

Take-Away:
The Production and Consumption of Service Journalism

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Abstract

This thesis argues that service journalism is a distinct form of journalism with identifiable components that has evolved largely within the context of women's magazines. This thesis also argues that service journalism has been socially constructed, produced and consumed. It draws from a range of conceptual approaches, a case study of *Canadian Living* magazine, and primary research involving interviews with producers and a content analysis of service journalism in *Canadian Living* to develop a functional and conceptual understanding of the genre. Particular attention is paid to the expectation of action associated with service journalism. Research findings suggest producers of service journalism do not currently assess if readers take action as a result of the reading, although research findings conclude that readers do take action, particularly within the context of the social construction of the feminine ideal. These findings provide important lessons for the study and practice of journalism.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Service journalism is a highly prevalent form of journalism. Service journalism is in newspapers and on the Internet, television and radio, but it is especially present in magazines. Three of the top five revenue-generating magazines in Canada in 2008 were service magazines. Total revenue for *Chatelaine*, which topped the list, was \$56.5 million. The remaining four in the top five were *Canadian Living*, *Reader's Digest*, *Maclean's* and *Canadian House and Home* (Ursi, 2009). Service journalism has been popular since the late-nineteenth century. *Ladies' Home Journal*, commonly considered to be the formula upon which modern women's service magazines are based, was first published in 1883. *Chatelaine*, one of the most successful service magazines in Canada, celebrated its 80th anniversary in 2008, which is the same year *Esquire*, a men's service magazine, celebrated its 75th anniversary. Despite its success and wide appeal, service journalism has not been the focus of systematic scholarly inquiry. Why has the study of journalism not engaged more systematically with service journalism?

First, service journalism is most often found in magazines, and magazine journalism and its industry have been largely overlooked by journalism studies. As Holmes (2007, 510) argues, magazines are “a highly successful cultural form – yet it is a form which scholars have, with a few exceptions, tended to underestimate and overlook.” It may be argued that the magazine industry is difficult to study because, as Johnson (2007, 523) argues, “publishing houses simply don't want to share information about circulation, distribution, advertising, or editorial research.” Even if the magazine industry is difficult to penetrate, magazines are everywhere, making them a highly accessible cultural form.

Second, the journalism elite is critical of consumer magazines in general because of their relationship with advertisers. As Gough-Yates (2003, 56) argues, “[m]agazine publishing does not exist in isolation from other commercial institutions of cultural production. Allied especially closely is the advertising industry.” Magazines have depended on advertising since the late-nineteenth century, when publishers realized their products could be subsidized by advertisers and thus sold at a lower price and with higher circulation. Mass-market magazines have since been business ventures first and foremost. They compete in a highly commercial market by being everything to everyone, particularly advertisers and readers. But journalism has co-existed with business constraints in newspapers for decades, and, conversely, alternative magazines, such as *Ms.*, have struggled with attempts to limit ties with advertisers (Steinem, 1990). The relationship between service journalism and advertising does not necessarily devalue the cultural form but merely shapes it.

Third, service journalism is most often associated with women’s magazines. As Korinek (2000, 9) argues, “[t]he study of women’s magazines has been hampered by the wholesale adoption of a number of myths and generalizations about these periodicals – their purpose, effect, and content. These distortions arose out of the historical and popular literature on women’s magazines.” As a result, when women’s magazines are studied, they are often approached from a critical feminist perspective. As Hermes (1995, 29) argues, “[n]ot only are women’s magazines among the most taken for granted media, available public discourse (often elitist and reflecting high cultural values) concentrates on why one should not read women’s magazines.” Even those who study women’s magazines have failed to address any aspect of service journalism except dismissively

mentioning the service departments of women's magazines. As Friedan (1997, 55), laments, "[n]o longer the old article about issues or ideas, but the new 'service' feature."

Fourth, service journalism is not considered 'serious' journalism. It is most often associated with baking perfect cherry pies in 10 easy steps. As Lockhart (2008, 56) writes, "the editorial elite regards the category as entirely forgettable or, worse, trite and insipid." However, just as journalism is about conveying information, service journalism is about the application of information. The practical knowledge dispensed through service journalism is what differentiates it from other forms of journalism. As Lang (1999, 145), argues, "[t]he slow-breaking stories about health, education, or welfare that filled the women's section moved lives more potently than much of the more ephemeral 'hard' news that would be little more than 'old' news tomorrow." There is an expectation that the reader will *act* upon the information. As Ranly (1992, 139) argues, "[s]ervice journalism is 'action journalism' – not action on the part of the journalist but expected action on the part of the reader." Producers call this prescribed action the 'take-away.' Yet despite, or perhaps because of, this relationship with readers, service journalism continues to be the poor cousin of journalism. Why, then, is service journalism worthy of study?

Rationale and research questions

Service journalism is a prevalent form of journalism as well as a cultural form. Women's service magazines may be a secondary source of socialization, but their "high visibility" makes them influential (Martin, 1997). If journalism studies claims to engage with the practice of journalism, then service journalism must also be considered part of journalism studies. The goal of this thesis is to contribute to a foundation for the academic study of service journalism by filling key gaps in our understanding of it. Given the prevalence of

service journalism and the share of the journalism industry occupied by the genre, it would seem problematic to dismiss it.

In an attempt to address the significant gap in the literature in journalism studies, this thesis poses the question: How is service journalism socially constructed, produced and consumed, particularly within the context of action? This thesis also poses the following related questions. How has the evolution of service journalism been socially influenced? How do we understand service journalism from a functional perspective? Why is service journalism so popular?

This thesis argues that service journalism is a distinct form of journalism with identifiable components that has evolved largely, although not exclusively, within the context of women's magazines. Drawing from a range of conceptual approaches from related areas of the literature, as outlined below, a case study of *Canadian Living* magazine, and primary research involving interviews with producers and a content analysis covering 30 years of service journalism, this thesis argues that important lessons can be drawn from a critical analysis of service journalism that have relevance to both the theory and practice of journalism. In particular, this thesis examines the notion of action in service journalism and argues that reader interpretation of texts affects the consumption of service journalism, notwithstanding the intentions of producers. Fundamentally, this thesis undertakes a critical analysis of service journalism, which provides the basis for necessary future research.

Conceptual framework

This thesis draws from a number of related areas of the literature, such as history, psychology and sociology, to further the study of service journalism. The following

overview is a guide to the conceptual framework of this thesis. As outlined below, this thesis was informed by the work of Scott (1987) and Ranly (1992, 1993 and 1997), Eide and Knight (1999), Thorngate and Plouffe (1987) and Fiske (1998). Given the lack of research into service journalism, this thesis was also informed by the work of Korinek (2000), Hermes (1995) and Ferguson (1983), in addition to the broader literature on the history of women's magazines.

There is no single work that traces the history and evolution of service journalism. To begin, this thesis draws from the literature on the history of the women's periodical press, which mentions service journalism but stops short of engaging with it. Damon-Moore (1994) provides a snapshot of how women's service magazines have evolved through her study of *Ladies' Home Journal*, which has arguably served as the blueprint for the majority of mass-market women's service magazines. She argues that *Ladies' Home Journal* carved out a market for middle-class monthly magazines and helped institutionalize the notion that women needed help, which is central to service journalism. While Damon-Moore considers the establishment of women's service magazines, Walker (2000) looks at women's magazines in the 1940s and 1950s. She pays special attention to women's magazines' role as advisers. Walker also devotes a chapter of her book to the role of experts and considers the messages they provided to readers about all aspects of life. This literature provides an important foundation by outlining how social and societal trends created a changing context within which women's magazines and service journalism were produced and consumed.

This thesis also draws on the limited applied literature on the practice of service journalism. As discussed in Chapter 3, Byron Scott was the first Meredith Chair in Service Journalism at the University of Missouri School of Journalism. Scott's (1987)

work broadly argues that service journalism represents the most common style of journalism practised today. As Scott (1987, 15) argues, “[a]n editorial formula that features personal, ‘me-first’ articles will invariably attract higher readership than a discussion of the world’s largest problems every time.” He argues, however, that service journalism may be a way of bringing attention to social issues and points to women’s service magazines as an example of how service journalism can be an approach to “serious journalism.” Scott (1987, 2) defines service journalism as “needed information, delivered in the right medium at the right time in an understandable form, and intended for immediate use by the audience.” The final portion of his definition, “use by the audience,” underscores the importance of action in service journalism, which is consequently the focus of this thesis and will be discussed more fully in Chapter 3.

Also important is the work of Don Ranly, a colleague of Scott’s and professor emeritus at the University of Missouri. As Ranly (1992, 138) argues, service is “an approach to presenting information that: quickly shows the reader that the information is useful; gives information to the reader in the most usable way; and tells the reader how to take action or how to get more information.” He characterizes the concept of service journalism with the term “refrigerator journalism,” because, if the information is useful, the reader will cut it out and stick it on the refrigerator. As Ranly (1992, 139) concludes, a service journalist has done his or her “job even better if the reader does something as a result of the information.” This reinforces the importance of action in service journalism.

This thesis also draws on the work of Eide and Knight (1999), who argue that service journalism addresses the grievances and risks of everyday life, thus making everyday life problematic but resolvable by following the advice dispersed through service journalism. As Eide and Knight (1999, 531) argue, “[i]n the case of grievance

problems, the ultimate goal of action is to change the behaviours of others, In the case of risk-based problems, changing one's own behaviour is both the means and the goal of action." Service journalism individualizes problems as well as solutions, and the service journalist acts as the trusted adviser. Eide and Knight (1999) argue that service journalism has arisen out of a resistance to established forms of expertise, a desire for greater individual autonomy and confusion about the many available forms of help and guidance. This will help to explain the genre's rationale and wide appeal.

Thorngate and Plouffe (1987) address the above confusion by considering how information consumers manoeuvre the attention economy, in which information expands while attention remains fixed. While their research looks at the proliferation of psychological knowledge, it is nonetheless relevant to this study of service journalism. The attention economy helps to explain why consumers choose to pay attention to service journalism, as evidenced by the genre's high circulation compared to other types of journalism. *Canadian Living*, for example, maintained 388,953 subscriptions over a six-month period in 2007, whereas the *Walrus*, a Canadian literary magazine, maintained 37,106 subscriptions for an entire year (Lockhart, 2008). Thorngate and Plouffe (1987) argue that information consumers assign value to knowledge based on four criteria. Any form of information that scores high on these criteria, which shift with social and cultural trends, succeeds in the attention economy. This thesis argues that service journalism succeeds in the attention economy by fulfilling the four criteria.

This understanding of the attention economy connects to Fiske (1998), who argues that consumers control popular culture because they choose what becomes popular. He applies his theory to television as a cultural commodity, which is easily transferred to mass-market magazines because they, too, are cultural products. Fiske (1998) argues that

cultural products exist in a popular economy. He further argues that the popular economy is divided into two sub-economies: financial and cultural. In the financial economy, the audience is a commodity that is sold to advertisers. In the cultural economy, however, the audience becomes the producer of meanings. As Fiske (1998, 507) argues, “the variety of audiences will presumably produce a variety of pleasures and meanings.” The goal of service journalism is to prescribe action, but, as Fiske (1998) argues, the producers cannot determine how the consumers will interact with the product. This disconnect is central to this study of service journalism, particularly its role in social constructionism.

Korinek (2000) has also been influenced by the applied theories of Fiske in her study of *Chatelaine* magazine in the 1950s and 1960s. *Chatelaine* is a women’s service magazine and has been a main competitor of *Canadian Living* since the 1980s. As Korinek (2000, 12) argues, “[r]eaders choose to purchase or subscribe to a magazine, select what they read, and bring their own experiences and interests to interpreting the material.” Korinek’s focus on reader interpretation is particularly relevant to this thesis, because she draws on primary research to establish that readers did not feel compelled to “slavishly follow the magazine’s suggestions” (2000, 72). She argues that *Chatelaine* contained a variety of meanings for readers and was likely read for a variety of reasons.

Closely linked to the understanding of reader interpretation is the work of Hermes (1995). Rather than focusing on the text in women’s magazines, she interviewed the readers of magazines. Hermes (1995) identified repertoires that readers use to make texts meaningful and argues that the repertoires feed fantasies about doing something more than they develop the skills to do something. Two particular repertoires emerged from her study: practical knowledge, and emotional learning and connected knowing. As Hermes (1995, 49) argues, “[i]t is only through a repertoire that allows readers to fantasize about

being well-organized, perfect women who keep the tips they collect in handy files, who can find the right recipe or tip whenever they want to, that the magazines become more meaningful and worthwhile.” These repertoires parallel hard and soft service journalism, which will be discussed in Chapter 6.

While Hermes (1995) focused on the consumption of women’s magazines, Ferguson (1983) considered the production of women’s service magazines. Her study focuses on the “cult of femininity” of which magazine editors are the “custodians.” What is particularly useful about Ferguson’s (1983) study is that she merges her own professional experience as a writer and editor with a content analysis and interviews with editors. As Ferguson (1983, 10) argues, “it is ... through their content choices that women’s magazine editors truly act as gatekeepers of the female world.” One of her conclusions is particularly relevant to this study of service journalism and its expectation of action. As Ferguson (1983, 131) argues, the editors of women’s magazines are “powerful in that they exercise influence over their readers to the extent that women rely on them for information, support, guidance, direction about – and distraction from – those things which they equate with their womanliness.”

Taken together, this conceptual framework provides a foundation for an analysis of the production and consumption of service journalism. It helps explain the origins and development of service journalism, why it is popular with readers, how readers engage with the texts and how it has contributed to the social construction of the feminine ideal.

Methodology and limitations

Given the questions posed by this thesis, a mixed methodology was employed involving literature reviews, interviews and content analysis. This methodology was informed by

other examples of research into women's consumer magazines, especially Ferguson's (1983) study of *Woman*, *Woman's Own* and *Woman's Weekly*.

Reviews of related areas of the literature were essential for the development of this thesis given the absence of a literature specifically on service journalism. Based on preliminary reviews undertaken during course work, this thesis reviewed the related areas of the literature outlined above. As discussed above, these literatures together provide a useful conceptual framework through which the nature and application of service journalism can be explored. These literature reviews provided the key sources of information for Chapters 2, 3 and 4. Chapters 5 and 6 are based mainly on primary research and a consideration of the case study of *Canadian Living* magazine. A single case study provided the opportunity to consider the production and consumption of service journalism within the parameters of a master's thesis.

To situate the case study within the broader magazine industry, magazines may be divided into three categories (Johnson, 1993). First, consumer magazines are publications of general or specialized interest that are sold to the public and depend on subscriptions or advertising, or a combination of the two, to exist. This is the most common form of magazines found on newsstands. Second, specialized business magazines, such as trade publications, cover various aspects of particular industries or professions and may be sold or given away free. Third, public relations or contract magazines are published by corporations for specific internal or external audiences and are almost always free, such as *Food & Drink* magazine published by the Liquor Control Board of Ontario. While this last category provides a service, it is not service journalism. As Holmes (2007, 514) explains, "they are crass promotional vehicles and in many ways they could be classified as a hybrid with marketing." This thesis focuses on consumer magazines and service

journalism, that is service articles written by journalism professionals adhering to the same research and ethical standards as all journalists. As Lockhart (2008, 57) argues, “[a] service piece done well takes hours of painstaking research, numerous interviews and a fresh approach to what may be a familiar story.”

To this end, *Canadian Living* can be understood as a women’s consumer magazine that focuses on service journalism through feature articles about home and family life. This thesis is principally concerned with the editorial content of the case study, because the focus of this thesis is service journalism. The advertising material will be considered in Chapter 6, but the core question of this thesis remains centred around the editorial content of the magazine. *Canadian Living* was chosen as the case study for a number of reasons. First, it is a successful service magazine with a readership of 3.8 million (Print Measurement Bureau, 2009). Second, despite its focus on food, it may be considered a general-interest magazine due to its range of subjects. Third, it has not been the focus of much scholarly research, especially when contrasted with its main rival, *Chatelaine*. Finally, as discussed below, the author of this thesis had particular access to *Canadian Living* through her previous experience working for the magazine during the period from 2003 to 2008, first as Copy Chief and then as Senior Editor of the Life section.

The objective of the interview portion of the primary research was to fill gaps in our knowledge of the history of *Canadian Living* and explore and characterize the producer-consumer relationship. The interviews also sought to examine how producers of service journalism understand the genre and how the notion of action affects their production of service journalism. Since this thesis is concerned with the production of service journalism, interviews were conducted with 11 past or present editors of *Canadian Living*, including editors-in-chief, associate editors and section editors. Editors are the

“gatekeepers” of what is included and excluded from the magazine and are consequently instrumental in the evolution of service journalism and the genre’s contribution to social constructions. As Shoemaker (2009, 3) writes, “[g]atekeepers determine what becomes a person’s social reality, a particular view of the world.” The investigation of their role involved semi-structured, one-on-one interviews using open-ended questions revolving around the history of the magazine, the process of production, and their understanding of service journalism, the reader and the expectation of action. Ten of the interviews were conducted in person, with one interview conducted by telephone. The Carleton University Research Ethics Committee approved the methodology for interviews.

