magazine had run an excerpt from *The Female Woman* written by the high priestess of anti-Women's Liberation, Arianna Stassinopoulos. She found Women's Liberation "repulsive". The movement attacked "the very nature of women" (Stassinopoulos, 1974: 40). Women were inherently different from men, but she saw women's liberation as seeking to "abolish all differences between them". This would lead to "bitter conflict", to regarding men as "the enemy" and to contempt for "you the average female reader as perverse, servile, dishonest, inefficient, inconsistent, idiotic, passive, ignorant and ineffectual" (40). Stassinopoulos was not opposed to emancipation, which she saw as "the removal of all barriers to female opportunities" but she had no interest in "compelling women into male roles by devaluing female ones" (41). It was a strongly rhetorical and emotive argument, generalising a diverse movement, and the book received massive media coverage. It also honed in on the very concerns that many women (and men) – "you the average female reader" – had about Women's Liberation.

This excerpt garnered a lengthy two-page feature response a few issues later from Judy Gemmell, a member of the Women's Liberation Movement in Melbourne, entitled 'We're not feminine but we're certainly female women' (Gemmell, 1974: 190-191). Gemmell argued against Stassinopoulos' attacks and outlined the principles of Women's Liberation in detail: women must have control over their own bodies; women must not be discriminated against in education; they must have full equality in domestic labour, either paid for or shared; 24 hour child care; equal pay for equal work; their bodies should not be "used in a degrading way to sell products"; and laws which discriminate against women should be repealed. Gemmell concluded:

These basic aims certainly do not mean that the movement is trying to fit all women into a Women's Lib stereotype ... [The aims] boil down to one basic viewpoint – that all human beings, regardless of sex, should be permitted to develop and grow to the limit of their capacities and desires without hindrance from discrimination of any sort and free from being brainwashed on their true nature and role in life. (190)

Feminism and femininity have traditionally been posited as polarities in popular culture. Within the academic work on women's magazines, it was only in the nineties that a 'new' feminist femininity has been recognised as being able to co-exist in this genre (McRobbie, 1996: 173). But in *Cleo's* popular feminism of the seventies, the two were not considered necessarily antagonistic or impossible to reconcile. There is a strong sense of an attempt to assert a more broadly defined femininity in the pages of *Cleo*, as if the magazine felt under pressure to insist that certain kinds of feminism and a concern with women's pleasurable difference from men – and sexual desire for men – were not incompatible. The emphasis was on the range of choices now available for the new woman. A 1976 feature by Bette-Jane Raphael, 'What makes you feel feminine?', demonstrates how the definitions of the feminine woman were multiplying and how confusing it was to reconcile the contemporary discourses around femininity and feminism when both terms were clearly so unstable. The stand-first ran:

For every woman who feels most feminine in a bubble bath, there's another who finds excitement wearing army surplus gear. Ask 100 women what makes them feel most feminine and you'll get 100 different answers. (68)

In Raphael's feature a 'bad' femininity (silliness, passivity, negative social conditioning) is positioned against a 'good' new femininity that struggles to define itself but could still include 'feminist' fashion (army surplus gear). Raphael insists that femininity is still "a viable feeling", that it is a "state of mind", "an acceptance of yourself", but as she recites the responses to the question 'what makes you feel feminine?' from a range of interviewees, Raphael found that femininity was most often explained in terms of a relation – to masculinity. Explaining that relation was just as tricky. The women reverted to anecdote. Size, muscles, a voice of authority, dominant male sexual partners, all made these women "feel feminine". And when Raphael asked "the most militant feminist I know", she was startled by the answer of "this ferociously independent career woman": "When I see a newborn baby, I immediately want to nurse it. I can almost feel the milk flowing in my breasts" (68). The only thing definite in this feature was the question – and the awareness that feminism had begun to interrogate femininity into an ambiguous space:

Unfortunately, femininity has fallen into disrepute lately. Some feminists have coupled it with such negatives as passivity, unimportance, silliness, uselessness, subjugation and other less than admirable qualities of political and social weightlessness. Insofar as it is aligned with social conditioning, femininity can have a negative, stunting influence. But when women make free choices as to where and how and when they want to be and feel most feminine, then life options are opened up rather than limited. In the best sense, feeling feminine bespeaks an acceptance of yourself as a female human being. (68)

Whatever that might mean ... There were, however, 'bad' femininities that *Cleo* was on firmer ground in criticising. Two books were released on the Australian market in December 1975 almost begging *Cleo* to draw its knives. Helen Andelin's *Fascinating Womanhood* and Marabel Morgan's *Total Woman* were both best-sellers in America and the basis of popular courses across the country teaching women how to transform themselves from "disgruntled embittered hostile shrews into 'queenly mates' whose only desire is to serve their masters" (Harrison, 1975: 164). Barbara Grizutti Harrison's critical review was called, 'Is a Barbie doll happy?': "Who in the world would advise any woman to be consummately coy, uncomfortable and breathtakingly silly in order to improve her marriage?" (164).

*Cleo* repeatedly analysed the male investment in women's stupidity. "The woman with all the rights answers is treated like a freak," wrote Annabel Frost (1976: 29). A feature by Sandra Hall explored one of the myths around femininity and feminism being discussed by 'experts' at the time, 'Do brainy women make strong men weak?'

I wouldn't say that men generally are still afraid of women with brains; some are, some aren't ... the hostility can't last, just as the humourless feminist stereotype can't last. A lot of feminists don't like it either and are looking for a tactic more sophisticated than pure outrage. But that tactic should not be tact. Women have been tactful about their brains for too long. (1976: 108)

*Cleo* was attempting to explain how women could integrate feminist insights without jettisoning femininity and female difference from men altogether. Brains were in, so were financial and emotional independence. Tact was out; passive, coy, simpering silliness was

out but so was extreme political outrage. The magazine's stance on political activism had been biased towards liberal feminism from the start. Throughout its pages were repeated mentions of the Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL). A feature 'Arise, females of Australia' was a broadside for women to "get involved", and an expression of disappointment in the pace of achievement from the Labor government, using its 1972 campaign slogan 'It's time' as a critical device:

IT'S TIME women were elected to sit in Parliament.

IT'S TIME we had women making decisions on education needs and child welfare.

IT'S TIME women decided what wage rises and strikes are justified.

IT'S TIME women made their own decisions about laws governing their births, deaths and marriages.

But how many women know even the name of their local politician? (Kent, 1974: 28)

While *Cleo's* first issue had gone soft, talking about Women's Lib in Russia rather than on more familiar streets, features increasingly appeared in the first half of the seventies covering the Women's Liberation Movement itself. Stories on the state of the movement in America, 'The Women's Movement is really moving' (Yuille, 1974b), in Britain, 'Equality British Style' (Woodham, 1976) and a four page feminist history of 'The Australian Woman' (Flett, 1973). During International Women's Year, 1975, *Cleo* introduced a page of feminist news in every issue. But after the negative publicity following the *Women and Politics* conference in Canberra that year it had become necessary for *Cleo* to distance itself from the extremes of the movement.

By the mid-1970s, the women's movement had splintered into more defined and antagonistic ideological groupings: liberal, radical, socialist, Marxist (Burgmann, 1993: 82-88). There were disputes about strategy, especially around the liberal feminist organization WEL. Radical feminists were opposed to the femocrats playing men's games and their institutionalisation in the government and bureaucracy. The earlier critique of limited sex roles for women developed into a critique of heterosexuality, and the heterosexism of the early years of Women's Liberation came under fire from lesbian women. As Lake noted, "Radicalesbians' joined the proliferating women's groups and

heterosexual women found themselves increasingly accountable for the seeming perversity of their desire” (1999: 243). Concern with male sexual aggression, the dangers rather than the pleasures of heterosexuality, began to dominate discussions of sexual politics. At the sensational Canberra conference in 1975 the differences between mainstream ‘respectable’ feminism and the militant ‘revolutionary’ strands received extensive negative news media coverage. The *Sydney Women’s Liberation Newsletter* noted the “appalling press coverage” of the conference which generated much anger in the movement and an even more combative attitude towards mainstream media (n/a, 1975b: 5). Elizabeth Reid, the Prime Minister’s Adviser on women’s affairs, described the Parliament House reception:

The statue of King George V in King’s Hall was draped with a placard reading ‘Women and Revolution, not Women and Bureaucracy’ and ‘lesbians are lovely’ and similar slogans were written in lipstick on the mirrors in the men’s toilets. (quoted in Lake, 1999: 259)

*Cleo* was still intent on popularising feminism throughout the 1970s, but not *that* kind of feminism. As amorphous as popular feminism might be, and while it never claimed a name as a clear identity, the parameters were becoming clear. ‘Disidentity’ might be too strong a claim, but popular feminism was developing in distinction to a more radical ‘other’ feminism. *Cleo*’s feminism was not revolting in the houses of parliament; it was encouraging its readers to *write* to the government.

In 1976, a feature called ‘Womanpower’ surveyed the state of feminism after “the end of IWY and a change of government [had] dampened a lot of the razzamatazz” (n/a, 1976b: 105). The structure was ten first-person statements from women who represented a range of feminisms. Joyce Stevens, a Women’s Liberation activist, noted the recent criticisms of the movement over its white middle class nature and its unrepresentative definition of ‘women’. “We know that all women have some problems in common but we have also learned that where we work, live and the colour of one’s skin can increase these problems a hundredfold” (106). In what seems to be a reference to feminist women working with the state and possibly even to *Cleo* itself, Stevens wrote that “our biggest challenge is to be able to preserve that spirit [the euphoria of sisterhood] in the face of dollars bidding for our souls and those who tell us to ‘soften’ our approach”



(106). An anonymous member of the Lesbian Feminist Collective wrote, "lesbianism is only just being recognised as a political issue of the Women's Movement ... [it] has created a climate of change in which women redefine themselves without reference to the dominant patriarchal society." Erica Jong talked about the "filtering down to a grass-roots level" of the movement's ideas:

There has been a real change. People now really do understand that feminism is not about not wearing make-up or bras; it's about equal pay, equal division of household labour, equal childcare, issues like that. On the part of most women who are not fanatical – who are very ordinary women – there is a great rededication to this. (105)

But the predominant voice in this collection of feminists was that of WEL: Edna Ryan, Susan Braudy, Joan Bielski and Elizabeth Windschuttle, all from WEL, contributed. *Cleo's* bias was obvious.

Ita Buttrose presided over the magazine she had pioneered until April 1975. Her final editorial was about International Women's Day:

The main aim is to promote equality between men and women, to ensure the full integration of women in the total development effort ... recognition of the importance of the status of women [as] a major issue throughout the world. (4)

Buttrose went on to encourage her readers to become involved politically by writing to the National Advisory Committee established by the Federal Government, taking part in local politics and protests, and writing to newspapers and politicians. Speaking to her housewife readership as much as single working women (and the women who did both jobs), Buttrose insisted "women who are tagged housewives should not be made to feel that they need to apologise for it ... We must not criticise how women find their fulfilment" (4).

Buttrose's admonition was towards a feminism that was indeed critical of the housewife. As she was about to take over the editorship of *The Australian Women's Weekly*, the housewife's bible, this delineation was pointed. While more women with children were

also doing paid work in the 1970s, their role as housewives could not be dismissed. Buttrose identified with the women's movement. She felt entitled to speak for and include her readership with the plural first person 'we', but as her parting gesture Buttrose included her readers in an identification with feminism that was *not* of the radical kind. The housewife may have been Other to the dominant narrative of second wave feminism but she still had a place in the popular feminism *Cleo* was developing.

After Buttrose's departure, the interim editor, Viki Wright, included an eight-page 'Women's Action Booklet'. She too felt it necessary to claim distance from the extremes of feminism. In her editorial letter Wright explained, "the phrase Women's Action conjures in me a vision of masses of hairy armed ladies with clenched fists. I imagine this is the result of over exposure to some of the more politically zealous among us" (1975: 4). The politically zealous were still regarded as part of 'us' women but the booklet had nothing to do with the clenched fist. Instead it was offered as a guide to "helping yourself".

Here we have a women's magazine in the seventies, bursting with features about feminist issues and the women's movement itself, which was being read by 30 per cent of women under 25. It was popular and it was feminist. In some issues, it is difficult to distinguish *Cleo* from *Spare Rib*, apart from the ads and the fashion pages. If this was merely a "put on" as Patricia Edgar accused or a "mouthing of support" as Anne Summers had written, there was apparently a lot of disingenuous chatter going on. Despite Summers' antagonism towards the glossies, *Cleo* gave *Damned Whores and God's Police* an enthusiastic book review (Blanch, 1975: 57). This magazine's feminist content may have been 'perverse', 'embarrassing' and 'shocking' to more radical and critical feminist readers but the ordinary readers of *Cleo* did not agree, as the following chapter will explore.

## 5. READERS WRITING THE POPULAR FEMINISM OF *CLEO*

*Experiences, ambitions and anger unknown to us speak in the first person.*

(de Certeau, 1997[ 1974]: 138)

*The media is neither a mirror of reality nor reality itself – but an imprint of the traffic between  
the two.* (Lumby, 1997b: 6)

We can read the letters pages of *Cleo* as traces left in an in-between space, in between everyday life and the public sphere of representation. Reader letters provide textual clues as to how *Cleo* affected individual realities at the time of reading/writing. What issues mattered? What issues mattered enough to engage with 'my' imagined community? At the distance of thirty years the reader letters published in *Cleo* are the marks left by the Other of feminist history and the Other of the rational public sphere, another textual layer of popular feminism. Using their letters, we can know what the readers said about the feminist ideas encountered in *Cleo's* pages and that they actually wanted to turn their private reading into public writing. As Kathryn Shevelow says of readers' letters to eighteenth century periodicals, "the concept of reader and the concept of writer were conjoined; the discourse of the private became a public discourse" (1989: 69). The letters pages became a forum for the practice of critical writing/reading and often critically about feminism.

What becomes evident in reading the letters pages of *Cleo* is just how much feminism interested and concerned 'ordinary' women, and how much it was a part of their mediated counter-public sphere in the seventies. Their engagement comes as a surprise given the importance of the figuration of the resistant ordinary woman to the construction of second wave feminist identity, as discussed in Chapter Three. With her apparent investment in femininity and her housewifery, feminism is not meant to be part of the mix as well. This 'ordinary' woman reveals herself as far more complex in her relationship to feminism than the historical narrative has imagined.

## Reading letters: "I feel as if I've crawled out of a cocoon"

Before exploring the reader letters to *Cleo* in some depth, it is worth looking at the perceived function of letters in newspapers and magazines, who writes them and how media staff regard them. Letters perform quite differently depending on the media site. As a forum for the public to voice opinions, the letters page in newspapers has been viewed as "the community's heartbeat" and "a debating society that never adjourns" (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2002: 183), as a "thermometer" of public opinion (Sigelman and Walkosz, 1992). Letters usually either contest or consolidate positions taken by the publication (Newman, 2005: 300). In writing about newspapers, Stuart Allan suggests that letters to the editor "have only a limited impact on the newsworker's rudimentary impressions of their readers" (1999: 110). In fact, he cites research that argues there is an ethos amongst news journalists that "the bulk of audience reaction is from cranks, the unstable, the hysterical and the sick" (110). Wahl-Jorgensen's research also found that newspaper editors can employ what she calls the "idiom of insanity": "A description of a letter-writer as a rational person is a rare and exceptional occasion, whereas the label of 'crazy' is generously and frequently applied" (2002: 189). The letters editor polices 'the crazies' by judicious selection procedures. This functions, she argues, to "sustain dominant top-down forms of journalism, in which the news agenda is determined by journalists, politicians and other elites and the public play only a bit role in legitimating their decisions" (199). Amongst news journalists, letters to the editor seem to create the *inverse* of the magazines' 'we' are 'you'.

If writing a letter to the paper can be regarded as a civic duty or democratic participation, even if the contributors are considered 'crazy' by those who edit and select them, what does it mean to write to a magazine? We could draw on Foucault here when he argues that discursive practices "systematically form the objects of which they speak" (1972: 49). To write to a very specific public of (predominantly) women is to imagine oneself as, to engage with, even to create a *counter-public* sphere. The letters pages of *Cleo* actually helped *constitute* membership of an imagined community of popular feminism. The seventies was still the era of the 'solus' rather than the 'repertoire' reader.<sup>38</sup> There was

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<sup>38</sup> The 'solus' reader of magazines is one who is loyal to a particular publication and buys it regularly. The 'repertoire' reader buys on impulse from a range of similar titles (McKay, 2000: 193).

less choice on the newsstands for younger women and readers could develop an intense loyalty to a particular magazine. In their research on the *Australian Women's Weekly*, Susan Sheridan et al. describe how its readers "have a sense of belonging to a club as well as having mentors and advisers to turn to" (2002: 4; and see Scott, 1998: 79). Letters to *Cleo* often reveal a similar sense of belonging, even of ownership and entitlement, and indeed a sense of betrayal when *Cleo* departed from beliefs or responsibilities that the reader expected. The March 1975 issue of *Cleo*, as just one of many examples, ran a feature 'Do men really like women?' by one of its occasional writers, Ron Saw. His unreconstructed chauvinism provoked outrage from readers, not just towards his traditional ideas about a woman's place, but towards *Cleo*:

My antagonism is directed towards the magazine ... you really have a nerve to print such sub-standard rubbish ... Thanks for nothing, *Cleo*; we deserve much better than that and I know you can provide it. (Carol Jones, no address; June, 1975: 161)

Letters can allow insights into the reader, if editors are inclined to listen. In magazines, reader letters operated as an informal kind of market research, especially at a time when focus group reader research was only conducted before a magazine was launched (if there was a budget) or when a magazine was doing badly. As the last chapter explored, magazine staff saw themselves 'as' their readership. The 'idiom of insanity' and the utter disrespect for the reader apparent in newspapers was not the ethos at work in *Cleo*. Indeed, reader letters sometimes suggested ideas for the editorial agenda. In a sense, readers could function as editors. This was often the case with *Cleo*, as will be shown. Not a 'top-down' form of editing but one that was directly open to input from the readers 'below'.

Reader letters have been seen as a place where the tradition of oral storytelling can be continued in the mediated public sphere (Bird, 1996). The very ordinariness of many of the letters is a striking indication of how valued these stories from women's everyday life were for many women's magazines. Of course there had to be selection and cutting. Some were just paragraphs. Others were allowed to run for more than a column of print. Unlike some traditional women's magazines at the time, there was no payment for letters. Readers did not feel obliged to dramatise or sensationalise to gain attention. We need to

understand the reassuring function of the ordinary in a women's magazine such as *Cleo*. Its feature style was almost premised on the liberal use of anecdotes from the ordinary lives of readers or from people who shared experiences much like the target demographic. It is a technique of human interest writing familiar to readers of newspapers, but without the news value of the 'extraordinary'.<sup>39</sup> In its more exquisitely executed literary form, this approach to feature writing has been called "intimate journalism" (Harrington, 1997). It is a journalistic value that can mystify journalists trained in newspapers, as if ordinary and everyday experiences are intrinsically unworthy of circulation in the mediated public sphere. "Everyday life is typically distinguished from the exceptional moment: the battle, the catastrophe, the extraordinary deed," writes Rita Felski (1999-2000: 17). Everyday life has, historically, been gendered as the space of women.

Women, like everyday life, have often been defined by negation. Their realm has not been that of war, art, philosophy, scientific endeavour, high office. What else is left to women but everyday life, the realm of the insignificant, invisible yet indispensable? (17)

Considered trivial in terms of the journalism of public record, women's magazines refused to accept such devaluation of their readers' lives. The letters pages of *Cleo* became a space of public intimacy, grounded in the importance of these mundane stories of women's personal and everyday experiences. A few examples taken at random can make the point here:

I am fortunate in having a job that is stimulating and carries responsibility, but since the money I get, plus some maintenance money from my estranged husband, is by no means enough to pay domestic help, the work all falls to me and it is not an easy life. It is very tiring in fact and I still don't have enough money to dress myself the way I would like and really should for the front office position I hold. (Reader, Vic.; July 1974: 178)

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<sup>39</sup> As Liz Nice suggests in her analysis of the distinction between tabloid and popular journalism and girls' magazines, "popular journalism might be said to have a rather more esteemed history as a site for representing the ordinary, everyday lives and popular culture of the people" (Nice, 2007: 120).

In response to an article about decentralisation, a push from the Labor government at the time, many readers wrote about the appalling conditions and services available in regional centres. One woman wrote:

There were no childminding facilities and kindergartens were booked out years ahead ... shopping was barely adequate ... the brighter child must move to receive most tertiary education; the ordinary one has difficulty in finding work and many girls drift into early marriage because they have to or because there is nothing else to do. (Anti-decentralisation, Berkeley, NSW; July 1974: 178)

*Cleo* often ran features about women's health and sexually transmitted diseases. After one such article, 'VD: The Fight We Are Losing', a reader wrote complaining about the advice:

I wonder why every magazine's advice seems to be to go immediately to a clinic at the first signs of gonorrhoea or syphilis, as information is always kept confidential. I went along to my local hospital for a check up and in one month my sister knew about it and told my mother ... (Secret's Out, ACT; January 1975: 146)

No newspaper would run letters of this length or of this 'dreary' personal detail. The tales these women tell in every issue of *Cleo* are ones considered irrelevant to the serious debate of the rational public sphere, and where such personal detail *is* used it's typically told by a journalist-narrator who deploys the ordinary person's story as a 'case study' to illustrate an issue. Buried in these personal tales is a political discontent – with poor pay for clerical and secretarial work, with the burden of the double shift especially when women were raising children alone, with the child care problems and limited opportunities for girls in rural Australia, with medical ethics about sexual behaviour. Published and read in the context of a magazine so concerned with female inequality and discrimination against women, these letters take on a political – indeed a feminist – dimension. Here is another:

Your magazine has really helped me become aware of my rights as a human being; I feel as if I've crawled out of a cocoon ... I have been intimidated for the

six years of my marriage but at long last have developed enough confidence to stand up and say “no” or, more correctly, “NO” ... I endured two years of sheer hell before anyone knew what our marriage was like – the only reason people found out was because of his violence towards me which resulted in my having a miscarriage ... He convinced me I was the ugliest, most useless, unwanted slob in all of Australia ... I started reading copies of *Cleo* borrowed from a neighbour and he said I only wanted to look at the centrefolds. (Reader, Perth; February 1976: 146)

(And he wouldn't let her surf. Swine!) Reading this woman's letter even now is heartbreaking. It is impossible to know how many other women suffering domestic violence and personal annihilation read this at the time and were similarly moved, perhaps moved to action. Leaving abusive marriages was not anything new in the seventies, but it was made much easier by the work of feminists who established women's refuges and women's health centres around the country and lobbied government to change divorce laws and increase payments to single mothers. But this woman was so isolated the only means to this information was through a woman's magazine like *Cleo*, borrowed from a neighbour. Its feminism slipped under the radar of her husband's surveillance. The letter from this Perth reader illustrates how engagement with a woman's magazine can offer the compensation of emotional support absent in primary relationships with men. It is an emotional sustenance that Janice Radway (1984) noted in her interviews with readers of romance fiction. But *Cleo* provided practical suggestions too which could help some readers make dramatic changes to their difficult lives.

Using reader letters as a way to hear the voices of ordinary women raises questions about veracity. It is a popular mythology that magazines just make them up (Swain, 1991; Scott, 1998). So it is probably worth a brief digression here. The concern about fabrication of letters is a complex issue that draws yet again on the predominance of the values of the rational public sphere in much media theory, in the print media industries and in educated conversation. The standards of quality newspapers predominate. Letters pages employ a specific editor to check the authenticity of signature and content, and letters are not run if authorship cannot be verified (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2002: 188). This is the rationale of the traditional public sphere: truth, verification, accountability and legal



safety. When letters pages take on different modes of practice and intent in different print media sites, they tend to be dismissed as untrustworthy, irrelevant and probably fabricated by unethical staff.

The first point is to acknowledge that in some magazines the integrity of signature and letter is indeed a journalistic invention. But this is exactly the point. At the tabloid end of the magazine spectrum the concern for veracity and personal responsibility is turned upside down. Kevin Glynn terms this “fantastic populism”: “Fantastic knowledges can be understood as evasive ones, for they evade the explanatory powers of official truths that serve to extend the social power of dominant interests and alliances” (2000: 143). An irreverent men’s magazine like *Picture*, for example, treats most of its content, including letters, as light entertainment. The earnest style of the quality press is played with. Journalists adopt jocular pseudonyms and letters are often written by staff with a clear intention to amuse and often offend. In magazines like *Penthouse* or *Hustler*, where reader letters evolved as one of the most entertaining elements of their content, staff writers do sometimes write letters – if the influx of reader responses are not suitably salacious or amusing (Dapin, 2004: 51). Inventing letters in these contexts is an ironic device, part of the implicit contract between readers and writers in these genres.

Within women’s magazines, the rules are different again. *Vogue*, for example, at the top end of the women’s magazine hierarchy, has traditionally not run a letters page.<sup>40</sup> It was a mark of distinction to avoid something so participatory. Readers bought *Vogue* for its authority and direction in matters of taste. Dispensing personal advice was not *Vogue*’s function; even its fashion coverage was not framed as ‘advice’. Nor was its function to offer space for the reader’s voice. For mid-hierarchy magazines such as *Cleo* and *Cosmo*, reader involvement is critical to the identity of the magazine. There is a direct equivalence sought between writer and reader, as if from friend to friend. Checking authorship of letters in women’s magazines is not a matter of tradition or standard practice, but does sometimes occur as a matter of individual editorial policy. The invention of letters, however, is usually frowned upon in this environment. There is an ethic of trust involved. If the secret knowledge were to leak out that reader letters were written in-house, the trust between readers and their magazine would be broken. Given

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<sup>40</sup> In recent years, however, *Vogue* has included a letters section and developed an interactive website.

the intensely personal nature of magazines such as *Cleo* and *Cosmo*, full of advice, confession, self-help and anecdote, respect for the reader is a key element. It is important that a reader can trust the information within the pages, and believe that the other readers they engage with on the letters page actually exist. The disbelief in the authenticity of reader letters in magazines is another indication of 'distinction' at work. Educated middle class readers of print media, who may well write letters to newspapers, seem to find it difficult to imagine that there are women who invest passion and time to engage with their counter-public sphere, especially to write about such personal, 'trivial' subjects.

Having argued for the authenticity of signature and letter in the pages of *Cleo*, the letters still do not provide access to some pure unvarnished truth of reader's lives. "Intrepid researchers who sally across the gap between audiences and people in search of the (representative and quantifiable) 'real' will still only find textuality" (Hartley, 1999a: 494). The spillage of readers' critical thinking onto the page remains an act of conscious writerly construction, a narrativisation of a moment's reflection penned with the hope of being selected for publication. In her work on reader letters to women's health magazines, Christy Newman argues that authenticity doesn't really matter. "Whether published letters are a genuine 'voice for the people' they nonetheless create particular impressions of the reading public, thereby contributing to the discursive constitution of magazine audiences" (2007: 158). Kathryn Shevelow makes a similar point in her study of eighteenth century letters to women's magazines. "The reader 'represented' is the reader constructed," she argues. This is not necessarily because letters are fabricated, "but because the representation of the self in writing is always a construction, whether on the part of the alleged writer or on the part of the periodical's editors" (1989: 68).<sup>41</sup>

The first letters page of *Cleo* in November 1972 was left blank, asking readers to write in with their responses to the magazine. It was a sign of honest intent, to deny any suspicion of editorial fabrication. The empty page was also a pedagogic lesson –

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<sup>41</sup> For what it's worth, my experience in the magazine industry suggests a range of practices at work. For magazines with loyal engaged audiences – especially teen or fan-based – there is simply no need to fabricate letters. There is a plentiful supply of rich texts to enliven a letters page. I have never heard of a completely fabricated letters page. If there were so few or no reader letters the page would simply be killed off and the editors would accept that this readership was not the letter-writing kind. To pursue the fallacy by further fabrication would display a misunderstanding of the readership – if they don't write letters they probably don't read them either.

encouraging the readers to help make this magazine, to merge the 'we' with the 'you' into 'us'. The volume of letters forced the single page to become two by 1975, and the pages became a vibrant and often critical forum for women to talk about the issues covered in *Cleo's* features. A useful focus for this discussion of reader engagement with *Cleo's* popular feminism might be the letters that respond to journalism about paid and house work, class, ethnicity, academic feminist elitism, femininity and sexuality.

### **The gender of housework: "Why can't two equal individuals share the drudgery?"**

The second wave arguments about the inequalities of domestic drudgery that remained gendered as women's work even when they worked outside the home were well in circulation in the early seventies. Pat Mainardi's essay on 'The politics of housework' was popular in the Australian women's movement. "We both had careers, both had to work a couple of days a week to earn enough to live on, so why shouldn't we share the housework?" (1970: 502). Her list of classic male responses were legendary and became "the prototype for endless stories by women journalists ever since" (Curthoys, 1998: 43). In 1974, Ann Oakley published *Housewife*, writing at length about how the domestic role of women impeded any chance of gender equality. She argued that this kind of work was "directly opposed to the possibility of human self-actualisation" (222). Her argument went even further. To be contented with being a housewife "is actually a form of antifeminism" (233). Moreover, to eradicate the role of housewife, the family would have to go as well. A vast gulf had opened up between the feminist and the housewife. "While the politics of housework and suburban privatised domesticity could be objects for feminist analysis, they needed to be kept well away from the feminist subject" (Hollows, 2006: 101). *Cleo* stepped into the gap and readers and writers both explored a dialogue between domesticity and feminism. The domestic home was not abandoned in the pages of *Cleo* during the seventies; it was under renovation. As we saw in the last chapter, *Cleo* had to negotiate content between the presumed interests of its housewife readers, single young women and the readers who did both paid and house work. It was a difficult editorial balancing act.

In Buttrose's parting editorial letter in February 1975 she insisted "women who are

tagged housewives should not be made to feel that they need to apologise for it" (4). Between the forces of feminism and the economic demands of an accelerating consumer culture, however, fewer women were in a position to choose 'occupation housewife' even if they wanted to. By 1975, 41.1 per cent of married women were working outside of the home and by 1980, 42.6 per cent (Mitchell, 1998: 360). What the figures don't reveal is women's movement in and out of the workforce. Mitchell notes that after 1976 more women returned to the labour market by their mid-thirties, after their child-bearing was finished. The 'housewife' was becoming a far more contentious mode of being for readers. Concern about not offending housewives and not alienating its readers more attuned to feminist arguments made editorial decisions difficult. But it is perhaps not coincidental that under a new interim editor, Vikki Wright, *Cleo* took a risk with a strong stand against the housewife via a four-page excerpt from Lee Comer's *Wedlocked Women* – although using an excerpt was a clever way to disguise editorial commitment to the position. Comer likened the housewife isolated at home to a chronic invalid, an obsessive neurotic and a dependent prisoner in solitary confinement (Comer, 1975). Readers responded positively, with the common letter style of personal testimony as evidence of support. J.M. Rossiter of Rotorua, New Zealand wrote:

I loved 'Wedlocked Women' and endorse every forceful word of it. After 11 years of Super Woman, which included two years probation to have twins, I resigned my commission and took off ... Finances were tight but the freedom was terrific. I have now remarried on my terms. We have a partnership, both work, both do any necessary chores and I discovered I was not frigid. (September 1975: 185)

A reader from Mt Gravatt, a working class suburb of Brisbane, used 'Wedlocked Women' as a take-off point to share her own life story:

['Wedlocked Women'] should be compulsory reading for all sweet young things rushing from a poor home situation into an early marriage. Twelve years ago, tied to four children under five, I felt I was peculiar because I found my life stultifying, doubtless because other women had been conditioned to believe that child bearing and rearing was their 'lot'. American surveys in mental hospitals have shown that many women are not mad but merely dispossessed people.