The content analysis portion of the primary research was applied to the March and October issues of *Canadian Living* from 1976 to 2005. The content analysis traced the growth of the magazine, the evolution of service journalism, the prevalence of subjects in feature articles, the type of action prescribed in parenting features and then the proportional presence of interest and action in Letters to the Editor. The content analysis further contrasted the interests reflected in letters with editorial content and advertising. The overall objective was to investigate the relationship between the action prescribed in the magazine’s feature articles and the subsequent actions taken by readers. This content analysis provided an empirical basis for this study of service journalism.

The parenting theme was selected to limit the scope of research but also because of its expected frequency in the magazine, relevance to the adviser aspect of service journalism and connection to the social construction of the feminine ideal. As Walker (2000, 171) argues, “[a] woman faced the greatest challenges, ran the most risks of failing, and needed the most – and the most contradictory – advice in her role as a mother.” Full details of this methodology are presented in Chapter 6.

It is also important to note some potential limitations of this thesis. As mentioned above, the challenge of this thesis is not to fill an identified gap but to choose which of the many gaps can reasonably be addressed. Although this thesis provides a history and description of the elements of service journalism, it does not claim to address all the aspects of service journalism. Since service journalism is rarely considered in the academic literature, this thesis will serve as a basis for future research. In addition, this thesis is not an exhaustive analysis of service journalism in *Canadian Living*. The mandate of the magazine is to include articles about food, fashion and beauty, crafts, home and garden, and family life and health. Parenting is only one of the topics addressed by this service magazine. Furthermore, it is also important to recognize that *Canadian Living* is but one example of service journalism. While this thesis develops an understanding of service journalism that may be applicable to other cases, further research would be required to determine the application of the findings of this thesis to other cases.

Finally, as noted above, the author of this thesis worked at *Canadian Living* between 2003 and 2008. While this experience provided valuable insight into the production of service journalism and greatly facilitated access to key informants for this research, it is important to address subsequent concerns about the potential for bias. Concerns relating to bias revolve around the author's objective consideration of the case study and response of informants to interview questions posed by the author, especially given prior working relationships. To address these two potentials for bias, the case study was informed by the broader secondary literature on women's consumer magazines (Ferguson, 1983; Hermes, 1995; Korinek, 2000; Walker, 2000; and Winship, 1987). This literature helped the author be more aware of her own potential bias while serving as a basis against which the results of interviews could be gauged. Likewise, all informants

signed informed consent forms, which specified the nature of the research and clearly indicated the position of the author.

Structure of thesis

This thesis argues that service journalism is an identifiable genre of journalism and that a critical analysis of this genre, drawing from broader studies on history, psychology and sociology, provides a foundation for more systematically understanding and engaging with this highly prevalent form of journalism. This argument is important to journalism studies because it identifies and seeks to help address an important gap in the literature.

To support this argument, Chapter 2 provides a history of service journalism through the lens of the women's periodical press. The earliest women's magazines were published for the upper class. With industrialization, society experienced a number of changes, particularly the emergence of a middle class. The women of this middle class quickly became the target of magazines because advertisers were keen to access these new consumers and middle-class women demonstrated an appetite for practical information. This appetite arose from a number of societal changes, particularly a disconnect between generations that meant younger women could no longer turn to older generations for advice about homemaking and life skills. Magazines soon took on the role of adviser due in part to their accessibility and prevalence. While newspapers tried to attract women readers with women's pages, it was difficult for them to compete with the glossy pages of magazines. As a result, women's magazines of the late-nineteenth century lay the foundation for modern service journalism.

Chapter 3 presents functional and conceptual perspectives on service journalism. The defining characteristic of service journalism is the presentation of information with an

expectation of action. Service journalism facilitates comprehension by presenting information in an accessible format, typically employing packaging devices such as explicit headlines, subheads, sidebars and bullet points. It also engages readers by addressing individual grievances and risks (Eide and Knight, 1999) and offering individualized do-it-yourself solutions via expert sources. As a result of presenting information that is comprehensible, credible and interesting, readers assign importance to it and thus pay attention to it (Thorngate and Plouffe, 1987). According to the attention economy, information proliferates but attention remains constant. As a result, readers must choose what to pay attention to and do so by assigning value to knowledge (Thorngate and Plouffe, 1987). Circulation numbers suggest they assign high value to service journalism. The expectation of action is a key element to service journalism, and one that contributes to social constructions. Service magazines contribute to the repertoire of practical knowledge and tell readers *how* to act within cultural norms by contributing to the repertoire of emotional learning and connected knowing (Hermes, 1995).

To this end, Chapter 4 will examine how service journalism has contributed to the social construction of the feminine ideal and, with a view to the case study, the social construction of motherhood. Service journalism is everywhere and addresses a range of audiences with a range of interests. It is, however, most commonly found in women's magazines and is thus complicit in the social construction of the feminine ideal. Situating service journalism's contribution to social constructionism is a necessary step in developing an understanding of how the notion of action affects the production and consumption of service journalism. Women's service magazines tell women *who* they should be and *how* they may become the 'ideal of woman.' An added challenge to studying the notion of action is that readers ultimately have control over the meaning of

texts (Fiske, 1998). They interpret, critique, revise and modify the advice to suit their habits and cultural practices. This is key to the expectation of action and leads to the question: Is the action intended by producers the same as the action taken by readers?

Chapter 5 will introduce the case study, *Canadian Living* magazine. A brief presentation of the history of mass-market magazines in Canada helps explain how *Canadian Living* developed into a women's service magazine. When the magazine was first published in December 1975, it was intended to be a general-interest publication focusing on home and family life in Canada. Its prime competitors were the American-published *Family Circle* and *Woman's Day* and the Canadian-published *Chatelaine*. The magazine experienced tremendous growth in the mid 1980s, reaching almost two million readers (Griffiths, 1993) and expanding into a franchise that included television and radio shows, cookbook and book series and a mail-order shop. What is particular about, but not exclusive to, *Canadian Living* is the producers (editors) believed they understood the interests and needs of the consumers (readers) because they self-identified with the readers. As a result, they based editorial content on this perceived relationship. This producer-consumer relationship is key to understanding service journalism: if the editors see themselves as the readers, then they decide if the content is useful, usable and used.

Chapter 6 will draw on extensive primary research to investigate the production and consumption of service journalism in *Canadian Living*. Primary research includes interviews with producers of service journalism in *Canadian Living*, a content analysis of feature articles and Letters to the Editor, a smaller content analysis of full-page advertisements, and posting research questions on CanadianLiving.com. Primary research suggests the producers have a firm understanding of service journalism and do prescribe action but currently do not assess if consumers take action as a result of the reading. This

exploration of the producer-consumer relationship further suggests a disconnect between what the producers believe is useful information and the information consumers want to read. Primary research shows that consumers do act upon the advice in *Canadian Living* but mostly when the advice addresses elements of the feminine ideal, such as recipes and crafts. Despite consumers showing a greater interest in practical information, the majority of features contributed to the repertoire of emotional learning and connected knowing rather than the repertoire of practical knowledge (Hermes, 1995). The information producers favoured also coincided with the presence of full-page advertisements, which suggests they prioritized consumerism over the betterment of readers, despite the views expressed by the editors in the interviews.

Chapter 7 will address the implications of this thesis for the practice of service journalism as well as journalism studies. In particular, the producers of *Canadian Living* do not currently assess if consumers use or act upon the information presented in the magazine. The findings of this thesis suggest that a more informed understanding of the action taken by readers could usefully inform and enhance the production of service journalism. Journalism studies may also benefit from service journalism's focus on market segmentation and the reader rather than writing for the generic reader. As such, this thesis hopes to contribute to a more critical and informed understanding of the practice and context of service journalism and to help address an important gap in the current literature in journalism studies. The chapter will conclude by outlining a number of areas of future research arising from the thesis, including the potential role of service journalism in socializing new Canadians, the potential for service journalism to inform action in relation to non-consumer issues, such as social justice, and a more rigorous consideration of how readers engage with service journalism.

Chapter 2

History of Service Journalism

Service journalism appears in periodicals appealing to a range of interests, from running and travel to woodworking and quilting. It may be argued, however, that service journalism is most commonly associated with women's magazines, such as *Canadian Living*. Given this association, it is no coincidence that service journalism has evolved through the women's periodical press leading back to the late-nineteenth century.

The goal of this chapter is to provide context for the examination of service journalism in this thesis by tracing the historical evolution of service journalism through women's magazines. Modern service journalism is a fairly predictable form of writing. As presented in Chapter 3, service journalism provides information that is useful and usable, of interest to the reader and connects the reader to expert advice not otherwise available. Throughout this chapter, it is helpful to note how and when these three elements – usefulness, personal interest and expert advice – became mainstays of the genre.

To this end, this chapter has three sections. The first section will provide an overview of the history of service journalism through the lens of women's periodicals, particularly *Ladies' Home Journal*, commonly considered the format upon which women's magazines have since been based. The appearance of service journalism in newspapers will also be considered, particularly its inclusion in the women's pages and its popular instruction on managing a household during the war years.

The second section will consider explanations for the genre's increased presence in women's magazines since the late-nineteenth century, a phenomenon that may be attributed to a number of social changes resulting from industrialization, particularly the rise of a new middle class. The role of the household and the women responsible for its

management experienced significant changes when, for example, products that were once made at home were being manufactured in factories and sold in stores. At the same time, housework was being transferred from servants and hired help to housewives, a change that brought on a new ‘professionalization’ of housework. In addition, and perhaps most significant to the rise of service journalism, information that had previously been passed down from mothers to daughters was no longer relevant to a new generation of women (Damon-Moore, 1994; and Lang, 1999).

As a result of these changes, particularly the professionalization of housework, the third section of this chapter will look at the evolution of the role of ‘experts’ in service journalism. This chapter will conclude with a synopsis of how service journalism has evolved in women’s magazines and what this evolution tells us about its practice.

There is no single work that traces the history and evolution of service journalism. A number of scholars (Damon-Moore, 1994; Friedan, 1997; Lang, 1999; Scanlon, 1995; and Walker, 2000) refer to it in passing but never attempt to define it or consider reasons for its existence. Nonetheless, it has clearly maintained a place in the women’s periodical press since the late-nineteenth century. To outline this history, this section draws primarily on the history of women’s magazines, especially the work of Damon-Moore (1994), Lang (1999) and Walker (2000).

Damon-Moore (1994) provides a comprehensive comparative history of *Ladies’ Home Journal* and *Saturday Evening Post*. While her main purpose is to examine gender construction through a comparison of the female-oriented *Ladies’ Home Journal* with the male-oriented *Saturday Evening Post* from 1880 to 1910, Damon-Moore (1994) also provides a snapshot of how service magazines have evolved in North America through

her study of *Ladies' Home Journal*, a periodical which has arguably served as the blueprint for the majority of successful women's service magazines.

Lang (1999) focuses her study on female journalists in Canada from 1880 to 1945. She is primarily interested in newspaper journalists and the women's pages in Canadian newspapers, but she also provides one of the few thoughtful explorations of service writing and provides insight into why service journalism was useful to Canadian women. Lang (1999) also considers the prejudice toward the content of women's sections, judged by many to be "soft" news and therefore not valuable or deserving respect, but, as Lang (1999, 144) writes, "the kind of information that oiled the daily wheels of life."

Walker (2000), on the other hand, picks up the study of women's magazines in the 1940s and 1950s. She looks at the multiple roles of women's magazines and pays special attention to their roles as advisers, a key component to service journalism. Walker (2000) also devotes a chapter of her book to the role of experts and considers the messages they provided to readers about all aspects of their world, including motherhood. Walker (2000) contends that women's magazines have evolved as a result of significant changes in society, particularly industrialization. It is now interesting to consider this evolution and its effect on service journalism.

The evolution of women's magazines

The first women's magazines did not look like today's incarnation of the genre. They were not encyclopedias of how-to articles on cooking, home decorating, parenting, personal finance and health. The first magazines did not expect women to be guardians of their families' welfare or the chief consumers of their families' goods. Rather, the earliest publications were mostly filled with fiction and fashion, an ideal combination for the

upper-class woman with servants and few domestic responsibilities. As Winship (1987, 54) writes, “[i]nterestingly, it was mainly fiction on which the early-nineteenth century periodicals depended for their amusement.”

The first recorded periodical to specifically address women was *Ladies’ Mercury*, which originated in Britain in 1693. Eventually, American women of the nineteenth century could choose from a small number of periodicals aimed at their lifestyles and interests. One of the most successful of the period was *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, which was first published in 1830. In 1837, *Godey’s* merged with *Ladies’ Magazine*, which was founded in 1828 by Sarah Josepha Hale. As Walker (2000, 32) argues:

With a circulation of 150,000 by 1860, *Godey’s* was the first American magazine for women, and there is much to suggest that its primary readership was at least upper middle class. The magazine printed elaborate sketches of the latest fashions but seldom offered practical advice on everyday tasks, assuming that its readers ... had servants to tend to cleaning and cooking.

Practical advice about the performance of everyday household tasks was available throughout the nineteenth century in such books as Lydia Maria Child’s *The American Frugal Housewife* (1825) and Catherine Beecher’s *Treatise on Domestic Economy* (1846 and 1868). As Winship (1987, 23) writes, the earliest women’s magazines “aimed to aid upper-class women fill their lengthy, leisured days – these magazines were no guides to homemaking.” Homemaking became a staple of the periodical press by the late-nineteenth century, however, with the advent of *Ladies’ Home Journal*.

In 1879, publisher Cyrus Curtis started *Tribune and Farmer*, a four-page weekly magazine. He assembled clippings about women’s issues, such as cooking, child-rearing, sewing and housekeeping, from other sources in a column entitled, Woman and the Home. His wife, Louisa Knapp Curtis, soon took over this women’s column, noting the column’s distinct lack of a female voice. Before long it became the most popular section

of *Tribune and Farmer* (Scanlon, 1995). As a result of this success, in December 1883 Curtis launched *Ladies' Home Journal*, an entire magazine geared to women. Knapp Curtis was the first editor of the periodical. She understood the lives of middle- to upper-class American women and the topics that interested them. In 1889 she resigned, however, and was replaced by Edward Bok. By January 1904, the circulation of *Ladies' Home Journal* reached one million (Scanlon, 1995). As Damon-Moore (1994, 115) argues, “[t]he lines of the magazine world were thus being drawn, with middle-class monthlies outnumbering and outselling both more and less expensive publications.”

When Curtis selected Bok as editor, he chose a man who, as Scanlon (1995, 199) writes, “saw it as his duty to assist women in the management of their homes and lives, to provide a service of advice and instruction.” The early twentieth century was a time when the middle class became the main target of women’s magazines and housework became a pursuit to be applauded (a trend that will be discussed later in this chapter). This was also a time when, as Damon-Moore (1994, 68) argues, “[t]his notion that women needed help was institutionalized.” In addition, the tone of magazines such as *Ladies' Home Journal* shifted from sharing advice between women under Knapp Curtis to instructing women under Bok. As Damon-Moore (1994, 69) argues, “Bok’s service departments were more numerous and more specialized than Knapp Curtis’s had been. There was a genuine respect in Knapp’s *Ladies' Home Journal* for the opinions of readers, and there was a give-and-take relationship between the magazine and its audience.” And, as Damon-Moore (1994, 69) continues, “Bok not only took traditional service departments on housekeeping and made them into advice-dispensing columns; he also expanded the notion of service by creating specialized advice columns on living well in general.” This

shift from women sharing information with one another to women receiving information from experts will be discussed later in this chapter.

The late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were marked by an increase in service journalism in magazines as well as in newspapers. In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, Canadian newspapers included information that the editors considered to be of interest to women readers and presented the information in a specific women's section. As Lang (1999, 142) writes, "[w]ell-educated and well-informed women were mortified at the suggestion that an ordinary newspaper was beyond their comprehension." It is important to note, however, that these new women's pages began appearing in a time when publications started targeting the middle class generally and, more and more, middle-class women specifically. Many of these middle-class women would not have received the same level of education as those "mortified" by the women's pages. The women's pages published material that was targeted at housewives and mothers and not the upper-class or well-educated set.

As Lang (1999, 163) argues, "[s]ervice' was the watchword of the women's page, and in the name of serving their readers, women's page editors furnished everything from the price of carrots to marriage counselling." In Canada, all kinds of women turned to these pages for insight and guidance. Some were looking for guidance on how to act in the face of changing social norms, some were looking for a sense of sisterhood, and some were looking for basic how-to information about a new way of life. As Lang (1999, 164) argues, "[r]ecent immigrants to Canadian farms – women who may never have cooked before, let alone transformed a prairie sod hut into a home – used the women's page as their primer on how to conduct an arduous and isolated way of life." Service journalism provided women with well-researched and valuable information about, as Lang (1999,

164) recounts, “home finance, new standards of hygiene and efficiency in home management, modern principles of child-rearing, and hints about the changing modes of cooking, decorating, and entertaining.” While some feminist scholars (Damon-Moore, 1994; and Friedan, 1997) argue that the notion that women needed instruction was “institutionalized,” presumably by publishers and advertisers eager to submit women to a life of consumption, the fact that women read and subscribed to the practical content provided by service journalism must not be overlooked. As Lang (1999, 177) writes:

Conscientiously service oriented, ‘The Home-Maker’ page [in the *Toronto Globe*] was, according to one newspaper survey, the single most popular feature in any Canadian newspaper. Readers who admitted that they could not afford to take a newspaper during the lean years of the Depression nevertheless wrote in to tell Mona Purser, the editor, that kind neighbours saved her page to pass on to those who might otherwise miss it. This and similar features specialized in cost-cutting devices, shopping strategies, and alternative recipes designed to help readers cope with the collective stringency of the Depression and war years.

While a number of newspapers in Canada produced a women’s section, the number of pages devoted to women dwindled as the twentieth century progressed, possibly due to the increasing availability of women’s periodicals. Magazines quickly took over the role of adviser due in part to their “inviting, aesthetically pleasing format” (Scanlon, 1995, 12). Magazines in the United States had already enjoyed tremendous success at the turn of the century. As Damon-Moore (1994, 114) writes, “[i]n 1865 there had been one copy of a monthly magazine for every 10 people; by 1905 there were three for every four people, or about four to every household.” Despite competition from American publications, the periodical press in Canada was about to heat up.

The first modern women’s magazine published in Canada for a national anglophone audience was *Canadian Home Journal*, which was published from 1905 to 1959 (Sutherland, 1989). *Everywoman’s World*, whose editorial content was similar to *Canadian Home Journal*, started in 1914 but only lasted eight years. Next on the scene

was *Canadian Homes and Gardens* from 1924 to 1962. It was aimed at an “exclusive clientele” and was bought in 1925 by J.B. Maclean, later founder of the Maclean Hunter Publishing Co. (Sutherland, 1989). In 1927 Maclean started *Mayfair*, which targeted upper-class women with ample spending power (Sutherland, 1989). The next year, Maclean Hunter founded *Chatelaine*, which still exists today. Its mandate was to include all Canadian women, not just a privileged few, and feature a mix of fiction and articles dealing with social problems, the changing structure of family life, fashion trends and classic service departments such as food, crafts and gardening (Sutherland, 1989).

Service journalism had found a home in women’s magazines, and readers valued the content of the service departments, but what is unclear is why the popularity of service journalism had been steadily increasing since the late-nineteenth century. The next section will consider some social changes that lead to its popularity.

Influences on the evolution of service journalism

The success of the women’s periodical press and its reliance on service journalism may be attributed to several phenomena spanning the late-eighteenth to early twentieth centuries.

First, in addition to creating a new middle class, the industrial revolution also changed the role of the household. As Ehrenreich and English (2005, 156) argue, “[e]ighteenth and early nineteenth century rural women (and most women then were rural) weren’t just making apple pies and embroidered samplers; they were making bread, butter, cloth, clothing, soap, candles, medicines, and other things essential to their families’ survival.” Women were so busy producing that they had little time for daily laundry, weekly cleanings and trying out new recipes, the tasks that today would be considered *homemaking*. As the industrial revolution took hold, families moved to towns

in search of paid work, and women experienced significant changes in their lifestyles, such as purchasing ready-made clothing and cleaning products, sending children to school and eventually buying canned, processed food.

While this change may have been unsettling for upper-class women, it is important to note that working-class women – a group magazines have never targeted due to their unattractiveness to advertisers because of their lack of spending power – managed the change by working in factories rather than in the home. Suddenly they could be paid to make clothing or soap. The void that would soon be the dream of advertisers – more leisure time at home meant more time to consume – was affecting the new urban middle-class women the most. As Ehrenreich and English (2005, 158) explain, “[w]ith less and less to *make* in the home, it seemed as if there would soon be nothing to *do* in the home. Educators, popular writers and even leading social scientists fretted about the growing void in the home.” With industrialization came the trend toward professionalization, not only for doctors and lawyers but for housewives as well. The precursor to creating “Occupation: Housewife” (Friedan, 1997) took place in the pre-war period. As Ehrenreich and English (2005, 156) argue, “[t]he new ideal carved out in the first decade or so of the century would not be the political activist or social reformer but the housewife. ... Bustling, efficient – intellectually as well as emotionally engaged in her tasks – the housewife could stand as a model for all women, not just the wealthier ones.”

The home and what was – or was not – taking place in it was becoming a concern for social scientists. The majority of society, including *Ladies' Home Journal's* Edward Bok, encouraged women to maintain reign over the private sphere of the home. Indeed some women took exception with the fact that what had been their contribution to daily life, such as preparing food from scratch and making clothing, was now being conducted

in factories. While feminists may have seen this as a time for them to join the ranks of men working in the public sphere, other women took it as an opportunity to raise the bar for housework. As Ehrenreich and English (2005, 166) explain, “[i]t was only natural that the homemaking experts would organize to elevate their area of expertise beyond the stage of recipes and household hints and onto the higher ground of scientific professionalism.” Society, including popular women’s magazines, agreed with the latter group determined to further domestic science.

Second, the work of taking care of domestic life was transferred from servants and hired help to housewives. As Walker (2000, 104) explains, “[p]rior to the 1920s, housekeeping and child care were acknowledged to be chores that families of sufficient means readily hired servants to perform.” Just as modern magazines are aspirational in that they show fashion that is beyond the average reader’s budget or recipes with ingredients beyond the average reader’s repertoire, magazines in the early twentieth century showed households with servants to cook, clean and take care of children, even though most families could not afford hired help. This was the image the magazines sold.

Industrialization affected the availability of hired help. As Ehrenreich and English (2005, 183) write, “[g]ood servants were getting scarcer all the time, as more and more working-class women opted for factory work or nursing over the low pay and indignity of domestic service.” As a result, most housewives assumed responsibility for all aspects of homemaking. Being solely responsible for the management of the home was the new trend facing women, and the best way to sell a trend is to make it attractive and appealing. If domestic work was the new experience of women, the magazines needed to affirm and romanticize the experience with instructions and tips about all matters pertaining to home.

Third, women were facing an increased availability of products. As Walker (2000, 105) writes, “[a]t the same time that housework was touted for its creative and emotional rewards, the homemaker was nearing the end of a long transition from producing goods (food, clothing, cleansers) to consuming them.” Magazines had previously instructed women on canning, for example, but these new products meant the magazines needed to instruct women on being consumers and how to buy canned goods, not make them. Much of this instruction came from the advertisements in the magazines. Magazines, being businesses first and foremost, needed advertising dollars, and advertisers needed women’s magazines to reach potential consumers. As Walker (2000, 36) argues:

All four of the magazines with the largest circulation by 1940 originated in some sort of commercial impulse: advertisers’ interest primarily served to inspire Curtis to change the women’s section of his newspaper to [*Ladies’ Home Journal*] within a few months in 1883; *McCall’s*, begun by James and Belle McCall in 1876 as *The Queen, Illustrated Magazine of Fashion*, started as a circular to sell paper dress patterns; *Women’s Home Companion* and *Good Housekeeping* were established in 1873 and 1885, respectively, as mail-order catalogs.

Three of the four magazines listed by Walker (2000) still exist today (*Women’s Home Companion* ceased publication in 1957), and their survival continues to depend on advertising revenue. It is important to note that while advertisers and publishers no doubt benefitted from one another’s success and from convincing women of the necessity of these products, women were also curious about the products coming into the market at the time. By the post-war period, advertisements in women’s magazines promised that ‘modern conveniences,’ such as washing machines and cake mixes, for example, would make their lives easier, whereas they actually raised the bar for housework. Clothing, for example, was more plentiful now that it was purchased rather than sewn, and laundry was an easier task with washing machines, so the expectation of cleaner clothes followed. The same may be said for the cleanliness of a home or the variety in meals.

Fourth, information that had previously been passed down from mothers to daughters was no longer relevant to a new generation of women. Whereas in the middle of the nineteenth century mothers could teach their daughters to bake bread, for example, daughters now needed to understand how to buy bread. From our modern perspective, it is easy to judge both the women and the magazines as simple-minded, especially if women could be confused about buying bread. It may be compared to the confusion of arriving in a new country before becoming familiar with that country's way of life. A little instruction is helpful. Magazines not only instructed women on products but also provided instruction on less tangible pursuits. As Lang (1999, 163) explains:

Where once a homemaker might have prided herself on her homemade bread, clothes, and even cosmetics, she increasingly judged her efficiency on how well she performed in the marketplace of consumption. As this marketplace expanded and became more elaborate, in the process transforming the nature of her work, she turned to the home page [in newspapers] for guidance.

Similarly, new appliances meant mothers were not versed in the everyday tasks of their daughters. As Damon-Moore (1994, 22) argues, “[t]hese new tasks and others meant that there were larger gaps between the experiences of one generation of women and the next, a problem that was exacerbated in many cases by the physical separation of the generations resulting from migration.” Magazines were taking over the role of adviser by offering advice and helpful hints that were relevant to the everyday experiences of women, but the advice offered in service magazines focused not only on the home.

As Lang (1999, 170) writes, “[t]he modern career woman needed more up-to-date advice about how to present herself in this public world than her own mother could supply.” One of the problems for women in the mid-twentieth century was a problem of identity. Magazines may be a secondary source of socialization, but their accessibility and visibility make them an influential source of learning (Martin, 1997). As Friedan (1997,

72) argues, “American women are so unsure of who they should be that they look to this glossy public image to decide every detail of their lives. They look for the image they will no longer take from their mothers.” What this shows is that magazines evolved into the role of adviser as a result of changes in society.

As a result of changes in the everyday lives of women – moving from farmsteads to downtown apartments and then to suburbs, isolation in the private sphere instead of engagement in the public sphere, children at school instead of being at home all day, and heftier expectations for the cleanliness and all-around presentation of family and home – women yearned for the camaraderie that women’s magazines provided. As Korinek (2000, 179) explains, “[t]his material fostered the notion of a ‘women’s network’ and a distinctive women’s culture through the presumption of the commonality of women’s experience.” This sense of collective knowing changed, however, as women and men, who called themselves ‘experts’ in managing the home, took over the editorial reigns of women’s magazines.

Laying the foundation for modern service journalism

Much like newspapers, women’s service magazines depended on the knowledge and credibility of experts to bring legitimacy to the information the publications presented to their readers. These experts could be professors, doctors, representatives of bureaus or even experienced homemakers. Much like today, these experts added validity to the content of service magazines and replaced sharing information between generations. As Korinek (2000, 217) argues, “[n]ot only were experts a staple of women’s magazines, but suburban North American women were becoming increasingly reliant on them as replacements for the more traditional familial guides.”

By the early twentieth century, women's roles as parents, homemakers and consumers received a great deal of attention from magazines, and the practice of specialty journalism had begun to change, especially in areas connected with homemaking. Experts in specific fields were also journalists. As Lang (1999, 182) explains, “[n]o longer was housekeeping advice dressed up in story form, adorned by fine writing, or inserted in chatty essays. The emphasis now was on information and accuracy.”

Indeed, it is easy to imagine editors and writers researching to provide housewives with the most useful and usable information they could muster. Christine Frederick, who wrote for *Ladies' Home Journal* in the early twentieth century, was one of the first writers to offer a scientific approach to housework. As Ehrenreich and English (2005, 178) write, “[m]uch of what she had to say was useful, though hardly startling: ironing boards should be at the proper height to avoid bending; appliances should be chosen with care; schedules should be made for daily and weekly chores; etc.” No doubt Frederick's service articles did not garner the same respect as news reporting or the same awe as science reporting, areas held almost exclusively by male journalists and aimed at male readers. But, as Ehrenreich and English (2005, 178) write, “a record sixteen hundred women wrote in for further information in one month.” As women's magazines and the media in general began providing their female audiences with more service-oriented pieces, the demand for useful and usable information grew. A similar example of the thirst for usable information may be found in early Canadian radio.

Kate Aitken, a Canadian radio personality in the 1930s and 1940s “exemplified [service journalism] at its zenith” (Lang, 1999, 185). Early radio's daytime listening public was comprised of mostly homemakers with an appetite for practical information. As Lang (1999, 187) explains, “[Aitken] became ‘the busiest woman in Canada,’

answering 260,000 letters a year and giving 600 broadcasts to five million listeners, all about baby care, marketing, recipes and general household lore, and proving that the Canadian appetite for expert advice had no limit.” This illustrates that women wanted practical information about all aspects of the home, and they wanted the media to provide the information. As Walker (2000, 54) argues:

The shift in the 1940s to practical guidance for everyday domestic life received its impetus from the new prominence given to the domestic in American culture and, perhaps most insistently, from the exigencies of World War II itself, which presented a host of problems to be addressed, including the rationing of products and materials, child care for working women, and an increase in single-parent households.

By the time the United States entered World War II in 1941, the magazines’ role as adviser to women was well established in Canada and the U.S. and continues to be present in service journalism today.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided a foundation for understanding how service journalism has evolved through women’s magazines. The earliest American women’s magazines of the nineteenth century provided entertainment for upper-class readers by showcasing fashion and fiction. Following the effects of industrialization, however, society experienced a number of changes, most importantly the emergence of a new middle class. Publishers, such as *Ladies’ Home Journal’s* Cyrus Curtis, were intrigued by this new group of women because of their attractiveness to advertisers, and women readers were easy to target because of their appetite for useful information about homemaking. This appetite for information arose from a number of societal changes, such as products being manufactured in factories rather than in the home, a decreased availability of hired help, the creation of homemaking or domestic science as a profession and the drastic changes

between generations that meant younger generations could no longer turn to older generations for advice about housework. Magazines soon took on the role of adviser due in part to their accessibility and prevalence. While newspapers tried to attract women readers with women's pages, it was difficult for them to compete with the glossy pages and striking photographs of magazines.

Some of the key components of service journalism were shaped during the early years of women's magazines. Fiction and fanciful fashion spreads gave way to practical advice about such domestic tasks as child-rearing and canning. Even though useful information was at first presented between the lines of lively writing, within a few decades readers demanded useful and usable information presented in a no-nonsense manner. Readers also wanted information that reflected their experiences, and who better to provide that information than female writers with first-hand knowledge? Experts soon paved the way for specialty journalism, which is much like service journalism today.

This chapter has outlined the history of service journalism by drawing on the works of scholars who have studied the history of women's magazines from the late-nineteenth century through to the mid-twentieth century. Many of these scholars refer to service departments and service features. They fleetingly refer to service journalism but fail to provide any in-depth understanding of what differentiates a service piece from a straight news story, for example. It is clear that service was a vital component of women's magazines since the dawn of *Ladies' Home Journal*, but what is not clear is why service journalism was and continues to be so attractive to readers and so lucrative for publishers. The next chapter will provide a functional understanding of service journalism and will seek to provide some explanations for its wide appeal.

Chapter 3

Functional and Conceptual Perspectives on Service Journalism

The previous chapter traced the historical evolution of women's magazines as a means to understanding how service journalism has evolved into its modern form. As Korinek (2000, 178) argues, "[w]omen's magazines are specific genres, which, if they intend to keep and attract new fans, must follow certain conventions. One of the prime conventions of women's magazines is the inclusion of service department material." While women's magazines provide a valuable forum within which to follow the historical development of service journalism, it must be stressed that service journalism is not a genre limited to women's magazines. Instead, service journalism is a genre that may be used to cover a wide range of issues and is more about style than content.

To this end, this chapter will broaden the study of service journalism beyond women's magazines to include a consideration of service journalism more generally. One example of a general-interest magazine is *New York*, which was under the direction of editor Clay Felker from 1968 to 1977. Felker is credited with pioneering service journalism (Scott, 1987). A profile of Felker in the *New York Times* opens: "Few journalists have left a more enduring imprint on late 20th-century journalism – an imprint that was unabashedly mimicked even as it was being mocked – than Clay Felker" (Carmody, 1995, 1). This quote suggests the editorial elites have criticized service journalism as much as they have used it to bolster revenue. As Lockhart (2008, 56) writes, "[i]t wasn't enough for a magazine to be informative and entertaining – it also had to be perceived as useful. As *New York* journalist Michael Wolff wrote in an anniversary issue, 'Felker's magazine wasn't so much a guide to the city as it was a guide to being cleverer, hipper and more in-the-know.'" This example illustrates how service journalism

contributes to the repertoire of emotional learning and connected knowing (Hermes, 1995). As Scott (1987, 9) argues, “[t]he most requested reprint of any *New York* [magazine] article deals with getting around midtown Manhattan in bad weather by using subterranean walkways and passages under Radio City and elsewhere.” This example shows how useful information, which contributes to the repertoire of practical knowledge (Hermes, 1995), shows readers how to solve a grievance (Eide and Knight, 1999).