Whether a man is a doctor or dustman, he finds his own level of companionship among his colleagues. Often a woman living on an isolated housing estate knows no such rapport, having to content herself with small talk or the company of infants. (R.Webb, December 1975: 218)

Joan Harrison blamed women themselves for “clucking around” after the males in the family, “letting them know by word and deed that housework is women’s work and showing their daughters that men must be treated like tin gods”. Her solution was far more pragmatic. Talking was useless. Becoming a full-time housewife again would just lead to “more moaning, disgruntled women”. The only answer, she wrote, “is to employ a home help, to send laundry to the laundromat and, hopefully, to share the remaining chores” (Frankston, Vic; November 1975: 218).

Julie Fielding, of Taringa, Queensland, acknowledged that she “avidly’ read *Cleo* because of its “basically liberated attitudes” but found a feature on ‘Women at Work’ (February 1976) too accepting of the female duties of the second shift. Fielding wrote:

We’re all victims of the cultural conditioning which encourages a woman to see the home as her exclusive domain. Why can’t two, equal individuals share the drudgery and enjoy their well-deserved leisure time together? We turn to publications like *Cleo* for reassurance that we’re striving towards equality. Articles which blithely accept the status quo that so many of us would like to change are bad for morale. (April 1976: 162)

*Cleo* took Fielding’s letter as stimulus for stories arguing for the importance of men sharing “the drudgery”. Within months, staff writer Shelley Gare and her husband published a diary of the tensions role-sharing created. “I’ve explained ironing to Stephen but he frets over the red dials and looks puzzled when the iron snorts steam. Stephen’s solution is to give up ... instead he dresses like a refugee and waits for me to look pained” (1976b: 33). As amusing and difficult as it was, they did not revert to traditional roles. Two months later *Cleo* ran an excerpt from a new book written by a househusband, *The Kitchen Sink Papers*. Mike McGrady had been a journalist in the US. He discovered that “staying home watching the dough rise” made him depressed, “a bone-deep blueness capable of coloring my life for days at a time” (1976: 70). The feature appended

a Family Charter for sharing domestic chores. A male reader, G.W.Scott responded to the story, complaining it had “painted a dreary picture” of life as a househusband. Scott explained how he and his wife had swapped working roles and how it had brought him closer to both his children and his wife. “When I was working I took my wife’s housework for granted. I don’t think anyone can realise the effort involved in that work until they have done it constantly,” he wrote. “I think it’s great” (December 1976: 226).

The next month Norman Lobsenz talked to “scores of husbands” about working wives and domestic labour. “Most say they’re willing to help out with the domestic chores and the children. But do the acts really support this picture? ... the answer is no” (1976: 116). Resentment, ambivalence, fear “that she is becoming too independent” were the conclusions. Edna Ryan was interviewed for the story.<sup>42</sup> She observed that “old habits die hard in Australia” when it came to men enduring the “terrible stigma” of their wives leaving the house to work (121). But she had also noticed – through rose-coloured glasses at it turned out – that equal sharing of household tasks was increasing. “Young couples accept housework as the natural thing,” she said. “Unfortunately the attitude does not carry through to the so-called mature generation” (121). The only reader response was from a woman, ‘Deliberately Downgraded’, who had given up trying:

Will women ever get anywhere by applying their logical reasonable approach to inter-sex relationships? ... Sadly the rational woman must go along with the pretence because if she doesn’t suppress her own ego and behave like the embodiment of home, sex and baby-maker she’ll have neither a happy mate nor a viable marriage. (Adelaide; January 1977: 144)

In 1978 a lively debate was conducted on the letters pages, not in response to a feature but in response to a male reader’s complete misunderstanding of the issue of unpaid labour in the home. ‘Name withheld by request’ began by arguing against a Women’s Liberation demand that had never eventuated: “From the beginning of the Women’s Liberation Movement I have heard the cry ‘women should be paid for their work at home’” (June 1978: 144). He incited a near riot with his comments that as an unmarried

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<sup>42</sup> Edna Ryan was an active older second wave feminist, involved at this time in the Industrial Action group of the Women’s Electoral Lobby (WEL). It was her submission to the Arbitration Commission in 1974 that succeeded in removing the legal concept of the male family wage replacing it with the adult minimum wage.

man he did his own housework, and complaints that his taxes had to go towards educating other peoples' children, paying for single mothers' and 'deserted wives' benefits. The thought that the government should ever consider paying women for housework made him ropeable. "A wife should be considered a luxury, like a maid or an expensive screw, and certainly not paid for by single people's taxes," he wrote. Ms C. Carter of South Perth could barely contain her anger:

As a sole parent running a home, family and holding two jobs I really don't have time to contemplate the attitude ... who had the joyless task of raising this man?  
(June 1978: 144)

A reader from Nundah in Queensland identified herself as a full-time housewife looking after seven people and insisted she did "at least seven times as much work as he does" (June 1978: 144). Morag Sutton wished upon 'Name Witheld' all the suffering she endured: "I manage to rise at 5am, travel for three hours a day, hold down an eight-hour, stand-up job *and* keep house for my husband and two children" (St Marys, NSW; June 1978: 144). In these letters there is no sense of questioning the systemic and gendered unfairness of their lives. What these women seemed to want was respect and recognition for their work, especially from men. Sharing the load was not at issue here. It points to the difficulty of generalising from the content of *Cleo's* features to the varied realities of readers' lives, and to the slow time frame in which feminist ideas seep into consciousness. Feminist arguments and women's everyday life were often out of step.

By 1978 however the housewife was beginning to disappear from the feature pages of *Cleo*, so much so that when she reappears it is as fantasy. 'Why some women are fed up with freedom' begins with this anecdote:

I have a friend who periodically (and always with a laugh) vows that one of these days she is going to fulfil a new ambition. She is going to go back to being a housewife. (Johnson, 1978: 18)

The fantasy for this divorced woman was a husband who was an "excellent provider", a house in "leafy sedate suburbia", a cleaning service plus a woman who comes in to do the ironing. Patricia Johnson's essay is a musing rather than a sustained argument. But

she notes that the yearning is “traitorous” and most difficult for those women in their thirties “who did not generally achieve women’s lib, but who had women’s lib thrust upon them”:

... They are the ones still pulling in a double harness, still intimidated (sometimes by feminists just as much as the other side) into being what they *think* they should be rather than what they would really like to be. (19)

In the end however, this is not an argument against feminism, it is an argument against the over-work ethic.

There was resentment from one housewife reader towards Johnson’s “waffly, stereotyped stay-at-home woman” (C.Healy, Nundah, Qld; September 1978: 224). Margaret Robertson agreed that the fantasy was appealing, but her concern was in living with the realities of independence and gender equality and adjusting her own attitude:

Although I am a single woman I agree with the story completely. I am a liberated woman and like to do things for myself but it does ‘get to you’ after a while. ... it is nice to have a man around to help sometimes. The trouble with liberation is that men are taking it to the extreme and don’t think women need to be looked after any more. ... I am getting a bit fed up being treated like one of the boys. (Auburn, NSW; September 1978: 224)

Towards the end of the decade, readers seemed to have lost interest in the issue. (Or *Cleo* lost interest in publishing their responses.) A debate about ‘Equality Today. Who carries the can?’ between Christopher Ward and Carol Sarler was an indication of how commonplace the expectation of shared domestic duties had become, and how intransigent many men still were (1979: 104-107). Once again, readers did not respond. This part of the Women’s Liberation argument had almost become common sense in the pages of *Cleo*. By 1981, when Sue Wendt surveyed the achievements of the past decade for women, she could write:

There is a new conviction abroad that it is neither undignified nor unmasculine for men to take care of their children. The enlightened among us do not consider



buying the groceries a female responsibility and putting out the garbage as exclusively male; we know they're interchangeable. (1981: 22)

The readers didn't disagree, but nor did they respond. They were more interested in writing about sex. By the eighties, inequality and ignorance in the bedroom was of far more interest to *Cleo's* readers than sharing the domestic load (as will be explored in the following chapter).

### **Class and ethnicity: "Paid work is not automatically liberating"**

Employing home help or a cleaning service to solve the problems of domestic gender inequities was obviously a prerogative of class and income, and, as Johnson's story above indicated, a fantasy for most. *Cleo* went for the scattergun approach with its features and took the fall-out on the letters page. Circulation figures were increasing, so it was safe enough to assume that offending some readers in one issue and pleasing them in another was not going to lose sales. Sometimes *Cleo* got its editorial balancing act very wrong, and readers let them know.

In a 1974 feature 'Are housewives the truly liberated?', Kirsten Blanch interviewed "three women who think the real slaves are out in the rat race". The interviewees had given up paid work, ran middle class homes and children, did art classes, took piano lessons, felt that their independent identities were "alive and well inside the garb of being Barry's wife and the children's mother" and only occasionally felt their university education had been wasted. "Only occasionally," said Susan Ferguson, "when I'm down on my knees scrubbing out the toilet. But it's very flash in the pan" (Blanch, 1974a: 171). One of the interviewees, Anne Osborne, was asked about Women's Lib. She had "a great deal" of sympathy for the movement, "but I think it's turned out to be an almighty flop. It's only preaching to the converted and will never reach those who need it most" (170).

This story caused an outcry on the letters page. An unnamed 'Reader' from Nunawading, Victoria, wrote a letter in response that barely addressed the issue of the 'liberated' housewife. Instead, with intense resentment, she used the space to write about how

unliberating *paid* work could be. For this working class reader, the very idea of liberation was alienating:

I've read many articles about women at the top and how much satisfaction they get from work without their families suffering but of course they get enough money to pay the hired help who do their housework. Then there is the woman at home who has the time and money to indulge her hobby preferences. Well, lucky them. Nowhere have I read of the thousands of women who work at boring deathly jobs for comparatively low wages because their husbands don't earn enough ... These women do all their own housework as well for maybe five or more people. They may even be the ones doing housework for the lucky few mentioned earlier. This is not at all liberating – just plain hard work ... Don't you think it's time all the women with their heads in the air – academics with no ties in many cases – stopped pointing out the few lucky ones in their effort to get more women back to work. Paid work is not automatically liberating. (July 1974: 178)

It was as if this reader was responding to a different feature altogether. *Cleo* didn't appear to mind. It let her vent for a column about the unfairness of her life. Liberation through work, liberation at home, neither made any sense because there was no choice. She was not 'just' a housewife. She worked outside the home as well. For her, Women's Liberation did not resonate with her 'ordinary' life of divorce, low-paid dissatisfying work, the double load, children and exhaustion. Moreover, feminism here was experienced as a voice from above, not just from intellectual feminists but from the magazine she read and to which she contributed. For Christine Fegan, another reader angered by the story, the issue at stake was more clearly expressed through the frame of class:

I have just read the April issue of *Cleo* and I find the contents as usual praiseworthy and stimulating ... But in a magazine written exclusively for women, daring to batter against the unscaled portals of male supremacy, assuring me of deliverance from long unquestioned ignorance and promising me a place in the glorious army of liberated souls, why the hell have I and thousands like myself been so heinously ignored? We, the ordinary working class women, see

emblazoned across shining pages, month after month the same old sanctimonious piffle. In the article 'Are Housewives Truly Liberated', your 'typical housewife' gives up her work to further her piano lessons and travel to New York to study modern art ... How could they be called typical? What about the women so often referred to as the unliberated Western Suburbs housewives who all seem to 'let themselves go'? Why aren't we represented? Or are the mindless masses considered too far below the standard of your usual array of celebrities? (Bankstown, NSW; June 1974: 198)

This was 'symbolic annihilation' – not just by *Cleo*, but by the women's movement. Feminist ideas had travelled to working class women in Nunawading and Bankstown and one of the carriers was *Cleo*. The ideas sounded like a luxury they could not afford. Like employing a housecleaner and engaging in stimulating, liberating work, feminism translated as a middle class female fantasy. The problem was not just the class bias of *Cleo*, it was the class bias of the Women's Liberation Movement. These readers were using the space *Cleo* provided to comment on the very issues that were to fragment the movement from the mid-1970s onwards, over the aim to speak for all women but neglecting the very different intersections that made up women's identities (Larbaleister, 1998: 158). They were articulating their 'difference', discussing their refusal of a movement whose vision of liberation bore no relevance to their lives. It is an insight into why feminist identity might have been rejected by 'ordinary' women – one that a number of researchers have also found in the US and the UK.

Elizabeth Fox-Genovese has written in detail about this subject in *Feminism is not the story of my life*. In the voices of the many women she interviewed and the opinion polls she scanned over the decades from the seventies, Fox-Genovese found that 'ordinary' women mistrusted feminism, yet "all of them have absorbed ideas that many people associate with feminism" (1996: 10). They agreed that the desire for independence, to be self-supporting, not relying on a man for one's identity, was important for them and their daughters. They agreed with the political platforms of equal pay for equal work, for equal opportunity in education and careers, for freedom in sexual life and that sexual harassment and rape were intolerable:

[And yet] they do not see feminism as a story about their lives. For some it's a story about rich women's lives or white women's lives or career women's lives. For the Catholics it stands for a defence of abortion, which they cannot accept ... it stands for an attack on men that threatens them directly or threatens their husbands, boyfriends, sons. For most it is simply irrelevant to the pressing problems of managing life from day to day. (10)

Based on research with white working-class women in Northern England in the 1980s, the work of Beverley Skeggs reveals a slightly different experience of exclusion from feminism. These women gained knowledge of feminism through a number of sources, including magazines such as *Cosmopolitan*. While they agreed with many feminist ideas, the identity 'feminist' was associated with middle class achievement and a selfishness they did not have space or time to indulge. From their class position, "feminism is seen to be selfish, a prerogative of the privileged, something that benefits those in different economic, social and cultural circumstances" (1997: 153). Feminist ideas did help them think through certain life experiences and much of their everyday and community life could be seen as exhibiting feminist struggle and activism. As Skeggs notes, "they did not give their consent to feminism because they were rarely addressed, recruited or asked" (156). There are clear correspondences with the Australian experience, even in the seventies.

In her work on ordinary US women in the seventies, Beth Bailey found an acceptance of many feminist principles, but a rejection of women's liberation. "Most of the employed women ... believed in equal pay for women, and many believed in equal job opportunities. But for them, women's liberation carried other connotations and threatened other sorts of loss" (2004: 114). For housewives, especially uneducated low-income housewives, 'women's lib' seemed to equate with going out to work, and the jobs on offer didn't look particularly liberating – just as they didn't for our reader from Nunawading.

Stimulated by its readers' anger, *Cleo* pursued the class question and Women's Liberation in the following months and years. In a feature on Tasmania, the lay coroner and WEL member Kim Boyer had commented that WEL had become "snobbish": "They aren't catering for the factory girls, the lower middle class earners" (Wilson, 1974: 160). Edna

Ryan used the letters page to respond. She insisted that, "WEL does not seek to control or manipulate or to be maternalistic but to investigate, expose and publicise and to lobby for equal rights for women ... This activity is not particularly middle class, working class or upper class." Although Ryan did concede, after a column of print, that WEL indeed did not "have many of the poorer women of the community among our activists" (October 1974: 198). Boyer replied in a letter, "most WEL activists tend to be middle class because working class and poorer women have neither the time nor money to become involved while they are battling to help keep their kids fed and clothed" (January 1975: 146). She also clarified that her comment about "snobs" in the Women's Movement "was restricted to that small number of Women's Libbers whose stress on intellectual feminist theories tends to alienate women from groups such as WEL and Women's Liberation" (146).

Within the Women's Liberation Movement itself there was some recognition of this patronisation of ordinary women. "Quite a lot of elitist talk goes on among us," wrote Shayne, Miriam, Joan, Pat, Esther and Joy in the *Sydney Women's Liberation Newsletter* in July 1974. But the acknowledgement reeks of a moralistic philanthropic desire to rescue these women from the "misery" of their delusions:

They are quite content with the Women's Weekly. That kind of thing. We believe THEY read WW and all the rest of the garbage because it's there, clearly labelled WOMEN and therefore for them. What alternative have we ever tried to give them? Thousands, hundreds of thousands of buyers of the WW are bewildered by their own self-doubt and the misery they have grown to live with – even as they reach out a hand to pick up the habitual colourful glossy. (6)

The intellectual feminism of "women with their heads in the air ... academics with no ties" as the reader from Nunawading put it – or, "the fantasy injustices of the feminists who are largely well-educated middle-class women or intellectual university types who can afford to play at revolutions to amuse themselves" as one uncharacteristically vehement *Cleo* feature described them (Willesee, 1976: 26) – was felt as alienating by many readers. Women in this period were not unaware of the claims being made on their behalf by activist feminists. And as much as many of the ideas and aspirations appealed, to claim sisterhood with the revolutionary and destabilising ideas of feminism was a risk

to many women's life narratives. The refusal to associate with the label was not necessarily an act of ignorance or patriarchal brainwashing, it was an act of dis-identity. To assert what one is not is a tactic that denies the legitimacy of feminist strategists who, in this historical moment, powerfully attempted to define what women should be. To refuse to be spoken for, or to speak in defiance as these letter writers did, is the return of the gaze, the 'up yours' gesture of the powerless and the misrecognised. In *No Respect*, Andrew Ross writes of how the resentment towards intellectualisation can express itself as "immediately satisfying pleasure" – in writing letters to *Cleo*, for example:

It is a complaint that is felt, like all effects of power, across the body, in structures of feeling that draw upon hostility, resentment, and insubordination as well as deference, consent and respect. And it is in many of the more successful fictions of popular culture, however indirectly articulated and however commodified, that these contradictory feelings about knowledge and authority are transformed into pleasure which is often more immediately satisfying than it is 'politically correct'. (1989: 231)

Reader letters had brought the class contradictions of the women's movement to editorial notice at a time when the movement itself was beginning to splinter under these same accusations (as will be explored at the end of this chapter). *Cleo* could not provide solutions. Although its broad political umbrella was liberal feminism the magazine was not a theoretical journal or an internally coherent political manifesto. It just provided space for women to debate some of the issues that feminism was raising. Some readers found feminist insights through *Cleo*. Others, like the readers above and the women interviewed below, rejected feminism as irrelevant to their lives.

At the close of International Women's Year in November 1975, *Cleo* sent two staff writers into Sydney's factories to talk to women working there about the women's movement. June, the forewoman at a clothing manufacturers in Surry Hills, told stories of the migrant women who worked with her – stories of extreme domestic violence and less extreme oppressions:

It's working here, going home, doing what the old man wants – a bit of roll over, darling ... Their nerves are shot, half of them. They're tired ... Men are bloody

pigs, if you ask me. I've been married twice, I know. They don't help a woman around the house, and a woman has 101 jobs. She has to be wife, mother, nurse, cleaner, as well as go out to work. (Blanch and Goodyer, 1975: 159)

It was not just class but ethnicity that came to the fore. As the forewoman at a Blacktown factory commented, "Women's Lib ... the women's movement! They wouldn't know what it meant. They can't read, can't speak English" (159). A shop steward at an Auburn factory, noted for its policy of equal pay, said that the women were "very aware ... but they haven't the time to apply themselves to practical work in the women's movement". International Women's Year passed most of these women by. As Blanch and Goodyer wrote:

There has been a lot of talk but words don't get the shopping done, the children minded, the stove cleaned, the extra money brought in – and these are still, after all, the most immediate concerns of most women. Especially of those women who most need liberating – from poverty, poor education and the paternalism and authoritarianism they often experience from men. (158)

A Blacktown community-aid worker interviewed for the feature observed that in the working class suburbs, women's organisations such as WEL or Women's Liberation were seen "to have that aura of middle-class trendiness that people here resent" (161). One of the Auburn factory workers, identified as Margaret, said that she had attended some meetings at Women's Liberation House, but she felt out of place: "Nobody made us welcome, nobody really talked to us ..." (159). Margaret sensed that the organised women's movement was not for her or working class women like her, but she did feel empowered by the experience to be able, in her own workplace and home, "to speak up and have a say".<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> In her autobiography, *Ducks on the Pond*, Anne Summers wrote of the exclusivity of Sydney Women's Liberation. "In theory ... open to any woman, in practice the group was very picky ... They admitted into their group only women like themselves: young, educated, inner city" (1999: 298).

**Femininity and feminist style: "If only women like her would use their own natural resources, their femininity"**

The president of Blacktown Community Aid, Margaret Bennett, was interviewed about attitudes to women's liberation in the area. Bennett said that most women associated women's rights with Germaine Greer – "an unfeminine no-no ... They don't want to be like her. If only women like her would use their own natural resources, their femininity" (Blanch and Goodyer, 1975: 163). Femininity was cultural capital for many working class women (Skeggs, 1997: Black, 2006: 157). Denied other forms of capital - economic, social, educational - using and investing in their femininity as traditionally understood was a way to ensure partnership with a male who could provide security. Rejecting femininity was a risky and unappealing move, and not just for working class women. Women's Liberationists had deliberately created an image of the non-feminine, non-traditional woman. To defiantly refuse the surfaces of mainstream femininity was a tactic of huge symbolic weight. That Women's Liberation had not given thought to the effect this image might have on less radicalised women was probably a strategic, if unavoidable, mistake. "The history of the women's movement in the 1970s was marked by bitter, at times, virulent, internal disputes over what it was possible or permissible for a feminist to do, say, think or feel" (Delmar, 1986: 9). Or, indeed, wear. As Marilyn Lake argues:

There was a tension between Women's Liberation's stated aim to create a mass women's movement and the rapid consolidation of a particular style, look and self-presentation, which served to emphasise the difference between themselves and 'unliberated' women, creating in the view of one Melbourne eastern suburbs group, an 'us' and 'them' attitude which left suburban women feeling threatened. (1999: 236)

Valerie Walkerdine too has written of the anxious conflict that feminism, fashion and class produced in the seventies, especially for a young working class woman:

The period of feminism which made me most unhappy with myself was the one in which I wore dungarees and no make-up, at least partly because it replaced the to-be-looked-at-ness with the trappings of working-class masculinity, dungarees, for example! (1997: 168)



For Walkerdine, and for many other radical feminist women at the time, trading “the trappings of working class femininity for those of working-class masculinity” (168) was an obligatory but uncomfortable sartorial journey. To refuse was to risk discipline and exclusion from the movement.

By the end of the seventies some began to question whether the problem was in the feminine ‘tools of oppression’ or whether the focus should be on challenging men’s reactions to them. Elizabeth Wilson was one of the first to undermine the basic premise of the feminist ‘fashion system’ in her 1985 book *Adorned in Dreams*. Adopting masculine dress as a way to escape oppressive feminine fashions was simply to privilege masculine norms and values over culturally feminine ones. Feminist style should really be seen as “a sub-theme of the general fashion discourse” (242). It was the apparent rationality and functionality of masculine dress that appealed to the radical second wave. But as Wilson argued, “Dress is never primarily functional, and it is certainly not rational” (244). There was no ‘outside’ of fashion (3). Even if feminists chose the anti-fashion ‘natural’ look, there was no ‘outside’. Appearances *did* matter. In fact they became symbolically central to feminism

In refusing traditional signifiers of femininity, in attempting to avoid the male gaze, the to-be-looked-at-ness as Walkerdine put it, radical feminists hoped that the gaze would now fall on the ‘real’ female self, presumably revealed when the layers of feminine fashions and beauty practices were removed. In the search for a ‘real’ female self, freed from the constraints of the surface, feminists were left with another surface. One, admittedly, that was symbolically powerful, but ‘appearance’ nonetheless. It is easy to dismantle the arguments now (see Chapter Three) but also important to understand the anger that motivated radical feminism. “Women in our society are forced daily to compete for male approval, enslaved by ludicrous ‘beauty’ standards we ourselves are conditioned to take seriously,” argued Robin Morgan (1970: 586). And if fashion was false consciousness it was also an expression of male-defined consumer culture. As the US WLM member Alice Embree explained in 1970, “a woman is supposed to be a body, not a person – a decorated body. If she can successfully manage that transformation, then she can market herself – for a man” (1970: 206).

If women had been reduced to their bodies, defined by their biology, restricted by beauty rituals and fashions that emphasised their control by men, rejecting fashion and beauty was a way to 'liberate' the mind. Mind – the 'real' self of a woman – was what mattered. The risk here was that the body was thrown out with the bathwater. The contradiction was that in the insistence that appearances should *not* matter for women, they actually mattered so much that even women who *identified* as feminist would be shunned because of the way they dressed. And there was no hope for the women who 'flirted' with feminism in the pages of women's magazines. Embree had written in the same article, women's magazines were "the special vehicle for the message of commercialized women ... the function of women's magazines is to reach the woman as consumer, rather than the woman as thinker" (206, 208). The feminine ordinary woman was all body; the feminist was all mind.

In the desire to make the feminine woman socially peripheral to a new feminist understanding of the thinking woman, the feminine woman became symbolically central. Stuart Hall argues:

Marking 'difference' leads us, symbolically, to close ranks, shore up culture and to stigmatize and expel anything which is defined as impure, abnormal. However, paradoxically, it also makes 'difference' powerful, strangely attractive precisely because it is forbidden, taboo, threatening to cultural order. Thus what is socially peripheral is often symbolically centred. (1997: 237)

But which kind of woman was 'impure and abnormal'? Was it the radical feminist in her army boots, short hair and no makeup or was it the 'popular feminist' with her floaty feminine frocks, her seventies tresses and her lipstick? Who was Other to whom? The symbolic centre depended on location.

Feminist style was a symbolic part of that narrative journey away from the 'mother' and her traditional femininity. But the journey was powered by a vehemence that suggests something more – perhaps a desire for retribution against that 'mother' or even vengeance on her mother's behalf. The extremity of the reaction to the ordinary woman's interest in fashion and beauty could indicate the psychic rupture involved in creating a new feminist self, and the need to expel that 'other' woman who had been part of the

formation of her very subjectivity. Feminists weren't born in army boots. There had been a girlhood and adolescence filled with feminine dreams before feminist consciousness was attained. So not just the 'ordinary woman' and the 'mother' but that 'girl' too had to be radically disavowed. As we have seen, this was not an easy or even appealing journey for many women to take. Their very subjectivities were at stake.

While criticising the beauty and fashion industries, Sandra Lee Bartky makes a key point relevant to this discussion of popular feminism: "Any political project that aims to dismantle the machinery that turns a female body into a feminine one may well be apprehended by a woman as something that threatens her with desexualisation, if not outright annihilation" (1990: 105). If the practices of beauty and fashion were crucial to female subjectivity and to a sense of heterosexual desirability and of being able to desire ... what was a woman to do? Post-patriarchy was a destination a long way from home.

By the mid-seventies the opposition between feminism and femininity had become entrenched in many strands of the fractured women's movement. "Feminists were over-reacting to what we saw as the shackles of conventional femininity," recalled Lynne Segal, "but we uncovered enough misery and bitterness in that world to warrant much of the reaction" (1987: 14). "True' feminist identity became symbolically marked by a rejection of femininity. "Feminist identity was, in some ways, understood as an identity for women which transcended – and by implication, put an end to – traditional femininity" (Brunsdon, 1997: 186). Popular feminism, as we have seen, did not value this distinction. This was not identity politics and being a woman interested in feminism did not require a stand against femininity. Femininity versus feminism may have been the poles of opposition in the eyes of many second wave feminists, but for *Cleo* and many of its readers these poles were not necessarily contradictions at all. *Cleo* was part of a popular shift in the dominant cultural meanings of femininity over the past thirty years, a shift that, I would argue, has incorporated many feminist ideas within it. This is another meaning of popular feminism, already being elaborated here in the seventies. In the pages of *Cleo* in 1977, Rachel Knight expressed her joy at this development:

... slowly, slowly, lots of women are beginning to enjoy their femaleness without at the same time reining it in to conform to some fantasy version of femininity ... Maybe Women's Lib has raised my consciousness; maybe it would have

happened in any case ... I'm no rebel. I like to feel accepted. Other women (Germaine Greer, I love you) cleared the way. (1977: 84)

The women's movement had indeed affected ordinary women, but Knight, like many *Cleo* readers, wasn't a rebel. She did not see herself as Other to the women's movement, nor did she need to repudiate those women with the courage to clear the way ("Germaine Greer, I love you".) But this is where the picture becomes murky.

*Cleo* was committed to a feminism that could be contained within the discourse of equal rights within a liberal democracy. And in terms of gender, its position celebrated feminine difference from, and much improved relations with, men. It was through a much broader vision of a 'new' femininity that *Cleo* could make a feminist linkage with 'ordinary' women. If feminism and anti-femininity had become synonymous for many women, this was one circuit of resistance to feminism that *Cleo* was in a position to break.

To do this, *Cleo* had to distance itself from more radical feminisms. *Cleo* was staffed, written and read by women who did not engage with the critique of beauty and fashion as part of the political project of feminism, nor did they really engage with what Buttrose would later call the 'radical forces within the movement'. Can we call this an Othering? If neglect and absence of more radically feminist agendas and analyses within *Cleo's* pages count as Othering, then perhaps so. There was certainly an absence of overtly feminist style in *Cleo's* fashion pages – there were no fashion stories based around army surplus clothes or men's flannelette shirts. But was radical feminism 'symbolically central' in this absence or just considered marginal and irrelevant to their mainstream readers? In the following sections I explore a curious and, I think, telling shift in *Cleo* from 1976 that might shed light on the question.

**The lesbian question: "There is not a single, radical, liberated, aggressive butch among them"**

By the end of International Women's Year in 1975, the 'movement' was riven with internal dissent and theoretical disputes, not least of which were issues of heterosexuality

and lesbianism. There was an increasing visibility of lesbians within the women's movement and awareness and discussion of the move to 'political' lesbianism and separatism. At the Women's Liberation Mount Beauty Conference in 1973, a presentation from the Hobart Women's Action Group confronted the movement with its homophobia and sexism. The paper was subtitled 'Why do straight sisters sometimes cry when they are called lesbians?' (Baird, 1998: 198). Published in *Refractory Girl* in 1974, point 3 in the "catalogue of experiences" recalled how the authors had been told "to keep out of the movement because 'some women won't come if lesbians are there, and those women shouldn't be put off because Women's Liberation is for all women'". Point 5 noted how lesbians were told "you're simply a media problem" (Hobart Women's Action Group, 1974: 31). The reaction to this paper was described "in terms analogous to a group of radical whites indignantly reviling blacks who accuse them of racism" (Lynch, 1974: 35). Lesbianism had also been left off the agenda of the Women's Commission in Sydney in March 1973, where women had been invited to give personal accounts of their experiences of oppression (Lynch, 1974: 37). Marilyn Lake explains that within the WLM "there was considerable reluctance" amongst heterosexual feminists to confront their prejudice and, indeed, their desire to "assimilate" lesbians rather than recognise their oppression as different (1999: 242). And it had been at the Canberra Conference in 1975 that the lesbian feminist agenda was ignored, that lesbian graffiti was plastered over statues, that lesbianism defiantly did indeed become a media problem. Lake cites a criticism made by a group of lesbian feminists that the conference was taken to be part of "a slow movement towards the greater respectability of feminist topics" (244). Respectability was anathema to radical feminists, be they lesbian or not. Respectability, of course, was in *Cleo's* interests and making feminism respectable had been part of its editorial aim.

Myra MacDonald suggests that mainstream women's magazine coverage of lesbianism as "a supposedly aberrant sexuality" is "part of a voyeuristic concern with the exotic" (MacDonald, 1995: 176). Referring to nineties magazines, she agrees that it might be an "advance" to even acknowledge that lesbianism exists, but that these magazines "are happier to deal with it as a trendy side issue rather than as an integral part of discussions of women's sexuality" (176). And yet, in reading the early years of *Cleo* what is striking is how little the issue of lesbianism was a media problem for the magazine, how it was not represented as aberrant and how much readers appreciated the non-moralistic coverage.

What is also striking is how *Cleo's* approach to the subject of lesbianism changes after 1975. Not aberrant, not even a trendy side issue, the subject almost disappears.

'Love and the lesbian', a first person feature written by Thais Johns, began with the statement, "I am a lesbian". Johns went on to break down many of the myths surrounding the subject. She doesn't know why she is a lesbian. After first wanting to throw herself over a cliff, she doesn't care anymore and regards herself as "very happy ... normal and well adjusted" (1973: 114). Countering a popular belief (and one held by many in the medical community) Johns insists she doesn't fear or hate men. "On the contrary, I find men stimulating and good company; it just happens that I am turned on by women" (114). She writes about discrimination from friends, family and bosses and the difficulties and dangers of coming out. "There is always someone waiting to put you down or push your head in – even other homosexuals ... until we all have complete acceptance, we have to remain cautious" (115). Johns explains lesbian sex. "I had one girl who liked to be made love to all night. She certainly wasn't a half-an-hour quickie ... we gave up counting how many times she climaxed, so work that one out. That girl's scratches left scars" (115). And the myths about lesbians looking 'butch' provoked some conflict:

We do wear jeans, T-shirts and such but we also wear the latest gear and some girls spend a fortune on clothes and make-up. Short back and sides are out. We are no longer type cast ... The heavy-swearing, beer-swilling butch calls us prissy but I would rather be called prissy than lose my femininity. The butch (meaning the more aggressive of the two) need not be dressed up as a man ... (115)

Readers were delighted. Mrs E.B. from Randwick, NSW, wrote:

Thank you for publishing articles such as 'Love and the Lesbian'... there should be much more publicity to bring to light the fact that society must eventually learn to accept us. I say 'us' because I, too, know how it is to hide the truth and marry for the sake of 'what people might say'. If things were different, perhaps today I would be with the one I loved truly and be much happier for it. (June 1973: 146)

Two months later, *Cleo* ran a more straightforward (and unsigned) feature about 'The myths of homosexuality'. Mainly written from the perspective of the homosexual male, it outlines the myths point by point and attempts to dispel them: there are easily as many female homosexuals as men; homosexuals actually like the opposite sex; male homosexuals are not necessarily effeminate nor are lesbians always 'masculine'; homosexuals are not paedophiles; there is no credible explanation for why some people are homosexual; and there is no cure because "the majority of homosexuals not only do not want to be cured but also argue that there is nothing to cure" (n/a, 1973a: 33).

A year later, *Cleo* ran a long and supportive feature about lesbian mothers. "Homosexuals – both male and female – who were previously ashamed and guilt-ridden are now forming very public social and political groups. They parade and protest; they demand equal rights. Within that group, the lesbian mother is also organising" (Walder, 1973: 48). And in 1974, a first person feature, 'I am a lesbian. The frank story of a woman who came to terms with herself', was quickly followed by 'The shy homosexual woman'. Kirsten Blanch visited a regular social night for homosexual women in a suburban Melbourne home and talked with the women there:

There is not a single, radical, liberated, aggressive butch among them. They are the proverbial silent majority of lesbianism, ordinary women with almost nothing in common except their preference for relationships – sexual and otherwise – with people of their own sex. (Blanch, 1974b: 72)

Lesbian readers started to write to *Cleo* in response. Reader, NSW, wrote of the pretence still involved with socialising as a lesbian in public and the abuse she received:

I buy *Cleo* regularly and read 'The Shy Homosexual Woman'. This article and previous articles have done a great deal to destroy the nasty bitch "offering boiled sweets to young girls" image that lesbians – I still hate the word – have unfortunately acquired. I am 23 and camp and have lived for the past three and a half years with a girl I love ... I have been through the trauma of not believing myself to be camp and finding excuses but now I would never change. (October 1974: 178)

'Anonymous lesbian' from Perth wrote in with thanks for the article. "Please continue to bring to the public's notice that we are as decent and God-fearing and as law-abiding as the majority of heterosexuals" (September 1974: 178). And a reader from Townsville used the letters page to publicise the social functions of her group of "camp women":

The girls in our group read your magazine regularly and we would like to express our pleasure with the articles you present on female homosexuality ... let's try to educate the public. We are not sick people but normal life loving girls (and guys) who just want to be accepted into society to live our own lives in our own way. (December 1974: 230)

Cathy wrote to *Cleo* expressing concern that the women interviewed for 'The Shy Homosexual Woman' "all had rather horrific backgrounds". This was presenting homosexuality as a reaction to some early traumatic event that turned women away from men:

People cannot seem to accept that most of us haven't had shocking upbringings. We choose to love someone of our own sex because by doing so we gain the happiness and fulfilment that heterosexual people gain from their relationships with the opposite sex. (January 1975: 146)

Cathy too gave an address for a "thriving group" for female homosexuals in Bexley, NSW. One feature 'When the other woman is a man' (n/a, 1975c) provoked a tirade from a male reader about "the man who calls himself Rodney" who refused to 'come out' as gay. "Heterosexuality is paraded blatantly in almost every aspect of our society. Much advertising is aimed at the heterosexual market; the nuclear family is presented as the norm." This reader, W.R. Alston from New Zealand, advised Rodney and others like him to buy Denis Altman's *Homosexual Oppression and Liberation* (December 1975: 218).

In April 1976 *Cleo* ran one of its last features for the seventies on the subject, entitled 'The sexual misfits'. It was an excerpt from British agony aunt Marjorie Proops' new book of collected columns. A question from one of her 17 year-old male readers, for example, about his concern that his parents refused to accept that he was gay received the following response. "I wonder why you are so positively certain that you are, in fact,



a committed homosexual?" asked Marjorie. It was probably a "stage". His father's violent reaction and his mother's tears and depression "were to be expected". Proops' theories on lesbianism were equally conservative and confused. "The majority of women – including latent lesbians – would find the idea of sexual contact with another woman unspeakably repulsive ... Some girls fail to make the transition from uncertain adolescent to well-adjusted adult ..." (1976: 51,52,57). The Proops excerpt provoked an outcry from the Brisbane Gay Collective:

Your magazine's credibility is seriously flawed by the many articles you run which are fountains of overbearing heterosexual pontification ... What could be more complacent, unfeeling and ignorant than the statement that homosexual affairs between 14-year-olds are not serious ... Whatever gives heterosexuals the right to proffer advice on a subject about which they have no experience, comprehension or understanding? (August 1976: 154)

*Cleo* appears to have taken the gay collective at its word and this was the last feature specifically on homosexuality. Despite its early support of lesbianism, and appreciation from its lesbian readers, there is a clear move away from the subject after 1975. The magazine had been challenged at the level of an expertise it did not share and at the level of a new politics it could not participate in without drawing criticism. Homosexuals did not want to be spoken for, especially not by this straight woman's magazine. Up until this point, *Cleo's* liberal tolerance of lesbianism had been via representation of its non-butch and non-threatening sexual difference. Lesbianism was seen as a free sexual choice for women in a tolerant liberal democratic society, not as a form of feminist politics. The mid-seventies saw the emergence of lesbian feminist separatism, "not characterised as a sexual choice framed by desire, but rather a political choice framed by the rejection of a male cultural system" (Spongberg, 2002: 205). It was when lesbianism began to get 'radical', angry and politicised, as we saw above in the 1975 conference and the negative media coverage this provoked, that *Cleo's* interest in the subject dropped away. The shift coincided with a new editor taking the helm, and Pat Dasey was determined to make *Cleo's* non-radical, respectable and highly heterosexual version of popular feminism very clear to readers in her opening editorial letter.

## The man question: "What has liberation done to our men?"

A desperate militant feminist rang this office the other day. 'You must do something,' she said. 'Things are going from bad to worse. Romance is back. Women are wearing dresses. Can't you do a story to set everything straight?' (Dasey, 1976: 4)

We must allow Pat Dasey a little poetic licence here because the prospect of a "desperate militant feminist" ringing the editor of *Cleo* in 1976 for help seems highly strange. Even if this was a literary journalistic device, the phone call did allow Dasey to muse on the state of the women's movement from the viewpoint of the liberal feminist's editorial office:

I had to agree there certainly is an enormous wave of antagonism to the women's movement right now. It's a pity that radical forces at work within the ranks are undermining the success of the movement. For who could deny that women have benefited enormously since Germaine Greer and others helped to make women aware of their capabilities and their rights and made freedom to choose possible. Whether women wear dresses or like romance really has little to do with the issue. (4)

Underlying Dasey's concern for "the success of the movement" - a success she clearly wanted - was a fear that radical forces would threaten the growing acceptability of many feminist ideas. Implicitly, the increasing internal disputes and radicalism of many women's groups could be a threat to *Cleo's* own liberal feminist editorial philosophy. Developing popular support for the women's movement had been one of *Cleo's* aims from the beginning and increasingly visible militance and disputes over sexuality, politics and style could turn its ordinary readers away. A similar fear was expressed by some members of Women's Liberation about the effect on *their* desires for mass support (see Lake, 1999: 243).

The popular feminism *Cleo* was developing had no intention of abandoning the pleasures of heterosex and the frocking up of femininity. Women were just learning how to enjoy heterosexual pleasure through the explicit sex education they received via *Cleo* (and *Cosmopolitan*), as will be explored in the following chapter. *Cleo*, and its readers, were not

about to abandon it. The positive reference to the celebrity sexy feminist Germaine Greer, rather than the anonymous desperate militant feminist on the phone, made *Cleo's* popular feminism far more palatable to the ordinary reader (even if the readers in Bankstown might not think so). As if in defiance, *Cleo's* fashion spread that month featured floaty feminine frocks.

This phone call to Dasey apparently prompted a lively discussion amongst the *Cleo* staff. The magazine asked: 'what has liberation done to our men?' The long feature, 'Hey Sister - What about your brother?', was divided into two opposing positions. The first, by Geraldine Willesee, developed a passionate argument against the perceived extremism of mid-seventies feminism. She positioned herself against it:

I wonder what the feminists will do when they realise that running with pay packets in liberated clenched fists towards the largely illusory goal of independence and equality has no rewards? (1976: 23)

Her sympathy was with the men who had been left bewildered, emasculated, envious and even jealous of women who demanded their independence and often walked out of the family home. These 'liberated' women were selfish, humourless, nagging and guilty, "urging their sisters to follow suit and support them" (25). Marriage, argued Willesee, was "a release from a boring financial load and a depressing need to get up every day and go to a hated job", turning women into "sharks" to survive (23, 25). The women's movement was for a small elite of "revolutionaries" and had dire consequences for men and for other women too:

... most women don't want to know. They don't see themselves as a group having 'injustices' thrown at them. With all the real injustice to people in the world it's horrifying that women should try to jump on the bandwagon with such spurious claims. Black women, yes. And migrant women and poor women. But not the middle class feminist who blithely ignores the fact that all women who reject the movement aren't unintelligent, in bondage and miserable with their lot ... Should they swap [their men] for a group of screwed-up sisters who insist we have to turn the world upside down so they can feel a bit better. (25)

The article was hyperbolic and inflammatory and the influence of Arianna Stassinopoulos' anti-feminist tract, *The Female Woman*, was not only obvious but referenced. Here we can see an outburst against the 'abnormal', a clear Othering of not just radical feminism and implicitly lesbianism ("a group of screwed-up sisters") but the entire women's movement.<sup>44</sup> Willesee drew on a common criticism from opponents of Women's Liberation: that the movement was made up of largely white middle class educated women who, comparatively, could hardly call themselves 'oppressed' (Bailey, 2004: 112). *Cleo* had never run an article as vehemently opposed to Women's Liberation as this before and throughout the seventies it did not do so again. Which raises the possibility that as much as some of *Cleo's* staff felt threatened, the magazine was also testing the turbulent waters at this point in the history of the second wave. 'Hey Sister' functioned as a thorn-in-the-side strategy, and it angered readers:

Geraldine Willesee's article still has me smarting. She undoubtedly aligns herself with that strange and pathetic animal the 'female anti-feminist'. Her article is a step backward for all women who have struggled for their rights since the turn of the century. Would she be prepared to give up her career for the 'suburban bliss' she feels awaits all 'womankind'? I only hope men and women can be friends in the future instead of stereotyped role-players. (M. Sperka, Sydney; April 1976: 162)

Jenny Harris was similarly dismayed by Willesee's apparent belief that to be a feminist was to hate men and to abandon family for career:

Willesee obviously misunderstands the women's movement. Not all 'libbers' are man-haters or single-minded career women. Not all subscribe to a separate men-excluded women's culture. Some women have a twisted hate for men but they are merely imitating the oppressive techniques of chauvinist men. The true women's libber believes in freedom of choice for both sexes: to work or stay at home with

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<sup>44</sup> The rejection of men and the political move to separatism was hardly endorsed by all second wave feminists. It was a particular strategy of a segment of radical feminism. As American feminist Barbara Epstein recalled, "Many women who did not like the direction that radical feminism was taking ... simply stayed away from it, or remained at its edges ... I suspect that I was not the only woman, even the only white woman, for whom feminist separatism was more a problem than an answer" (Epstein, 2007[1998]: 128-129).

the kids. (April 1976: 162)

Harris's interpretation of feminism was far more in line with *Cleo's* standard position, which Pip Porter articulated in *her* section of the 'Hey Sister' feature. Although even here, Porter is dismissive of the term 'liberation' because it had acquired associations of "aggressive", "strident" and "hysterical" women. In an amusing attempt at her own neologism, Porter decided to re-name the phenomenon of women's liberation as "increased self awareness" or ISA for short (Althusser would turn in his grave.) Her article, however, does argue that the extraordinary popularity of the movement amongst ordinary women, spreading "almost in spite of itself to the remotest parts of the country", comes as a response to "intolerable pressure" to accept what they were not, "socially, emotionally, intellectually and physically inferior to men" (26). Porter thanks Kate Millett and Juliet Mitchell for "showing us the colour of our servitude"(27).

If *Cleo* was trying to gauge a general attitude amongst their readers towards the women's movement at this time it found no support for Willesee's utter fear of Women's Liberation. Running this story did not imply that *Cleo's* editorial position as a whole had moved away from an interest in feminist issues, but it made an important clarification of popular feminist politics: revolution and a rejection of men were not on the pop fem agenda. This debate came just at the moment in the mid-seventies when radical feminism was shifting away from its earlier optimism about the possibility of liberating men too from the effects of sexual stereotypes and male sexual dominance. "Rather than seeking liberation for both women and men, certain feminists came to argue that what was needed was liberation from men" (Spongberg, 2002: 203).

Men's responses to the challenges of women's liberation had become a running theme in *Cleo*. They were, after all, almost one third of the readership according to the McNair Anderson survey in 1974. The magazine tried the same feature idea just a few months later, but this time without the fear and anger. Jan Smith answered 'The Burning Question: Have We Demanded Too Much From Men?' with irony. It was a long article about how men had now become unnecessary and sex was much better with the varieties of vibrators now available:

It's all just too much trouble and hardly a week goes by without articles on the bliss of living alone. Vibrators and masturbation may not be specifically mentioned in the nicer type of publication. The more militant journals may be advocating homosexuality or even celibacy. But the whole point is that having a man around actually means more frustration than not having one around. (Smith, 1976: 19)

There is a final twist however. Smith wonders whether women have tried too hard. After all of that "deconditioning, Masters and Johnsoning and consciousness raising", perhaps women expected too much? "Of course we haven't," railed S.B from Canberra:

If men are going to sink into their water beds and refuse to take up the challenges issued by the New Women, then I say let them sink. Any man worthy of the name will not wilt at the prospect of a woman who wants him to be aware of the needs of her body and mind. Men have been asking the same thing of women for centuries and look what happened. Women became so resourceful in meeting men's demands that they eventually became strong enough to meet their own. Perhaps if men try to satisfy the New Woman they will go through the same evolution until they too liberate themselves. The way is forward, not backwards. (October 1976: 226)

In 1975, Anne Woodham too had explored the demands placed on men by social conditioning and their new questioning of their assumed superiority:

In the wake of the Women's Movement, an increasing number of men are questioning this illusion; suspecting they too, are on an equally proscribed treadmill which forces them like Pavlovian dogs, into rigid patterns of behaviour. (1975: 32)

She spent the rest of the feature talking with men involved in consciousness-raising groups of the emergent men's movement. "They are questioning whether today's world really needs aggressive, achievement-oriented, competitive, emotionally crippled males" (32). While some of their stories were quite touching, readers wouldn't have a bar of this nonsense. Glenda Dodd of West Brunswick, Victoria, responded:

It is a fact that in spite of the recent improvements in the legal status of women, and the opportunities now open to them, women are still considered inferior beings and second-class citizens ... Until women are afforded social recognition as full members of the human race with all the rights and privileges this entails, I cannot see how your article can dare to suggest that men are subject to the same or comparable social pressures as we women are. (September 1975: 185)

Buttrose had insisted in her first editorial that *Cleo* was “all for men”, and the assumption that men would have to be dragged along for the feminist ride towards gender equality was basic to *Cleo*'s philosophy. And in this, *Cleo*'s position was not that different from one articulated by second wavers such as Sheila Rowbotham: “We must go our own way but remember we are going to have to take them with us. They learn slowly” (1973: 38). But any sympathy for men's resistance or advice to protect the male ego against women's new independence was roundly squashed by the readers:

Your article ‘The Male Ego – Handle With Care’ made my blood boil. Men don't have a monopoly on the fragility of self-esteem. When a man puts down a woman to the extent that she becomes frigid, frumpish, nagging or, worst of all, a suburban neurotic, she is still expected to be the one to do something about it. I challenge you at *Cleo* to publish an article on a man's responsibility for taking care of the well being of his woman's ego. (V.R.L., Wongarbron, NSW; September 1977: 224)

For so long the poor bloody male has been mollycoddled, pampered and waited upon ... Now, not only are men against women but our own sisters are against us too. Remember that that ‘fragile’ male is the same male capable of rape and ruthlessness. (H.M., Canberra; September 1977: 224)

Most readers were really not interested in how difficult some men were finding women's liberation and independence and by 1977 *Cleo* finally got the message. This feature idea had almost dried up. The next time it appeared was in May 1979 as a gripe: ‘Why can't men say YES to Equality?’

### *Cleo's* question: "Are you a good feminist?"

This was the title of a quiz in the February 1976 issue, the same issue that had revealed such fear of radical feminism in Dasey's editorial letter and Willesee's diatribe. Even though, as with all *Cleo's* quizzes, it was not meant to be taken seriously ("If you took the quiz seriously subtract 20 points"), the level of feminist literacy required to answer it was impressive. Readers needed to know what a speculum was, what CR meant, and had to be able to identify the authors of a range of feminist (and anti-feminist) quotes. They were asked to define sexism and answer the question: "Is shaving your legs a political decision?" The answer was: "If you are a radical feminist, yes. Shaving your legs is pandering to society's view of how a woman ought to look." But the key question here was Question 12. When asked to differentiate between "feminism, emancipation, women's liberation and the women's movement" the correct answer was "none" (Petersen, 1976: 134-135).

The answer to Question 12 may well help in providing another insight into popular feminism. For activist and intellectual feminists at the time, the difference between those terms was the subject of much debate within the fracturing movement. "The term feminism largely came to replace the term women's liberation ... as the movement struggled with the needs for inclusion across the barriers of racism and classism inculcated in all of us" (Ward, 1998: 524). If the divergent groupings of feminists were arguing bitterly (and productively) about what feminism was, and how Women's Liberation had excluded many women, these internal theoretical debates were of little interest to the magazine. Nor could they be. As we have seen in this chapter, *Cleo* and its readers were still struggling to integrate (and sometimes resist) some of the basic challenges of the second wave: the gendered nature of housework, the pressures of the double shift, the meanings of femininity and whether independence and equality meant women had to abandon dresses and make-up, marriage and home. What I hope has been shown through the voices of *Cleo's* ordinary women readers is just how challenging the new ideas were and how they were always filtered and understood through very different life experiences based on age, class, ethnicity, education and 'life phase' – whether a woman was single, married and/or a mother. 'Women' were a diverse category in *Cleo's* pages. "If you're a woman there's room for you too," proclaimed Joyce Stevens' famous



'Women's Liberation and You' statement in 1975. But we have seen that this was not true for all women. Many were not hailed by the clenched fist of sisterhood and their experience of the organised movement (real or imagined) was as something alien.

When the answer to Question 12 told its readers that there was no difference between feminism, emancipation, women's liberation and the women's movement, it was because to explain these differences would introduce a discursive and political complexity that would shift this mainstream magazine into intellectual and increasingly academic territory. As we saw in the last chapter, *Cleo's* survey of the fragmentation of the movement in August 1976 published statements from various feminist organisations and writers, but it did not try to make sense of the differences. And the predominant coverage in this feature was of liberal feminism from WEL spokeswomen. Making feminism popular – and 'respectable' – had been *Cleo's* philosophy in the seventies. In its stance against the 'radical forces' be they political lesbians, left revolutionaries or 'elitist' intellectuals, *Cleo* was protecting its investment. It was quite possible to get full marks as a 'good' feminist without moving outside the frame of liberal feminism. Heterosexuality and, indeed, sexual liberation were an integral part of that popular feminist philosophy as well. It is this connection, between women's and sexual liberation, which will be explored in the following chapter. As Sandra Hall wrote in *Cleo* in 1976:

The women's movement is going through a provocative stage, as it was during the period of the women's suffrage movements, but there is one important difference: sex is involved in the debate this time. Feminism has been linked with liberation movements of other kinds ... (106)

## 6. HETEROSEXY POPULAR FEMINISM

Sexual liberation and women's liberation were entwined in the early years of second wave feminism. This connection began to unravel as second wave feminists contested the meaning of sexual liberation for women throughout the seventies. For *Cleo*, the two remained entwined and became a cornerstone of the magazine's editorial philosophy. The gender politics of sex was explored in its pages in the language of equal rights: women had a right to the freedoms and erotic pleasures it seemed men had always had, and they had a right to knowledge about their bodies that could make such ecstasy possible. It was the sexual politics of the fair go.

The usual picture of the seventies is that the clitoris dominated the decade, in both feminist and popular understandings of female sexual pleasure. Within dominant strands of second wave sexual politics, the clitoral orgasm became the feminist orgasm – an embodied site of a particular commitment to feminism. The vaginal orgasm was ridiculed as a delusion, an internalisation of male definitions of female sexuality. And the women who said they experienced such orgasms were often bullied into silence.

That, at least, is one story of the feminist sexual politics of the seventies. There was resistance from both feminist and popular feminist sources. The orgasm, that most ecstatic of bodily pleasures, became a battleground between different visions of feminist sexual politics, played out on the intimate field of women's bodies.

In *Cleo* too, the clitoris was central to female sexual pleasure. Not, however, at the expense of penetrative vaginal sex. *Cleo* refused any damnation of women who found their pleasures in penetration. And this was to become one of the markers of difference from many strands of more theoretical and organised feminisms as the decade developed and, I will argue, an important element of the appeal of popular feminism for ordinary women.

What becomes apparent in *Cleo's* repetitive discussion of sex is the encouragement of an active approach in women's sexual behaviour with men. Here the influence of Germaine Greer's idea of cuntpower and active female sexuality will be shown to be critical for the

continued entwining of women's and sexual liberation in the popular journalism of the new women's magazines, even as it unravelled in the theories of many second wave feminists. Greer's performances of sexual and women's liberation were well-covered by the media and helped cement one of the meanings of popular feminism – women's liberation could be explored via heterosex. *Cleo* attempted to break down one of the oppressive polarities of traditional understandings of heterosexuality and gender – of masculinity as active and femininity as passive. This was quite a radical position at the time (and for some theorists of heterosexuality it remains so) and was surprisingly evident in *Cleo's* features and in the readers' responses.

For many readers, embracing the new practices of active female sexuality involved a struggle against shame and ignorance. There was a base line lack of knowledge about women's bodies and the sexual pleasures they were capable of. As Michael Warner explains so well:

The more people are isolated or privatized, the more vulnerable they are to the unequal effects of shame. Conditions that prevent variation, or prevent the knowledge of such possibilities from circulating, undermine sexual autonomy. (2000: 12)

While Warner is writing here about sexual practices that are not considered 'mainstream' or 'normative', shame via isolation and privatisation of sexual knowledge and experience was operative within heterosexuality too, especially in this period and especially for women. There was a lot of sex work to do here for and by 'ordinary' women in the seventies, and especially those women who were isolated from social formations where sexual liberation or feminist discussion groups were active.

This chapter will establish the inadequacy of sex education in Australia at the time and the role *Cleo* played as one of the primary sites for teaching women about their bodies and their potential for sexual pleasure. As much as *Cleo* relied on sexperts, theirs were not the only voices to be heard in this intimate public sphere. In the reader letters and questions to advice and doctor columns we hear stories of women certainly anxious to know what 'normal' means in a time of dramatic social change, but we also hear stories of women's struggles and triumphs in finding sexual pleasure and the refusals of their

bodies to do what experts – be they doctors, sexologists, advisers or feminists – said they should. In the chaotic sexo-babble of experts and amateurs, the varieties of sexual pleasures women experienced were all valued in this intimate public sphere. ‘Normal’ female heterosexuality expands beyond containment as the decade unfolded in *Cleo*’s pages, but a stubborn unshiftable opposition between male as active/strong/desiring and women as passive/weak/desired is not what we hear. The meaning of the ‘mainstream’ of female heterosexuality was under noisy re-construction.

*Cleo* and its readers, I will argue, were inflecting many of the second wave feminist ideas about female sexuality in their own way and at the same time. This process could be called ‘heterosexy popular feminism’. Of the new women’s magazines in the nineties, McRobbie writes:

The idea that sexual pleasure is learnt, not automatically discovered with the right partner, the importance of being able to identify and articulate what you want sexually and what you do not want; the importance of learning about the body and being able to make the right decisions about abortion and contraception, the different ways of getting pleasure ... each one of these figured high in the early feminist agenda. (1999: 57)

She could have been writing *Cleo*’s editorial philosophy.

## **Women’s liberation and sexual liberation**

*Without the sexual revolution there would have been no feminism.*

(Coward, 2000: 23)

*Feminists in the late 1960s joined sexual liberation to women’s liberation, claiming that one without the other would keep women second-class citizens.*

(Gerhard, 2000: 465)

The beginnings of the second wave are often painted in the colours of disenchantment with the experience of the sexism of men involved with radical politics. Sexually, the role

of women was famously positioned by Stokely Carmichael as “prone” (Garton, 2004: 223).<sup>45</sup> The sweet talk was the words of liberation from capitalist repression of sexuality and the ‘hang-ups’ of bourgeois morality. As many of the women involved in radical politics in the sixties have noted, more sex with more partners did not mean more liberation. The *Playboy* ethic for revolutionaries drove many women to recognise sexism as an oppression as great, if not greater, than imperialism and class, and to form the early groups of Women’s Liberation (Curthoys, 1992; Lake, 1999; Segal, 1994). These experiences of sex with men was not, however, always as objects of use, victim to predators who whispered seductive words of ‘fucking for the revolution’. Listening to the memories of many feminists involved in the early years of Women’s Liberation there is another story told about the role of sexual liberation. While sexuality may have been the source of women’s oppression, for many it promised to be the source of their liberation.

In a frank exchange in the early eighties, US feminist Deirdre English spoke of the mythologising that was already occurring about the ‘sexual revolution’:

It’s very popular now to say that the sexual revolution of the sixties was incredibly oppressive to women ... The sexism was there, but ... the raised sexual expectations created enormous social and sexual gains for women ... Many women were actually able to change the way that men made love with them as well as the way they made love with men ... Women were fighting for sexual rights and often getting them. (English, Hollibaugh, Rubin, 1982: 42)

For many women, the experience of sexual freedom was intoxicating. It gave them a taste of sexual pleasure, independence and possibility. Jane Gallop writes of her early experience of feminism as a “double transformation”: “The disaffected, romantic, passive young woman I had been gained access simultaneously to real learning and to an active sexuality. One achievement cannot be separated from the other ... feminism made me feel sexy and smart; feminism felt smart and sexy” (1997: 5-6). Ann Snitow recalled how she had felt sexually oppressed and depressed before feminism opened her body to the empowering possibilities of active desire: “... before the movement I found sexual power unthinkable. Now angry and awake, I felt for the first time what the active

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<sup>45</sup> Carmichael was the leader of the US Student Nonviolent Co-ordination Committee.

eroticism of men might be like” (1989: 219). Lynne Segal notes that for all the confusion and uncertainty, these ‘liberated’ heterosexual experiences could be “a delight in the affirmation of self” (1994: 9):

The fight against sexual hypocrisy and for sexual openness and pleasure provided much of its [women’s liberation’s] early inspiration, as women decided that pleasure was as much a social and political as a personal matter. These issues were not only central to the genesis of feminism, they remain central to the majority of women’s lives today. (xi-xii)

The ideas behind sexual liberation carried *into* the early years of women’s liberation. The Australian feminist historian Jill Julius Matthews reflected:

For a while in the early seventies, feminism was able to hold on to both positions: the end to be achieved by overcoming women’s oppression was a human liberation in which true equality and freedom in sexuality as in all else would be enjoyed by all. (1997: xii)

There are a number of tropes operative in the recollections of these second wave feminists: active female eroticism, opposition to the sexual double standard, sexual pleasure as self-affirming. These tropes became, I will argue, crucial in the development of popular feminism as incorporating the sexual liberation of women. While *Cleo* did not link sexual liberation to utopia, the magazine did develop some of the elements of this early connection

In the ‘sex wars’ of the late seventies and eighties this early entwining of sexual and women’s liberation seemed to disappear. The shift is summed up well by the American feminist theorist Carol Siegel:

While in the 1960s and early 1970s some observers naively conflated feminism with women’s pursuit of unrestricted sexual pleasure, by the late 1970s the majority of Americans saw feminism as anti-sexual. (2000: 5)

In trying to explore female sexuality outside of structures of sexism or sexual practices designed, it was argued, to solely benefit male desires and pleasures, the practice of penetrative sex (and for some feminists the very institution of heterosexuality) came under serious question:

The emphasis had changed from confronting men with their petty tyrannies in the bedroom – the myriad small acts of selfishness, ignorance, and egotism that interfered with women’s sexual pleasure – to denouncing rape as the paradigm for male dominance. In retrospect it is clear that we were witnessing a pivotal moment in the movement’s history ... many feminists’ utopian hopes gave way to apocalyptic despair. (Willis, 1994: 46)

Some feminists, particularly in the late 1970s and early 1980s, judged heterosexuality harshly, publicly denouncing it as anything from sleeping with the enemy to legalised prostitution, masochism and/or patriarchal brainwashing (Albury, 2002: 33-38). Feminists such as Carol Smart have described the intensity of this debate:

It was as if there were really only two available positions; one which seemed to gloat over the mistakes of heterosexual women and one which seemed to apologise for being heterosexual. (1996: 168)

Focus on the dangers rather than the pleasures of heterosexuality came to dominate internal debates.<sup>46</sup> Male sexuality began to look like a ‘continuum of violence’ and straight feminists were left angry, resentful and for a time, silenced. “Many heterosexual feminists had no intention of suppressing their desires for sexual encounters and relationships with men, but I think that many of us did feel undermined and confused, if not guilty, by the accusation that we were too ‘male-identified’ and ‘soft on men’” (Segal, 1994: 58). Anna Coote and Beatrix Campbell explained how heterosexual feminists had been driven onto the defensive: “They felt roughed up by the very movement in which they had sought safety” (1982: 243).