Scholars (Damon-Moore, 1994; Ferguson, 1983; Friedan, 1987; Korinek, 2000; and Winship, 1987) and practitioners are all aware of the existence of service journalism, and there is no doubt that it is a popular form of journalism with readers, but there has been little systematic scholarly effort to understand service journalism from functional and conceptual perspectives. Therefore the goal of this chapter is to first lay the foundation for a functional understanding of service journalism, and then develop an understanding of why service journalism is so appealing. Just as tracing the history of service journalism in Chapter 2 meant drawing from a variety of scholars interested in women’s magazines, constructing a functional understanding of service journalism requires drawing from mostly non-academic sources. This section will draw mainly from Scott (1987) and Ranly (1992, 1993 and 1997) from the University of Missouri School of Journalism. As presented in Chapter 1, the author’s own experience as a writer and editor of service journalism will also contribute to this section of this chapter.

The second section of this chapter will outline key concepts that help explain the appeal of service journalism. To consider reasons for service journalism’s wide appeal, this section will examine the media’s role as adviser and how audiences look to media to provide solutions for individual grievances and risks, a concept developed by Eide and Knight (1999). The section will then link the literature on grievance and risk with the

work of Thorngate and Plouffe (1987) and Thorngate (1990) on the attention economy, which argues that consumers place value on knowledge in order to determine to what they pay attention to. This chapter will conclude by outlining how those values are linked to key concepts in service journalism, which will lead to a consideration of the relationship between service journalism and social constructionism in Chapter 4.

Functional perspectives on service journalism

Although service journalism has remained largely absent from journalism studies, a notable exception is the University of Missouri School of Journalism and the establishment of the Meredith Chair in Service Journalism in 1986. By institutionalizing the study of service journalism, the Meredith Corporation – publishers of such service standards as *Ladies' Home Journal*, *Better Homes and Gardens*, *Successful Farming* and *Fitness* – may have been seeking to legitimize the genre that had been disrespected by journalism studies for years. As Lockhart (2008, 56) writes, despite “service-heavy magazines dominating newsstands sales..., the editorial elite regards the category as entirely forgettable or, worse, trite and insipid.” The Meredith Chair was met with mixed reaction when it was first established. Some faculty considered service journalism to be a “soft niche within a news-oriented curriculum,” but that impression seemed “unfairly narrow, however, to those who taught it” (Weinberg, 2008, 206).

Byron Scott, Danita Allen and John Fennell have each held the Meredith Chair at different times and have made a commitment to expanding the study of service journalism. Scott (1987) was the first Meredith Chair and presented the following definition to the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication: “Service journalism is needed information, delivered in the right medium at the right time

in an understandable form and intended for immediate use by the audience” (1987, 2).

This definition presents some challenges to the understanding of service journalism.

First, it makes the user the arbiter of whether an article, for example, is service journalism or not, since only the user knows whether the time is right and whether the information is needed. While the role of the user is significant, a broader understanding should also consider the producer’s knowledge of the user, as discussed in Chapter 5. Second, Scott’s definition requires the information to be presented at the right time, but the timeliness of its application is not a crucial element. The article, for example, may prompt later action and not when it is initially read. Third, Scott’s understanding of *use* may be unnecessarily narrow. Service journalism may serve to inspire or provide a solution to a problem that is not immediately reconcilable. Research on readers of romance novels (Radway, 1984), for example, has found that readers turn to popular media for escape, while other research has shown that women turn to popular media for instruction on how to function socially and to benefit from a sense of shared experience and knowledge (Hermes, 1995), ideas that will be discussed more fully in later chapters. While Scott’s definition is a helpful departure point, these arguments highlight the importance of developing a more complete definition of service journalism.

This thesis defines service journalism as the following: Service journalism is a form of journalism that provides practical information relevant to a reader’s needs or wants and follows through on that provision by presenting the information in an accessible, comprehensible and enticing package that ultimately invites the reader to take some form of action as a result of the reading. Admittedly, the first part of this definition, which contains *practical* and *relevant*, is subjective and depends on the reader’s perception of the information. Possessing a comprehensive understanding of the reader is key to

producing service journalism that will be useful to that individual, which will be discussed more fully in Chapter 5. The second part of the definition of service journalism presented in this thesis will be discussed here.

As Arnold and Messenger (1989, 4) explain, “essential elements of every service journalism article are utility, need, format, availability and comprehension. If you give the readers this kind of information, you can expect some kind of action to result from the article.” Like any form of journalism, service journalism must present accurate and factual information about a specific topic, and almost any topic can be covered by service journalism. The information must be presented in an accessible manner that allows the reader to efficiently work through the material and quickly weave out what is most relevant to that individual. As Ranly (1992, 139) argues, “[b]ecause for most people the cliché ‘time is money’ happens to be true, tell them how much time it will take to do something or how much time your advice will save them.” An example of this may be found in the headline and deck (secondary headline), “Make Your Opinion Count: Maude Barlow, Doris Anderson and Judy Erola tell you how to speak up and get things done” (*Canadian Living*, March 1984, 104). This headline tells the reader that the information contained in the article will help the reader voice an opinion in the public sphere.

As a result of this need to communicate practical information quickly, narrative is rarely used in service journalism. *Better Homes and Gardens* of the 1950s, for example, enjoyed a circulation of 4.2 million. More readers meant more pages, and the editorial department decided to add more narrative to its content by scheduling special features. As Reuss (1974, 295) recounts, “[a]rticles such as these broke away from the service orientation that had been established at *Better Homes and Gardens* and brought excitement to staff members, but readers – the important audience – remained interested

primarily in features describing homes, foods and gardens.” Requiring a reader to sift through personal anecdotes, quotes and lines of impractical information steers the article away from utility, thereby softening its service focus. This custom of excluding narrative from service journalism is changing, however, as editors of service magazines are beginning to accept that sharing experiences is a form of service journalism – often called ‘soft’ service journalism – if it contributes to the “repertoire of emotional learning and connected knowing” (Hermes, 1995), which will be discussed more fully in Chapter 6. It is also changing as editors use service journalism to complement narratives, such as packaging the narrative with sidebars and resource information.

Packaging is a key component to service journalism because it employs devices that are designed to help the reader sort the information more efficiently and facilitates better comprehension. As highlighted in Figure 3.1 (see page 40), some of these devices include an explicit headline and deck that quickly explain the subject and goal of the story. Other common devices include subheads, which are mini headlines within the columns of text that show how the article is structured and allow the reader to locate, for example, the most relevant section; lists or sidebars, which are boxes of information designed to complement the main article by summarizing information or drawing attention to a specific point; charts, graphs and tables, which may visually complement the main article but may also actively involve the reader by encouraging the reader to write in the boxes, for example; and information boxes or web teasers, which outline where to find more information, either in books or via telephone numbers or through websites. As Ranly (1993, 339) explains, “[n]ot every service article has to contain all of these elements. But the more you include, the more usable your information becomes.”

Figure 3.1: Example of Service Journalism (*Canadian Living*, February 2006, 170-173)



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life | inspiration

Chances are there's a dream that's close to your heart. It may entail a climb up Mount Everest or it could be as straightforward as learning a second language. Here are seven easy-to-follow steps to make your dreams come true.

BY LAURIE MACKENZIE

CLARA HUGHES IS A DREAMER. THIS FEBRUARY THE 33-YEAR-OLD WINNIPEG NATIVE WILL STARE DOWN THE SPEED-SKATING TRACK AND CHASE HER LATEST DREAM: WINNING A MEDAL FOR CANADA AT THE WINTER OLYMPICS IN TORINO, ITALY.

Clara discovered her passion for speed skating when she watched Gaetan Bouchier glide through his final race at the 1988 Winter Olympics in Calgary. "I just felt something blossoming inside of me, and that was my dream." While Clara started skating at age three and competed at the provincial level, it took 14 years in periods that included a medal-winning stint in cycling to reach her dream. She won her first speed skating medal—a bronze—at the 2002 Winter Olympics. Along the journey Clara never questioned whether her dream was realistic. "I just focused on moving toward it every day. That's what I'm doing right now; just following my heart."

You may not be sheltering a secret desire to make it to the podium, but chances are there's a dream that's close to your heart. Our dreams—those inner desires that reflect our true passions and have the potential to bring us incredible joy—are as much as the dreamers themselves. Yours may be to travel to Kenya, earn an MBA or simply get your driver's licence. "A dream doesn't have to be big; it doesn't have to be important to everybody," says Debra Rosewater, coauthor of *Dreams Have No Expiry Date* (Random House Canada, 2006). "It just has to be something that resonates with you, that's consistent with your values and that gives you hope and pleasure."

No matter what the scope of your dream is, or what stage you're at in terms of your life or fulfilling your heart's desire, these steps will help your dreams come true.

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NAME IT
To get in touch with your dreams, sit down by yourself with no distractions so you can hear your own thoughts. Try to open up and be honest about what you feel. Expand your world to include all kinds of possibilities and let your spirit soar, says Ellen Goldfarb, a life coach based in Toronto. "I've always tried to listen to my first instinctual thought," says Clara. Then, at the beginning of each training season, she writes down a dream, such as winning a medal. During this process, put the idea of fantasy behind you, advise Rosewater and coauthor Laurie Gottlieb, because our dreams are only unreal until we articulate them, label them, validate them and make plans to implement them. So, whether you want to scale Mount Everest someday, launch a valuable community group or lead a campaign for a cause you hold dear, get a journal and jot it down.

SEE IT
Now that you've identified your dream Goldfarb suggests you sharpen your vision using an exercise she calls Vision 10: if whatever you want were to be a 10-out-of-10 experience, what would it look like? Picture it in your mind's eye. Clara's other dream-come-true was to live in the mountains surrounded by forest. She had come to know it so well that she described it to her real estate agent in detail. "I told him that I wanted to be on a small road that leads to a dirt road that leads to a smaller dirt road so nobody can find it." That's exactly what he found for me," says Clara, who lives in her dream home with her husband in Glen Sutton, Que.

FEEL IT
Once you can see your dream, it's time to feel it. "You've got to feel it to be it," says Goldfarb. In *What Would You Do If You Had No Fear?* (Publishers Group Canada, 2004), Diane Conway writes that she knows how she would feel in her dream home—once she finds it. "I realized I'd like to have bright



DREAM BIG

So your dream is to walk on the moon, or maybe you *oussu* acceptance speech is already written. Debra Rosewater, coauthor of *Dreams Have No Expiry Date* (Random House Canada, 2006), says that it's fine to have a larger-than-life dream as long as not fulfilling it doesn't make you unhappy. "These are dreams that are more in your reach than others, but that's the whole point of dreaming: it's about what you want to do, not what you can't do," says Ellen Goldfarb, a life coach.

WANT IT
The likelihood of realizing your dream depends on your motivation, and the motivation has to belong to you and no one else. Clara suggests asking yourself: When I am all alone will I still want to do this? She says that's truly when you know if you're living out your own dreams. "When I am pursuing a dream, I step back and think, why am I doing this? Am I doing this because I want to do it? Or because I'm doing it because it's authentic inside of me?"

In their book, Gottlieb and Rosewater suggest you ask yourself the following questions to evaluate whether a particular dream is the one you want to be pursuing.
* Am I motivated when I talk about my dream?
* Am I working hard on my dream?
* Even though I feel stress, is the dream worth pursuing?

* Can I see myself inside the dream?
* Does my dream make me smile?
If you answer yes to most of these, then you are on the right track.

IMAGINE IT
Before an athlete, such as Clara, steps into her arena—a rink, a track or a pool—she visualizes the motions she will perform. "You want to get so good at [visualizing that] you feel like you've experienced your dream before it even comes to life," says Goldfarb, who suggests taking 10 minutes before going to sleep each night to visualize and attach your dream into your subconscious. "Visualizing exactly what living your dream would look like can be a tool that produces unfailing results," adds Conway.

FACE IT

"We all have fears that we have to break through to begin living our dreams," says Conway. Our biggest fears—regret and inner criticism—are actually the biggest incentives to realizing our dreams, says Rosewater. That said, you need to manage your fears. First, recognize them. For instance, do you worry that realizing your dream may be too hard or take too long? Second, only share your dream with supporters. "At the beginning dreams are delicate because of our own insecurities and self-doubt. You want to nurture the dream and get it to a place where it's healthy," says Goldfarb.

LET IT HAPPEN

Check in with your dream every so often. If it begins to feel like a burden, Goldfarb says you're no longer dreaming. Perhaps your dream is to start an interior decorating business, but after a little research you realize it's going to take 80 hours a week and that prospect is less than desirable. You may modify your dream and decide you want to work as a designer for someone in the field instead. As Clara says, don't put limits on your dreams. "I'm always moving forward. No matter how difficult it is at the time I always know that I am moving toward something special."

HOW ONE WOMAN MADE IT HAPPEN

When Susan Polner returned to Canada after living and working abroad for 17 years, she came home with a dream: to break down the barriers between ethnic communities. Susan, 39, realized part of that dream when her documentary *Identities* aired. "Mother Tongue," about the history of ethnic women in Canada, began airing last September. "Having a dream is like having a goalpost to aim to," she says. "It gives you focus and the passion and power to overcome those times when things aren't going right." It took three years from the film's conception for the documentary to materialize. Susan says she had no idea how to start, whom to speak to or how to secure funding. The financial hurdle was the most difficult to overcome. "It was all self-fund, I accepted I didn't have the money to make the show and I didn't know where I was going to get it," says Susan. But after using her own money to produce a pilot, she secured funding from two small Canadian broadcasters. Herita Gas Canada eventually followed suit.

Susan says it's easy to get comforted and discouraged, especially when friends, loved ones and even society dictate what your dreams should be. Her advice: "Don't listen to people who say you can't do it."

ON THE NET
To overcome five startling obstacles that keep you from realizing your dreams, visit www.canadianliving.com.

THE AUTHENTIC DREAM

REQUIREMENTS OF A DREAM	STRONGLY AGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	DISAGREE
Meaningful to me			
Consistent with my values			
Resonates with who I really am			
Mine, not somebody else's			
Gives direction for my future			
Realistic			
Captures my passions and interests			
Makes me feel good about myself			
Makes me feel joyful and glad			

Check off the statements in the table above. If you strongly agree, give yourself two points; somewhat agree, one point; disagree, zero. Tally up your points.

If your total score is between: 14–18 Congratulations! You have found your authentic dream and you are on your way. 6–13 You are almost at your authentic dream, but check what requirements are not being met. Your score suggests that you have some requirements. Look over each item to see what characteristics your dream is not satisfying. 0–5 You have not yet tapped into your authentic dream. But do not worry—these things take time.

Reprinted from *Dreams Have No Expiry Date: A Practical and Inspiring Road Map for How to Live a Change of Your Fantasy* by Laurie Gottlieb, PhD, and Debra Rosewater, with Copyright © 2004 Susan Gottlieb and Debra Rosewater. Published by Random House Canada. Reproduced by arrangement with the Publisher. All rights reserved.

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The benefit of packaging a story in this way was highlighted by a 2007 study conducted by the Poynter Institute in St. Petersburg, Florida. The co-directors of the study were Sara Quinn, visual journalism faculty member of the Poynter Institute, and Pegie Stark Adam, affiliate faculty member of Poynter. The study compared three story prototypes for both an online and broadsheet news format and revealed interesting findings about the effect of packaging on both interest and comprehension.

Each prototype presented a news story about bird flu. The articles were factually identical but, as presented in Figures 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4 (see pages 42-44), the information was presented in three different ways. As Stark Adam et al (2007, 1) explain:

Prototype 1 was conventional, with headline, narrative and photograph. Prototype 2 contained a narrative story with some of the information broken out in a map and some in a fact box. Prototype 3 was very visual with no traditional narrative. It featured alternative story forms – a map, a Q&A, a numbers chart and other graphic storytelling.

Each participant in the study read only one prototype and was not told that he or she would be tested on the information. Participants were then given a questionnaire about the information presented in the stories and asked a series of questions about their attitudes toward the version they read. Their findings supported their hypothesis that short text, especially with visual elements, boosts comprehension. As Quinn and Stark Adam (2007, 3) present, “[i]n both the print and online [groups], subjects who answered the most questions correctly had read the version of the story with the most alternative structure – no traditional narrative.” In addition to comprehension, the study also found an effect on attention. On average the study found that Prototype 3 (Figure 3.4, see page 44), with no traditional narrative, saw 34 per cent more visual attention than Prototype 1 (Figure 3.2, see page 42). The findings of the study clearly reinforce the importance of packaging, particular its affect on comprehension and attracting the attention of readers.

Figure 3.2: EyeTracking the News – Prototype 1 (Stark Adam et al, 2007)

2A

World

IN BRIEF



Nashville's No. 1

By Lisa Greene

...the Nashville area...