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<sup>46</sup> See the edited collection by Carole S. Vance (1984), *Pleasure and Danger: exploring female sexuality*, for a clear elaboration of the state of the ‘sex wars’ at this time.

Amber Hollibaugh captured the shift that had occurred in just over ten years of the second wave. "Part of my attraction to feminism involved the right to be a sexual person. I'm not sure where that history got lost" (English, Hollibaugh and Rubin, 1982: 42). That history found a home in magazines like *Cleo*. If dominant strands of second wave feminisms lost sight of the importance of women's right to sexual pleasure, and especially through penetrative sex with men, the continuation of this trajectory of sexual liberation throughout the seventies and beyond almost defines heterosexy popular feminism. Women's right to the freedom and erotic enjoyment they perceived men to be having, the dismantling of the double standard, disconnecting sex from shame, was part of *Cleo*'s basic editorial philosophy and part of its popular feminist work. If 'official' feminisms almost came to blows over heterosexuality, *Cleo* pretty well ignored the 'sex wars' within the organised feminist movement and the academy. The journalism and reader letters show only the barest awareness of these debates. The 'sex wars' are one historical marker of how far activist/theoretical feminisms had travelled from the initial aims of Women's Liberation to be a mass movement. Elizabeth Wilson points to the 'sex wars' and the anti-pornography push as "partly or even largely responsible for the collapse of feminism as a movement" (2001: 39). From its overt support for Women's Liberation in the early seventies, as we saw in the previous chapters, by the later years of the decade *Cleo* began to distance itself from the fragmented and combative movement and the word, confident in its own sexy kind of feminism, one that rarely cross-referenced increasingly academic debates. It especially avoided the strands of feminism that were antagonistic towards men and heterosexuality.

In the evacuation of certain kinds of feminism from engagement with the popular media and from the 'normal' heterosexual desires of ordinary women, the gulf of non-identification with feminism widened. It is here, I would argue, that the 'I'm not a feminist but...' phenomenon – usually identified as generational and the 'structure of feeling' of younger women in the nineties – has one of its origins. The ideal of a mass organised women's movement may have collapsed, and 'feminist' may have become an identity many women did not want, but the connection between women's and sexual liberation continued as a trajectory in the new women's magazines.



## Sex Ed

I am a scripture teacher in a girls' school and spend a lot of time trying to teach my girls the value of chastity and clean living. But with publications such as yours writing so frankly about things which, to my mind, ought to be kept private, it is no wonder that young people today think of nothing but sex, sex, sex. (Mrs J.W., Brisbane, December 1972: 146)

For all the talk of liberation and the social changes taking place, for all the talk about sex, we should not forget that many people in Australia in the seventies were sexually conservative and the level of ignorance about bodies and sexual practices was high. As was discussed in Chapter Two, sex before marriage, 'living in sin', unmarried mothers, illegitimate children given up for adoption, illegal abortion, even getting a prescription for the Pill, were still sites of shame, anxiety and social controversy. These issues were under challenge in the seventies, but for many young women it was a confusing time. In 1971 the average age of marriage was 21 and the teenage birth rate was the highest in Australia's history, at 55.5 per 1000 of population. In 2001, by comparison, it was 17.6 (Summers, 2003: 29). The 1971 figure is extraordinary and suggests young women in confusion and dramatic transition about sexual behaviour.

"In the early 1970s," writes Bettina Arndt, a sexual therapist at the time and editor of the Australian edition of *Forum* magazine, "sex was a topic which abounded in mythology":

Most people knew very little about sex and what they thought they knew was often wrong. It was widely assumed, for instance, that most women had very little interest in sex – and those who did were regarded as nymphomaniacs. Female orgasm had rarely been heard of and the clitoris was quite uncharted territory. (1982: 176)

In a study of sex in Australia published as *The Sex Survey of Australian Women* in 1974, Professor Robert Bell interviewed 1500 women. His conclusions were that there had been a sexual revolution in Australia in terms of attitudes but the behaviour was "lagging behind". Writing in *Cleo* he explained, "The revolution has been towards greater sexuality as a right for both women and men ... [but] the conservative forces governing sexual

morality continue to be strong" (1974: 92). The greatest failure, wrote Bell, was that Australian society "provides little in the way of reliable information about sex as a human experience. It is not provided in the schools and there is little available written material" (92).

A review of current practices and trends in sex education in Australia by the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) in 1974 revealed that sex education was not taught as a separate subject in any school, and the little sexual information on offer was subsumed into science courses or religious instruction. The ACOSS research concluded that the prevailing approaches to sex education in Australia were "ineffective" (ACOSS, 1974: 17). In Queensland the situation was worse. The Department of Education refused to include any sex education in the school curriculum at all. It was a subject of public debate in the seventies. There was ambivalence about what should be taught, how the information should be presented, by whom and where. In schools? At home? The church? It was noted that "apprehension" best described the issue of educating teenagers about sex. What effect might it have? Would the children know more than their parents? Would sexual knowledge increase extra-marital sex and pregnancy and the spread of venereal diseases? Pleasure was not on the agenda.

The usual source of information about sex, apart from equally ill-informed friends, came from a one-off Family Life Movement mother/daughter, father/son evening (ACOSS, 1974: 17). The information young people received was based on the movement's aims of inspiring them "to idealism in sexual matters" (Auchmuty, 1979: 182). The nine guides produced by the Family Life Movement sold an extraordinary one and a quarter million copies in 1969 alone and "probably did more than any other individual or organisation to distribute sex education information among Australians of the post-war generation" (182). The content of the guides, however, was Christian-inspired and highly conservative. Readers were told that masturbation would bring guilt and shame and risk the development of homosexuality; avoidance of the practice was "character building". Homosexuality was a perversion for both men and women. Sex was for marriage and pre- and extra-marital sex were sinful and psychologically scarring (184). Using the guides as an aid, the primary responsibility for sex education lay with parents.

Parents however were embarrassed and often ill-informed themselves. In *The Female Eunuch* Greer had written about the ignorance of both mothers and daughters:

When little girls begin to ask questions their mothers provide them, if they are lucky, with crude diagrams of the sexual apparatus, in which the organs of pleasure feature much less prominently than the intricacies of tubes and ovaries. (1999 [1970]: 44)

In a *Cleo* feature about the importance of sex education for girls, the complaint was the same. Mothers' ignorance and shame was being passed onto their daughters: "Many mothers unwittingly bombard their daughters with negative and damaging information about sex" (Johnson, 1977: 84). Patricia Johnson quotes sex therapists who quipped, "mothers keep me in business". Most of the story, as is usual for women's magazine features, is filled with anecdotes from ordinary women who spoke of the guilt-ridden messages about sex received from their mothers:

I remember her saying when I was about 16: 'If you ever feel tempted, just see my face before you'. It was tantamount to having the bone pointed at you. And the very first time I did go to bed with someone I really did see her face, this sad face being terribly disappointed in me. I suffered giant guilt and I was convinced that the next morning I would be dappled with this scarlet rash, invisible to everyone else but her, which would let her know immediately that I was no longer a virgin. (84)

Johnson interviewed Robyn Clark, a health worker from the overtly feminist Leichhardt Women's Health Centre in Sydney. Clark spoke of the levels of sexual ignorance, especially amongst migrant women and those with strong religious backgrounds:

There is still that vicious circle of morality versus pleasure, thinking only of the man's pleasure, never of her own. When a woman can't have an orgasm, the first step is to encourage her to masturbate. But it has never occurred to the majority that they could. They find it so distasteful after all that earlier conditioning that they simply can't. (85)

A story on the sex education of boys revealed a similar story. "Our sons grow up groping and fearful of their growing sexuality, often with the barest discussion with parents who would consider themselves loving, enlightened and enlightening" (Mardon, 1973: 99).

The young women who read *Cleo* had been raised on respectability, but they were being hailed by the popularised discourses of sexual liberation to surrender these values of respectability and restraint and take on the new ethos of 'fun', 'sophistication' and 'sexiness'. The clash produced much anxiety, evident in the doctor and adviser pages. "The number of letters which arrive for the *Cleo* Doctor each month is staggering," wrote *Cleo* in a special *Dear Cleo Doctor* booklet:

It concerns us that women know very little about their bodies, that they are too embarrassed to seek medical advice – and that even after they consult a doctor they are quite ignorant of their condition and the treatment they are receiving.  
(1976a: 60)

The booklet provided a list of questions to ask doctors, and encouraged women to be more assertive and demanding. The *Cleo Adviser Booklet*, based on the "hundreds of letters" that were sent to the magazine's advice column every week, was even more explicit. With a barely contained anger it stated, "doctors, lawyers, even parents may be wrong. They are limited by their own view of the world, their own conditioning, their own fears and prejudices" (1975e: 42). The booklet suggested women might be better off avoiding male doctors and going to a Women's Health Centre or to the Family Planning Association clinics.<sup>47</sup>

It is easy to disparage advice columns (be they medical or social) as a lesser kind of journalism. But it would be a mistake to assume that these columns are always "intensely prescriptive" (Ferguson, 1983: 41). As Meryl Altman writes, "So often an anxiety about sex, women and gender, turns into an anxiety about genre". This trashing of trash can be "an unsuccessful way of stopping women's mouths" (Altman, 2003: 12). In the *Cleo* advice column, especially towards the end of the seventies, we hear not moralism or

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<sup>47</sup> Both were organisations inspired by feminist ideals and staffed by women committed to providing non-judgemental advice and treatment in all areas of women's health including contraception, abortion referral and sex counselling. The Family Planning Association was considered more 'establishment' by many involved in Women's Liberation (McCarthy, 2000: 112).

prescription but support and a pluralistic acceptance of different sexual practices. It is a shift Janice Winship noted too in her analysis of the changes in women's magazines in the decade or so prior to her writing (1987). In her revised analysis of teen magazines *Jackie* and *Just Seventeen* Angela McRobbie wrote about the new breed of advisers/agonny aunts as indicative of the "wide range of feminist ideas [that have] entered the realms of popular common sense" (1991: 159). As we will see, the kind of advice offered by Wendy McCarthy, the *Cleo* adviser from 1978 – 1984, was avowedly feminist.<sup>48</sup> The advice columns provided a space for the vast numbers of readers who did not have access to sex education or to sex and relationship therapy. It is a genre of journalism where the boundaries between private and public, of what sexual knowledges should and should not be spoken in public, are challenged.

By default it seems, throughout the seventies *Cleo* became one of the most important regular sites for the provision of explicit and non-judgemental sexual information for young women (and men) in Australia. Interviewed by *The Bulletin* in the planning stages of *Cleo* in September 1972, Buttrose was blunt about the need: "There will be articles on the physical woman discussing health and sex. These articles will be frank and mature" (Hall, 1972: 57). Australian women's magazines had simply not covered this territory before. *The Australian Women's Weekly* made an attempt in the sixties to discuss sex openly in its pages. A reader survey conducted in the *Weekly* and published in January 1968 revealed "a wide lack of sex education among parents and a degree of precocious knowledge among younger women" (Sheridan et al., 2002: 35). The authors note a discursive shift at this time from "moral to medical" in *The Weekly's* Medi-Talk column that answered reader questions (35). However, "romance and marriage continue[d] to be the parameters within which sexuality [was] contained" (41). Even in the seventies there was little detailed sexual information offered by this most widely read of women's magazines (39). And while *Pol* certainly wrote *about* the sexual revolution and *about* women's liberation as social phenomena, it didn't provide women with the gritty 'how-to' technical and biological details. *Cleo* adopted the tradition of the service guides, the 'trade' manuals of feminine work that had defined mainstream women's magazines, and applied sex to the format.

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<sup>48</sup> Indeed, McCarthy has spoken of her time as *Cleo's* adviser as involving some of the most important feminist work she has done in a long career of feminist-inspired interventions. In her autobiography she writes, "My *Cleo* years were seen by my children as my finest achievement" (McCarthy, 2000: 122).

It was not that Australian women were completely without resources when it came to finding information about sex. By the time *Cleo* launched, popular sexology had taken off as Australian publishers began to release the mainly American-authored books (see Ehrenreich et al., 1987; Gerhard, 2001). *Forum* magazine, the international journal of sex research, was available in selected newsagencies. By late 1972, Australians could buy David Reuben's *Everything You Wanted To Know About Sex (But Were Afraid to Ask)* (1969), J's *The Sensuous Woman* (1969), Inge and Stan Hegeler's *The ABZ of Love* (1971) and, of course, Alex Comfort's *The Joy of Sex* (1972).<sup>49</sup> These books were the start of an avalanche that was to roll through the seventies and provided *Cleo* with much of its feature material. Every new book released seems to appear in excerpt form in *Cleo*'s pages. The excerpt was a much more digestible format, and one that avoided potential embarrassment. For *Cleo*'s younger readers, raised in households where sex was an intensely private and often 'dirty' or unspoken subject, buying books would also require hiding them. The brilliance of cradling sexual information within a women's magazine was that the social practice of reading this genre was already well established. And there was enough non-sexual content to disguise the intention of reading *Cleo* for sex. As a result, *Cleo* managed to circulate 'subversive' information without arousing too much resistance.

The level of ignorance and misinformation had made sex education a subject of feminist work in the seventies. In *Sbrew* magazine, Janet D'Urso noted the need for practical non-moralistic information about sex and sexuality for girls:

Her sex education is almost 100% sure to be gravely deficient. Most women, 'good girls', 'bad girls' and the vast range in between rely on information told to them by their friends, parents or they buy a book ... likely to be inaccurate. (1971b: 11-12)

A working group involved with the Adelaide Women's Liberation movement wrote *What every woman should know*, a sex education booklet covering VD, abortion, pregnancy and

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<sup>49</sup> The alternative student handbook *The Little Red Schoolbook* was on sale in 1972. Originally from Denmark, *The Little Red Schoolbook* was banned in several Australian states because of its open and non-moralistic approach to sex and drugs. About pornography, homosexuality, and 'abnormal' sexual practices the authors advised, "It's normal to be different. We all are" (quoted in Auchmuty, 1979: 187).

contraception in 1971. Coverage in *Mejane* noted that their attempts to distribute the booklet in schools were met with “hysterical reactions by some parliamentarians, police information of those handing out the booklet at schools with special attention from the abortion squad” (n/a, 1971: 3).

Feminists had begun to wrench sexology from the hands of male experts, medical and psychological. Through meetings of consciousness-raising groups, The Boston Women’s Health collective produced the first edition of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* in 1969 which circulated in various forms in Australia and was available as a book from 1973. When *Our Bodies* was released in September that year, *Cleo* ran a long excerpt with an introduction explaining its feminist origins and women’s frustration with “condescending doctors” (Boston Women’s Health Collective, 1973: 10). The excerpts *Cleo* chose were about genital self-examination in groups; the explanation of the clitoris; the individuality of sexual response and orgasm; children by choice; shared contraceptive responsibility and the double messages about sex being dirty, virginity being saved for true love and the pressures of a commercialised sexual ‘liberation’: “What really has to be confronted is the deep, persistent assumption of a sexual inequality” (10). Sexual frustration or non-responsiveness was explained in social terms, the result of a “male dominated culture [which] imbues us with a sense of second-best status ... the men we sleep with are never as interested in our orgasms as they are in their own” (11).

*Cleo* readers knew the story about male selfishness already. ‘Men and the female orgasm’ was a feature in the fourth issue based on the transcript of a small focus group of men and a female journalist. Shelley Summers fired the questions. ‘How important is it to you that a woman has a climax?’ ‘Peter’, a doctor in his early 30s, replied, “If she is a one-night stand I don’t give a damn whether she does or not – why should I? I don’t really expect her to under those circumstances anyway” (Summers, 1973: 114). ‘Michael’, another doctor in his thirties, seemed confused:

I find most birds who have trouble climaxing are pretty demanding. That is about the only thing wrong with the liberated woman – she is not happy with anything but what she calls a vaginal orgasm and that takes a lot of determination from a man. (114)

'John', a divorced solicitor in his thirties, thought some women were "getting too aggressive" when it came to sexual liberation and becoming a "sexual threat" to men (117). Peter, the doctor, was convinced that liberated women had a lot more neuroses and that they could never have the same attitude to sex as men. "Men are going to suffer," he said prophetically (116). It appears that *Cleo* was wise to direct women away from their male GPs when it came to sexual advice.

### Glancing at Germaine

In 1972 Germaine Greer entered the London studio of photographer Pete Sanders, took off her clothes and threw her legs over her head (Figure One). Smiling with glee at the camera, Greer offered an intimate image that suggested women could take control of the representation of their bodies and take pleasure in it. The photo was published full-page in the large format European sex newspaper *Suck*. As a member of the editorial board, Greer was committed to the exploration of explicit sexual images that escaped the mould of male heterosexual pornography. Published in Amsterdam, *Suck* could avoid the stricter British censorship laws, and that too appealed to her libertarianism. For Greer the image was a statement of cuntpower: "lady love your cunt". Cunt was "beautiful" and it had been hidden for too long (1986 [1971]: 74). And by cunt she didn't just mean clitoris. 'Cuntpower' involved the whole genital area and was a potential opening to the unknown erotic possibilities of the whole body. And, critically, the theory of cuntpower tried to challenge the association of the receptive vagina with passivity. Cunt was an active force.

It is an arresting image, shocking even now. As Lynne Segal explains, "The vagina has served as a condensed symbol of all that is secret, shameful and unspeakable in our culture" (Segal, 1999: 84). Greer's intention was to refuse that abject status and to force people into both an acknowledgement and questioning of the internal conflicts the view of her cunt might provoke. While few Australians would have seen the *Suck* image, it was emblematic of an attitude – a sexual shamelessness and a preparedness to put her body on the line for her beliefs, against censorship and for sexual liberation.

Greer had embraced the ideas and lifestyle of the libertarian Push until she left Sydney for England in 1964. The Push was a collection of 'critical drinkers' in the fifties and





**Figure One: Germaine Greer, *Suck* 7. 1972**



sixties, inspired by the libertarian ideas of John Anderson, an influential Professor of Philosophy at the University of Sydney. The group was anti-censorship and was opposed to sexual repression, which Anderson linked to conservative fears of social disruption. "The group's equation of sexual repression with political authoritarianism was the basis of a dynamic in which free sex was the marker of the political progressive" (Wallace, 2000 [1997]: 68). The bequest of the Push sexual lifestyle for Greer was a belief that freedoms enacted in one field, especially sexual, would extend to other sectors of life (68). Hardly a feminist haven for the women involved, what was extraordinary about the Push in the general conservatism of fifties and early sixties Australia was the acceptance of female sexual desire and women's right to initiate sexual activity with men. Interviewed by Anne Coombs for her history of the Push, Lynne Segal (also an early Push member) described this experience for the women involved and its importance for their understanding of women's liberation later in the sixties. "That moment of sexual liberation was absolutely crucial to the origins of feminism and women's liberation," Segal said. "We had to see what it was like to be one of the boys, to be bachelor girls, who, just as men did, went for everything we wanted, and we did" (Coombs, 1996: 129).

This early experience of sexual independence and apparent sexual equality strongly influenced Greer. It was to inform her early vision of women's liberation (a vision which she has since implicitly renounced in a number of contexts), and critically for popular feminism, her exploration of the possibilities of a liberated female sexuality in *conjunction* with men – not without them. Rejecting men was akin to running the revolution from a nunnery, where some women might find independence "but that never changed reality for the mass of women" (1986 [1970a]: 28). Greer was far from alone in her desire. Lynne Segal reminds us, "the majority of feminists then believed that men could, and must, change. Women's personal struggle with the men in their lives was seen as the main aim of sexual politics in the early seventies" (Segal, 1987: 16).

Having sex with men was an act of feminist research to see what a liberated female sexuality might look like. To do this, women had to actively pursue their own sexual liberation, not wait for men – be they 'experts' or amateurs – to tell them how. Greer refused to settle for the clitoral liberation of Masters and Johnson, "the blueprint for standard, low-agitation, cool-out monogamy. If women are to avoid this last reduction of their humanity, they must hold out not just for orgasm but for ecstasy" (1999[1970]: 50).

The revolution was about exploring an unknown expansion of energetic and sexual possibilities. Greer didn't want definition in advance.

Expansion of libido and the sites where it might erupt was her Reichian inspired vision of the importance of releasing sexual repression.<sup>50</sup> Women had been castrated; a woman without libido had become the meaning of femininity (1999 [1970]: 78-79). Orgasm with a man, but achieved actively through a moving 'cunt', not passively bearing a man's weight, was Greer's ideal for the sexual liberation of women:

Once a woman throws her leg over her lover she has accepted responsibility for her own sexuality and recognized it as an integral part of her personality and her intelligence, and not merely a function of meat. Once she is posed over her lover, male or female, she is able not merely to claim the right of orgasm but espouse the sweet responsibility of giving pleasure. (1986 [1970b]: 40)

At the time, the proposition that female heterosexuality was not necessarily or inherently passive was a radical vision. Greer however was throwing the 'given-ness' of the passive heterosexual woman into question. Part of her argument was that women could experience the positive power of actively giving pleasure to a man and in the flow of movement that *she* controlled, give pleasure to herself as well. Women had not only been denied the right to *receive* orgasm, their acculturated passivity had denied them the pleasure of *giving* orgasm. It is a fluid vision of heterosexual practice, where pleasure and power flow between male and female, active and passive, subject and object. I would argue that Greer offered the possibility of disarticulating the traditional binary couplings of penetration/activity and reception/passivity. "Cunt is knowledge. Knowledge is receptivity, which is activity" (1986 [1970b]: 37-38). And it was more than theory. Greer's media performances displayed the active woman in all her threatening, binary-dissolving wildness.

Greer's media presence could be read as a series of 'glances'. She was a 'political bonehead' according to Beatrice Faust (Faust, 1972: 1), however a coherent political

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<sup>50</sup> See Robinson, Paul A. (1969), *The Freudian Left*, for a clear exposition of the ideas of Wilhelm Reich and Herbert Marcuse on sexual repression and liberation.

platform was not Greer's point and it is not how she was 'read' by the women who consumed her through media moments if not through her writings (as Chapter Two explained). It is a highly intellectual and rational understanding of the world and of how the media operates to assume that influence and ideas can only spread through a logical and ordered reading process. In her celebrity, Greer's meaning was made through "a performative and dramatic pedagogy, visual and vestimentary, and its message – precisely because it is not spelt out but performed as part of popular entertainment – can be read 'at a glance'" (Hartley, 1996: 181). What Hartley terms the 'logic of the glance' is one of the ways in which meaning is constructed through media and celebrity, and it helps to explain Greer as the meaning of women's liberation for women who were still trying to work out what feminism might be and how they could 'live' the desire for gender equality and for good sex in everyday heterosexual lives. Greer's popular performances of sexual liberation, the anecdotes about her sex life, are what many women remember about women's liberation. Reviled by many in the second wave for what they saw as a protection of heterosexual conventions and promoting the image of the feminist as "a superfuck" (Coote and Campbell, 1982: 240), she has rarely been taken seriously in the accounts of the sexuality debates of this time (see Spongberg, 1993). Ordinary women were fascinated.

The figure of Greer became metonymic in the popular imagination for women's liberation and its connection to sexual freedom. As Chilla Bulbeck notes, "*The Female Eunuch* became almost synonymous with women's liberation, even as the growing handful of Australian feminists repudiated her work" (1997: 2). Bulbeck's interviews with women who had lived through the seventies often mentioned Greer and her book as their stimulus to feminist awareness. One interviewee was prompted to leave her husband after reading *The Female Eunuch* (135). Another, Teresa, said that she tasted her menstrual blood under Greer's instruction (136). Anne Summers reflected that Greer "opened eyes and changed lives. The book received enormous media coverage and thus got many thousands of women who might otherwise never (or at least not as soon) have been confronted with these truths about their lives" (1999: 293).

For *Cleo*, the figure of Greer reappears throughout the seventies like shorthand. She is one feminist the readers knew. Greer was a woman prepared to put her reputation on the line – indeed to make her reputation – through dirty talk and an overt heterosexuality.

She was not a man-hater, although she gave men much grief. The message at a glance was that one of the steps to women liberating themselves had to be through sex with men, not without them. And women had to be active – desiring sex, initiating sex, controlling its movement to make penetration a female activity and orgasm an experience they were in charge of.

This was a kind of liberatory practice the readers, writers and producers of *Cleo* could embrace. It sounded like something you might be able to manage in your own bedroom. Part of Greer's appeal was her insistence on personal rebellion. It was a tactic that even the most 'ordinary' woman could find inspiring: "The first exercise of the free woman is to devise her own mode of revolt [reflecting] her own independence and originality" (1999[1970]: 20). Greer herself appreciated the realities of life for the ordinary woman. If not always sympathetic, and often scathing about women's complicity in their own oppression, Greer also understood that it was through mediated outrage and shock that feminist ideas might begin to take hold. In 'The slag-heap erupts', an article written for *London O2* in 1970, Greer showed her usual mix of disdain and insight:

The average housewife is dulled and confused by her day-to-day diet of pulp journalism and crap television ... Of course, most women are not radical leftists or unmarried university students; the luxury of [such] theorizing is not accessible to them at all. Mrs Smith, who tends a bottling machine by day and husband and kids morning and night, has no use for a reading list, however fascinating. (1986[1970a]: 27)

The ordinary woman may not have been reading feminist theory but she was tuned in to the media and she was having sex. In itself, to have sex without shame and ignorance, to discover what pleasures a female body was capable of, was a 'liberation' of a kind. As we will hear through the voices of the ordinary woman in the pages of *Cleo*, there was an embodied experience of equality to be struggled for there, especially via orgasm.

## The feminist orgasm

*Feminists reclaimed the orgasm from experts and male lovers and reinfused it with new symbolic meanings. Within second-wave feminism, the female orgasm came to represent women's self-determination, making 'the great orgasm debate' central, not incidental, to the project of women's liberation.*

(Gerhard, 2001: 82)

Masters and Johnson's work in the sexual laboratory of the sixties had revealed the clitoris as the centre of female sexual response. In their best selling *Human Sexual Response* (1966) the authors had explained that women's most intense orgasms came not from intercourse but from masturbation. Kinsey may have caused an outrage in the fifties by suggesting that women actually masturbated, but the radical implications of Masters and Johnson's work was that intercourse was not essential for female sexual pleasure. They turned the Freudian orthodoxy of the clitoral orgasm as 'immature' and vaginal orgasm as the site of adjusted and mature female sexuality on its head (45-68). Moreover, women had the capacity for multiple orgasms and could remain in the orgasmic phase for longer than men (3-8). Masters and Johnson's intent, however, was to strengthen the marital couple via better and orgasmic sex for women. Their findings reoccur through the popular sexology literature of the late sixties and seventies and become mantras repeated throughout media coverage of sex, especially in magazines such as *Forum*, *Cleo* and *Cosmo*.<sup>51</sup>

Anne Koedt based much of her influential article 'The myth of the vaginal orgasm' on the insights of Masters and Johnson but put them to quite a different use. The clitoris, the "female equivalent of the penis", is the centre of sexual sensitivity. The vagina "is not a highly sensitive area and is not constructed to achieve orgasm" (1973 [1970]: 198). Every orgasm, no matter how it felt, was clitoral (199). Because of the male need to have penetrative sex:

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<sup>51</sup> While *Human Sexual Response* was a best-seller, the language of this tome is dense and difficult. My guess is that most readers got their Masters and Johnson via media popularisation rather than close reading. Like many best-sellers my suspicion is that it remained unread.

women have been defined sexually in terms of what pleases men; our own biology has not been properly analysed. Instead, we are fed a myth of the liberated woman and her vaginal orgasm – an orgasm that in fact does not exist. (199)

Koedt's radical interpretation was to suggest that the clitoral orgasm threatened the "heterosexual institution" (206). Men were potentially "sexually expendable" when penis in vagina was not necessary for orgasmic female sex. "It would indicate that sexual pleasure was obtainable from either men or women, thus making heterosexuality not an absolute but an option" (206).

Koedt gave an early version of this paper at the first national Women's Liberation Conference in the USA in 1968. Long and detailed conversations followed as women exchanged highly personal details about their orgasms, lack thereof, and their sexual fantasies. By talking together and recording their discussions, women were becoming the new sexperts. It was an example of the consciousness-raising that was to define the early years of women's liberation.<sup>52</sup> Gerhard argues that for Koedt, the clitoris was the site of liminality for women, "the point at which male experts' categories broke down. Clitoral stimulation resulted in orgasm for women, and this clitoral orgasm, whether stimulated by men or women, became the marker of 'the feminist'" (2001: 107).

Anne Summers has described 'The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm' as "one of the most provocative early writings to come out of America ... startling stuff. No one was yet speaking frankly about sex or sexual organs" (1999: 261). The Adelaide WLM published the article with an introduction by Summers, who disputed some of Koedt's conclusions. "Most women do experience desire for penetration," she wrote. And the "thinly veiled lesbianism" was not a solution that would sexually satisfy all women. "Even our boyfriends were uncomfortable, and for most men ... it was as good as a declaration of war" (262).

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<sup>52</sup> Kathie Sarachild of New York Radical Women explained the principle behind consciousness-raising: "to emphasize our own feelings and experiences as women and to test all generalizations and reading we did by our own experience was actually the scientific method of research" (Sarachild, 1975[1968]: 145 ).

In Sydney, piles of Koedt's paper were stacked in Women's Liberation House. Versions circulated attributed to a different author (Lake, 1999: 221) and the article was used as the basis for many consciousness-raising sessions (Bulbeck, 1997: 36). The 'Orgasm Meeting' there was attended by scores of women talking about their own experiences. Liz Fell, a libertarian feminist at the time, recalled "there were as many orgasms as there were women ... There was no way of neatly classifying them. It was revelatory for many women there I think, that there was no right or wrong way" (quoted in Wallace, 2000 [1997]: 206). Such open-minded generosity towards this most intense of sexual pleasures was not to last. That vaginal orgasm was a myth became an incontrovertible 'truth' in the feminist movement. 'Gale', writing in *Mejane* in 1971, for example, stated, "This devastating myth ... has been the curse of women throughout the western world" (13).