Cell phone? Buy phone!

...cell phone usage...



Name a blimp

...blimp naming contest...

...beer advertisement...

...tough Byrd...



...Who would believe it?...

...cell phone advertisement...



A worker diagnoses of dead chickens, believed to be infected with the H7 strain of the bird flu virus at a farm on the outskirts of North Tindbergen, England. Concerns are rising that the virus is heading west to the U.S. sooner than anticipated.

Those ducks at the park could turn deadly

By Lisa Greene

As a new H7N9 virus strain spreads in Asia, a deadly flu pandemic is feared to be just a matter of time away.



The 1918 influenza pandemic was the deadliest outbreak in history, yet the mortality rate was only 2 percent. (With this flu) the mortality rate is 50 percent. That's what's suddenly grabbed people's attention.

Dr. Gova Polonsky, director of the Mayo Clinic Vaccine Research Group and a member of the advisory committee on influenza for the Federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

...the 1918 influenza pandemic... the mortality rate was only 2 percent. (With this flu) the mortality rate is 50 percent. That's what's suddenly grabbed people's attention.

...Wuhan, China... the virus is spreading... the mortality rate is 50 percent.

...the H7N9 virus... the mortality rate is 50 percent. That's what's suddenly grabbed people's attention.

...the H7N9 virus... the mortality rate is 50 percent. That's what's suddenly grabbed people's attention.

...the H7N9 virus... the mortality rate is 50 percent. That's what's suddenly grabbed people's attention.

I swear that was my cell phone

...I swear that was my cell phone... the sound was so realistic...

...I swear that was my cell phone... the sound was so realistic...

...I swear that was my cell phone... the sound was so realistic...



That ringing sound is all in your head, but you're not crazy. — New York Times

Figure 3.4: EyeTracking the News – Prototype 3 (Stark Adam et al, 2007)

2A
World

IN BRIEF



Nashville's No. 1

Kiplinger's Personal Finance

Cell phone? Buy phone!



Name a blimp

And you, dreamer: Jim Libby, Paul's, Robert of Essex, Paul of America, Spook of Ecthemore, Spook of America, Spook of Innovation... The Spook of Now

Here for beer? Read on

One tough Byrd



Robert C. Byrd

Who would believe it?

SPECIAL REPORT: BIRD FLU

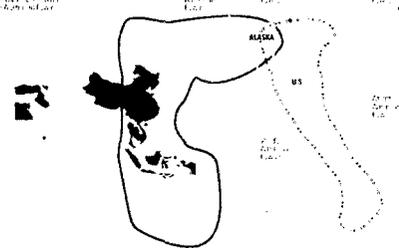
A DEADLY INVASION?

The summer, scientists are keeping their eyes on the skies. Why? Bird flu. A potent new bird could potentially spread the deadly disease into the United States. **Here's what's known now about that potential threat and about the disease itself.**

Compiled by Lisa Greene, staff writer

How the virus could spread

U.S.S. (H5N1) virus could be carried by birds from Asia to the U.S. via the Gulf of Mexico. The virus could also be carried by birds from Asia to the U.S. via the Gulf of Mexico.



The World Health Organization reports that scientists are increasingly convinced that at least some waterfowl are carrying the deadly H5N1 avian flu virus, sometimes over long distances, and introducing the virus to poultry flocks in areas that lie along their migratory routes.

Source: BBC.com

Your questions answered

What is it and how did it start?



The 1918 Spanish Flu pandemic killed millions around the world. A powerful flu strain today could kill as many as 100 million people, experts predict.

What's the status of the outbreak now?

Can I catch it from a bird?

That sounds scary. How many could die?

What's being done in case it does spread to humans?

What about our food? Is eating poultry safe?

Didn't something like that happen before?

How many people normally die from the flu each year?

What else?

Where can I get more information?

So what makes this flu so deadly?

Why are they so worried?

Sources: KRT, Los Angeles Times, CDC, pbs.org/npr

A scary march

WHAT THEY'RE SAYING:

"The 1918 pandemic was widespread, and yet the mortality rate was only 2 percent. (With this flu) the mortality rate is 50 percent. That's what's so deadly about this pandemic."

Dr. Greg Poland, director of the Mayo Clinic Vaccine Research Group and a member of the advisory committee on vaccines for the National Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.



By the numbers

1,500-3,000	40 million
20,000	2 percent
48	50 percent
36,000	
229	26 million
131	
200 million	81 million
2 million to 100 million	

The headline of a service article entices the reader by explicitly telling what may be gained by reading the article and often quantifies that expectation with numbers, such as 10 Easy Steps to.... An example of an explicit headline is “Would You Give Your Teen a Job? Here’s how to send your kids into the work world prepared” (*Canadian Living*, March 1995, 85). The headline tells the reader that the article will outline how to prepare teenagers for paid work. If the reader is the parent of a teenager, and that teen is interested in working outside the home, this headline and deck may appeal to that person. As Arnold and Messenger (1989, 4) explain, “[y]ou have to make readers actually sit down and *read* your article before you can expect them to follow the advice you give them.”

Service journalism further entices the reader by talking directly to the reader with the use of the pronoun *you*, for example “Start Your Own Business: 5 women tell how” (*Canadian Living*, October 1979, 33). As Ranly (1992, 139) explains, “[t]he use of the second person and the contraction (you’ve) makes the passage personal, conversational and engaging.” The second person also personalizes a service article, making it a conversation between friends or counsel from a trusted adviser. As will be presented later in this chapter, the notion of trust is crucial to the success of service journalism.

A good example of a service piece is the how-to format. Two early examples of this format is “How I Made My Country Kitchen Efficient” in the July 1913 issue of *Ladies’ Home Journal* (Scanlon, 1995, 74) and “How to Save Pennies and Food” in the April 1948 issue of *Good Housekeeping* (Walker, 2000, 148). It is just as easy to imagine the following headlines: How to Lobby Your Local MP or How to Write a Thesis. A how-to headline allows the reader to quickly assess whether the article is appealing and worthy of reading because it explains in just a few words what the reader will receive from reading the piece by addressing a particular grievance or risk (Eide and Knight, 1999).

Ranly (1992) argues that service journalism is a different approach to journalism, one that produces useful, usable and used information, but an approach that can be applied to any style of journalism, such as investigative reporting. While traditional reporting is about information, service journalism is about the application of information. As Ranly (1992, 138) argues, service journalism is “an approach to presenting information that: quickly shows the reader that the information is useful; gives information to the reader in the most usable way; and tells the reader how to take action or how to get more information.” He further characterizes the concept of service journalism by terming it “refrigerator journalism.” As Ranly (1993, 335) explains, “[a] good service article is one that the reader would tack on the refrigerator. You have done your job even better if the reader takes some action as a result of the information and advice you give.”

Understanding this expectation of action is the focus of this thesis.

According to Ranly (1992) and Scott (1987), a small group of journalists may be credited with furthering the practice of service journalism, and among those is Clay Felker, as mentioned above, and James A. Autry, former editorial president of the Meredith Magazine Group. Autry started as a copy editor for *Better Homes and Gardens* in 1960 and has been recognized for his contribution to the development and reach of contemporary service journalism. As presented by Ranly (1992, 139):

In a speech delivered in 1979, Autry defined service journalism as ‘the delivery of ideas and information through words, illustrations, design and various mechanical formats, which is intended to produce on the part of the reader a positive action.’ Service journalism, he said, was to go beyond the delivery of pure information and to include the expectation that the reader will *do* something as a result of the reading. Service journalism is ‘action journalism’ – not action on the part of the journalist but expected action on the part of the reader.

This thesis argues that the expectation of action in addition to the delivery of information is what separates service journalism from other forms of journalism. As will

be discussed more fully in Chapter 6, the action prescribed in a service article may include all or any of the following: change a behaviour, adopt a new strategy, buy a suggested product or find more information.

This section has presented a working definition of service journalism by outlining similarities with other forms of journalism, such as factual information, and what differentiates it from other forms of journalism, such as presentation and the expectation of action. This chapter will now present a conceptualization of service journalism to more fully explain its rationale and wide appeal.

Conceptual perspectives on service journalism

As noted above, the academic literature on service journalism is limited. As a result, this section will draw on concepts from other areas of literature to help conceptualize service journalism. Grievance and risk (Eide and Knight, 1999) and the attention economy (Thorngate and Plouffe, 1987; and Thorngate, 1990) help explain why readers choose service journalism. It is important to note that a reader may derive information from a number of sources, not strictly service journalism. As mentioned above, journalism is about information, and service journalism is about the application of information. A reader may read a women's service magazine, for example, in addition to newspapers, websites and other magazines. As suggested by the revenue and circulation of service magazines, service journalism is popular. Total revenue for *Chatelaine* in 2008 was \$56.5 million (Ursi, 2009), and its circulation was 624,000 (Print Measurement Bureau, 2008). *Canadian Living* earned \$43 million (Ursi, 2009), and its circulation was 520,000 (Print Measurement Bureau, 2008). *Maclean's* earned \$34.8 million (Ursi, 2009) but with a circulation of 385,000 (Print Measurement Bureau, 2008). As Winship (1987, 53)

suggests, “[w]omen’s magazines ... afford a reliable and not-too-extravagant treat women can justifiably give themselves; after all, they’re useful as well as enjoyable.”

The usefulness of service journalism derives from its treatment of grievances and risks (Eide and Knight, 1999). While service magazines compete with a plethora of other publications, the attention economy would suggest readers place value on the knowledge presented in service magazines. To strengthen the discussion of its appeal, this section will critically engage with service journalism by applying parameters of the attention economy. It is worthwhile, however, to first consider Fiske’s (1998) theory that audiences ultimately determine what becomes popular.

Although most of Fiske’s (1998) work looks at television, his concept is applicable to service journalism because it most often appears in what would be considered popular culture, such as glossy mass-market magazines. An aspect of Fiske’s (1998) work that is most relevant to this thesis is his understanding of reader agency and popular culture. While the financial economy, such as advertisements and the corporations that publish magazines, play a significant role in the production of service journalism, it is important to highlight the significance he places on the relationship between the financial economy and the cultural economy. He argues that the popularity of a cultural commodity, such as a magazine, must meet the interests of and be popular with both the producers (publishers and editors) and consumers (readers). As Fiske (1998, 507) argues:

The financial economy offers two modes of circulation for cultural commodities: in the first, the producers of a program sell it to distributors: the program is a straightforward material commodity. In the next, the program-as-commodity changes role and it becomes a producer. And the new commodity that it produces is an audience, which, in its turn, is sold to advertisers or sponsors.

As Holmes (2007, 510) argues, magazines are “sources of pleasure for millions of readers and that alone gives them a cultural value.” And, as stated in Chapter 1, a magazine is also

a business, which ultimately makes it a cultural commodity. Most women's magazines rely heavily on advertising for revenue to keep the cost of the magazine low enough for readers to buy it (Steinem, 1990). As a result, these magazines exist in a dynamic between producers, advertisers and consumers. The producers must first sell the magazine to advertisers as an avenue for reaching target consumers. The producers must then sell the magazine to consumers. Fiske argues that while the audience is a commodity in the financial economy, the audience is the producer of meanings in the cultural economy. Magazine audiences affect longevity, revenue and circulation. While all these impress advertisers, publishers first and foremost need readers to want to buy their products. If readers were not interested in service magazines, these publications would not exist, because they would not garner advertising dollars. This chapter will now consider why audiences choose to make service journalism popular.

- **Grievance and risk**

Eide and Knight (1999) are two of the few scholars who have directly engaged with the question of service journalism. They argue that the core element of service journalism hinges on modern life. As Eide and Knight (1999, 526) argue, “[i]f modernity brings everyday life into being, it does so by making the practice of living problematic and resolvable through the application of diverse and changing forms of knowledge, information and advice.” They identify two influences of modern life that have created a demand for service journalism.

First, the demand for greater individual autonomy means people want to know how to solve their own problems, whether mastering simple chores, such as do-it-yourself projects, or more complex issues, such as mobilizing a community group. Service

journalism individualizes content to appeal to an individual's desire for solutions, advice and tips for improving one's life. This is one reason why the second person is frequently used in service journalism; an article talks directly to *you* and answers *your* questions about *your* problems, so that *you* can solve them. Recalling the circulation and revenue numbers outlined above, this also may help to explain why service publications, which tend to focus on the individual within the private sphere, continually outsell newsmagazines, which focus on the public sphere. As Scott (1987, 13) argues, "[w]e know from 'uses and gratifications' studies, among others, that information viewed as not immediately useful tends to end up in the attic." As the revenue and circulation numbers above show, editorial content with "me-first" service articles attract more readers than content that deals with societal problems in the public sphere (Scott, 1987).

The second influence identified by Eide and Knight (1999) is the media's role as adviser in democratic societies. As Walker (2000, 148) argues, "the wide range of topics on which [women's] magazines provided advice indicates both the complexity that the domestic arena had assumed by mid-century and the magazines' function as all-purpose advisers." Eide and Knight (1999) argue that the central assumption of service journalism, or "any helping relationship," is that the reader's problems are resolvable only with outside help. This recalls the rise of women's magazines in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the magazines' assertion that women could not resolve their own problems (Damon-Moore, 1994), particularly how to function in an ever-changing society, and thus needed the information provided by women's service magazines.

If the demand for greater individual autonomy and the media's role in advising individuals on how to attain that autonomy has influenced the rise of service journalism, then it follows that service periodicals also need to identify problems threatening that

autonomy if they want to remain relevant. As Scanlon (1995, 5) writes, “[m]agazines also provide a fairly predictable emotional formula: a balance between the fostering of anxiety that draws readers to seek out advice and the offering of positive messages that encourage them to return the following month.” Eide and Knight (1999, 529) classify two modes of “problematization” in service journalism: grievance and risk. It should be noted that there is a much broader aspect of Eide and Knight’s work that stretches beyond the limits of this thesis, but what is relevant about their work to this section is their understanding of grievance and risk.

As Eide and Knight (1990, 530) argue, “[g]rievances are a form of complaint where the source of the problem lies in the actions or inactions of others – the noisy neighbour, the insensitive bureaucrat.” Service journalism has been responding to grievances by offering solutions since the early days of advice columns. Modern service journalism, responding to the need for autonomy, includes sidebars and information boxes that prescribe exactly where to find further help or information. Risk, on the other hand, involves “self-empowerment.” Risks are about the actions of one’s self, such as a risky lifestyle that may cause cancer, wherein “the role of the service journalist is primarily informational, to enlighten the reader or viewer about behaviour that may be risky” (Eide and Knight, 1999, 531). The notion of action that is present in service journalism relates to both grievances and risks. As Eide and Knight (1999) argue, the ultimate goal of action regarding a grievance is reactive and designed to change the behaviour of others, while the action related to risks is proactive and intended to promote self-improvement.

They also address the notion of trust in service journalism and argue that trust and influence are closely linked. As Eide and Knight (1999, 540) argue, influence “rests on the ability to induce in the client a rational and responsible calculation of individual self-

interest in the face of problematic circumstances, the expert's superior skills and knowledge, and recognition of the latter's ethical commitment to serve the client's best interest and well-being." Autry also refers to this trust relationship: "If we, as service journalists, do our jobs right, the readers will believe us. On the other hand, we've failed when they say to hell with us because they discover that we have given them a bum steer" (Autry cited in Scott, 1987, 5). As outlined in Chapter 2, service journalists turn to experts to provide accurate and reliable information. The expert in service journalism may be a source, such as a doctor, or the expert may be the journalist (Ranly, 1993).

Participating in the media's role of adviser, service journalism individualizes problems, particularly grievances and risks, and provides solutions, which appeals to modern society's desire for autonomy, a desire that has been steadily increasing since the late-nineteenth century but has exploded in recent years. As Ranly (1992, 138) writes, "[t]he 1990s' thrust toward more service journalism articles and periodicals is unprecedented." While service periodicals have been growing exponentially, so, too, have other forms of information. Scott (1987) argues that people have developed a pragmatic survival technique to manage what he refers to as an "answer explosion" and one of the techniques they have developed is asking themselves, "Why should I care?" As Scott (1987, 4) argues:

If no positive answer is easily forthcoming, the information is ignored. The continuing and growing challenge of professional communicators is not to reduce the flow of information – this is particularly unacceptable in a culture that is socially pluralistic and economically capitalistic – but to find more effective and efficient ways to answer the question, 'Why should I care?'

All journalism producers face the question 'Why should I care?' And, like all journalism producers, service journalism producers find themselves straddling the need-to-read/want-to-read dichotomy of their audience (Scott, 1987). Offering them what they

want to read often prevails in service journalism. As Ranly (1992, 139) argues, “[s]ervice journalism is the epitome of putting readers first. Think of your readers, find subjects they want to know about, and present those subjects simply, quickly and attractively.” While this may be presented as a positive quality of service journalism, the more troubling reality is that service magazines “put readers first” primarily because doing so facilitates subscription and newsstand sales, which in turn guarantees advertising dollars. It would seem, then, that service magazines prioritize consumerism over the betterment of readers, which is in conflict with the general understanding of journalism’s role of presenting unbiased information. However, few periodicals exist without advertisers. As Steinem (1990, 1) argues, “[e]ven newsmagazines use ‘soft’ cover stories to sell ads, confuse readers with ‘advertorials’ and occasionally self-censor on subjects known to be a problem to big advertisers.”

In addition, most media attempt to give their audience what the audience wants in order to increase circulation, but media also provide information they believe the audience should know, and most women’s service magazines walk the same line. Giving readers the information they want does co-exist with supplying the information they need. A women’s magazine may feature articles about crafts and food alongside articles about gender equality and teenage steroid use (*Canadian Living*, October 1989). While service magazines are businesses first, there nonetheless exists plenty of scope to provide necessary – and applicable – information. In addition, service articles exhibit the same level of integrity as other forms of journalism. As Lockhart (2008, 2) explains, “[a] service piece done well takes hours of painstaking research, numerous interviews and a fresh approach to what may be a familiar story.” Hence, service magazines do “put readers first,” which may explain why they succeed in the attention economy.

- **Attention economy**

A useful framework for understanding service journalism is the attention economy. As Nordenson (2008, 5) explains, “[a]bout a decade or so ago a handful of economists and scholars came up with the concept of the attention economy as a way of wrestling with the problem of having too much information – an oversupply, if you will – and not enough time for people to absorb it all.” Since people are unable to absorb all the information available through the media, they make choices, and this act of choosing causes the media – newspapers, magazines, websites, etc. – to make choices, too. As Nordensen (2008, 6) argues, “[a]s more people who are information providers think of themselves as competing for eyeballs rather than competing for a good story, then journalism’s backwards.” In other words, journalism outlets in general should be prioritizing the betterment of readers over consumerism, but both their reliance on advertising for revenue (very little media rely solely on subscriptions to survive) and the attention economy forces media to incorporate stories that will result in more “eyeballs.”

While the previous section of this chapter addressed how service journalism gives readers what they want to read, this section of the thesis will bring the attention economy and service journalism into conversation in order to explain why audiences choose to read service journalism. This section will draw on the work of Thorngate and Plouffe (1987) and Thorngate (1990). Even though their work focuses on the consumption of psychological knowledge, it is nonetheless relevant to this thesis because whether the information is psychology or botany, readers still need to make a choice. Eide and Knight (1999) help to explain why audiences choose service journalism; Thorngate and Plouffe (1987) and Thorngate (1990) will help to explain how this choice is made.

As Thorngate (1990, 264) explains, “[i]nformation tends to proliferate, but attention does not. There is an upper limit to the amount of information anyone can attend, and any excess must necessarily be ignored.” As a result, people choose to pay attention to knowledge that they consider to be valuable over knowledge that is considered valueless. Readers choose what to pay attention to by assigning value to that knowledge, and, as Thorngate and Plouffe (1987, 65) explain, “the value one assigns to any given knowledge seems to be based on a combination of four assessments, one for each of four generic criteria.” The four criteria are comprehensibility, credibility, importance and interest. It is important to note that as society shifts, so, too, will audiences’ application of these criteria. Recalling Eide and Knight (1999), modernity has ushered in an appetite for do-it-yourself information that is readily available through service journalism. Just as societal trends have moved toward personal autonomy, society could redirect toward less personal autonomy. Similarly, experts in the post-war period were the trusted sources of information, but experts today include regular people with personal experience rather than institutional credentials. An examination of these criteria provides further insight into the dynamics of service journalism.

Comprehensibility: It is difficult for an individual to evaluate or consume knowledge if that person is unable to understand it. As Scott (1987, 12) argues, “[p]utting the information in a format and form that aids comprehension is the ultimate challenge of service journalism. The more urgent the need for information, the more impatient and easily confused the information-consumer tends to become.” As outlined earlier in this chapter, service journalism attempts to aid comprehension with alternative story forms.

Credibility: As Thorngate and Plouffe (1987, 66) explain, “people place a higher value on credible knowledge than on incredible knowledge.” Credibility is determined in

a number of ways, such as years of publication, which is evidenced in the splashy and public manner magazines celebrate their publishing anniversaries, but the methods of determination that apply most appropriately to service journalism include empiricism and authority. As Thorngate and Plouffe (1987, 68) argue, “[i]f one assesses the credibility of knowledge by checking it against what one sees, hears, touches, tastes or smells, then one is said to be engaging in empiricism.” An example of empiricism is the use of personal anecdotes or experiences. As Thorngate and Plouffe (1987, 70) argue, “[p]eople who have no previous anecdotes of their own ... usually swallow the indirect ones whole.” Anecdotes are a common element in service articles, which often lead with an anecdote that illustrates the grievance or risk upon which the article is focused.

As Thorngate and Plouffe (1987, 71) argue, “[t]he source of the knowledge may become as important as the knowledge itself in any evaluation of its credibility.” A hallmark of all journalism is using the authoritative voice of experts, and service is no exception, but credibility in many service magazines is also established by identifying the expertise of editorial staff. As Reuss (1974, 294) recounts, “[i]t was a compliment for [*Better Homes and Gardens*] garden editor Alfred Hottes to be called a ‘dirt-under-the-nails garden editor.’” Service magazines publish advice their writers and editors claim to use in their everyday lives, giving the advice credibility and affirming its usability.

Importance: Information consumers evaluate importance in countless ways. As a result, many types of importance exist, including pragmatic importance. As Thorngate and Plouffe (1987, 77) argue, “[a] sizable proportion of available knowledge concerns means to accomplish various ends. It is sometimes called tactical knowledge or ‘how to’ knowledge, and the importance one assigns to bits of it we term pragmatic importance.” Pragmatically important knowledge is used every day: how to save time in the kitchen,

how to invest money or how to plan a pet-friendly vacation. As Scott (1987, 6) argues, “[p]eople read first the stories that concern them most directly and immediately.”

Interest: Finally, what affects the taste for knowledge is interest, but what interests readers – both male and female readers – may result from emotional reactions. As Thorngate (1990, 264) explains, “[w]e tend to invest attention in situations for as long as they arouse, excite, or interest us. We terminate our investment as we habituate to the situations and as arousal, excitement, and interest subsides.” Service magazines struggle with this emotional reaction to information because the content of service magazines is often seasonally motivated: gift guides in December, barbecue recipes in June, back-to-school features in September, etc. As Lockhart (2008, 58) writes, “[w]omen’s magazines are often accused of recycling ideas, information and articles – a charge editors don’t necessarily deny,” but they resolve this repetitiveness by incorporating new ideas, new sources, new information, new research and a fresh approach. Readers usually interpret *new* as better, especially better than old information (Thorngate, 1990).

Service magazines further address the importance of interest by providing needed and wanted information to a defined group of readers through special-interest publications: *Today’s Parent* for parents or *Cottage Life* for people who own or aspire to own a cottage. This may at least partially explain the proliferation of special-interest service magazines (Ranly, 1992). Thorngate and Plouffe (1987) argue that an individual’s interest in a specific piece of knowledge may be corrupted by how the knowledge is presented. If a topic is interesting but boring or frustrating to read, it will fail to attract attention. This relates back to the findings of the Poynter Institute study as well as the emphasis service journalism places on packaging and the sensual pleasure of magazines’ glossy paper, full-page colour photographs and eye-catching fonts.

While the attention economy may explain why service magazines enjoy such impressive newsstand figures compared to other print media, it also points to some long-standing weaknesses in the genre. Most notably, service journalism often simplifies issues by providing simple answers to complex questions. As Walker (2000, 49) argues, “[h]ow-to’ articles took on an urgency that was thinly masked by a breezy style that suggested an immediate solution to every problem.”

A common example of this simplification is “Give Your Computer a Hug: Here’s advice on how to add the warm human touch to our computerized lives” (*Canadian Living*, November 1983, 130). The overarching societal effects of personal computers and less person-to-person contact are not solvable by giving the computer a hug. Readers know that, yet service magazines are plagued with ‘fix your marriage in five easy steps’ implications. According to the attention economy and psychology, readers want to hope that life’s problems are resolvable in five easy steps. As Thorngate (1990, 286) explains, “[m]any of these people, for example, want us to provide simple answers to complex questions. Others may want us only to provide information in support of a decision already made. Some want us to end their guilt by attending to matters they prefer to ignore. And some ask only that we entertain.” For every service magazine, there is myriad potential readers, and each magazine competes for the attention of readers. As a result, the information may not always be the highest calibre of journalism, but it sells.

Conclusion

Service journalism attracts the attention of readers by individualizing problems and providing do-it-yourself solutions to these problems. As a result, service journalism most often covers issues that relate directly to the personal interests of readers, particularly their

individual grievances and risks (Eide and Knight, 1999). Service journalism is able to keep the attention of readers and compete in the attention economy by providing readers with a comprehensible, credible and interesting package that encourages readers to assign importance to the information presented. The higher the value they place on the knowledge, the more attention they are likely to pay to it (Thorngate and Plouffe, 1987). Service magazines facilitate comprehension by presenting information in an accessible format, typically employing packaging devices such as explicit headlines and subheads and sidebars. They assure readers that the information is credible by including expert sources. Service magazines create an interesting product by appealing to individuals' self-interests. They achieve this by, for example, talking directly to the reader with the second pronoun or engaging the reader in the text with charts, information boxes and even quizzes. Service magazines further present a visually appealing product with glossy pages, colour photographs and aesthetically pleasing designs.

Even as service journalism addresses individual grievances and risks, it must also grapple with the balancing act of providing audiences with information they want to know versus information they need to know but may not be interested in paying attention to (Scott, 1987). As a result, service journalism most often addresses issues that attract the attention of the audience but at the expense of not covering worthwhile issues not yet on the audience's agenda. This tension is reconciled by running reader- and advertiser-friendly content alongside more journalistically valuable content.

Ultimately, service journalism differentiates itself from other approaches to journalism by expecting readers to take action. As noted above, Ranly (1992, 139) has coined the term "refrigerator journalism" with the explanation: "If you can digest useful information into a graph or chart or list that your reader hangs on the refrigerator or

bulletin board or puts in the special save-to-do file, you have done your job well. You have done your job even better if the reader does something as a result of the information.” This image of a reader cutting out information connects to research into the readers of women’s magazines, particular that of Hermes (1995). During her research, a source revealed: “I cut out a lot of things that I find useful, everything that has to do with sewing and gardening, plants and medical advice that I find important” (Hermes, 1995, 38). When Hermes dug further, she found the women did not use any of the tips they cut out. As Hermes (1995, 48) argues, “[b]oth the repertoire of practical knowledge and the repertoire of connected knowing may help readers gain a sense of identity and confidence, in being in control or feeling at peace with life, that lasts while they are reading and dissipates quickly when the magazine is put aside.”

Perhaps the element of usefulness of service journalism is represented in this case in the message about cultural norms. As Hermes (1995, 49) argues, “[i]t is only through a repertoire that allows readers to fantasize about being well-organized, perfect women who keep the tips they collect in handy files, who can find the right recipe or tip whenever they want to, that the magazines become more meaningful and worthwhile.” To this end, the next chapter will consider how service journalism contributes to the social construction of the feminine ideal through the expectation of action.

Chapter 4

Service Journalism and Social Constructionism

The historical evolution of service journalism through the lens of the women's periodical press since the late-nineteenth century was the focus of Chapter 2 of this thesis. The genre of service journalism took shape in women's magazines, particularly its role in providing advice and instructing action within the private sphere. Chapter 3 broadened the consideration of service journalism beyond women's magazines by considering the function of service journalism and identifying key components. Chapter 3 then considered some explanations for why service journalism appeals to readers, particularly its treatment of grievance and risk, and why it competes so successfully in the attention economy. A key component to understanding service journalism is recognizing its ultimate goal is to inspire action among readers, but motivating action is more complicated than simply giving easy-to-follow instructions.

To this end, and to further the critical examination of service journalism proposed by this thesis, this chapter will return to women's magazines to examine how service journalism has contributed to the social construction of the feminine ideal. This chapter will argue that service journalism can be critically examined through the lens of social constructionism. Magazine publishers, for example, develop a demographic profile of the 'ideal type' or target readership. This profile allows them to produce editorial content that would appeal to those readers, who boost circulation, and then sell that readership to advertisers, which boosts sales. In doing so, however, they also create a social construct of their readers, which affirms readers' inclusion in a particular group – and excludes those who do not identify with the magazine's image – but also invites readers to infer what actions they need to take to satisfy their desire to fit into that group.

The literature on social constructionism and gender roles is extremely broad and cannot be treated comprehensively in this chapter. As a result, this chapter will provide a brief review of the core literature as it relates to social constructionism and women's magazines (Damon-Moore, 1994; Ferguson, 1983; Friedan, 1997; and Meyerowitz, 1994a and 1994b). The chapter will also consider alternatives to strict understandings of social constructionism by considering literature on the importance of reader agency (Fiske, 1998; Hermes, 1995; and Radway, 1984). Building from this literature, this chapter will argue that while reader interpretation is present, service journalism contributes to social constructions through action. This argument will form the basis for Chapter 5, which will introduce the case study, and Chapter 6, which will examine the relationship between action and the production and consumption of service journalism.

The first section of this chapter will briefly define social constructionism, particularly its relevance to understanding women's magazines. The second section will consider how women's magazines have contributed to the social construction of the feminine ideal generally and motherhood specifically. As outlined in Chapter 1, the content analysis of this thesis will consider how the expectation of action affects the production and consumption of service journalism in parenting features. Understanding the social construction of motherhood is an integral step in building toward that analysis. A broad literature exists in this area, and this chapter is not able to cover the entire literature. Instead, the second section of this chapter will present an overview of the main themes in the social construction of the feminine ideal and motherhood. The third section will consider alternative views to social construction theories, particularly that readers are not passive targets for the messages in women's magazine but create their own interpretation of texts separate from the intended meanings. This process of interpretation

can have an impact on the nature of action. As Burr (2003, 5) argues, “[e]ach different construction also brings with it, or invites, a different kind of action from human beings.” In other words, the action intended by producers of women’s magazines may be quite different from the action undertaken by readers. It is important to note that while some scholars insist “advertising and editorial material are, on the practical level, inseparable in women’s magazines” (McCracken, 1993, 3), this thesis is mainly, but not exclusively, concerned with editorial content because of this thesis’s focus on service journalism.

Social constructionism in women’s magazines

Social constructionism argues that our identities are constructed by the people and institutions around us and, as Burr (2003, 2) explains, “insists that we take a critical stance toward our taken-for-granted ways of understanding the world, including ourselves.”

Social constructionism, then, is concerned with understanding the difference between real divisions, such as biological differences between men and women as sexes, and social constructs, such as social differences between men and women as genders. As Martin (1997, 89) argues, “[t]he origin of the notion of *femininity*, as we know it, is not ‘natural’ or ‘biological,’” but the result of a social construct. It is important to note that social constructs may change over time, just as our social or cultural practices change over time.

Much of the research on social constructionism has focused on gender roles, and sociological research has shown how influential socialization can be on children’s understanding of gender roles (Martin, 1997). Recalling Chapter 2, women’s magazines may be a secondary source of socialization, but their “high visibility” makes them influential (Martin, 1997). Scholars of social constructionism (Ferguson, 1983; and Martin, 1997) argue that women’s magazines play a significant role in socialization,

particularly gender roles. As Ferguson (1983, 8) argues, “[a]dolescent girls, brides, new mothers, all stages of newcomers are offered help with their *rites of passage*. ‘How to’ is the phrase which signals that this socialization process is underway: ‘how to’ make up or find a job, ‘how to’ be good in bed or make a casserole.” Recalling Chapter 3, ‘how to’ is also a key phrase in service journalism. The expectation of action and how it relates to social constructionism will be covered later in this and subsequent chapters.

Social constructionism uncovers ways in which individuals and groups, in this case women, participate in the creation of their perceived social reality, in this case by perpetuating the constructs in women’s magazines. It involves looking at the ways social traditions are created, institutionalized and accepted as fact. As Burr (2003, 4) writes:

If our knowledge of the world, our common ways of understanding it, is not derived from the nature of the world as it really is, where does it come from? The social constructionist answer is that people construct it between them. It is through the daily interactions between people in the course of social life that our versions of knowledge become fabricated.

Since the early days of women’s magazines, women editors and writers have contributed to the social construction of women through editorial content as well as advertising. The J. Walter Thompson Company, for example, was the most successful advertising agency in the United States from the early 1900s into the 1970s (Scanlon, 1995). The agency’s Women’s Editorial Department was run by women and provided advertisements for products aimed at women. As Scanlon (1995, 174) writes, “[i]n 1918, the billings for the copy written in the Women’s Editorial Department totaled \$2,264,759 out of the total of \$3,902,601 for the company.” The irony is that while the writers of the Women’s Editorial Department contributed to the social construction of the feminine ideal, they were enjoying successful careers that contradicted this ideal, which will be discussed more fully below.