Although the political impetus behind these discussions of women's orgasms was based in consciousness-raising techniques where women's experiences were privileged over male expertise, the democratic desire to hear – and accept – all women's experiences came to be over-ridden by the importance of the clitoral orgasm to feminist identity politics at the time. What had begun as an open discussion of varied orgasmic experiences turned into a regulative and normative theory where clitoral orgasm equalled feminist – and therefore, vaginal orgasm or desire for penetration equalled non-feminist. Importantly, as Alice Echols notes, the attempt to overcome old prescriptions would engender new ones and women who claimed to have vaginal orgasms were shamed into apologising (1989: 111-112).

The new findings of 'scientia sexualis' were marshalled in the service of feminist politics. The new sexual normativity of the clitoral orgasm led to a stigmatisation, indeed a construction as mythical, of what became its necessary 'other', the vaginal orgasm, the deluded orgasm of 'false consciousness'. What a feminist did about penetrative sex with men (or even, for some theorists, with women) divided the movement during this period. Feminist anthropologist Muriel Dimen looked back at this time of sexual 'political correctness' in the second wave:

The clitoral orgasm became public knowledge in 1969 because feminists made it so. But then the clitoral orgasm became the only politically correct orgasm to



have, consequently foreshortening exploration and, at best, confusing, at worst, marginalizing, those who had a different experience. (1984: 146)

The feminist orgasm would prove to be a strategic blunder for a feminism that wanted to represent, and speak for, all women. If the heterosexual feminist who desired penetration was 'othered' by a dominant strand of political/theoretical feminism, the heterosexual reader of a woman's magazine like *Cleo* was doubly so. And Germaine Greer didn't fare too well either (Spongberg, 1993).

And yet, Greer had pin-pointed one of the paradoxes of the feminist insistence on the supremacy of clitoral orgasm. For women who desired sex with men, once again men would become the masters of sexual pleasure, 'giving' women orgasms through their expert techniques of clitoral stimulation. "Love-making has become another male skill, of which women are the judges," said Greer (1999 [1970]: 47). If heterosexual women actually wanted to involve their male partners in an orgasmic process by focussing only on the clitoris, they were now *more* reliant on male skill, not less. Unless women took responsibility for their own orgasms, men would remain in control.

### **The popular orgasm**

It sounds like a tautology. Is there an unpopular orgasm? Amongst many feminist theorists in the seventies, if you weren't pursuing clitorally-focused sexual pleasure then the orgasms you were having were deeply unpopular. And yet, within the multi-voiced pages of women's popular journalism, many different orgasmic experiences were being explored and accepted. The popular orgasm can be seen as the orgasmic practices of ordinary women as they struggled for democratic equivalence in their sexual lives.

Orgasm became the symbol of women's sexual liberation in *Cleo*, as it had in some of the early writings and discussions of second wave feminists. Koedt had insisted on the primacy of the clitoris for the 'feminist' orgasm, and Greer had insisted on women's active engagement with the whole cunt as a means to erotic pleasures and liberation as yet unknown. *Cleo* explored both ideas, arguing the understanding and satisfying of female sexual desire as an issue for popular feminism. In 1974 this connection was clearly

made to *Cleo's* readers. "For centuries pleasure in sex was regarded as reserved for men only," wrote staff writer Anne Woodham. "Now women see their own needs and want men to know" (1974d: 15). Women had not been getting a fair go when it came to sex with men. The difference between *Cleo's* discussion of female orgasm and the developing feminist debate was that *Cleo* did not dismiss penetration or the pleasures of the vagina. Nor did it insist that one type of orgasm was better than the other. It presented the knowledge of experts, the knowledge (and questions) of its readers, in a mixed language of sexual science and descriptions of erotic pleasure. The result was a productive demotic babble.

If the clitoris had become the feminist truth of female sexuality, with the regulatory and disciplinary powers that accompany such truth claims, especially when bound up in identity politics, the magazine format created a far more democratic space for the multiple 'truths' of female orgasms to gain representation. One of the unsung powers of the intimate style of sex journalism in women's magazines is that its reliance on the voice of the sexpert *as well as* the anecdotal voice of the amateur inevitably results in a picture of the pluralities of female sexuality. There is just too much to be said and too many voices. The democratic generosity of a popular journalism reliant on readers' voices, as well as experts and journalists, can open up the possibilities of female sexuality and the popular orgasm – not shut them down. It is a feminist effect, indeed a feminist desire, all enacted without too much direct mention of feminism at all.

Sexologists, psychologists, doctors, sex counsellors, feminists – all the experts quickly took up residence in *Cleo's* pages. After a year and a half of running sex ed features, *Cleo* was already tempted to satirise the sexpert. In "The male orgasm: is it a myth?" the reference to Koedt's "The myth of the vaginal orgasm" is clear, as are the allusions to Freud's theory of mature and immature orgasms. Journalist Trisha McDermott's expert, Dr Mark E de Sade, had discovered two types of orgasm in men, the testicular and the penile. "The testicular orgasm is by far the superior one, removed as it is from the childishly immature penis," he said. "Men who insist that they derive intense pleasure from their penises are infantile and in need of psychiatric counselling" (1974: 28). The men in a rival study were revealed to have great difficulty achieving orgasm and admitted to faking, "skilfully enough to fool their partners" who would be hurt if they didn't (28).

It is a neat satire. But while *Cleo* thought it may have been time to laugh at the white coat brigade and their competing theories about the female orgasm, it didn't stop – couldn't stop – running features on the subject. Editorial choices were often made in response to readers' desires. And there were always new readers for whom this information was 'news'. Letters kept pouring in to the *Cleo* Doctor and the *Cleo* Adviser about orgasm. What is an orgasm? How does it happen? Why won't it happen? Am I normal? Readers were admirably unable to determine whether their problems with orgasm were medical problems or social/cultural ones. In the circuit of desire that had opened up around orgasm in the seventies, *Cleo* had no choice but to continue its stories. In the eruption of sexpertise any clear meaning of 'normal' female orgasmic sexuality almost dissolved, as the following excerpts, a handful from dozens, begin to show.

In one of the early sex stories in *Cleo*, the normative practice of intercourse in a 'sexual encounter' was already being questioned:

This is a die-hard myth. Propagated by some of the leading sex manuals, they say that there is nothing wrong with any kind of sexual activity – fellatio, cunnilingus, the use of vibrators – providing the love-making ends in intercourse with the man on top. (Blanch, 1974d: 10-12)

In an attempt to explain the female orgasm in response to "the hundreds of letters we receive from women asking about orgasm", Katrina Petersen, like Koedt, blamed Freud for diverting women away from the clitoris towards the sexually mature orgasm of the vagina. "Thousands of women since have been given psychoanalysis directed at achieving what is in fact a biological impossibility" (1974: 23,25). In a feature on the popularity of vibrator attachments, Anne Woodham took issue with "rubber sheaths with lumps and bumps [which] pander to the myth of the vaginal orgasm". There was no point to these devices if the clitoris was "the real key to female orgasm" (1974b: 99). Writing to the *Cleo* doctor a reader from NSW was disturbed by her inability to have an orgasm through penetration:

I have reached orgasm many times by manual stimulation of my clitoris by my boyfriend. However, attempts at reaching orgasm through intercourse have failed

miserably. I am quite unmoved ... feel nothing, left out and inadequate. (January 1976: 65)

She added that because she could just as easily experience clitoral orgasm "without him", the sexual experience "feels false". This reader was having a 'feminist orgasm' and it wasn't what she wanted.

The first *Cleo* Doctor, a male gynaecologist, had been running quite a different line in his column. Writing to the Doctor, one reader chastised him for "perpetuating the old Freudian myth of the vaginal orgasm" and sent him a leaflet for his feminist sex education. The doctor was cross. "The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm by Anne Koedt leaves me cold," he replied. "Utter rubbish" (March 1974: 83). There were readers who agreed with him. Responding to an article asserting "out with Sigmund Freud's vaginal orgasm, in with the clitoral orgasm" (Hall, 1974: 91), 'Freud Forever', as the reader described herself, wanted to take issue with the feminist 'experts' and demanded public recognition of the existence of the vaginal orgasm:

... there has been mention in previous issues of 'the myth of the vaginal orgasm'. I feel I must let the women readers of *Cleo* know that I can have both clitoral orgasm and vaginal orgasm. Clitoral through masturbation and vaginal through intercourse. Both sensations are different, so much so that I dislike having my clitoris stimulated before intercourse as it tends to diminish vaginal orgasm sensation. Please acknowledge that at least some women do experience two types of orgasm. (No address, September 1974: 178)

The plea for public acknowledgement is revealing. There were women whose bodies could not agree with the new clitoral supremacy and felt 'symbolically annihilated' by the dismissal of their orgasms.

Sex counsellor Frank Sutherland had a bet each way. The clitoris was essential for building excitement but orgasm was about vaginal spasm. The instrument of pleasure was irrelevant. Hands, dildos, vibrators, fantasy, intercourse, could all lead to the female orgasm (Sutherland, 1975: 65-66).

In a lateral shift, *Cleo* ran a story that attempted to move the focus away from orgasm to a wider spectrum of sexual pleasures. Catherine Storr was a psychiatrist who had come to a very pluralistic position about sex and a complete mistrust of the evidence from Freud, feminists or the sexual laboratory. Storr's range of 'normal' would have been reassuring to many readers:

Why should it be shaming to be roused sexually by the idea of having sex fully clothed, in a taxi, dressed in black leather, in boots, standing up in a hurry? Why should we want to deny that we find girlie magazines, soft porn, the sight of copulating animals sexually exciting? If you masturbate to a fantasy, if you use fantasy during intercourse with your partner, if you love people of your own sex, if you don't have sex three times a night, if you have longish periods when it doesn't interest you, if you are well over the age at which sex is considered 'respectable' – well, you may not be average but you are still well within 'normal' limits. (Storr, 1975: 109)

By 1976 it was time for a quiz on the subject. *Cleo* readers were invited to test their sexual knowledge. Question Nine asked the reader to identify whether the statement "there are two forms of orgasm, vaginal and clitoral" was true or false. After doing their homework through the back issues, you couldn't blame readers for being very confused. The answer? "All orgasms are triggered by sensation in the clitoris. Freud was wrong" (n/a, 1976c: 146-147).

Despite this moment of truth, the varied voices of the popular orgasm wouldn't allow *Cleo* to settle into such singular certainty for long. With each repetition of the orgasm story, following the journalistic requirement of the fresh angle, different inflections on sexological research and personal anecdote were building a highly complex picture of female sexuality. Through these voices of ordinary women – the voices of anxiety and disappointment alongside the testimonials of pleasure and demands for validation – a space was created to represent the multiplicity of sexual pleasures women were experiencing through sex with men, and without them. By the end of the decade it became apparent that a singular truth of orgasm kept slipping out of everyone's grasp. As Jeffrey Weeks put it, "there can be no esoteric 'truth' of sex to be discovered by diligent research; only perspectives on contending 'truths' whose evaluation is essentially political

rather than scientific” (Weeks, 1985: 251). And *Cleo*’s popular journalism provided the public space for contending truths to circulate.

1981 was a big year for the orgasm in *Cleo*. There were two features that prompted a huge response from readers. In February the feminist orgasm appeared to have dragged *Cleo* finally into the sex wars. In June, however, ‘scientia sexualis’ allowed the vaginal orgasm via the ‘discovery’ of the G-spot to return to the field to help broker the peace. A kind of sexual democracy was at work in *Cleo*.

‘The little man in the boat’ was billed as “the story every man must read!” (Southern, 1981: 26). Lisa Southern wrote personally about her orgasmic journey, her faking of orgasms before D-day (1969 and “the discovery of the clitoris”), her experience of lesbianism and clitoral orgasms, her return to men and political refusal to fake vaginal orgasm with them. “After making futile attempts to bring me to orgasm, men would give me little-boy hurt looks or accusing glares as they recounted their orgasm-producing exploits with other women” (27). For their ignorance and false pride, Southern held other women responsible for keeping men in the clitoral dark. Her tips for “what women really want” were graphic:

Women had faked vaginal orgasms so well that men were confident that there was nothing like good old-fashioned penetration to produce a climax. The clitoral orgasm was just some new-fangled feminist con ... men felt incredibly threatened by the revelation that they had probably never brought a woman to a genuine climax. (27)

‘Faking it’ was a feminist issue in the seventies. Southern’s article was a stern rebuke to women who betrayed the sisterhood (and confused men) with their “screaming and scratching” with penetration. (The best orgasms came, apparently, when you were quiet and never with penetration.) The enlightened certainty of this article rings with a tone of almost fundamentalist truth, unusual for *Cleo*’s features. At the close of the story, the tone begins to make sense. Southern had been raped. At the trial she had been accused of having an orgasm during the vicious assault and the jury believed it. The rapist was acquitted. “I had been done in,” she wrote, “by my own and by other women’s fake orgasms, by male jurors whose wives had always lied to them” (28). It was a strange but

understandable rationalisation. For Southern, the clitoris was the truth of female sexuality that would, if not stop rape, at least remove the erroneous belief that women could ever enjoy male sexual violence. The sex wars had come to *Cleo*. The clitoral orgasm here was not simply an issue of sexual pleasure, it had serious political and legal ramifications. If women accepted that they couldn't get pleasure from penetrative sex then rape would be understood for what it was – violent male power over women.

“The response was staggering,” wrote *Cleo* later in its review of the year. The article was “probably the most talked-about sex article of 1981” (Taye, 1982: 141). The letters expressed gratitude, relief and identification: “It is framed and hung next to my bed”; “I’ve a mind to post photocopies of it to all the males in Australia”; “It was a weird feeling to read an article written about me by someone I’ve never met...” (May 1981: 180). For Dawn from Victoria, the article gave her ‘the words to say it’:

For the past three years I have tried to explain what I wanted to my husband but couldn't seem to get through to him. I read the article, then gave it to my husband to read that night in bed. I won't say it was a complete success but at least he knows what I want now, and for the first time I am really enjoying sex. (June 1981: 184)

The clitoris was hardly news. But for many women, isolated from feminist ‘sexpert’ texts, who hadn't read popular sexology, who hadn't even read *Cleo*'s repeated features about clitoral pleasure throughout the seventies, who had clearly missed out on key sex education about their bodies, reading a single article written in the first person as an inspirational tale of suffering and recovery could be life-changing.

Just as *Cleo*'s readers seemed to be finally settling in to the clitoral truth of female orgasm came the truth-exploding news of the G-spot in the June issue in 1981. The ‘discovery’ of the G-spot and its popularisation through *Cleo* and other media arrived just in the nick of time for readers who were beginning to question their sanity because of the ‘clitoromania’ of the preceding decade. “Was Freud right after all?” asked Jack Jardine and Ruth Austen as they explained the history of sexology, Masters and Johnson, the myth of the vaginal orgasm, the refusals of experts to believe in women's stories of deep and different orgasms within the vagina and their tales of female ejaculation (1981: 28-

32). Beverley Whipple, a registered nurse and member of the American College of Sexologists, and her research partner, psychologist John D. Perry, chose to take these women seriously and 're-discovered' the G-spot, naming it after Dr Grafenburg who had described it in an all-but forgotten article in 1950 in *The International Journal of Sexology* (Perry and Whipple, 1981: 25). Grafenburg had also observed the connection between orgasm at this spot and female ejaculation. Whipple and Perry's research revealed a distinct difference between clitoral and 'uterine' orgasm (34). 'Reader' from Victoria could barely contain her relief at the validation this article provided:

At last someone else realises there is another spot for orgasm. I had many long-standing relationships in which I had never experienced an orgasm other than clitoral despite a variety of positions. Then, with a very special guy it happened ... I was away. This was to happen many times ... My friends have doubted that it was an orgasm, saying they only experienced the clitoral variety ... It was so good to read your article as I have always been sure that it was a true orgasm and not a figment of my imagination. (September 1981: 240)

A reader from Bondi also thanked *Cleo* for "enlightening" her that "those wonderful experiences were not figments of my imagination":

I for one have experienced many vaginal orgasms through stimulation of the G-spot. I used to find it hard to achieve orgasm ... We stumbled upon this hidden pleasure purely by accident when we were experimenting with different positions to try to increase my sexual response by means other than oral stimulation. We did this by 'rear entry' ... This enabled me to move freely and find the best way to meet his thrusts, therefore stimulating my G-spot. (October 1981: 248)

The detailed sexual intimacy of these letters would have been inconceivable in mainstream women's magazines before the seventies, and utterly impossible to print in newspapers. Chris from W.A. was relieved to find an explanation that her ejaculations during G-spot orgasms were not urination and happy to share the news with *Cleo's* readers. "I have experienced this ejaculation three times in all, with numerous vaginal orgasms (also clitoral) until now I have not known what was responsible" (October 1981: 248). What is more, *Cleo's* reader/writers were breaking down the distinction between



expert and amateur, displaying an expertise developed through their passionate amateurism and becoming, in effect, popular sex educators. Like Chris, Priscilla from NSW was grateful as well. She decided to share some of her own sexpertise with *Cleo's* readers:

*Cleo's* article omitted one vital piece of information; the truly devastating effect of achieving both the clitoral and G-spot orgasm at the same time. Quite often I would break down and cry afterwards in massive relief. It was as if my soul left my body and I could fly ... The clitoral climax is an emotional thing, my entire body seems to float, mouth salivates, toes turn up, type of thing, whereas the G-spot climax is more a physical thing, as if being pushed to its limits the body explodes. (November 1981: 14)

A.W. of NSW, a regular *Cleo* reader from the early 1970s, initially took the magazine to task for *informing* her about the big 'O' all those years ago. She was "shattered. I'd never had one. The long search for this elusive high began. Soon, after many failures and almost the breakdown of my marriage I hated *Cleo* for telling me about it." A.W. gave up on *Cleo*, left her husband, found a new lover, and started reading the magazine again, the sealed section on the G-spot (May 1983). "Most exciting," she wrote. "Only recently I bought a vibrator and discovered clitoral orgasm and only in the last month or so, vaginal orgasm. I was horrified at 'wetting my bed' during such an orgasm [but] I am sure my sex life will never be the same again" (August 1983: 168). Her letter speaks of both the pleasures and dangers of expert advice.

A wonderful letter from 'Nanna, NSW' made reference to the advice from 'oldies' contained in the G-spot and female sexuality sealed section. She had certainly found hers, and without expert advice:

Now they know that much more than financial security keeps us together. Remember too, we married in ignorance, had no books to guide us, to discuss sex with anyone was taboo and we didn't know what to call anything. Imagine the sense of humour needed to get our act together. (August 1983: 168)

Nanna makes a great point. In the voices of these 'ordinary' women it is obvious that many women stumbled onto all varieties of sexual pleasures without expert help, be it from the feminist, the sexologist or the psychiatrist. Her pleasures existed outside of sexological discourse. Nanna had been having pre-discursive orgasms. The "curse of the western world"? "The vaginal orgasm does not in fact exist"? Nanna would have laughed.

The vaginal orgasm and the G-spot remain contentious for some feminists. Instead of providing verification of some women's experiences, argues Kath Albury, the G-spot became proof of sexual dysfunction:

Even the product of very well-meaning feminist-orientated sex research had the old familiar normalising effect. Once vaginal pleasure was 'discovered', it became 'normal', in the most sinister sense of the word. Women who couldn't find their G-spots were obviously missing out on something, or doing sex all wrong. (2002: 10)

Just as, I could add, the singular focus on the clitoris had left many women wondering if *this* spot really was all there was to orgasm. The clitoris had hardly been displaced in *Cleo*. And the magazine was playful about the G-spot, aware that many women were bemused as much as some may have been made anxious by this 'new' source of pleasure. "The Grafenburg, or G.spot ... not a new kind of melanoma or a place to put the sequins but the new female erogenous zone. Found yours?" (Taye, 1982: 141)

The voices of women who 'found it' reveals an immense relief that science could now validate sexual experiences that no-one had believed. After all the biology lessons about the clitoral imperative, the G-spot promised an explanation for their difference, and possibly for women's desire for penetration. As much as this new finding of sexual science threatened to increase some women's sexual insecurities as Albury suggests, it also provided immense reassurance to women who had been left anxious about their 'normality' in the wake of the feminist orgasm.

*Cleo* was unquestionably focused on orgasm as the symbolic site of women's right to sexual ecstasy. But how that orgasm occurred, as we have seen across the decade, was far

from normative. And heterosexual practice in this mainstream magazine had moved a long way from the missionary male thrusting into a woman lying prone and passive in the dark. Orgasm and sex were 'lifestyle' signifiers of the new woman. She aspired to be good at sex, she knew about orgasm, her magazine proudly shouted about sex on its covers. The movement from ignorance to knowledge, from pre- or non-orgasmic to orgasmic, signified participation in the imagined liberated community of *Cleo's* new women. And writing about the popular orgasm, reading about it, having or struggling to have it, allowed her to participate in that community. Sex without shame had become a marker of 'the good life', even a sign of cultural capital. At the same time, this legitimization of women's right to sexual pleasure and the repetition of stories about sexual experimentation and orgasm could also lead to feelings of shame and illegitimacy amongst those readers who could not manage to reach the heights of such 'liberation'.

### Expanding the repertoire of normal

In exploring their potential for sexual pleasure, the readers/writers of *Cleo* were being encouraged to become *active* sexual beings. This didn't necessarily mean having sex with more men, it meant women learning about their bodies, taking control of their own pleasure and their right to orgasm, with men or without them. It was a huge shift in sexual practice for women and it was clearly a challenge for many women to engage in active sexual practices such as masturbation, using vibrators, sexual fantasy, oral sex and to take an active 'woman on top' role in penetrative sex with men:

I wanted to be more of an equal, to initiate some of the ideas. But he didn't like that. Some kind of power struggle began to upset the works. (Manville, 1973: 65)

One erroneous expectation is that the man should be the authority on sex – that the man is responsible for the woman's orgasm. But men do not have any magical answers and they are not capable of reading a woman's mind. (Barbach, 1975: 93)

Several women I talked to reversed the passive-aggressive roles. They took over – undressed the man, got on top, ran the whole show. And the men really loved it. (Weller, 1978: 77)

The philosophy is don't lie back and wait for your partner to give you pleasure: give it to yourself first, then you can show the poor fellow how to do it. (Davis, 1978: 134).

Exhorting women to disrupt the traditional expectation of sexual passivity was not only continuous throughout the seventies, it was presented as a feminist position. Anne Woodham observed that the feminist questioning of 'stereotyped sex roles' was allowing women to "take a more active part in suggesting love-play" but most women were still conditioned to take their cues from male partners, and remained unsatisfied (Woodham, 1974d: 18). "What happens to sex after women's liberation?" asked Nora Ephron in *Cleo*:

The women's movement and a variety of other events in society have certainly brought about a change in the way women behave in bed. A young man who grows up expecting to dominate sexually is bound to be somewhat startled by a young woman who wants sex as much as he does, and multi-orgasmic sex at that. (1976: 153)

By 1982, the phenomenon of the sexually assertive woman was commonplace, even expected, in the pages of *Cleo*. In a satire on the advice column, 'Dear Auntie Susan' responded to 'reader' questions:

Dear Auntie Susan,

A male friend of mine says he is fed up with women who put the hard word on him – he can't stand it. What do you think?

Dear Reader,

The poor dear. He probably feels like a sex object! Auntie Susan's heart bleeds for him. Many men have failed to understand that the woman's movement has changed the way many women feel about this attitude among men. And while it is never proper etiquette for anyone to put the hard word on anyone else, women

have certainly emerged from the 70s feeling freer to make their sexual wishes clear. Instead of waiting to be asked, and pretending to be coy, women are trying to get what they want. Men have always done so. Aunti Susan suggests you present your friend with a copy of *The Female Eunuch*, the seminal sex book of the 70s. (Anthony, 1982: 96)

Developing an active sexuality involved more than learning how to initiate sex and take responsibility for orgasm and pleasure. An article in *Cleo* by Betty Dodson, US feminist and doyenne of masturbation, pointed to the importance of self-exploration, vibrators and oral sex as ways for women to understand their own sexual responses and to find pleasure, with or without men. "Sexual skill and the ability to respond are not natural. It has to be learned and practised" (Dodson, 1974: 207). These were themes *Cleo* repeated constantly throughout the decade. Dodson argued strongly against the sexual double standard, that society approved of men who were "aggressive (independent) and sexually polygamous" but women were expected to be "non-aggressive (dependent) and sexually monogamous" (207).

There was a huge gap, however, between advising women to masturbate and the actual doing in everyday life. 'Beth' of NSW sent *Cleo* a letter which reminds us just how difficult and shameful masturbation was for many women:

When I was 10 I used to masturbate. I was caught masturbating by my parents and ever since then I have felt guilty even though I know it's perfectly normal. My mother does not come straight out and say anything about my masturbating, she makes snide, nasty remarks, which upset me. My husband has not caught on to her remarks yet and I feel I should tell him but I am ashamed ... My problem is wrecking my sex life. I feel ashamed of my body because of what I have done. Please help before it is too late. (June 1982: 34)

Wendy McCarthy's straightforward sensible advice could tell this woman nothing she did not already consciously know. "There is nothing wrong with masturbating – it's a normal healthy activity and most people masturbate throughout their lives. Indeed, there are sex therapists who believe that masturbation is the best form of sexual learning ..." (June 1982: 27). Requesting help in public, reading about the new, wider parameters of

'normality', listening to other readers' problems, could all potentially serve to alleviate the isolating shame and anguish Beth was experiencing. But her letter speaks of a lifetime of misery that simply 'speaking sex' would probably not solve. The shame surrounding masturbation was not "a discrete occurrence, but a perpetual attunement, the pervasive affective taste of a life" (Bartky, 1990: 96). The transition to the sexually shameless new woman was not going to happen overnight. And for some readers of *Cleo*, the liberation on repeated offer became a normative pressure.

Embarrassment, shame, anxiety, the difficulty for some in engaging in the expanding repertoire of normal heterosexual practice are constants in the readers' letters. An exchange on the letters pages over oral sex adds another element as well – the way more adventurous sexual practices had become a marker of a woman's 'liberation' and of her modernity. J.H. of NSW had found a feature discussing oral sex "disgusting, unclean and revolting":

... I nearly threw up ... I couldn't believe what I read. How any woman can put her mouth near a penis or a man put his mouth near a vagina is beyond me.  
(December 1977: 240)

The response was almost violent. "If you could liberalise your views on oral sex as well as sex as a whole your husband might just regain his potency"; "My boyfriend and I had to take another look at the issue's date to make sure it wasn't December 1947!"; "Oral sex is a clean wholesome way to satisfaction ... anything between consenting adults as long as it is legal and does not cause either partner physical or mental detriment is acceptable"; "Wake up to yourself JH" (March 1978: 144). Kissing on the mouth did not engender this kind of debate.

The vibrator was another new challenge for women – and for some men – too. In 1972, the quality broadsheet *The Australian* had described sex shops as "a pimple of the face of tolerance", and the courts were convicting the purveyors of such obscenity. Sex shops, their catalogues and vibrators were controversial. *Cleo* however championed the sex aid as "fashioned solely to increase the pleasure of women ... Of the myriad devices concocted to please us – usually clitoral or vaginal stimulators – only three are designed to titillate heterosexual males" (Campbell, 1973a: 43). Penelope George wrote a first

person account of her frustration in having an orgasm. She had to take the matter into her own hands. It took days to find the courage to go to a sex shop, but she did. Then went into her room and got to work:

The vibrator hummed for over half an hour ... Suddenly, my mind snapped, my surprised body exhibited all the text book signs of a good orgasm and I was, truly, gut boggled. I laughed, the sensation was extraordinary. Relief settled on me like winter sunshine. I was not frigid. I was normal. My life must surely change. (1979: 198)

In fact, it was suggested that vibrators were so good at providing better, more reliable orgasms that women might be tempted to dispense with partners altogether. "Many women express fears of becoming dependent on them for sexual release once they start ... Liberated women demand to know exactly what is wrong with being dependent on a vibrator?" (Mazzei, 1978: 44).<sup>53</sup>

The journey to liberation through vibrator addiction was a difficult pleasure for some. One reader, who had been uncertain and embarrassed about buying a vibrator, and especially from a sex shop, had been reassured and given explicit directions by another, by-passing the expert altogether. S.D. suggested she buy a massager from a department store and use the smooth button. "Excellent for masturbation," said S.D. (May 1974: 81). Another reader wanted to try a vibrator but was concerned that her husband found the idea threatening. "He thinks it means something is wrong with our relationship if we do. I don't have a problem with orgasm but I admit I'm curious about vibrators" (May 1982: 31). McCarthy sympathised that the man could be anxious about being replaced by a machine and very sensibly suggested: "Why not buy a general massage vibrator and try it on your husband so he feels comfortable with it. You could then begin to use it together in your lovemaking" (31).

Masturbation and vibrators were clearly connected to feminism. Regular *Cleo* writer Julie Clarke explored sex shops in New York and stumbled upon Eve's Garden, run by Dell Williams. Dell had been involved with Women's Liberation and was a devotee of

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<sup>53</sup>Rachel Maines (1999) explores the history of vibrators and the way women have used this technology for sexual satisfaction since the mid-nineteenth century.

Wilhelm Reich. She had read *The Function of the Orgasm* and “became convinced that the troubles of the world were caused by not enough people getting it off” (1976: 234). Dell discovered the vibrator via Betty Dodson and decided to “create a space for women to buy vibrators in a sisterly atmosphere” (234).

A sisterly atmosphere was created in the pages of *Cleo* for women to share their stories of sexual fantasies – “still one of the most taboo subjects” (Wilson, 1973: 15). It was another way the magazine encouraged women to explore the range of their sexuality and alleviate shame. As Michael Warner argues, “Isolation and silence are among the common conditions for the politics of sexual shame. Autonomy requires more than civil liberty; it requires the circulation and accessibility of sexual knowledge” (2000: 171).

Talking about sexual fantasies in public was framed by discourses of liberation, equality and progress. In an interview with Nancy Friday upon the publication of *My Secret Garden* in Australia in 1976, Camilla Beach confronted the myth that “nice girls don’t have sexual fantasies”:

In the bad old days before *My Secret Garden* hit the American bestseller list, women who openly confessed to sexual fantasising were popularly pronounced either mentally sick or over-sexed. Consequently many such women unnecessarily suffered feelings of guilt. (116)

Friday spoke of the reception to her book. “People get scared to death ... they simply cannot understand that women have erotic lustful fantasies and desires just as men do” (116).

In *Cleo*’s pages, female heterosexual desire was represented as a force that could not easily be trained or constrained by sexological truth, by moral dictates or by “conscious feminist pursuit” (Segal, 1994: 104). It kept erupting uncontrollably. This desire would not be faithful<sup>54</sup> and would not stay interested in its chosen partner.<sup>55</sup> It got bored<sup>56</sup> or

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<sup>54</sup> ‘Men – and sex outside marriage’, January 1975: 126-129; ‘Who wants to be a one man woman? I don’t’, September 1977: 58-58

<sup>55</sup> ‘Is there sex after marriage?’ April 1978: 52-55; ‘After sex...what next?’ November 1977: 254-255



it wanted more than its lover could provide.<sup>57</sup> It persisted in attaching itself to the wrong men,<sup>58</sup> couldn't align itself with lasting love,<sup>59</sup> and wanted to sleep with strangers or friends.<sup>60</sup> It wanted sex without love<sup>61</sup> and sex without the double standard foiling its plans.<sup>62</sup> Female 'heterosexual' desire even wanted sex with women.