The same contradiction may be found in magazines' contribution to the social construction of motherhood. While women's lives have experienced significant changes since the late-nineteenth century, one constant is that most women still become mothers. One of the most common social constructs affecting motherhood is that working mothers are neglectful of their children's needs, yet many of the women contributing to this image through the editorial pages of women's magazines were working mothers. In terms of social constructionism, the difference between a 'good' and 'bad' mother as a social construct means that being a 'good' mother is not an inevitable result of biology but highly dependent on social and historical processes. As Martin (1997, 104) argues, "[a] critical analysis of communication phenomena must therefore consider *female* and *male* traits as socially constructed concepts," particularly the creation of the feminine ideal.

Social construction of the feminine ideal

Through the emerging mass media of the 1920s, including women's magazines, scholars argue that women were inundated with portrayals of the feminine ideal. As Chafe (1991, 113) argues, "[w]ith increasing stridency, women's magazines voiced the same theme [throughout the 1920s], insisting that the roles of mother and housewife represented the only path to feminine fulfillment." A further element of the feminine ideal included the consumer, a construct of particular interest to the notion of action in service magazines and their reliance on advertising. One action encouraged in these magazines is the act of buying something. Theories of consumption suggest that consumer goods have been used for years to construct identities. As Bocoock (1993, 95) argues, "[c]onsumption involves goods being purchased for their symbolic value, their meaning to the consumer, not just for their material use-value." It may be suggested that the producers of women's

magazines were complicit in their role in creating a consumer culture among women because it supported consumerism. As Scanlon (1995, 8) argues, “[t]he very form of magazines follows a cardinal rule of consumer culture: they are disposable, replaced each month by a fresh set of images.” The producers of women’s magazines were also motivated by their social beliefs in a patriarchal capitalist system.

Recalling Chapter 2, the feminine ideal did not exist until well after the industrial revolution. As Martin (1997, 106) explains, “[f]ollowing the industrial revolution and the advent of media, such as radio and, later, television and magazines, the ‘ideal’ image of women began to change from the role of *producer* of domestic goods (food, clothes, etc.) to that of *consumer* of industrial commodities.” While this feminine ideal has existed since the 1920s, it experienced a considerable nudge during the Depression, when “many people believed that women should sacrifice personal ambitions and accept a life of economic inactivity” (Chafe, 1991, 115). The ideology of the feminine ideal experienced the most significant boom following the end of World War II. As Martin (1997, 107) argues, “[t]he media sustained this new ideology by creating content that portrayed women, first, as the ‘queen of the home’ and, second, as a cheap, secondary labour force in the service of the fluctuations and the needs of the economy.”

During World War II, most men of working age were sent overseas to fight in the war. Even though the social construct of women as housewives had already been entrenched, women started working in factories because the male labour force was temporarily unavailable (Martin, 1997). While women ‘served’ their country by working in factories during the war, they were expected to leave the paid factory employment when the men returned home from war because those jobs were intended for men. As Odland (2010, 63) recounts, “[c]oncerned that women would want to retain their high-

paying industrial jobs after the war, the [United States] federal government, in cooperation with various media outlets and advertising agencies, consistently reassured the public that women would return to their traditional roles once the war was over.” The patriarchal capitalist system achieved its main objective of solidifying women’s primary identities as working in the home.

Also during World War II, the magazines’ role as adviser to women was firmly established, but the content of the advice was changing. Before World War II, magazines were instructing women on how to continue to produce goods at home, such as sewing clothing by hand. Soon traditional knowledge, such as that which was passed from mothers to daughters, was discredited in favour of new technologies, such as sewing machines. As Martin (1997, 106) explains, “[t]he media used the concept of the feminine ideal to encourage women to consume commodities produced on a large-scale basis by capitalist industries.” Factories devoted to manufacturing tanks during the war were converted to produce home appliances and other consumer goods after World War II, and consumers were needed to buy these products. Motivational researchers were leading the way for advertisers to tap into consumers by way of women’s magazines. As Friedan (1997, 208) recounts, these researchers proclaimed that “properly manipulated ... American housewives can be given the sense of identity, purpose, creativity, the self-realization, even the sexual joy they lack – by the buying of things.” Scholars agree that women were being primed as the key consumers of post-war society. As Winship (1987, 60) argues, “[i]n the 1950s, when magazines discussed the new consumer work expected of women, women were being educated about a work which reflected not only on their femininity, but on their class status and the kind of individuals they were.”

A further change in women's service magazines was who was giving the advice.

As Walker (2000, 158) argues:

The chatty, convivial tone of much prewar advice about cooking, cleaning, and raising children, seeming to arise from a women's culture of mutual support, was supplanted by the voices of writers, often male, who were identified by professional titles and degrees and represented various agencies, institutes, bureaus, and universities. Before the war, magazines tended to interact with readers in ways that largely disappeared during the 1940s.

The magazines were taking their cues from more powerful social entities of the post-war period, particularly the patriarchal capitalist system, which, as Martin (1997, 104) argues, "reinforces the conditions that help create specific cultural categories for each sex, which in turn contribute to the maintenance of our current economic and political systems." In other words, as long as women were encouraged to stay at home, there would be enough jobs for men; and as long as women continued to buy products, there would be enough demand for those men to work. Magazines exploited this system because, as long as products needed selling, advertisers needed ad space in magazines.

It is not surprising that scholars report a loss of identity among women during this post-war period. As Chafe (1991, 175) explains, "[o]ne of the by-products of the war, it seemed, was a deepening sense of bewilderment among many American women over how to define their identity in a society that failed to offer adequate alternatives." It was not long before a book would name this loss of identity as the "feminine mystique."

When Friedan (1997) first published *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963, she identified a state of unrest among post-war American women. In her book, Friedan explores post-war American society's construction of women as suburban housewives dedicated to creating a perfect home to the exclusion of their personal goals. While she recognizes the role of all mass media, Friedan lays much of the blame for this on women's magazines.

Mass-market women's magazines, such as *Ladies' Home Journal*, presented an image of women that was childlike and feminine. Their only pursuit was finding a husband, and their time was filled with cooking, decorating, child-rearing and maintaining a shapely figure (Friedan, 1997). She argues that this image was a new representation of women, much different from the image of women in magazines in the early twentieth century. As Friedan (1997, 38) argues, "[t]hese heroines were usually marching toward some goal or vision of their own, struggling with some problem of work or the world, when they found their man." The women in magazine fiction until World War II were strong individuals, with developed interests and working in jobs that challenged them. Recalling Chapter 2, one of the reasons why service journalism gained such popularity following the tremendous social changes of the early twentieth century was because young women could no longer turn to their mothers for guidance. As Friedan (1997, 72) argues, "American women are so unsure of who they should be that they look to this glossy public image to decide every detail of their lives. They look for the image they will no longer take from their mothers."

While Friedan's work is commonly credited with launching the second wave of feminism (Chafe, 1991; Korinek, 2000; and Meyerowitz, 1994b), revisionist historians have discovered that women in post-war America were not offered one image only. In particular, Friedan restricted her study of post-war American women to white, middle-class, married, suburban women who did not work outside the home, but not all American women fit into this highly privileged group. As Chafe (1991, 160) explains, "[b]etween September 1945 and November 1946, for example, 2.25 million women left work, and another million were laid off. But in the same period, nearly 2.75 million were hired." These statistics reveal the patriarchal capitalist system, especially since most of the

women were hired into lower-paying jobs, such as clerical, sales and service positions, but the statistics also paint a different picture of women from Friedan's (1997) "Occupation: Housewife." As Meyerowitz (1994a, 5) argues, "[t]he quiescent housewives were joined by a wide array of women workers, community activists, politicians, and rebels, and the domestic ideal, with internal contradictions, was conjoined with other cultural constructions of women." Meyerowitz (1994b), who studied non-fiction in women's magazines as well as alternative and general-interest publications during the post-war years, also found that "magazine articles advocated both domestic ideals and nondomestic achievement for women" (Meyerowitz, 1994b, 249).

The fact that the social construction of the feminine ideal was joined by other social constructions of women may help to explain why service magazines, particularly mass-market women's magazines, experienced a boom during the mid- to late-twentieth century: more identities meant more social constructs to exploit and more room for special-interest magazines. Their primary motivation to construct women as consumers is that mass-market magazines started as and continue to be commercial products first and foremost. As Gough-Yates (2003, 56) argues, "[m]agazine publishing does not exist in isolation from other commercial institutions of cultural production. Allied especially closely is the advertising industry. Advertising has been central to the business of women's magazines since the 1890s." Magazines were motivated to encourage readers – mostly women – to act upon the advice in magazines by buying the products advertised in magazines. The *Ladies' Home Journal*, for example, relied on sales and subscriptions rather than advertising for revenues for only a short period of time. As Scanlon (1995, 172) argues, "by 1919 ... nearly two-thirds of all magazine revenues came from advertising. Due to its financial importance alone, then, advertising would secure a more

influential role in the magazine's policy-making than would the advice or the fiction."

The situation for other markets at the time was no different. As Lang (1999, 149) writes, "[i]n the years following [World War I], the advertising industry propelled an increasingly consumer-driven economy [in Canada], and the women's section acquired a market value that no newspaper could do without." Well before the post-war period women in North America had been ushered into the role of society's primary consumers. As Scanlon (1995, 171) argues, "[i]n the 1920s, researchers estimated, women purchased at least 80 percent of the total goods accumulated in families."

Since women's consumer magazines were such financial successes, it is not surprising that publishers attempted to reproduce that success among a male readership. In 1897 Cyrus Curtis bought *Saturday Evening Post* to create a middle-class men's journal in the image of his *Ladies' Home Journal*. As Damon-Moore (1994, 123) explains, "*Post* producers were, in these early years, actually unable to demonstrate to advertisers any compelling link between concepts of masculinity and commercialism. A gendered commercial milieu for men would take significantly longer to establish than it had for women." By 1910, however, *Saturday Evening Post* surpassed one million in circulation and eventually generated more revenue and sold more copies than *Ladies' Home Journal* (Damon-Moore, 1994). *Esquire*, on the other hand, was first published in 1933, when social commentators were developing, as Breazeale (2003, 231) suggests, "a discourse that highlighted diminished male self-esteem as an outgrowth of the Depression." *Esquire* recognized that this loss of identity among men could be refigured into a new male identity and used the same mix of content that had characterized women's magazines – "a centerpiece of seductive 'lifestyle' features whose job is to service advertisers by transforming reader into consumer" (Breazeale, 2003, 232). This mix, however, failed to

produce a magazine as popular as any mass-market women's magazines. As Ferguson (1983, 2) argues:

This difference in audience approaches seems to rest on an implicit assumption shared between editors and publishers that a female sex which is at best unconfident, and at worst incompetent, 'needs' or 'wants' to be instructed, rehearsed or brought up to date on the arts and skills of femininity, while a more powerful and confident male sex already 'knows' everything there is to know about the business of being masculine.

It may be no wonder, then, that women were a more compelling audience for service magazines than men. As Odland (2010, 64) argues, "[t]he postwar confusion and discontent about women's roles suggest that the concept of gender identity, far from being essential or fixed, is a construct shaped by social and historical circumstance." As society changes, so do gender roles, but women's roles seem to have experienced far greater changes than men's roles. This constant state of uncertainty is one reason why women buy service magazines that contribute to the repertoire of emotional learning and connected knowing (Hermes, 1995). Similarly, by publishing articles that focus on grievances and risks (Eide and Knight, 1999), service magazines created a renewable state of uncertainty about modern life that can be temporarily eased by their advice.

As outlined in Chapter 2, women turned to service journalism in the women's pages of newspapers and women's magazines for instruction on how to act, particularly in the face of changing social norms brought on by the industrial revolution, World War I, the Depression, and then World War II. While some women may have turned to magazines for guidance on how to maintain a role in the public sphere, many women turned to magazines for instruction on how to act, dress, look and behave. As Lang (1999, 171) argues, "[i]ntellectual and feminist women might take exception to [the] frivolous preoccupation with external appearance, but the obsession was merely the most obvious

manifestation of the uncertainty women felt as their place in society altered.” The effect of the constant newness of modern life, particularly changing norms, is that society is in a constant state of movement. As Martin (1997, 105) explains, “[a]s soon as the modern is conceived it becomes outdated and must be replaced.”

Social construction of motherhood

One social construction that has experienced a significant reformulation is that of motherhood. Motherhood in the early to mid-twentieth century was simply an extension of being a housewife, but as the lines between the private and public spheres began to blur, the subject of motherhood or ‘parenting’ took on a new popularity. Despite this reformulation, however, motherhood has always been part of the social construction of the feminine ideal. As Ferguson (1983, 109) writes:

A careful examination of the pages of any women’s magazine today will show how the feminine repertoire of roles has expanded. Yet if we ask which two roles outnumbered all others in the 1979 and 1980 analysis, we find again that it was the traditional ones of ‘Wife,’ 19 per cent, and ‘Mother,’ 21 per cent, as compared with 18 and 11 per cent in the earlier periods.

The woman’s role as mother experienced the most significant gain. To this end, this section will consider the social construction of motherhood in the post-war period.

Most of the research on how women’s magazines portray gender roles in the post-war era has neglected how these periodicals contributed to the social construction of motherhood. Instead, motherhood is studied as one piece of a broader domestic puzzle and often given the same weight as cooking and shopping. Recent research, however, has shown that women’s magazines of the post-war period have contributed to the social construction of motherhood quite purposefully. This section draws mainly from the work of Marshall (1991), Odland (2010) and Sunderland (2006).

Recalling Chapter 2, housework went through a period of professionalization in the early twentieth century, but the real push toward professionalizing housework came just before the end of World War II. As outlined earlier in this chapter, women worked in factories during the war to compensate for the absence of working-age men. As the war ended, women were ushered out the factory doors to make room for returning soldiers. Motherhood as a social construction played a key role in this push back into the private sphere. First, women were not as anxious to leave paid employment as the government hoped. As Odland (2010, 64) writes, “[a] 1946 survey by the Women’s Bureau ... revealed that three out of four women who had taken jobs during the war wanted to retain their employment after the war.” In order to sway the opinions (but not necessarily the actions) of women, it was necessary to create a sense of pride and fulfillment in motherhood, which echoes Friedan’s (1997) “Occupation: Housewife.”

Second, as Odland (2010, 64) argues, the government needed “to restore the nation’s feelings of security and safety, [so] experts infused motherhood with a sense of national purpose. Psychologists and sociologists directed women to rear responsible, patriotic children who would become future scientists and defeat the Russians in the cold war.” Exalting motherhood to new heights also opened doors to the public sphere.

It may be suggested that many women, including mothers, found personal fulfillment in working in the public sphere during the war years. While well-paying jobs were not commonly available to them during the post-war period, their appreciation for being active in the public sphere persisted, so many mothers turned to volunteering and community activism as an alternative to paid work in the public sphere. The feminine ideal mentioned earlier in the chapter affirmed women’s role in the home but also “authorized maternal activities in the public realm” (Meyerowitz, 1994a, 6).

As mentioned earlier, women experienced a high degree of uncertainty about their social roles and practices during the post-war years. As Walker (2000, 171) argues:

A woman faced the greatest challenges, ran the most risks of failing, and needed the most – and the most contradictory – advice in her role as a mother. By the late 1940s, the concept of instinctual motherhood had been modified to include the possibility – indeed, the likelihood – that a woman’s instinctual behavior as a mother might be destructive.

Given service journalism’s reliance on the exploitation of grievances and risks (Eide and Knight, 1999), it may not be surprising that magazines sought to capitalize on and perpetuate this uncertainty by problematizing motherhood, thereby making it a prime focus of service articles. *Ladies’ Home Journal*, for example, paid particular attention to the problems of motherhood, including isolation, boredom and nervous and physical fatigue, and provided myriad ‘expert’ advice for young mothers. As Meyerowitz (1994b, 242) recounts, “[t]hey offered palliatives to ease her burden: recreation, part-time jobs, volunteer work, ‘outside interests,’ more prestige for mothers, more help from fathers, cooperative babysitting, and nurseries.” Indeed, service magazines were quick with solutions that towed the line of popular constructions of motherhood.

This section will now outline the research of Marshall (1991), Odland (2010) and Sunderland (2006) to illustrate that while the social construction of women made room for interpretations – a woman can be a good or bad cook, a woman can work outside the home or not – one constant in the social construction of the feminine ideal is the central and non-negotiable role of motherhood.