In an extraordinary story, 'Woman to Woman', a "happily married woman" wrote in the first person about an experience that allowed her to discover more about her sexuality. At 35, the author makes love to her friend Amelia, also a married woman. The husband Ken is in bed with them. He fades out of the picture fairly quickly. "Much to Ken's disappointment, neither Amelia nor I felt the need of a penis" (n/a, 1979: 75). The reader is taken on a highly descriptive tour of both women's bodies. "Almost a year later," she writes, "we find neither of us has become lesbian. I still prefer a male partner but would never discount the possibility of another experience with a woman" (75). There was no guilt or shame and the experience had made her a better lover. The author discovered a new empathy for men. "I know how difficult it can be ... If a woman doesn't tell him what she likes or wants, how on earth is the man to ever know?" (75). Lesbian readers saw the article as a step towards the acceptance of gays by straights (May 1980: 264) and were writing in for back issues years later (November 1982: 8). And straight readers who responded to the story expressed relief that their sexual experiences with women meant they were *not* lesbian (February 1980: 144). From another reading, *Cleo* was suggesting how women could explore their sexual assertiveness and curiosity without worrying about labelling their sexuality at all.

A singular definition of 'normal' female heterosexuality had completely dissolved over this decade in *Cleo*. What remained normative was the presumption that women *should* be interested in sex as part of their newfound liberation and independence. Sex with men,

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<sup>56</sup> 'The Big Freeze. Does sex send you to sleep?', October 1979: 16-19; 'Single life in a double bed', October 1976: 105-108; 'Could you be happy with one man after sleeping with a lot?' July 1978: 17-21

<sup>57</sup> Adviser, June 1973: 17

<sup>58</sup> 'Men are proper bastards', November 1972: 14-17

<sup>59</sup> Adviser, March 1983: 21

<sup>60</sup> 'Sex with strangers? Sex with friends?', May 1977: 12-14; 'The sexual etiquette of brief encounters', October 1976: 73-79

<sup>61</sup> 'Sex without love', January 1979: 62-64

<sup>62</sup> 'True lust and real love', February 1984: 52-56

however, was not represented as something to be exchanged or endured for a meal ticket or social mobility, nor was it represented as something extracted from women as unwilling victims of phallic domination. Women were encouraged to lose their shame and embarrassment about sex. They were being provided with the techniques and attitudes to *do* sex – not have it *done to* them. Doing sex didn't even necessarily mean sex with men. Women could do it alone, with machinery, in fantasy, or with other women.

I have been arguing throughout this chapter that *Cleo* can be read as a document of women's struggle to become actively sexual and knowledgeable in the name of the fair go. The struggle was clearly represented as one of women's as much as sexual liberation, even though as the decade developed heterosexy popular feminism had to part company from the thrust of much theoretically and politically motivated feminist work that was becoming increasingly censorious about the kinds of sex and the types of pleasure women should have.

*Cleo* retained the earlier second wave optimism about the potential for sexual liberation as one means towards a broader women's liberation. Female orgasm became the embodied experience of women's liberation. This optimism and pleasure all but disappeared in the dominant debates of political/theoretical feminisms in the later seventies and eighties. Ann Snitow described her alarm at this turn "away from insistence on the power of self-definition":

... think of the Lavender Menace, or the early celebration of the vibrator, or the new heterosexual imperative that one should demand from men exactly what one wanted sexually – to an emphasis on how all women are victimized, how all heterosexual sex is, to some degree, forced sex, how rape and assault are the central facts of women's life and central metaphors for women's situation in general. (1985: 110)

And Andrea Stuart bluntly described the implicit authoritarianism in much feminist thinking of this period: "Feminism fell victim to its proscriptive legacy which dictated certain codes around dress, fashion and sexuality. Being a feminist had come to say more about what you didn't do – eat meat, fuck men, wear makeup – than what you did do ..." (1990: 32).

We have seen how many feminists felt silenced by the focus on the dangers rather than the pleasures of sex with men. What had also been silenced was any chance that the kind of heterosexy popular feminism being explored in magazines such as *Cleo* could be recognised – by historians, by feminists at the time and since – as one of the many feminisms the period of the second wave had produced.

The next chapter will take these ideas into a slightly different space. The active sexuality of women encompassed the right – and the desire – to gaze at male bodies. In looking at *Cleo's* 'nude' male centrefold, readers were highly vocal about how arousing they found the experience. In fact, there were more letters published on this subject than anything else across the decade. The refusal of the existence of the female gaze by most avowed feminists will shed a little more light on the meanings of heterosexy popular feminism and why ordinary women might have refused the identity of 'feminist'.

## 7. JUST LOOKING? THE *CLEO* CENTREFOLD

When Jack Thompson took his kit off as *Cleo's* first nude male centrefold in November 1972, Ita Buttrose had no idea that the 'mate of the month' would become such an iconic element of the magazine's popular feminism. In fact, she thought it was just going to be a gimmick, a one-off joke. Enthusiastic letters flooded into the *Cleo* office. Readers (almost) unanimously found the centrefolds sexy and wanted to see more. Every second wave feminist who wrote on the subject, as we'll see, thought they were 'ludicrous' and a failure for female sexuality. The disjunction between the two readings is at the core of this chapter. The centrefold allows a focus on feminist debate at this time about sexual objectification, the gaze, female heterosexual desire and its implications for popular feminism.

There were competing discourses in play during the seventies and eighties about the meaning of the male nude presented for female view. For more theoretically aware feminist readers, the very idea that women might find the representation of a nude male erotic was an impossibility. But their arguments, as we shall see, reveal a dismissal of the desires of ordinary women, those 'other' readers of *Cleo*. The letters page became a forum for what, in effect, was a popular debate about sexual politics. What did it mean to female readers to finally see a man stripped for their viewing pleasure and scrutiny? Could men be sex objects? What made a man sexy? Could anonymity lead to sexual desire? Was turning the tables on men an act of vengeance, humour, fair go feminist role reversal, or perhaps all three?

### Distinctions and definitions

The female nude has a long and highly visible history in magazines for men as pin-up cheesecake, as high art erotica, as hard and soft core pornography (Gabor, 1984). But nude males in magazines for women? It took the rise of both feminism and the new women's magazines in the seventies to allow the stripping of the male for mainstream public view.

Cheesecake 'pin-up' has traditionally functioned as a catalyst for heterosexual male desire and as a representation of female desirability (Buszek, 2006: 8). The term refers to "publicly acceptable, mass-produced images of semi-nude women" (Meyerowitz, 2003: 321). The new women's magazines of the seventies turned this tradition on its head and offered the naked male as a question. Could the representation of a nude male serve as a catalyst for female desire? Could it represent male desirability?

The editors were testing new ground. Naked men photographed specifically for women had not been seen in mainstream publishing before. As long as the magazines adhered to censorship guidelines of no penises and no depictions of intercourse they could stay within the boundaries of law, remain unrestricted publications and escape accusations of pornography. Pubic hair was still 'borderline' in Australia in 1972. The naturist magazine *Solar* had successfully argued in court for the right to break the 'pubic hair barrier' (Clarke, 1982: 156), and *Cleo* played with the borders.

I am not interested here in what seems to be a fruitless search for definitions and categories trying to determine whether the nude male in women's magazines was pin-up beefcake, soft core porn or lowbrow erotica. I am more interested in looking at what the nude male centrefold in *Cleo* meant for two very different groups of readers who wrote about it and what this might tell us about popular feminism in the seventies.

Catharine Lumby productively suggests we think of pornography as a blister – "a tender spot on the social skin which marks a point of friction" (1997a: 97). Laura Kipnis writes of the moral outrage directed towards forms of pornography as evidence of "the desire to distance [oneself] from and if possible banish from existence the cause of [one's] distress – the sexual expression of people unlike oneself" (1992: 377). Using both the ideas of 'friction' and 'banishment' as take-off points it is possible to explore very different readings of the male nude centrefold in *Cleo*. This friction and desire for distance and banishment came from a surprising source. Not from *Cleo*'s regular readers, not from the censorship board or the wider community (although some religious groups were up in arms), but from second wave feminists. This friction was expressed as acts of *theoretical* banishment.

Many of the analysts who bothered to comment on the male centrefold built on both John Berger's and Laura Mulvey's analysis of the male gaze, as will be explored later in this chapter. Within their frameworks, the desiring heterosexual female gaze could not have a representational existence and any analysis of the male centrefold had to presume its failure as a representation of female sexual desire. For a sexual libertarian feminist like Germaine Greer, the nude male centrefold was not transgressive enough. For anti-pornography feminists such as Sheila Jeffreys, the centrefold was playing with a format of oppression, a 'ludicrous' attempt to oppress the oppressors. For most other feminists it was just a joke and not really worthy of investigation. But it is hard to escape the impression that what might have also motivated these dismissals was the distaste for ordinary women and their ordinary pleasures – an 'othering' based on differences of class and education expressed not just through feminist politics but through erotic taste. The centrefolds were "the sexual expression of people unlike oneself". Andrew Ross, drawing on Bourdieu, argues that it is through categories of taste that "cultural power, at any one time, is able to designate what is legitimate, on the one hand, and what can then be governed and policed as illegitimate or inadequate or even deviant, on the other" (1989: 61). It is this friction between the enthusiastic legitimacy of the nude centrefold in *Cleo* expressed by ordinary readers and its construction as an 'illegitimate' object for theoretical feminisms that will be explored here.



## Beefcake for cheesecake



**Figure Two: Burt Reynolds as US *Cosmopolitan's* first male centrefold, April 1972**

In 1972, when US *Cosmopolitan* revealed Burt Reynolds lying on a bear skin rug, with penis covered by his hands, Helen Gurley Brown proudly gave a pop fem cry of “Equality at last!” (quoted in Bordo, 1999: 18; Figure Two). The most successful editor of commercial women’s magazines in the last forty years saw the introduction of the nude male as finally matching Hugh Hefner’s bid for male sexual liberation with the nude photographic pin-ups of women in *Playboy* in 1953, “a symbol of disobedience, a triumph of sexuality, an end of Puritanism” (D’Emilio and Freedman, 1988: 303).

Curiously, if we are to believe Margaret Walters claim, “the whole thing started as a joke. Way back in 1970, the feminist paper *Off Our Backs* ran an April fool parody, with a bearded naked man dreaming over a flower, brooding over his typewriter and stirring up a quick soufflé in the kitchen” (Walters, 1978: 300). According to Walters, the nude male centrefold for women had its direct origin in this radical independent feminist paper and the concept was copied by US *Cosmopolitan* (henceforth *Cosmo*). Although the irony is delicious, where the idea originated is less interesting than how it was constructed, framed, interpreted and used. While turning the tables on male representations of the nude female was a parody for *Off Our Backs*, it was more than a joke for *Cosmo*: part



parody, part role reversal, part liberation. Even Germaine Greer in an article for *Esquire* could grudgingly accept Gurley Brown's version of sexual politics:

It would be mean-minded to argue that her motives for running the first male nude pin-up in the gatefold of *Cosmopolitan* magazine were purely commercial. No doubt she wished to demonstrate a point of ethics: the 'liberated' or careerist woman is entitled not only to her own key to the executive washroom, but also to treat the younger, prettier male bodies as sex objects. (1986[1973]: 178)

After the success of the Burt Reynolds issue of US *Cosmopolitan*, which saw the magazine's circulation escalate to over two million, the floodgates opened onto the visual pleasures of the naked male for women. British *Cosmopolitan* launched in 1972 with its nude centrefold, Paul du Feu, who achieved a brief celebrity as Germaine Greer's (brief) husband. Although du Feu's genitals were well-hidden behind a raised knee and his navel mistakenly air-brushed out, the launch issue of British *Cosmo* sold out its print-run of 350,000 in a single day. Within two years, however, British *Cosmo* abandoned the nude male centrefold.<sup>63</sup>

Susan Bordo regards the *Cosmo* nude centrefold as a "cultural turning point". The male nude in a commercial magazine marked the male body as ripe for the demands of an expanding consumer culture, turning the political rebellion of the sixties into the "sex and lifestyle conceptions of liberation":

... No naked penises, true. But a new willingness to visually foreground the sexuality of male hips and buttocks, and, ultimately, male genitals. The representational frontiers of the male body had been expanded; geographically, it now included a southern hemisphere. Consumer culture had discovered and begun to develop the untapped resources of the male body. (Bordo, 1999: 18)

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<sup>63</sup> The reasons for *Cosmo's* abandonment of the centrefold have never been fully explored. The assumption has been that women didn't find them erotic and the joke had quickly run its course. It is more likely, however, that because magazines operate in a highly competitive commercial environment, the existence of *Viva* and *Playgirl*, with much more explicit male nudity, made *Cosmo's* tame attempt redundant. *Viva* struggled to get advertising because of its explicit male nudes and closed at the end of the seventies. In Australia, *Viva* was on sale via import. But in a country of small population and far-flung centres, *Viva* could not have the same impact as competition for the well-distributed *Cleo*. An Australian version of *Playgirl* began in 1973 but had similar problems with advertising and often fell foul of the censors.



The male centrefolds in women's magazines did mark the opening of a vortex into which the naked appeal of the male body was increasingly drawn by forms of popular culture over the coming decades. But this can be read as more than the logic of consumer capitalism at work. There was a heterosexy popular feminism in play too. One does not necessarily cancel out the other.

Mainstream men's magazines, such as *Esquire* from the thirties to the fifties and *Playboy* from 1953 onwards, had already developed the strategy of using the erotic spectacle of nakedness to engage their readers in consumer culture. The *Esquire* and, more so, the *Playboy* lifestyle was expressed through the acquisition of expensive things – cars, travel, high fashion, hi-fis, liquor, sumptuous meals. The displays of naked women as pin-ups in the pages of these magazines reassured their predominantly male readers that an interest in fashion and shopping was not going to compromise their heterosexuality (Breazeale, 1994; Jancovich, 2006).<sup>64</sup> For readers who aspired to the *Playboy* lifestyle, women were no longer Gibson Girl sweethearts to be dreamed of until marriage, once enough capital had been accumulated to afford a family (Gabor, 1984: 34). Sexual desire and immediate gratification were replacing family responsibility and saving for the future. Heterosexual men were being encouraged to 'spend' on themselves and naked women were giving them permission. As Barbara Ehrenreich has explained in *The Hearts of Men* (1983), *Playboy* came at a time in the fifties when men were revolting against their expected role as breadwinners. As many women were sedating themselves into accepting the domestic cage, many men were finding the noose of the grey suit just as tight. Sex and consumption in these mid-twentieth century men's magazines provided a fantasyland of rebellion.

With the male centrefold in the new women's magazines of the seventies we can see the beginnings of a similar process, gendered now in reverse. The male is beginning to be represented not as a good provider or a 'catch' but as a sexually desired object. His body could be used to sell things via his sexuality – even if, in *Cleo's* case, the only thing he was selling was the magazine itself. Explaining the changes in male representation for the female gaze in Australian *Cosmo's* advertising and (short-lived) centrefolds in the

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<sup>64</sup> And the readers were not only male. Women read *Playboy* too. What is more, they enjoyed looking at nude females (Meyerowitz, 2003).

seventies and early eighties, Mick Carter argued that capital had been searching for “a visual key that would unlock the masculine figure to the kinds of work so successfully carried out by the female figure” (1985: 106). For the male to be utilised as a site of consumption, women had to learn to enjoy the image of him as sexual exhibitionist. This could be a ‘dangerous’ process, Carter argued, requiring a massive transformation for both men and women. Watching this process unfold in commercial women’s magazines, he noted that gender relations are far from fixed when capitalism needs to expand. “[This] will entail a loosening of the former pleasurable reading of the man as primarily an indicator of economic and political power” (111).

Carter’s insights are a reminder that consumer culture is not necessarily politically regressive and that positive sexual politics can develop there. Outside capitalism was not the only space where traditional gender relations could be destabilised. Carter insisted, however, that “the role reversal prank” of *Cosmo*’s nude centrefold of the seventies was “a crafty failure” (107). It failed to hitch the nude male directly to advertising a product. Too much naked male flesh without commercial justification, the centrefold “stampeded” its female audience, he argued. But the encouragement of female consumption was not the only point of the centrefold, if indeed it was the point at all. Women didn’t need to be trained in consumption – that had been their territory for more than a century (Reekie, 1993). The point of the centrefold was a playful eroticism for heterosexual women. As we will see, the readers’ responses to *Cleo*’s centrefold make us question this conclusion of ‘failure’.

The liberal application of Marx’s *Grundrisse* to representations of the nude male surely cannot explain its meaning for readers. “Images don’t stop at their own visual borders – they’re affected by what frames them. How we read an image ... depends largely on where we see it, when we see it, what preconceptions we bring to it and what we know about it in advance” (Lumby, 1997a: 8; see also Myers, 1987; Staiger, 1993: 143). *Cleo* introduced its readers to the centrefold as an act of liberatory role reversal. The centrefold was sandwiched by stories about women’s and sexual liberation. The meaning of these representations of nude males lies in this framing, in the readers’ discussion of them and how women used the centrefolds in their domestic and working lives.

## The highs and lows of the *Cleo* centrefold

In Australia in 1972, the format of the nude male pin-up went viral. The first local publishing experiment with the nude male for the female gaze was not *Cleo* but the small circulation style and culture magazine *Pol*. The images appeared in an issue guest edited by Germaine Greer in May 1972. Under her influence, a fashion story 'For the Designing Woman' was shot indoors with a strongly suited woman, cigarette in hand, looking so masterful all that seems missing is the riding crop (Figure Three). Beside her is a completely naked man, shot from behind, with hands pressed flat against the full length window of a modernist suburban house, as if waiting for some kind of torture to be administered. More unnerving is the vista of suburbia through the trees. The viewer may not be able to see the man's penis, but the whole neighbourhood could if they chanced to look. It is an image of male disempowerment, open to view from both sides, seemingly frozen until the dominatrix beside him deigns to issue an order. He seems at her mercy. But the female model stares directly into the camera, haughty and disinterested in this naked body standing in wait beside her.

It is difficult to interpret the presence of these naked men in this and the other images in the series as anything but 'objects' for a fantasy of domination. The photography is hardly Helmut Newton, the feel is amateurish and awkward. Style aside, borrowing the iconography and attitude of s/m makes this an extraordinary fashion shoot for the times. Framed by the context of Greer's strongly feminist editorial features, readers had been primed to interpret the fashion story in terms of female revenge. This issue quadrupled *Pol's* circulation for the month.

Onto a winning formula, *Pol* ran the first nude male centrespread Australians had seen in mainstream women's media in the following issue.<sup>65</sup> *Pol* had purchased the same image of Paul du Feu that British *Cosmopolitan* had published a few months before. It caused a "storm of letters" from readers and "made the news media sit up and stare" (Makeig, 1972: 4). Unfortunately, these reader letters were not printed. Editor Maggie Makeig

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<sup>65</sup> A centrespread is a double page spread (DPS) in the centre of the magazine. A centrefold refers to the DPS with a page extending on either side, four pages in all.



those that do also was 60 per cent for and 40 per cent against. "Women, we're here to

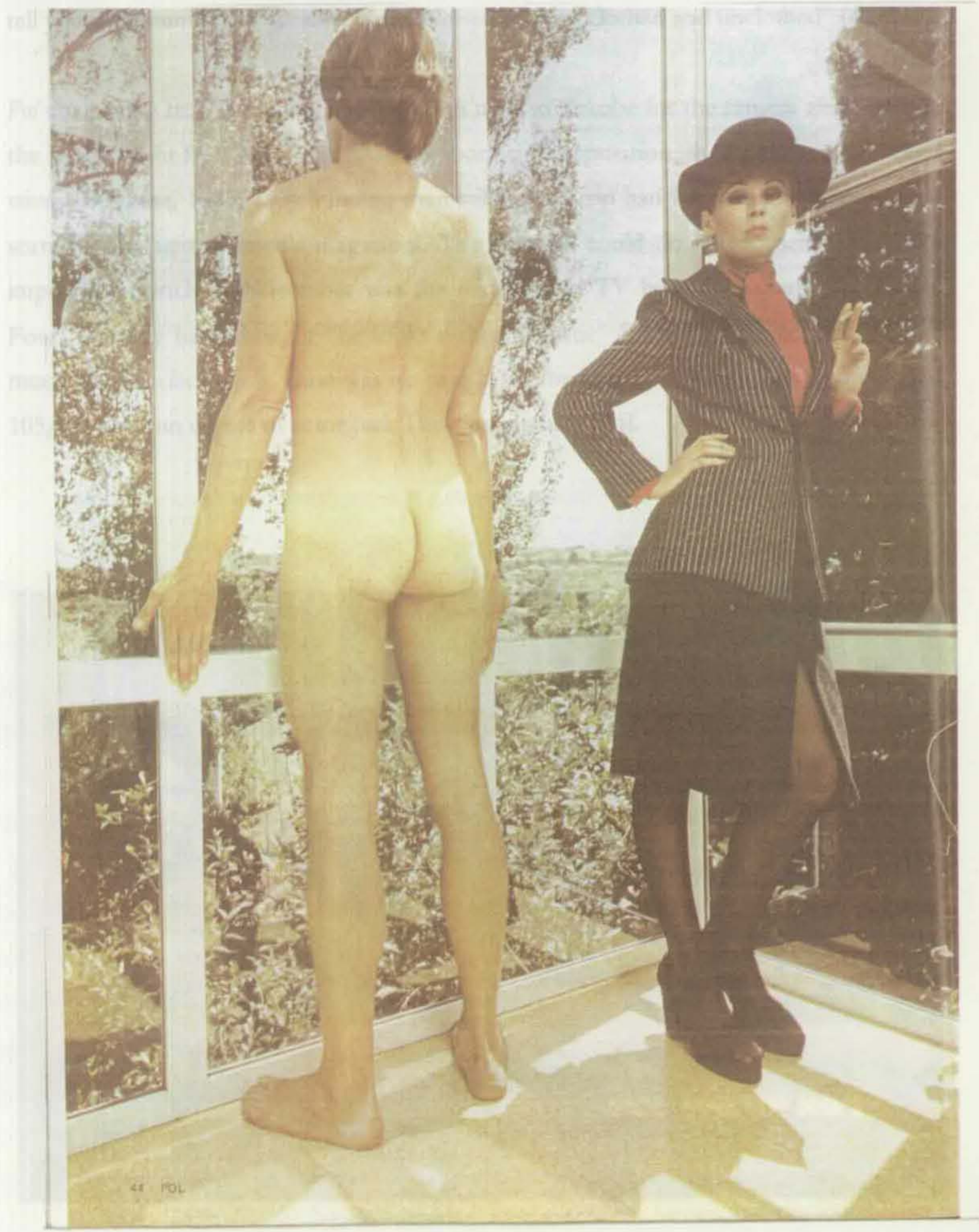


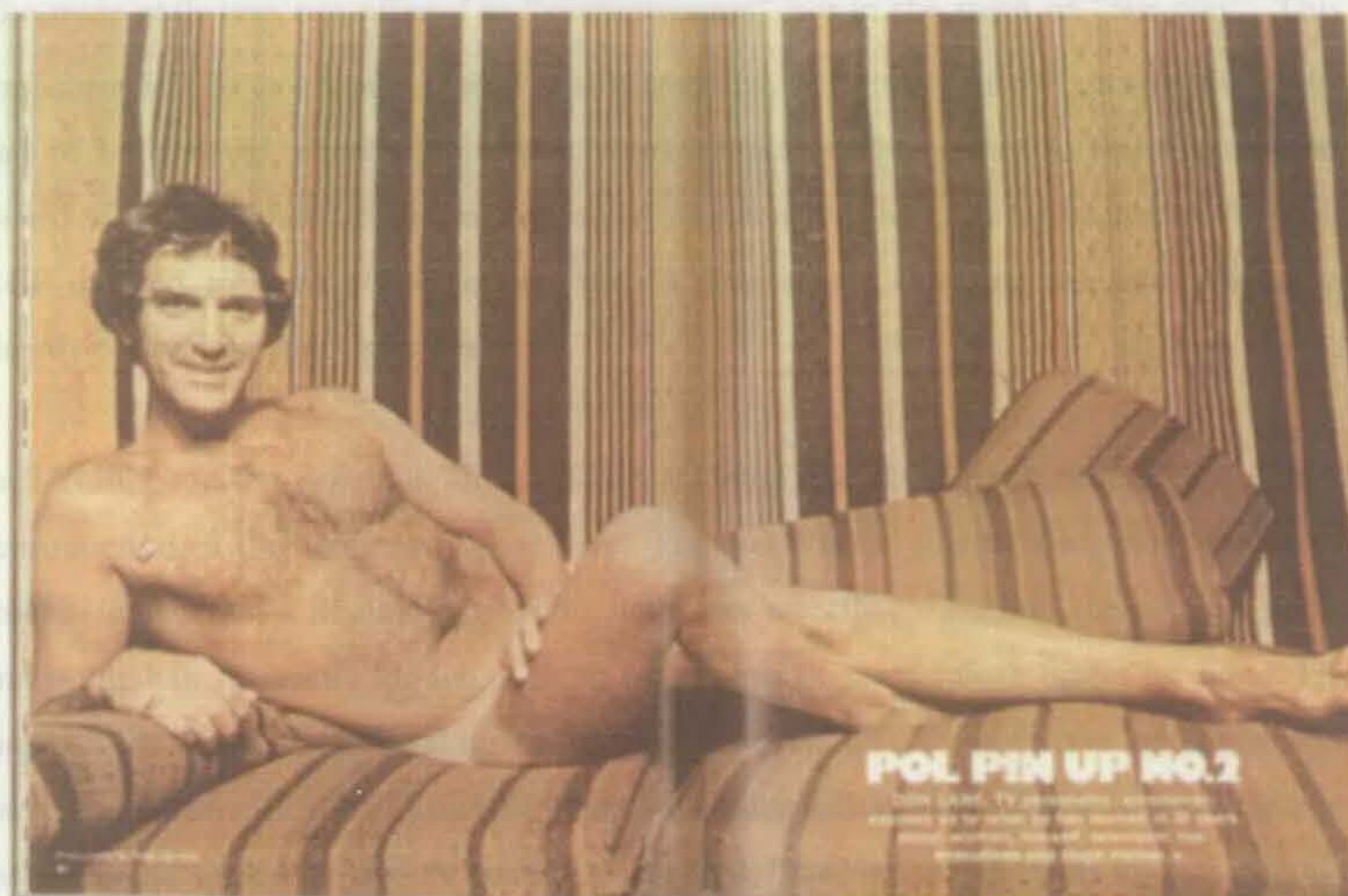
Figure Four: Don Lane in *Pol's* November 1972 centrefold

Figure Three: 'For the designing woman', *Pol* May 1972



wrote that the ratio was 60 per cent for and 40 per cent against. "Women, we're here to tell you with stunning originality, are interested in men, clothed and unclothed" (4).

*Pol* was having trouble finding an Australian male to disrobe for the camera after running the image of du Feu. Men were worried about their reputation, their contracts and their wives (Buttrose, 1985: 153). Finding men willing to strip had become a competition of sorts for the new women's magazines. The best *Pol* could do to compete with *Cleo's* impending launch in November was the middle-aged TV host, Don Lane (see Figure Four). *Pol* may have thought "he looks rather fantastic" for a 39 year old, but with its much smaller circulation, Lane was no match for the impact of *Cleo's* heavily publicised 105,000 first-run copies of actor Jack Thompson in the buff.



**Figure Four: Don Lane as *Pol's* November 1972 centrefold**

<sup>16</sup> The Society for Cutting Up Men (SCUM) was the australis branch of Yvonne Krieger, who entered more seriously the slandering Andy Warhol than the general support for her vulgar aesthetic opinions. (see Johnson, 1972)



In the editorial preface to its first centrefold, *Cleo* justified the decision to publish large format male nudity. It was not explained as 'erotica' and definitely not as 'pornography'. It was explained as sexual liberation, women's liberation and fair go larrikin fun:

One of the lovely side effects of this age of permissiveness is that women are learning to admit their sexuality just as frankly as men have been doing ever since they first clubbed us and dragged us unconscious to their caves ... The old double standard applies to nudity as well as sexual mores ... We thought about all the male oriented environments we had seen that were decorated with reproductions of our divine forms ... art galleries, labourer's huts, outback shearing sheds, bachelors' bathrooms ... Perhaps the day will come when the walls of typing pools, the kitchens and laundries of the world will be decorated with glossy, living colour pictures of nubile naked males. (n/a, 1972a: 82)

The nude male was not offered in "vindictiveness" but in the spirit of "fair play". This was not a SCUM manifesto, it was almost sporting.<sup>66</sup> Because of the censors the penis had to be covered, especially in "that strange state of Queensland". The Queensland Board of Review (the state censorship body) threatened to ban *Cleo* sight unseen. Instead, ACP decided to print 10,000 copies with a gold square covering the hand that was already concealing Jack's privates.

Jack Thompson was posed as Titian's *Venus of Urbino*, the photograph superimposed on a reproduction of the painting (Figure Five). He apes Venus' slightly wan, close-mouthed smile. His face has a neutral expression, with eyes directly gazing into the camera, penis and pubic hair discreetly hidden, a slight protrusion of scrotal flesh under his hand. He cups his genitals gracefully, almost affectionately. The effect could have been coy and even homoerotic. But the choice of Thompson meant that the reader was persuaded to interpret the image as overtly heterosexual. Jack Thompson was well known for his heterosexuality, co-habiting as he did with two sisters, who were shown singing around a bonfire with Thompson in the accompanying images. Thompson was asked to elaborate his own take on Women's Liberation:

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<sup>66</sup> The Society for Cutting Up Men (SCUM) was the anarchic brainchild of Valerie Solanas, who achieved more notoriety for shooting Andy Warhol than she gained support for her violent manifesto against men, (see Solanas, 1970).





**Figure Five: Jack Thompson as *Cleo's* November 1972 centrefold**

The concept of Women's Liberation seems to me to entail not an escape but an enslavement. It seems to require that women have the right to behave like men and not that they have the right to do whatever they may wish. Men are just as bound and constricted as women ... the greatest liberation would be to be freed of such preoccupations. (82)

But why the high art image? Why not Thompson lounging strategically around the fire, or riding a horse, or sitting under a waterfall, or using any of the penis-camouflaging devices *Cleo* utilised over the following decade? In her study of nudity, Ruth Barcan argues that representations of naked flesh can avoid accusations of mere prurience by calling on fine art traditions:



A naked image can point towards that which was previously unrepresentable, thus highlighting itself as naughty, liberated, or 'modern'. By contrast, it can gesture towards the past in order to sanctify itself, cushioning itself within the protective bosom of history or the fine arts. (2004: 208)

*Cleo* was indulging both in a single image: liberation plus sanctification. The Titian reference might have served to validate 'class', to gain protection from the pornographic that high culture offered, but the intention was to recall a visual history of male objectification of women. With light sarcasm, *Cleo* made this clear to its readers:

Thank you gentlemen for all the homage you have paid us: thank you Titian, Rubens, Renoir, thank you *Playboy*, *Man*, *Gals and Gags*, *Laughs and Lovelies*, *Tits and Teeth* and all the rest. (n/a, 1972: 82)

*Cleo* adapted a solution pioneered by *Esquire* magazine in the 1940s to avoid accusations of producing downmarket overtly masturbatory 'smut' in its photographs of nude women (Breazeale, 1994: 6). In a series of pin-ups in 1942, *Esquire* "fudged the boundaries between high and low", turning sweaty voyeur into art connoisseur. "Semi-nude models were made-up, posed, accessorized, and sometimes trick-photographed 'in the style of' famous artists such as Durer, Renoir and Picasso" (6). For Thompson, *Cleo* opted for the *Esquire* 'fine art' style over the *Playboy* 'glamour photo' – the style *Cosmo* had used for Burt Reynolds. The Titian idea provided a point of commercial difference as well. Imported copies of British and US *Cosmo* were on sale (in limited numbers) in Australia.

Getting the image right was complex. Good girls were not meant to look at nude pin-ups. And they certainly weren't meant to publicly acknowledge how much they liked them. Sex, class, respectability, rebellion – negotiating between the commercial value of shock and the socially acceptable was a fine balance for a mainstream magazine. *Cleo* had to steer a course between associations with the masturbatory intent of porn without relinquishing the rebellion implicit in putting a nude male inside a women's magazine aiming for big sales. This mixing of high culture and low, Titian and pin-up, profit and politics, stimulation without revelation, was a way of making the female erotic gaze respectable.



For the reader, the desire for sexual rebellion was in tension with the desire for respectability. Could she risk one without risking the other? We have already explored the difficulties changes in sexual behaviour and expectations were creating for the 'mainstream' young woman. Readers could be reassured that the centrefold was not 'pornographic smut' – even though many readers attested to finding the images arousing. Some members of the Australian community thought *Cleo* was unsavoury. "A lot of mothers didn't want their daughters to read it because of the sex issues," said Stephen Berry. "[They thought] it was dirty and disgusting." Berry had been *Cleo's* centrefold in June 1975, as well as art director for *Cleo* at the time (and later for *Playboy*). Reflecting on his experience as a centrefold, Berry recalled that "religious groups were up in arms because it showed nude men and the stories were about reaching orgasms and that sort of thing. At the time, however, that was just what women in Australia were seeking" (n/a, 1985: 125). Berry had felt obliged to leave the country for a while when the issue hit the stands.

### Domesticating the Centrefold

Packaging the nude male within the safer confines of a woman's magazine was an ingenious way to mainstream 'pornography' and make it respectable. The domestic space was a safe haven for the female consumption of porn/erotica. Reading about women's issues, gazing at naked males in magazines that were consumed in the rhythms of domesticity provided a soft 'liberation' from the being-for-others that defined many women's existence. "The home as the site of motherhood and housework often kept women from having both the physical time and the emotional self-esteem to understand their bodies and to see their bodies as sites of individual pleasure" (Juffer, 1998: 75). Print erotica allowed women to "gain control over sexually explicit materials as readers within the spaces of their homes" (105). The regular opening of the male centrefold was a safe practice in the re-creation of the reader's body for her own sexual fantasies and pleasures.

In a way, it was only a sexualised step up from the teenage practice of pinning idols to the bedroom wall. This was already socially sanctioned behaviour that could, as

Ehrenreich suggests, erupt into more “revolutionary” sexualised forms. On the Beatlemania of 1964-1965, she writes: “It was rebellious (especially of the very young fans) to lay claim to sexual feelings. It was even more rebellious to lay claim to the active, desiring side of a sexual attraction: the Beatles were the objects; the girls were the pursuers” (1997 [1992]: 527). To transfer this practice into the adult fantasy world of the nude pin-up was not so big a leap:

When I buy my *Cleo* the first thing I do in the shop is check both sides, quickly open the centrefold out and check him out. If he’s OK I buy the *Cleo*. It’s strange, I never miss a copy. My little sisters always seem to sneak into my bedroom and have a look at the poster ... so now I’ve made a big poster on the back of my bedroom door showing off the spunky bods. (Allison, Vic.; January 1983: 152)

A letter from ‘Delighted’ in Auckland, NZ, revealed that even older women could be inspired to re-ignite their teen habit of affixing a poster to the bedroom wall for sexual fantasy:

I received your beautiful Jack Thompson poster. I am ecstatic. He now occupies a space on the wall alongside my bed. What a sight to go to sleep on! ... I keep wishing he could slip down off the wall. Still, as I will be 50 next birthday maybe its best to stick to my dreams. Even my dear old conservative 65 years young boyfriend admits that he is something. (June 1975: 162)

Joan Williamson of Melbourne thanked *Cleo* for “exposing Jack Thompson. The girls in our office have the pin-up pinned up in the wash-room. My mother has it stuck inside the laundry cupboard ... ” (December 1972: 146) - close to the washing machine, that time-honoured domestic vibrating appliance.

Meanings of magazines are made in use and circulation: reading, talking, laughing, public display in the office, as well as private reading and fantasy in the bedroom and while doing the laundry. The centrefold aroused sexuality in both private and public spaces:

I work in an office of just over 30 females and each month whoever buys *Cleo* first instantly loses it to the rest so that everyone can check out the centrefold. Our tastes vary greatly from muscle-yes to muscle-no but there's only been one guy that we've all agreed upon, who could park his shoes under any of our beds *anytime*. That was Steve Neale from the Northern Territory ... (Reader, Vic; April 1982: 8)

We were thrilled by your beaut 1982 Calendar and fully intend to put it in the loo, for the pleasure of our visitors. (Readers, ACT; April 1982: 8)

To share the centrefold in these ways was to recall the experience of being public 'sex objects' for men, making the objectification of women a point of group acknowledgement and discussion, as well as a way of comparing notes about what different women found sexy about the naked male.<sup>67</sup> It also gave public sanction to the once private and secret pleasures of gazing upon male flesh, much like the male stripshows of the Chippendales have done since 1978 (Petersen and Dressel, 1982). Or, indeed, the forgotten Roadrunner Show, an Australian male striptease act, was doing in 1975. In her study of the Chippendales strip shows, Clarissa Smith argues, "it is one place in which women can show themselves as actively desiring. This may then be carried into other spaces such as the home or workplace" (2002: 83).

Of course *Cleo* covered the popular phenomenon of the male stripper too. "Is this the ultimate in Women's Lib? A man who gets his gear off in front of lusting women?" (Woodham, 1974a: 63). The feature was illustrated by 24 photographs staged from fully clothed to completely naked (with hand over genitals). When the stripper, Peter Galea, appeared in a slave costume for his private party of women, "his audience abandoned all maidenly restraint. There were cries of 'sexy beast' and more pleas to 'get it off'. Somebody souvenired a G-string" (65). Their husbands arrived, "drunk and belligerent", apparently having spent the evening "wondering what their wives and girlfriends were up to". They were asked to leave.

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<sup>67</sup> Beverley Skeggs' working class interviewees shared similar 'girlie' moments of popular culture (like watching *Desperately Seeking Susan* or listening to Madonna together). "[It] marked sites of pleasure where the women felt vindicated for collectively being positioned as women" (Skeggs, 1997: 144).

After running yet another 'how to strip for your man' feature, *Cleo* was besieged by letters from male readers asking for a guide to *male* stripping, "so that they could give their partners equal pleasure ... some felt it might spice up their marriage and some took it in a spirit of fun, while others saw it as a great challenge" (n/a, 1978: 38). Fair go indeed. And so, *Cleo* obliged its male readers by giving them a step-by-step 18-frame lesson in how to strip for women, encouraging them to become objects of desire as a mainstream domestic heterosexual practice. The gender boundaries of the erotic gaze were being eroded in public and private.

### Reading the missing penis

*An image can signal its own limits: what we'd like to be able to show, but can't; what we don't think you'd accept yet; what lies just outside the frame; what you'd like to see; what you don't want to see ... As that which cannot be freely represented (whether it be for legal, moral or customary reasons) in an era that likes to think of itself as one of unrestrained representability, nudity is often a device of the edge – teasing, playing, shocking or simply pointing out the limits and boundaries of representability. (Barcan, 2004: 208-09)*

There were letters every month about the centrefold's covered penis. Over the thirteen years of *Cleo's* continuous nude centrefolds, the penis was never shown and the published letters of complaint and desire mounted into the hundreds. Most of the female readers loved seeing naked men and expressed disappointment that they couldn't get a full frontal view:

As the president of our large local Women's Lib Club I would like to express the thanks of the club for your magazine. Most popular part yet is your Mate of the Month but it was our unanimous vote that you are frustrating our rights to see the man's penis (that is, all of it). As an average cross-section of women, we demand that you, even once, show us what we want ... please give us a picture of a named man – lying, standing, running or jumping – showing everything. (Determined to get It! no address ; May 1974: 178)

In 1974 this local Women's Liberation club clearly did not realise that reading women's magazines and enjoying looking at naked men was not meant to be part of the feminist script. It had, however, become a sign of membership in *Cleo's* community of popular feminism, as had writing a letter about the centrefold experience:

We are three birds, one single, one engaged and one married. We all buy *Cleo* but certainly not to look at the pinup. We are sick of seeing skinny legs or hairy chests and nothing else ... We love your articles but how about removing the flowers, telephones, shadows and so on which obscure the vital part? (Three Thrill Seekers, Perth; April 1975: 162)

Lately your pin-ups have been getting a bit limp (no pun intended) but Cheech and Chong (*Cleo*, November) really hit the mark ... Thanks for showing us Cheech's trumpet but what about his organ? (Randy, Adelaide; January 1976: 146)

You show only one naked guy throughout the magazine and even then we don't see any of the 'important' parts. My boyfriend reads *Playboy* and *Penthouse* and I get so jealous because he can see all those women, totally naked. I know there must be a lot of girls who feel the same way as I do and want a lot more out of the centrefold pages. (Reader, New Zealand; April 1980:192)

*Cleo's* vigilance in dressing on the unrestricted side of the censor's code and publishing these letters actually drew attention to the absence of the penis. The readers knew *Cleo* could not give them what they wanted. The editorial explanations about the censors, about protecting readers' children from the sight, were repetitive in the letters pages.<sup>68</sup> These letters of desire, however, continued. They can be read as a public declaration of a woman's sexual 'liberation'. The existence of the female erotic gaze 'came out' on the page. They reveal quite a complex if fragmentary debate about sexual politics as experienced and understood by this community of readers.

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<sup>68</sup> What was not mentioned was the concern about losing advertising if they showed a penis, even flaccid. The only time *Cleo* did show a photograph of a penis was in the sealed section on venereal diseases.

“Phallic power is still [contemporary culture’s] central organizing principle and the power of the phallus depends precisely on the invisibility of the penis which remains private” (Barcan, 2004: 184). The readers’ desire to see the ‘important part’, the ‘vital part’, ‘everything’, could be interpreted as a way of questioning this power. Why should men get to hide when women have been exposed for so long? Let’s have a good look at it, the women said, and see what all the fuss is about. It was a potentially threatening demand and no amount of explanation from *Cleo* about why the penis was missing would stop women asking.

The male centrefold functions as a dangerous kind of comedy, according to Richard Dyer, playing on the anxious gap between the fragility of the actual penis and the phallic mastery it is meant to represent. “The fact is that the penis isn’t a patch on the phallus ... the limp penis can never match up to the mystique that has kept it hidden from view for the last couple of centuries” (Dyer, 1992[1979]: 275). Susan Bordo has made a similar point about the centrefolds. The actual penis struggles and fails to match the symbolic power of “the singular, constant, transcendent rule of the phallus” (1993: 696). After years of fantasy, one *Cleo* reader, Joan Dalgleish, tells the story of finally seeing Jack Thompson’s “frontispiece”, as she put it, in the film *Petersen* in 1974. She was very disappointed (February, 1975: 162).

A vox pop in October 1975 asked ‘How would you like *Cleo* to show full frontal nude centrefolds?’ The respondents thought *Cleo* should go full-frontal, but pointedly, they referred to the comparisons that male, and female, readers would make. Their answers suggest anxiety, especially from men:

When I buy my copy I always look at the centre first and I’m usually disappointed ... I’m sure most of my girlfriends could stand the shock. It’s the Australian male who would worry about it. They are not used to that sort of scrutiny and competition. (Chris Peacock (female), 26: 140)

Only the older generation would complain. I always look at your centrefolds and make comparisons and I’m sure all men do the same. (Graham Patrick, 22: 140)

Women look at nude women in magazines and compare ourselves with them. I'm sure men compare themselves with your pin-ups. There would be a lot of women making comparisons too! (Gillian Topfer, 35: 140)

Some readers decided to alleviate the frustration of not seeing the penis by employing the fetishistic possibilities of focusing on other objects and other body parts. "Why don't you photograph a centrefold standing, sitting (whatever) on a truck?" wrote Sharyn C., of Foster, SA. "You have had horses, water and field scenes, bands, sportsmen. I assure you that the whole area of trucking is very popular. The mere thought of trucks, to a lot of women, is sexy, so imagine the response to a spunky male next to a great Big Wheels!" (March 1979: 160). And quite a sub-community developed around the appeal of the male bottom. "I too am one of those female chauvinist pigs who regularly indulges in bottom watching. Some men I've seen have bottoms that you can hardly resist watching or squeezing. I wonder how the male would react if only they realised that we are now looking at their bottoms instead of their faces or physique!" (Glenda Forbes, Sydney NSW; July 1978: 160). For the fetishists, not seeing the penis didn't matter so much at all. They by-passed its apparent symbolic power completely.

### The revenge of the soul-snatchers

In his study of the male as erotic object, Kenneth MacKinnon argues that "the display by women of the male pin-up in office space ... may be a form of revenge on men for the unthinking exhibition of fetishised women purely in the name of masculine pleasure" (1997: 146). Some readers agreed:

When it's all over bar the shouting, I wouldn't want to find that Women's Liberation had turned us into female chauvinist cows. But how can we avoid it if a magazine like *Cleo* plays the game by *Playboy's* rules? Not that a male body isn't good to look at; it's great! But remember what they say, "Those who can do and those who don't read *Playboy*". (Ms A.J. Melbourne; December 1972: 146)

*Cleo's* second centrefold was James Martin, a model and actor, star of the musical *Hair*, of West Indian descent (and one of only two non-white centrefolds in *Cleo's* history). In the

accompanying interview, *Cleo* commented, "apart from any motives of retribution we think there are certain male physiques which merit exposure to the appreciative eyes of the female population of Australia". Apparently, Martin could understand the motives of retribution. "He believes it's time women got their own back. Does he think women really want to look at male nudes? The answer was an emphatic 'Yes'" (n/a, 1972c: 82).

Staff writer Julie Clarke stressed the same points about revenge, about men as sex objects and the female pleasure in looking when she interviewed Paul Graham, a former Mr Universe and *Cleo's* third centrefold. The accompanying feature began with a salacious description of Graham's backyard gym in Sydney's Rosebery:

All around me reclining under the sun lay muscle men, their bodies oiled and shaved hairless to expose every sensuous bulge, bronzed golden by the sun and wearing only briefs. It's a scene from a women's equivalent of a James Bond movie, produced by a full-time female chauvinist. (Clarke, 1973: 82)

Clarke accompanied Graham to a Mr NSW Quest with glee. "Having always found the flesh quest imposed on females most loathsome, I was not going to miss a chance of seeing the chauvinators themselves put in the same demeaning position" (82).

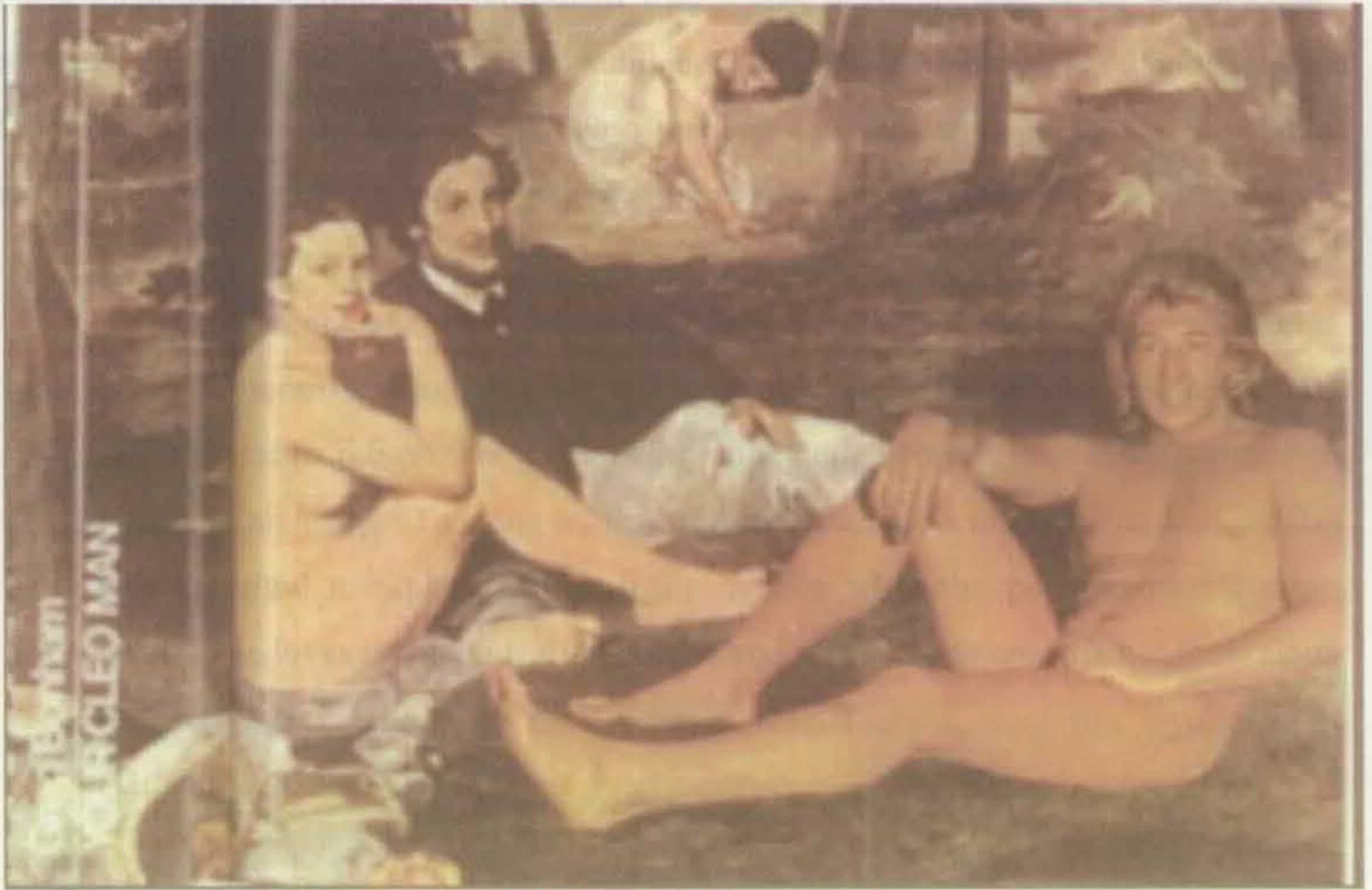
The men sometimes protested against their sexual objectification and pleaded for their humanity. Graham insisted, "I hate just being used sexually and not loved for myself" (82). Greg Bonham, nightclub singer and *Cleo* centrefold Number Five, had similar reservations (Figure Six). "If it turns women on, great. But I would like it if they got the other side of my personality as well" (n/a, 1973: 80).

In her analysis of *Playgirl* Ien Ang has argued that the appeal of the nude male pin-up was not the erotic potential of nude flesh but the fact that these images were humanised via accompanying interviews, thus differentiating them from pornography for men. The men were not sex objects but human subjects. "The manifest display of male bodies in *Playgirl* supports a fantasy of heterosexual romance rather than of female heterosexual desire" (quoted in Zoonen, 1994: 102).<sup>69</sup> Greer too argued, "so far, women persist in loving

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<sup>69</sup> The original article is in Dutch and has not been translated.





**Figure Six: Greg Bonham as *Cleo's* March 1973 centrefold**

people and not shapes ... the pleasing pattern of curves and shadows” was not stimulation enough for women (1986[1973]: 181). Women, apparently, needed to know the male they were fantasising about. In fact, his subjectivity, his ‘humanity’, seemed to be required before sexual desire could kick in – if it kicked in at all.

There was, however, nothing particularly gendered about giving the pin-up some personality. Indeed, *Playboy's* playmate format always included an accompanying profile (Miller, 1981: 67). And Hugh Hefner insisted the playmates were “an attempt to humanize the pin-up concept” (quoted in Jancovich, 2006: 83). Hefner chose girls from everyday life and gave his readers enough detail about them to allow ‘real life’ fantasies to develop (83). And by mid-decade, *Cleo's* interviews had devolved into a brief data sheet. None of the letters from *Cleo* readers indicate that it was the crumbs of personal detail about the centrefolds that they found sexy and built fantasies around. The fact that a particular nude might be a Virgo and liked playing tennis didn't seem to be the issue. The readers wrote about the bodies.



It was a common second wave argument that female sexuality was more 'wholesome', triggered by the full package of mind/soul/body and that male pornography 'dehumanised' women. In the separation of 'real' person from desirable flesh, the valorisation of body over mind, the neglect of female subjectivity, the damage was done:

At the very core of the pornographic mise-en-scene is the concept of woman as object. A woman's body forms the center of a magazine. She spreads her thighs and stares into the camera ... Looking on a living being, a person with a soul, it produces an image of a thing ... this objectification of a whole being into a thing is the central metaphor of the form ... For what the pornographer's mind believes he loves is the body of a woman and not the woman. It is her flesh alone he prizes. Her soul, if he even believes that it exists, does not interest him. (Griffin, 1981: 36 - 37)

But what happens to the argument if it turns out women can objectify, dehumanise and sexually desire *men's* bodies? Encouraging women to look with desire at male flesh without a 'soul' was a radical puncture in the belief that women needed to respond to a man's subjectivity before sexual desire was possible. That women, like men, might also be able to separate body from mind in focusing their sexual desire was threatening one of the assumed and sacrosanct differences between the sexes (see Gatens, 1993), and one of the traditional markers of the difference between respectable and unrespectable women. It certainly threatened the 'very core' of Susan Griffin's argument.

The possibility made some of the male centrefolds a little anxious, as their utilisation of 'feminist' language – not wanting to be just a sex object for women – suggests. They may not have liked the possibility of 'dehumanisation' involved in their representation as bodies without souls, but it was also difficult to deny women their experiment with fair go sexual representation and role reversal. As Martin Wynne, a 28 year-old *Cleo* reader said, "If it's OK for men to look at totally naked women it should be OK for women to look at totally naked men" (vox pop, October 1975: 140). The ideology of the fair go was making it difficult for men to argue against the centrefold, no matter how uncomfortable it made some of them feel. The centrefold was destabilising all kinds of assumptions about female sexual desire and traditional gender relations. Perhaps this is why the centrefolds were often interpreted via the frame of parody and why they were written off

without too much analysis as 'failures'. If the centrefold was just a joke, only a joke, its radical implications for female sexual desire, and for how femininity was defined, could be ignored. The problem was, no-one could be quite sure how much of a joke it was:

You deserve a medal for bravery for daring to send up (it is a send-up, isn't it?) one of the strangest facts of life: that men enjoy centrefold sex almost as much as the real thing ... I liked the Mate of the Month. In my opinion, the one thing Women's Lib has been short of up until *Cleo* came along was a sense of humour. (Denise Cotton, Sydney; December 1972: 146)

**Objects and subjects: "Being a sex object is a very good thing"**

**(Helen Gurley Brown)**

For some kinds of feminism, women could never really objectify men. If objectification meant oppression, then as the *Redstocking Manifesto* of 1968 stated: "The most slanderous evasion of all is that women can oppress men" (Redstockings, 1970: 599). In 1985 The New York Women Against Pornography defined objectification as:

A process whereby a powerful group establishes and maintains dominance over a less powerful group by teaching that the subordinate group is less than human or like an object. This precludes the powerful group from identifying with or sympathising with the less powerful group. (quoted in Gamble, 1999: 286)

Sheila Jeffreys followed a similar line of thought in *Anti-Climax*. In writing about the male centrefold in magazines such as *Playgirl*, Jeffreys insisted that "it is not sexy":

In heterosexuality the attractiveness of men is based upon their power and status. Objectification removes that power and status. Naked beefcake is not a turn-on for women because objectification subordinates the object group. (1991: 254)

For Jeffreys, objectification is the eroticisation of power, dominance and oppression. For women to objectify men would require female sexuality to become "ruling class sexuality". Objectification only exists in societies based on inequality. A truly egalitarian

society would not be able to produce objectification or pornography. As men were the powerful group it was impossible for women to objectify them, therefore the centrefold had to be a 'failure' for the representation of female sexual desire.

In a much-cited and best-selling collection of essays, *Female Desire* (1984), Rosalind Coward took a slightly different tack on the same argument. She wrote only briefly about the male body – a curious omission, given the book's sub-title 'women's sexuality today' – but her arguments are representative of a common feminist position at the time. The male body has gone missing – “men have managed to keep out of the glare” – escaping the defining power of the gaze and the passivity and powerlessness that comes with being an object of desire. Because of “men's refusal to be the desired sex”, women don't really find male bodies attractive. They find men's bodies “strange” (230). Men have been in control of 'the look' and have “left themselves out of the picture because a body defined is a body controlled” (229). Men resist aestheticisation in everyday life (they neglect their grooming), and in representation (they have escaped depiction), and are hostile to the power of the defining gaze.

Men had not, of course, escaped the 'defining gaze' completely. And there were many dozens of published readers in *Cleo* (and unknown numbers of unpublished ones) who disagreed with Jeffreys and Coward. “The centrefold in the July issue really got me! He is so-o-o sexy! He was really something else!” wrote a reader from WA (October 1982: 240). “Where did you find that ravishing hunk? How come I have never seen any men this sexy? Where are they hiding?” (Hard to please, West Ryde, NSW: November, 1983: 216). And Reader from Abbotsford, NSW, argued “many women *do* like to fantasise about male nudity, *do* like to look at male genitals and do *not* necessarily dislike men looking 'vulnerable'” (December 1981: 14).

The readers were using the letters page to develop and share their own aesthetic systems. “Thank you at last for a really sexy body in March's centrefold. We were despairing of ever seeing anything as gorgeous as Jack Thompson's but our hope is revived” (Mrs Robin Hopwood, Epping, NSW, May 1973: 162). “... your mates of the month all seem to be muscle bound lately. I know I find lean tall men sexier ... how about finding one for us?” (Maureen Brown, Lane Cove, NSW, May 1973: 162). “Not every femme lusts after a hairy hefty. I would love to see something lithe, slender and hairless (to a degree

of course!). I wonder how many other women share my feelings?" (Helen Daunt, *Ivanhoe*, Victoria, April 1973: 146).

So how *do* we explain these women's sexual attraction to representations of men's bodies? For Coward, we can't, because women are not really attracted to men's bodies at all. *Some* women may find themselves powerfully attracted to the 'intriguing difference' of the male body but this attraction is not really physical. "[Women] tend to like what the body *symbolizes* rather than what it *is* – the power, protection and comfort" (228, 231, original italics). An overtly masculine body cannot be separated from the power that it symbolises, therefore it can never be objectified. There are always other meanings attached to the male body before representation or looking take place. Coward argued that men resist idealised or sexualised representation because it threatens to question this power, to render them passive objects. Their role is as the "active, seeking sex". Women's role is to be passively sought. Men desire women. Subject-verb-object.

As we have seen, *Cleo* worked hard to reverse this grammatical sexual destiny for women. The centrefold was working on the right to visual erotic pleasure too. Yet when Coward briefly analyses the phenomenon of the nude male centrefold for women she treats it as an image that provokes discomfort for the *male* viewer, "a fear that you (the man) are powerless in the light of someone's active and powerful desire" (229). In a strange twist (disavowal?), this disempowering gaze is not imagined as female – it is imagined as male. It is the homosexual gaze that men fear, even while being depicted for women. The active/masculine/power versus passive/feminine/powerless binary is so strong in this essay that the phenomenon of women looking at the centrefold cannot be discussed at all.

The analyses of Jeffreys and Coward also cannot explain how the men in the centrefolds, clearly made objects for women, *remain* powerful. What do we do with the (powerless) women who are hailed as subjects who hold and define the gaze (thus powerful) and who are actively aroused by looking at these sexualised men (objects, thus powerless, but men, thus powerful)? If being a sexy object within heterosexuality requires disempowerment, what is going on here? As Kath Albury puts it, "to acknowledge that men can be objects and powerful at the same time is quite dangerous for some kinds of feminism and

psychoanalysis. If being 'objectified' is not automatically disempowering, then perhaps heterosexual women are not so powerless after all?" (2002: 58).

This nexus of being object and being powerless – and of being subject and always powerful – was being broken down in the centrefold images of men for the gaze of women. The binary terms of subject and object were starting to flow between the genders. It was something Helen Gurley Brown had understood from the start. Asked in 1994 to summarise the philosophy behind *Cosmo*, she said:

Being a heterosexual woman, I think sex with a man is probably what you're after, and being a sex object is a very good thing. If you're not a sex object you're in trouble. You want to be known for your brain, but to have somebody want you sexually is the best thing there is ... You can't get anybody to bed unless you are the object of sexual desire. So there is nothing wrong with being a sex object. He is your sex object. It works both ways. (*Psychology Today* staff, 1994: 3)

Talking about her experiences in the early years of the second wave, feminist academic Ellen Willis recalled, "I wanted to be a sex object" (quoted in Allyn, 2001: 267). The desire to be a sexual subject – and the possibility that this might involve being a sex 'object' too – in both sexual practice and representation was being entertained it appears not just in popular women's culture but by some avowed feminists. Writing in 1984, Muriel Dimen explained the difficulties heterosexual feminists had in trying to explore and vocalise their sexuality within the 'politically correct' demands of objectification discourse:

On the one hand, since women have been traditionally seen as sex objects, feminism demands that society no longer focus on their erotic attributes, which, in turn, feminism downplays ... On the other hand, because women have been traditionally defined as being uninterested in sex, they have been deprived of pleasure and a sense of autonomous at-one-ness, both of which are necessary to self-esteem. (Dimen, 1984: 140)

The feminist joy in exploring the movement between being erotic subject and object is positioned now as part of the third wave or postfeminism (see, for example,

Baumgardner and Richards, 2000; Karp and Stoller, 1999). Feminist artist and writer Joanna Frueh explains her work as based on this principle: "As long as I am an erotic subject, I am not averse to being an erotic object" (1997: 4). When we read *Cleo* in the seventies it seems that this more fluid understanding of the connection between subjects and objects in heterosexuality was being explored much earlier within popular feminism. Which then makes the persistent refusal to acknowledge the work being done by *Cleo* and other new women's magazines to shift these stubborn binary terms a subject for a little more interrogation.

### Haze of the gaze

The idea of gendered role reversal was common in the early seventies, and not just in the new women's magazines. In 1972 John Berger published the highly influential *Ways of Seeing* and a television series of the same name, which screened in the UK and Australia. Berger was interested in the relationship between seeing and knowledge, between representation and gender, especially in regard to the nude:

Women are depicted in a quite different way from men – not because the feminine is different from the masculine – but because the 'ideal' spectator is always assumed to be male and the image of the woman is designed to flatter him. If you have any doubt that this is so, make the following experiment. Choose from this book an image of a traditional nude. Transform the woman into a man. Either in your mind's eye or by drawing on the reproduction. Then notice the violence which that transformation does. Not to the image, but to the assumptions of a likely viewer. (64)

It was a challenge that Patricia Edgar and Hilary McPhee took up in the final pages of *Media She* (1974) (Figure Seven). The effect was humorously camp and ironic. The point was that women are routinely turned into objects for the male gaze but the reverse rarely occurs, and when it does the effect is laughable.



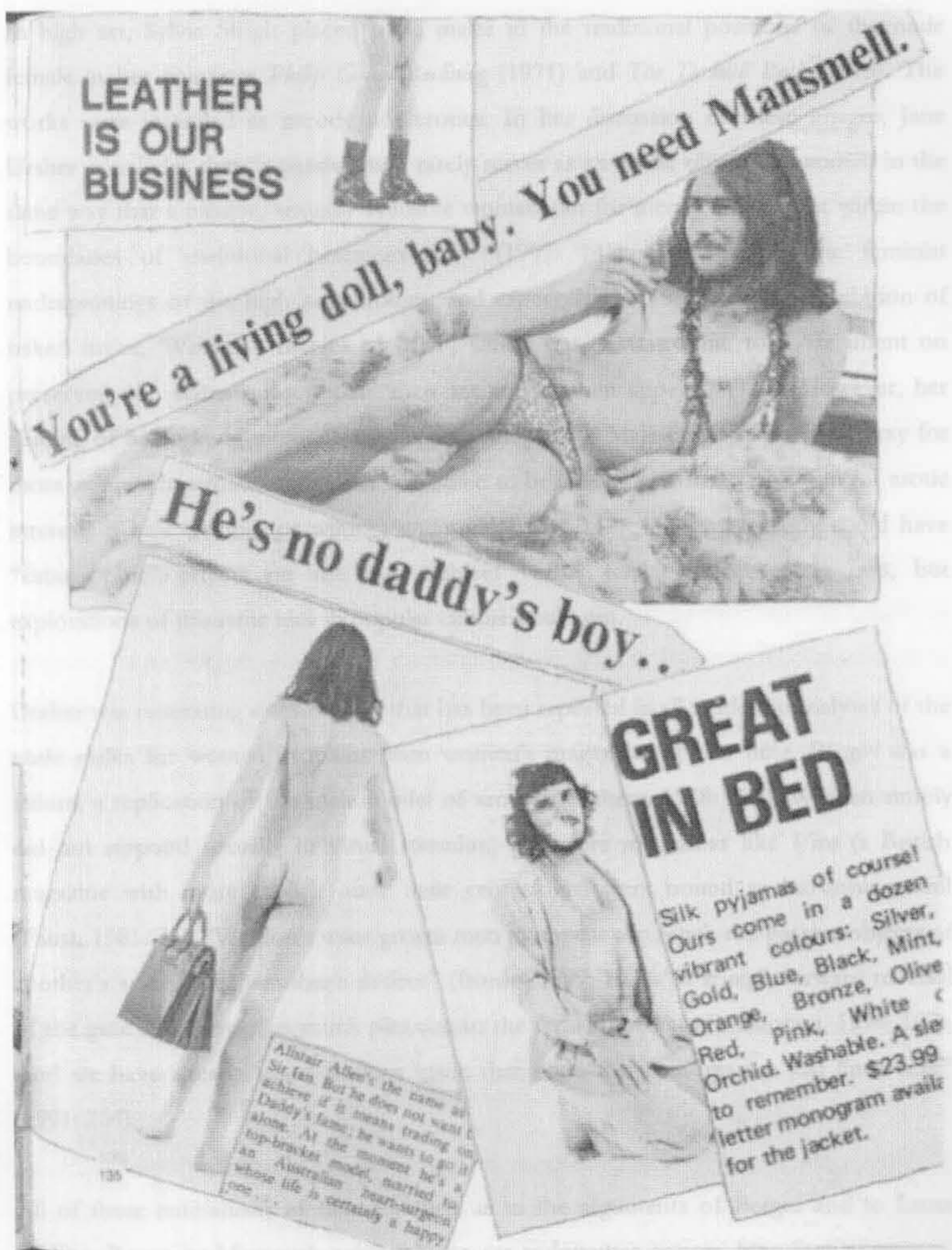


Figure Seven: Images of sex-role reversal in Edgar and McPhee's *Media She*, 1974



In high art, Sylvia Sleigh placed nude males in the traditional positions of the nude female in her paintings *Philip Golun Reclining* (1971) and *The Turkish Bath* (1973). The works were intended as parody not erotica. In her discussion of these images, Jane Ussher concludes that “a passive man rarely serves as an erotic object for women in the same way that a passive, sexually available woman can for men – at least not within the boundaries of traditional heterosexuality” (1997: 141). She admires the feminist underpinnings of the high art parodies, and especially the 1980s touring exhibition of naked males, ‘Women’s Images of Men’, which was “catastrophic to those intent on preserving the status quo ... that ‘men act and women appear’” (143). However, her reading of beefcake in women’s magazines is derisory. “Male passivity just isn’t sexy for most women; heterosexual women want men to be able to perform ... No fun (or erotic interest) if he’s waiting (or wilting) and weak” (141-142). High art parody could have “catastrophic” effects on the male/subject versus female/object status quo, but explorations of the same idea in popular culture could not.

Ussher was reiterating a conclusion that has been repeated in all academic analyses of the nude males for women in mainstream women’s magazines at this time. *Playgirl* was a failure; a replication of the male model of arousal (Walters, 1978: 305). Women simply did not respond sexually to visual stimulus. Therefore magazines like *Viva* (a British magazine with more explicit nude male centrefolds) were bound to be unsuccessful (Faust, 1981: 28). “We don’t want grown men to appear too much the passive objects of another’s sexual gaze, another’s desires” (Bordo, 1999: 193). “A straightforward reversal of the gaze does not offer much pleasure to the female spectator” (Zoonen, 1994: 102). And we have already heard Jeffreys insist that nude male pin-ups are just “not sexy” (1991: 254).

All of these reiterations of failure return us to the arguments of Berger and to Laura Mulvey. Berger had famously argued, “men act and women appear. Men look at women. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves” (Berger, 1972: 47). Mulvey gave a highly influential Lacanian turn to Berger’s idea in ‘Visual Pleasure and narrative cinema’, published in 1975.

To explain a complex theory very briefly, using Lacanian psychoanalysis “as a political weapon”, Mulvey explored how film is structured via the unconscious processes of

patriarchal society. The masculine gaze dominated, its active presence requiring the passivity of the feminine. Mulvey dissected the way visual pleasures available in the narrative cinematic experience – of looking (scopophilia) and identification with the protagonist (narcissism), reinforced by the use of the camera – were pleasures only available to men. The male gaze was determining. As ‘the maker of meaning’ man is always positioned as active. Woman, as the ‘bearer of meaning’, is passive. It is ever thus, in cinema and, because of our unconscious subject formation in patriarchy, in life (Mulvey, 1992 [1975]).

Although this was a theory about filmic representation, Mulvey made clear that “film reflects, reveals and even plays on the straight, socially established interpretation of sexual difference which controls images, erotic ways of looking and spectacle” (22). Within her framework, the female gaze is not discussed because it is not possible. The structure of the unconscious in the language of patriarchy means that “woman’s desire is subjected to her image as bearer of the bleeding wound, she can exist only in relation to castration and cannot transcend it” (22). Women as sexual objects were “the leitmotif of erotic spectacle: from pin-ups to strip-tease, from Ziegfeld to Busby Berkeley, she holds the look, plays to and signifies male desire” (27). Women might be pin-ups but they cannot erotically gaze at one. The male does all the gazing.<sup>70</sup>

Although her focus was film, Mulvey’s theory of the male gaze was carried into analyses of other forms of visual representation and into theorising women’s experience of heterosexuality. As *Screen* journal editorialised in 1992, “Mulvey’s view of man as subject and woman as non-subject exerted a profound influence on critical debates, particularly feminist debates, of the following decade” (*Screen* (ed), 1992: 5). Her ideas “were largely agreed with and assented to far beyond their original context” (MacKinnon, 1997: 27). Much critiqued now, the spill-over effect into other analyses – such as the failure of the nude male pin-up because of the impossibility of the female gaze – still circulates as

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<sup>70</sup> In a later article, Mulvey did deal with the female gaze. But here the female gaze could only be a form of masochistic identification with the woman on screen, or a form of transvestism, when the female spectator adopts a masculine position. There was no position for female gazing pleasure, women were either made masculine or masochist by the text (Mulvey, 1989[1979]).

uncritiqued historical 'fact'. Ballaster et al., for example, could still insist in 1991 on "the proven failure" of the centrefold, clearly using Mulvey's theory as their evidence: "The female gaze must be interpreted either as the adoption of a masculine subject position in relation to the female image, or as an indicator of the continuing symmetry of the terms 'woman' and 'commodity', even for women themselves" (Ballaster et al., 1991: 38). And even theorists who disagreed with Mulvey, such as Liesbet van Zoonen who describes her vision as "dark and suffocating" (Zoonen, 1994: 95), could still agree with the application of Mulvey's theory when it came to the male centrefold.

Patricia Mellencamp argues that the theoretical tradition of the male gaze which followed from Mulvey's influential article trained women to interpret themselves as objects rather than subjects, as the bearer not the maker of meaning. It was a pessimistic kind of politics for women:

It involves narcissistic rage, that of turning oneself into an object, often an inadequate one (a theoretical inadequacy fuelled by theories of women's infamous Lacanian 'lack'). The model so actively employed by feminists about women in representation did not empower women in real life; in fact, it constantly pointed out what women were not. (Mellencamp, 1990: fn 24, 87)

Mellencamp asks how women can attempt to develop a strong independent subjectivity while holding to an argument that women are passive. The issue is not just that teaching women that their role in patriarchy as always object is not very productive. If the female psyche is constructed in passivity because of patriarchy, then there is no way out – short of dismantling patriarchy (or psychoanalysis).

The weight of gaze theory was on Suzanne Moore's shoulders as she wrote about the proliferation of images of naked men in popular culture for an important edited collection, *The Female Gaze* in 1988. In Moore's essay there is an awareness that *her* gaze could be met with the penetrating/castrating look of the feminist academy:

As theory lopes in its ungainly way behind what is actually happening I could find little explanation for this phenomenon of the male body on display for women ... To suggest that women actually look at men's bodies is apparently to stumble

into a theoretical minefield which holds sacred the idea that in the dominant media the look is always already structured as male. (45)

By the time she was writing, popular culture had offered up enough images of the naked male for the gaze to appeal to both sexes, “not presented as all-powerful but as objects of pleasure and desire” (56). For Moore, the eye of desire was losing its gender. The male body was offered to anyone who cared to look: male, female, gay, straight. She explains this as partly a response to the popularisation of feminist arguments about the objectification of women. As consciousness of the ‘offensiveness’ – and the sheer predictability – of using naked women to sell things circulated in pop culture, the focus became male. But for Moore it was gay activism rather than a popular feminism that had released the male body for public gaze.

And the male centrefold of the women’s magazines? Moore too considered them a failure. Not even remotely erotic for her, these magazines were “launched on the assumption that women could move from being sexually passive to being sexually active by behaving like imitation men and devouring pictures of naked models in ludicrous poses” (57).

Just as women had an opportunity to develop and discuss their experience of the erotic gaze, the gaze of the academy turned away. When it comes to culture, especially popular culture, ‘ordinary’ readers do the thinking too, and sometimes they are way ahead of the academic game. As we have seen in this chapter, one academic’s turn-off is another reader’s turn-on. Decades of theoretical reiterations of ‘failure’ for the male centrefold hold as their yardstick an ideal of the representation of female desire that is never quite articulated. It is as if an authentic female desire could only be found beyond patriarchy. The producers and readers of the new women’s magazines were clearly not prepared to wait.

In this light we could see *Cleo’s* male nude for women as a representational practice – enacted every month – that was allowing women to imagine themselves as active sexual agents, quite capable of holding the gaze. And the representations evoked the responses of readers, a flow of desire as one responded to the other. What change in gender relations and heterosexual practice might have resulted from the centrefold experience?

How could all this talk about the male body *not* be a sign of sexual desire, and perhaps one of the many forms desire takes? If we follow Foucault, all of this talking about the nude centrefold actually *produced* the female gaze (Foucault, 1979: 35). *Cleo* readers were not waiting for patriarchy to dissolve before they could experience sexual agency as women.

In claiming the female right to look at images of naked men as an exercise of democratic equivalence, *Cleo* was part of an emergent and ongoing popular discourse that was dismantling the oppositional gendered construction of male activity/ female passivity, male desire/female desirability, male subject/female object. It suggests the beginnings of a deeper shift in gendered sexual culture. The cultural practice of the male centrefold also gestured towards a destabilisation of traditional conceptions of acceptable female (and in the ideal world of true romance, male) heterosexuality as the expression of mutual desire of the other's mind/soul and body. Homosexual men were publicly exploring this disconnection. Within some parts of heterosexual popular culture, this disconnect between sex and love – where love had traditionally been the passport to socially permitted sexual behaviour for women – was coming under question. It was a cultural shift that disconnected pleasure from purpose apparent in many of the consumer lifestyle magazines beginning to emerge in this period (Jancovich, 2006; Binkley, 2006). Specifically here, women were encouraged to engage in the possibility of *sexual* pleasure without *social* purpose, if only in the fantasies surrounding the anonymous centrefolds. Not sexual desire in exchange for material gain or long-term relationships or marriage. And not sexual desire sanctioned by love. It was a new approach to sex for mainstream heterosexual women. If readers couldn't manage the 'zipless fuck' in everyday sexual lives, they could at least fantasise about it via the centrefold. This period in *Cleo* marks the beginning of a highly sexualised culture for ordinary women in both representation and practice (McNair, 1996; 2002).

History is on the side of this way of seeing. In the thirty years that followed the rash of nude males for female eyes in the new women's magazines, the naked male body has become a regular presence in all forms of popular culture for both men and women to gaze upon (see Jones, 1999; Bordo, 1999; MacKinnon, 1997; Dutton, 1995) and 'bad girls', 'new laddettes' and 'raunch culture' have emerged as terms to describe young women's fluid and chosen existence as sexual subjects/ objects (see Lumby, 1997a; Gill,

2003; Levy, 2005). The suggestion that women might *not* find erotic pleasure in looking at images of naked men would now be seen as 'ludicrous'.

### Coda

In a curiously unpopular development of popular feminism, *Cleo* abandoned the centrefold in July 1985. The justification of new editor Lisa Wilkinson was clearly influenced by the popularised arguments of a powerful anti-pornography feminism that had developed over the preceding decade. "We feel that in an age when women are becoming increasingly incensed about being exploited as sex objects in naked centrefolds, it's probably about time we gave men back their clothes," she argued (1985: 98). It was already time to give the *blokes* a fair go.

Kerry Packer took some convincing. He had become personally attached to the centrefold concept. Wilkinson was becoming a powerful force in ACP at the time, and finally persuaded him (Armstrong, 2004: 146). It was one of those moments when popular culture seems to crystallise the mood of a time, just as the original centrefold had in 1972. While naked male bodies were proliferating in other pop cultural media in the eighties, Wilkinson was prepared to take a stand for a particular kind of popularised feminism. She was going to ban the nude centrefold.

Like any new editor, Lisa Wilkinson wanted to make her mark. She couldn't topple an icon without offering something else in its place. And so came the smorgasbord of men, The Eligible Bachelors. Sometimes revealing bare chests, but never completely nude under her reign, the Bachelors had an ogle factor with an added fantasy of marital or dating possibility. These men were valued not just on their looks but for their personalities and prospects as well. More humanised by biographical detail, more available for a fantasy of relationship and not just sex, some saw it as a step backwards, others, like Wilkinson, saw it as a respectful feminist move.

Wilkinson's farewell to *Cleo's* iconic male centrefold was an image of Mel Gibson – fully clothed (Figure Eight). Gibson commented, "Ultimately, you are not going to get to people by ripping off your clothes and showing them your frontals. You have to gain



their respect” (Wilkinson, 1985: 98). *Cleo* was respectfully going to give the ‘soul’ back to the male body.



**Figure Eight: Mel Gibson as *Cleo*'s July 1985 centrefold**

Abandoning the sexual objectification of the male was a telling moment in *Cleo*'s history and in the shifts of popular feminism. Wilkinson assumed the editorial mantle as a particular kind of feminist, adopting a position made popular through the pornography debates at the end of the seventies and into the eighties, enunciated most forcefully (and with attendant media coverage) in the work of Andrea Dworkin (1982). ‘Objectifying’ naked bodies of women was seen as ‘degrading’, and this mode of thought was now applied by Wilkinson to male bodies as well. (I do not want to suggest that Wilkinson had been ‘Dworkined’ but that the arguments some feminists made against pornography were clearly taken on board.)

Wilkinson, however, had misunderstood the complexities of her reader's response to the centrefold. Some readers agreed with her. It was encouraging, wrote Ms J. Woodford of Corinda, Qld, “to see a magazine of such widespread influence with today's women take a stand on our cry that we abhor being looked on merely as sexual objects – whether

male or female – used to gratify another’s whims and desires” (September 1985: 152). Many others continued to write to *Cleo* for months after the removal of their centrefolds. The nude male had been more than just a joke or the revenge of reverse objectification. The centrefolds had been a source of erotic pleasure. These readers were not happy:

I have been buying *Cleo* ... always for the centrefolds ... I sobbed; I kicked doors; I said I’d write and complain! I adore photographs of male torsos and thighs and buttocks etc (Whew!) and I am of the belief that several thousand women in Australia would agree with me. (Horrified Citizen, McMahons Point, Sydney; September 1985: 152)

I could name probably dozens of magazines for men that have centrefolds, but *Cleo* is the only hope for us. I love looking at good-looking men; please bring back our *Cleo* centrefolds. (B. Rolfe, Nambour, Qld; September 1985: 152)

The field was now open for other publications to step into the breach. In 1991 *Australian Women’s Forum* (*AWF*) launched with a much more explicit approach to sex. In fact, sex in one form or another provided the entire content of the magazine and *AWF* was not shy about penises. They showed them down, they showed them almost up (following the 45 degree ‘angle of the dangle’ rule), they showed them under jocks. The magazine’s final editor, Helen Vnuk, explained the kind of ‘heterosexy popular feminism’ at work in her history of *AWF* and its censorship battles:

Its existence did more to bring about equality of the sexes than any academic text. Instead of complaining about men treating women as sex objects, it accepted people’s natural sexual attraction to each other, and allowed women to treat men as sex objects. It acknowledged women’s lust and enjoyment of sex and, in doing that, showed it was possible to get rid of sexism without getting rid of sex. (Vnuk, 2003: xiii)

The issues were selling out. *AWF* pushed the boundaries with the October/November 1991 issue running a nine-page feature ‘The Body in Question. A celebration of the Australian male’. Dozens of men were posed full-frontal with their heads encased in a knight’s helmet to protect their anonymity. *AWF* was redressing the balance, as they put



it. These men weren't posed in a recognisably erotic style. More like full-body mug shots, with Q&As on the men's opinions of their own bodies. Readers loved it and the Forum Feedback page was full of letters with now-familiar pleas for full erection shots and how women found the magazine sexually arousing.

It was a challenge to *Cleo* on home turf they had left fallow. Not to be outdone, *Cleo* went into action and somehow pulled together an almost identical feature for its November 1991 issue, flagged on the cover not as a celebration but as a question: 'Naked Men. Do they Look Ridiculous? You judge' (1991:142-147). Accompanying the six-page story was one of *Cleo's* pop democracy surveys, asking readers what they thought of representations of naked men.

How did they feel when they saw a full-frontal photo of a naked man? 67 per cent said turned on. To the question about bringing back the centrefold, 93 per cent of *Cleo* readers said yes. And in that centrefold 50 per cent wanted to see penises semi-erect; 35 per cent wanted them erect (n/a, 1992: 103). The problem for *Cleo* was a double one. If *Cleo* listened to its readers' desires, the centrefold should have returned as a monthly insert. But Wilkinson didn't *want* the centrefold to return.

...isn't all that incredibly sexist stuff? If we brought it back we could be accused of exploitation. Of using men purely for their bodies. Of failing to recognise they have brains. Of not taking men (God forbid!) seriously. (Wilkinson, 1992: 19)

Besides, the magazine had moved into the nineties high-celebrity phase. A gratuitous naked male would not do. *Cleo* needed the cover of celebrity for their naked males. In the preparatory work, most celebrities said no. The celebrities they asked were "positively prudish".

Wilkinson's solution was irony, which probably suited her stance on the centrefold perfectly. The result in the April issue was a six-page feature of old centrefolds with superimposed heads of current celebrities: Keanu Reeves on Mr November 1974; Mel Gibson on Jack Thompson; James Reyne on the gunslingers butt of Mr June 1980, Michael Hutchence on Mr September 1979 (1992: 102-103) (Figure Nine). The effect was amusing but hardly erotic. There were no reader letters in response.







## CONCLUSION

In November 1982 *Cleo* looked back at the decade with articles written by prominent feminists. Germaine Greer, Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem, Ita Buttrose and others, all reflected on what the women's movement had achieved and the issues it should focus on for the future. Sandwiched amongst these features by celebrity feminists was a 20-page survey of the highlights of *Cleo*, a smiling "story of women's progress over the past decade" (Taye: 124). *Cleo* clearly saw its own history as closely tied to that of second wave feminism.

What might women's magazines and feminism have in common? This broad research question gained closer focus through a detailed study of *Cleo* magazine in Australia in the decade 1972 – 1982. One answer offered by this thesis is that *Cleo* was a popular practice of feminism.

To be able to recognise this mainstream women's magazine as a mode of feminism required abandoning the historic turf war between feminists and this problematic genre of women's media. **Chapter One** argued that this oppositional frame is not the only, or even a terribly productive, way to view either magazines or feminism. To read *Cleo* as a practice of feminism required a quite different conceptualisation of the relationship between politics and media, and between texts and readers. The concept of popular feminism was developed as a means of shifting this opposition.

Throughout this thesis I have drawn on John Hartley's theorisation of where politics can occur – in the space between texts, politics and popular readerships – to argue for a re-interpretation of a woman's magazine like *Cleo*. In this space popular feminism was made.

Popular feminism does not operate here as simply a lens through which to read *Cleo*. The concept has developed dialogically in the process of research, through reading this magazine alongside theoretical work about media, feminism and women's genres of popular culture. Here the work of Joanne Hollows has also been particularly influential (2000, 2006). I have not argued that women's magazines always and inevitably operate as sites of popular feminism. That would be perverse. There were particular historical conditions that converged to allow a magazine like *Cleo* to do its popular feminist work in

the seventies. These conditions of possibility were explored in **Chapter Two**, historical conditions which allowed producers, text and readers to be “ideologically, politically and semiotically in touch with each other” (Hartley, 1996: 8).

There was another question informing this research, tied to the first. Why could popular feminism not be seen by second wave feminists at the time, and by the academic gaze in the decades since? There were readers of *Cleo* who were not ‘in touch’ with the imagined community that formed through this magazine. These were the critical readers, of *Cleo* and of women’s magazines in general, who produced texts about this popular genre of women’s media. **Chapter Three** explored their critiques, interpreting them within the context of emergent second wave feminism and feminist identity politics. Understanding the power of the antagonism, indeed the disgust, of second wave feminists towards women’s magazines helps explain the invisibility of the popular feminism of *Cleo* from the academic gaze, then and now.

At the heart of the second wave lay a contradiction: it wanted to be a mass movement without utilising the mass media. In its specific rejection of the media genre that had often, and over centuries, communicated issues of importance to women in a public space, second wave feminism stymied itself. The effect of this internal contradiction was that commercial women’s magazines could not be seen or included as a potential site of feminist work. Nevertheless, and not exactly in spite of this second wave rejection, popular feminism developed in many of the new women’s magazines and particularly in *Cleo*. I have argued that it was partly through this mainstream women’s magazine that feminism actually became popular – a mass movement, if not quite the mass movement of more radical second wave desire.

The dominant narrative of second wave history has so far been a tale of heroines who worked to improve the lives of ordinary women and themselves. As admirable as this work was, as we have seen, even while working *for* them, there was a need to separate *from* them and from their media, commercial women’s magazines, to find identity as a feminist. Ordinary women struggling to make sense of feminism, and indeed to incorporate elements of it into their lives, were left out of the narrative. Chapter Three in particular investigated how this drive to find a speaking position for feminists

necessitated the silencing of 'other' women, and indeed the disappearance of their popular media from the narratives of second wave feminism.

Toril Moi has argued that the word 'feminist' has been used to exclude far more than to include by those who want to police the boundaries of 'feminism' and 'feminist' (1999: 9). This thesis has suggested that this tendency to exclusion stems partly from the origins of the women's movement as providing an identity and speaking position for feminist women and that the necessary corollary of identity politics was exclusion and 'othering'. William Connolly has influentially explained this effect of identity politics: "identity requires difference in order to be and it conveys difference into otherness in order to secure its own self-certainty" (1991: 64). Popular feminism broadens the parameters of feminism beyond any necessary identity politics. Women could (and can) *do* feminism without *identifying* as feminists.

The writing of journalists and readers in the pages of *Cleo* in the seventies provides evidence that feminism is not just the politics of the critical outside/rs – feminist politics can occur 'inside' as well. Carol Siegel has suggested a description of feminism that could be useful here:

We might think of feminism in a somewhat unaccustomed way, not as a set of ideas external and resistant to mainstream culture, but as a series of movements that have reflected mainstream concerns perhaps as often as they have been conceived in opposition to them. (2000: 4)

The interaction between ordinary women, their mainstream media and everyday life may not inevitably be a site of resistance to change, as is so often assumed and perhaps even required by certain kinds of feminism, but the space where the struggle for gendered democratic equivalence has been enacted. The reading of *Cleo* offered here has suggested that women – especially those who were not involved with activist organisations or higher education – could find in this magazine a personal, pragmatic and everyday politics, "more directly participatory than representative politics ever could be" (Hartley, 1992: 3). And perhaps more directly participatory and appealing than becoming a card-carrying feminist, which as we have seen, was a choice only a small minority of women were in a position to make.

**Chapters Four and Five** invited these ordinary women into the pages of another story that can be told about feminism in this period by focusing on the popular feminism of *Cleo* in the texts produced by journalists and readers. This magazine was shown to be literally full of feminist journalism and journalism about feminism, and readers wrote letters in response. The ordinary reader/writers displayed an engagement with feminist issues that was far more complex than the historical narrative has so far imagined. We heard stories of the tensions between desires for more traditional expressions of femininity and the second wave demand to abandon them, and tensions between domesticity, motherhood and career, the push for independence and the pull of home. We heard stories of the injustices of the double shift, of many women's minimal education and the constraining (and sometimes satisfying) effects of early marriage and children, of classed resentment towards feminist arguments about the definition of a 'meaningful' life. In the multi-voiced pages of this magazine, it was argued that *Cleo* truly democratised feminism.

By the end of the decade, many of the core arguments of Women's Liberation had been subsumed into common sense. *Cleo* journalist Katrina Petersen wondered if feminism had become "a dirty word" and asked many ordinary women, "what does feminism mean to you today?" Although her respondents felt "uneasy" using the word to define themselves, that was not because it was "dirty" but because "those ideas that seemed so radical and threatening only 10 years ago, are now just part of the wallpaper of our lives" (Petersen, 1982: 40). Feminism had become ordinary.

As *Cleo's* popular journalism illustrated, the success and the strength of contemporary feminism lies in the acceptance by most people who live within liberal or social democracies of what the Australian feminist philosopher Jean Curthoys has called "a basic fact":

Most people have had an essentially decent response to what has become recognised as a clear injustice. This support is not intended to be for a few women 'making it' but is given on the basis of a morality which rejects arbitrary privilege. (1997: 9)

It is not a radical vision of feminism. Indeed, it is ordinary. But it is a vision on which popular feminism found its ground. This is why I have employed the very Australian concept of the fair go. To claim a fair go for the fair sex is the terrain of popular feminism. It is a gendered vision of social equality, "a fair and just organization of society so as to ensure that no one sex is unfairly favoured over another" (Moi, 1999: 386). And it was through sex that many women explored this ideal of equality.

Popular feminism took a sexual turn with women's demands for equal (if different) erotic pleasures. **Chapter Six** looked at the way *Cleo's* editorial philosophy was inspired by the original embedding of sexual liberation with women's liberation. *Cleo* provided its readers with much needed sex education, which drew from current sexology, from feminist theory and from writer/readers' own experiences. Moreover, it packaged sexual 'liberation' in a discourse of women's right to a fair go in sexual pleasure, and the varieties of female orgasms became the symbolic and obsessive focus of this desire. Readers were encouraged to develop an active sexuality, inspired by the figure of Germaine Greer. It was argued that as second wave feminism entered a period of bitter dispute about female sexuality, and particularly heterosexuality, *Cleo* kept its distance from these internal and increasingly academic debates. What has been identified as 'heterosexy popular feminism' emerged as an appealing, pleasurable and possibly 'do-able' practice of liberation for ordinary women. This heterosexy popular feminism also existed in fantasy, as women demanded the right to gaze upon nude male flesh and their magazine responded. **Chapter Seven** explored the desires of ordinary women to turn the tables on a long history of the representation of naked women for male erotic pleasure. The popular feminist practice of the male centrefold was a claim for the erotic female gaze, as well as an expression of larrikin fair go 'vengeance'. This chapter suggested, once more, the classed operations of taste and distinction between educated middle class feminists and less privileged 'ordinary' women. It returned us to the gulf that had developed between increasingly radical feminist theory and the heterosexual desires of ordinary women, providing yet another reason for their resistance to the identity 'feminist'.

There is an obvious question that arises from this research and it is one I cannot answer. Was the feminism operative in the Australian magazine *Cleo* apparent in other magazines produced around the world, in countries where the second wave emerged with similar

passion and energy? There was enough work to do in the magazine archive in Australia to sustain the time it took to research and write this thesis. If the historical eye of the emergent concept of popular feminism was to be focused on the magazines produced in the period of the second wave and beyond, might similar stories be revealed?

My hunch would be that *Nova* in the UK, perhaps *Honey* too (Whelehan, 2005: 49), *Elle* in France, the New Zealand magazine *Eve*, the Japanese magazines *An'an*, *Non'no* and *More* (Sakamoto, (1999) and *Cosmopolitan* in the US, UK, Australia and many of the other countries this global magazine empire 'colonised', could provide substantial evidence of ordinary women's engagement with feminist ideas in particular locations. *Cosmopolitan* has hardly been avoided by analysts working within a wide range of academic disciplines, as Chapter Two touched upon. But these analyses have generally been constrained by what I have argued as a limited conception of what feminism might be. If we expand the meaning of feminism beyond the politics of the radical and critical outside/r and accept that another kind of feminism has been, and is, operative in mainstream women's media and in everyday life, then *Cosmo* – the women's magazine only fit for the second wave trashcan – may offer a completely different cultural history of global feminism. 'Magazine studies' is such a nascent field (Abrahamson, 2007; Holmes, 2007). There may well be other magazines we have forgotten, sleeping in the vaults of libraries around the world. I can feel another bout of archive fever coming on.



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\*Reader letters are referenced within the body text with name if supplied, place, month and year. As there were often so many un-named reader letters from the same year, to reference in the bibliography as n/a would have become cumbersome.

Because this is a work of historical writing, I have chosen to reference published works with the date of imprint, followed by the original publication date in square brackets. This alleviates constant reference to the bibliography for the year in which a text was written.

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