As outlined in Chapter 3, one of the hallmarks of service journalism is relaying expert advice to readers in the quest to help solve their problems. Marshall (1991) studied seven childcare manuals published between 1979 and 1988 and considered how these manuals constructed motherhood. She argues that the manuals construct motherhood as an

“unquestionably positive experience” (Marshall, 1991, 72) and provide ‘how-to’ instruction for mothers. Her study is relevant to this examination of service journalism because, as Marshall (1991, 67) explains, “most mothers in Western countries, at some point, consult at least one of these childcare or motherhood manuals.” Similarly, magazine editors refer to those same manuals when researching parenting articles, thereby perpetuating the same social constructs. By relying on experts, service magazines also reinforce cultural norms, and motherhood is no exception. It should be noted that the case study for this thesis, *Canadian Living*, was published during the same years as the childcare manuals in Marshall’s study.

Child-development experts, such as doctors and psychologists, “attempt to impose styles of mothering which are culture-bound and can be seen to reflect preoccupations linked to fashion in childrearing” (Marshall, 1991, 66). Marshall’s study found that childcare manuals constructed motherhood as crucial for women and contradicted modern constructions of gender roles, particularly women’s active involvement in the public sphere and more flexible notions of the family structure. As Marshall (1991, 83) reports, these manuals provided one version of motherhood: “To mother adequately a woman needs to be present with her child 24 hours each day and to be continually and actively engaged, providing stimulating and attentive company.” As we will see later in this chapter, however, women have demonstrated agency in constructing their own meanings of motherhood and interpreting the need and parameters of being “present.”

Ladies’ Home Journal has occupied a starring role in feminist studies of women’s magazines, due in large part to its longevity and its contribution to the ‘recipe’ for successful women’s magazines. In her study, Odland (2010) found that the ideological treatment of motherhood in *Ladies’ Home Journal* in 1946 differed significantly from its

treatment of the feminine ideal. As outlined above, images of women in post-war women's magazines were not restricted to the "housewife-mother" (Friedan, 1997) and were often inconsistent with the feminine ideal. As Odland (2010, 73) argues, "[w]hile infrequent, these moments of resistance affirm Meyerowitz's [1994b] contention that the domestic and the nondomestic coexisted in women's magazines in the postwar era."

When it came to motherhood, however, *Ladies' Home Journal* presented constructions of motherhood that left little room for interpretation. As Odland (2010, 75) argues, "[m]otherhood was a woman's highest and most important calling, and its proper performance involved women selflessly attending to the needs of their children within the confines of the home." Within the social construction of motherhood, the magazine presented no options and no alternative identities for readers. Women's employment, for example, was tolerated only before she became a mother. By presenting this one image of the fully domestic mother, the magazine excluded mothers who did work outside the home. Interestingly, many of the editors and writers of *Ladies' Home Journal* and other comparable magazines were working mothers.

As Odland (2010, 63) argues, "[g]ender identity, far from being fixed, is a construct shaped by social and historical circumstance." As gender roles shift, it would be expected that a shift has also taken place in the social construction of motherhood. In preparation for Chapter 5 and its analysis of parenting stories in *Canadian Living* magazine from 1976 to 2005, it may be helpful to consider studies of more recent publications and their construction of motherhood.

Sunderland's (2006) study sampled three parenting magazines from 2002 and focused on service articles that addressed childcare. Parenting magazines differ in theory from women's magazines because the title implies that parents – both mothers and fathers

– are the magazines’ audience. Changing social practices, including fathers asserting a more prominent role in child-rearing as well as magazine publishers’ desire to broaden their target audience, may also influence this move toward ‘parenting’ magazines. The study, which focused on the presence of fatherhood, found that the ‘mother as main parent/part-time father’ discourse continues to be present in parenting magazines. While the study revealed that, at first glance, most of the features were not targeted at either mothers or fathers, the parenting magazines resembled women’s magazines much more than men’s magazines. As a result, women are more likely to consume parenting magazines, and producers are more likely to target women readers. When parenting stories do include fathers, they are most often seen as helpers rather than independent and autonomous members of the parenting team. To this end, magazines in general, and women’s magazines specifically, do not always overtly announce social constructions. Even if they do, magazines also provide, perhaps unknowingly, alternative meanings for readers to construct, which is the focus on the next section of this chapter.

Reader agency and the interpretation of texts

Research has found that women’s magazines have a considerable impact on shaping women’s identities (Ferguson, 1983; and McCracken, 1993), but they are not all powerful. The argument that producers of mass-market women’s magazines position readers as “helpless pawns ... fails to acknowledge that reading a magazine, watching television, or consuming other types of popular culture involve the reader in making a series of choices” (Korinek, 2000, 11). As Damon-Moore (1994, 68) argues, “[r]eaders [are] active agents who [choose] whether to buy the magazine, what to read in it, and what to believe of what they read.” Indeed, there is a literature that examines how reader agency affects the

interpretation or meaning of texts, which suggests an alternative to a strict understanding of the contribution of service magazines to social constructionism.

A common example of hidden meanings in mass-market women's magazines is the contradictory message about women working outside the home. *Good Housekeeping*, for example, provided myriad examples of women in careers in the April 1951 issue: the associate art editor was featured in her roles as both responsible career woman and attentive mother and homemaker; a female technician in the *Good Housekeeping* Bureau analyzed products for the magazine; and that issue introduced the American Career Girls series, which featured working women (Blix, 1992). As Blix (1992, 65) argues, “[t]he irony, of course, was that *Good Housekeeping* was a magazine dedicated to the domestication of women, to the celebration of what went on in the home, not the office. Here were women in business telling women at home how to make the most of their lives – at home.” As mentioned above, women have contributed to the social construction of the feminine ideal, but they also open the door to alternative interpretations.

Further research into reader agency argues that it is necessary to understand how messages are encoded by producers and decoded by audiences. Media producers construct media texts, such as women's magazines, with dominant messages, but their ability to communicate that message stops at the reader's ability to interpret. First, as Croteau and Hoynes (2000, 270) explain, the “ability to interpret ... media depends upon our familiarity with the basic codes of each medium.” Long-time readers of women's magazines, for example, know that promises to ‘Save Your Marriage in 5 Easy Steps’ are not realistic but provide, at worst, entertainment, and at best, affirmation of belonging, inspiration and helpful tips to improve one's marriage. Second, as Croteau and Hoynes (2000, 271) argue, “media messages also draw upon broader sets of cultural codes.” The

headline ‘Save Your Marriage in 5 Easy Steps’ assumes a cultural value that marriage is worth saving and the desire of readers to solve their own problems, which is one of the societal conditions outlined in Chapter 3 that has led to the success of service journalism. The following study of readers of romance novels further argues reader agency.

Radway’s (1984) study of readers of romance novels argues that the objective meaning of texts is not as important as “how the *event* of reading the text is interpreted by the women who engage in it” (Radway, 1983, 56). The readers surveyed were similar to the demographic of many modern women’s magazines: married, middle-class women who also worked part-time outside the home. The focus of the study – romance novels – is helpful because romance novels, like women’s magazines, are cultural forms that provide escape from everyday life. As Radway (1984, 61) argues, romance reading is not only “a relaxing release from tension produced by daily problems and responsibilities, but it creates a time or space within which a woman can be entirely on her own, preoccupied with her personal needs, desires, and pleasure.” Informants in Radway’s (1984) study answered why they read romance novels by explaining how they read them, which is a similar finding to a study of readers – male and female – of women’s magazines.

Hermes (1995) interviewed men and women readers as “a way of disproving the theory that women’s magazines directly influence gender identity or turn one into a housewife” (1995, 150). She divided traditional women’s magazines into two categories: domestic weeklies, which have a strong emphasis on practical advice, such as *Woman’s Day*; and high-priced monthlies, often called glossies, such as *Cosmopolitan*. Both categories rely on service journalism for much of their editorial content, and either may be read in a manner not intended by the producers. As noted at the end of Chapter 3, the way in which the information from these magazines is ‘used’ may be determined largely by the

intention of the reader. As Hermes (1995, 48) explains, “[b]oth the repertoire of practical knowledge and the repertoire of connected knowing may help readers gain a sense of identity and confidence, in being in control or feeling at peace with life, that lasts while they are reading and dissipates quickly when the magazine is put aside.” In other words, reading these magazines affirms the readers’ membership in a particular social construction, but since the act of reading is unable to sustain that sense of membership, readers continue to turn to such magazines. Hermes’ (1995) research affirms the practical value of service journalism, particularly its relation to the social construction of the feminine ideal, but it does not answer the question about whether readers actually act upon that practical knowledge, which is the focus of this thesis.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined how women’s magazines have contributed to the social construction of the feminine ideal and how magazines altered their representation of women to coincide with dominant cultural practices. Magazines of the early 1940s, for example, called women to action by supporting their participation in the public sphere when male labour was scarce during World War II. The magazines then recalled women to action (or, perhaps, inaction) within the private sphere when male labour was in good supply following the end of the war.

Research by revisionist historians, however, has shown that women’s magazines portrayed alternative images of women, particularly those working outside the home, and research has also shown that women continued to work even when the dominant image was the “housewife-mother” (Friedan, 1997). Readers of women’s magazines do not necessarily emulate the social constructions portrayed in the magazines.

The social construction of motherhood, however, has received the same treatment in women's magazines since the early days of *Ladies' Home Journal*. Women may work outside the home or not, and women may be single or married, but women were predominantly presented in relation to motherhood. Even modern-day parenting magazines fail to reflect the cultural practice of shared parenting between women and men by targeting women and producing a magazine that is similar to women's magazines (Sunderland, 2006).

Situating service journalism's contribution to the social construction of the feminine ideal is a necessary step in developing an understanding of how the notion of action affects the production and consumption of service journalism. Constructing the image of women as consumers, for example, is helpful because it is a construction that can be measured in dollars and cents. What is particularly challenging about studying the social construction of motherhood through service journalism is that the frequency or level of action is not as easily measured. An added challenge is that readers ultimately have control over the meaning of texts. They interpret, critique, revise and modify the advice to suit their habits and cultural practices.

This debate between social constructionism and reader agency is helpful in developing a critical understanding of service journalism. To this end, the next chapters in this thesis will introduce a case study in service journalism and consider how the notion of action affects the production and consumption of service journalism.

Chapter 5

Service Journalism in *Canadian Living*

Chapter 4 of this thesis examined the relationship between social constructionism and service journalism in women's magazines. The chapter considered that while many scholars argue that women's service magazines have contributed to a narrow image of women, particularly the feminine ideal, others argue that these same magazines have provided alternative images of women that were open to interpretations. The chapter further outlined how some scholars have argued that women's magazines have contributed to the social construction of gender identities, particularly women as consumers, and how service journalism plays a central role in these social constructions due to the genre's focus on encouraging action. Regardless of the numerous social constructions magazines perpetuate, Chapter 4 concluded by considering how the content of these magazines are ultimately subject to the interpretations of individual readers. What is crucial about this conclusion is the question it raises about the interpretation of action: is the action intended by producers (editors and writers) of service journalism the same as the action taken by the consumers (readers)? The goal of this thesis is to develop an understanding of how the expectation of action, which is essential to service journalism, affects the production and consumption of service journalism. To further this study, this chapter will introduce the case study of *Canadian Living* magazine, which will provide the basis for the content analysis and discussion in Chapter 6.

The first section of this chapter will provide a brief overview of the history of Canadian mass-market women's magazines to provide context for the case study of *Canadian Living*, which is a mass-market women's magazine published in Canada since 1975. The purpose of this section, which draws mainly from Vipond (2000) and

Sutherland (1989), is to broadly outline the steps in mass-market magazine publishing that defined the context within which *Canadian Living* was established.

The second section of this chapter will outline a history of *Canadian Living*, drawing primarily on interviews with the editors-in-chief of *Canadian Living*. In 35 years, four editors – all women – have led the magazine: Judy Brandow (1977-'88), Bonnie Baker Cowan (1988-'99), Charlotte Empey (1999-2005) and Susan Antonacci (2005-present). Since the editor-in-chief dictates the direction of the magazine and decides what is included and excluded from the editorial content of the magazine, their individual perspectives provide an important basis for understanding the evolution of the magazine.

The third section of this chapter will present how *Canadian Living* has understood its 'ideal type' and will draw from original documents as well as interviews.

Understanding the reader and that individual's interests and desires is important for any publication. As Holmes (2007, 514) explains, "[t]he mantra of magazine publishing is always to pay attention to the needs, desires, hopes, fears and aspirations of 'the reader.'

All major magazine publishing companies spend substantial sums on researching all aspects of the readers of their publications so that they can better tailor the product to match readers' interests." Understanding the reader is especially crucial for service journalism because the readers of service magazines tend to be specialists in their areas of interest, be it travel or cooking or running, and failing to correctly identify the reader will result in a drop in readership and, consequently, advertising revenue.

In preparation for Chapter 6, the final section of this chapter will examine the relationship between editors and readers. This section will draw on interviews with editors. As McRobbie (1996, 180) writes, "the readers come to represent an extended community of the producer's own circle of friends and acquaintances; they are

constructed and imagined in this intimate kind of way.” The section will illustrate how producers imagine consumers as extensions of themselves and their friends. This understanding will lay the groundwork for the discussion in Chapter 6 of how the expectation of action affects the production of service journalism.

The Canadian magazine market

As detailed in Chapter 2, magazines have existed predominantly since the late-nineteenth century in North America. Their readership, however, was initially limited to the upper class. As Vipond (2000, 22) writes, “[p]rior to the 1890s, several different kinds of magazines existed in North America, but none of them served a diverse or national readership.” As Vipond (2000) argues, mass-market magazines were the result of a number of advances and changes in the publishing industry in North America. First, improved transportation systems and publishing technologies made it easier to produce and circulate magazines to a larger audience. Second, leisure time became a reality for the middle class largely because more products were being produced in factories rather than at home, so there was more free time in the home. This increased leisure time allowed for more time to read for pleasure and more time for the pursuits of interests and hobbies. Third, publishers lowered the cover price of magazines. This move made the magazines more affordable but also increased their reliance on advertising revenue. Fourth, the editorial content of these magazines was designed to appeal to a variety of readers with differing interests. As Damon-Moore (1994, 114) argues, “[i]n 1900 the circulation leaders ... were either glorified mail order catalogues or middlebrow magazines costing ten cents. The lines of the magazine world were thus being drawn, with middle-class monthlies outnumbering and outselling both more and less expensive publications.”

As Vipond (2000, 23) explains, “[t]he mass magazine caught on almost immediately in the United States, circulations soared and even traditional magazines began to adapt themselves somewhat to the new mode.” The explosion of mass-market magazines in the U.S. was bad news, however, for Canadian publishers. As Vipond (2000, 23) writes:

The difficulties to be overcome in order to launch Canadian mass magazines on a national scale were great: the smaller market reduced the economies of scale available, the great distances increased distribution costs, and the lag and external dependency in industrial development meant there were fewer national advertisers looking for outlets.

American magazines entered the Canadian market by subscriptions through the mail and also on newsstands, and competing with the accessibility and appeal of their products was a significant challenge, especially since Canadian readers became fans of the American magazines. It took as long as the 1920s for Canadian magazines to enjoy success at home.

Following in the footsteps of American publishers, the *Busy Man’s Magazine* was relaunched in Canada as the general-interest *Maclean’s* magazine in 1911, and by the end of the 1920s publisher J.B. Maclean followed the lead of American publishers by lowering his magazine’s cover price and increasing its reliance on advertising revenue (Vipond, 2000). Also following the lead of their American counterparts, Canadian publishers soon realized the earning potential of the women’s mass-market category.

Although the first modern women’s magazine with a Canadian anglophone audience was *Canadian Home Journal*, which was published from 1905 to 1959, *Everywoman’s World* was the first to aim for a mass circulation (Sutherland, 1989). Published between 1914 and 1922, *Everywoman’s World* reached a circulation of 100,000 in 1917, which, as Sutherland (1989, 157) writes, “[was] the largest then achieved by a Canadian magazine.” Other magazines tried to cross gender lines, such as *Canadian Homes and Gardens* (1924-’62) and *Mayfair* (1927-’61), which also targeted an upper-

class audience, and *National Home Monthly* (1900-'50). The first women's mass-market magazine with undisputed staying power was *Chatelaine*, which was first published in 1928. As Sutherland (1989, 160) explains, "[b]etween 1928 and 1933, the circulations of *Canadian Home Journal*, *National Home Monthly* and *Chatelaine* had all roughly doubled. That the increase and onset of the Depression were simultaneous was one signal that a strongly supportive mass audience was in place."

Even though the mass audience was in place, *Chatelaine* was the first to target middle-class women specifically. Its mandate was to include all Canadian women, not just the privileged class, and the magazine featured a mix of fiction and articles dealing with social problems, the changing structure of family life, fashion trends and classic service departments such as food, crafts and gardening (Sutherland, 1989). *Chatelaine* would go on to survive the war years as well as the post-war era, which proved to be difficult for women's magazines. As Sutherland (1989, 249) writes, "[b]y 1959, *Chatelaine's* circulation was nearly 746,000 – it had doubled in eight years," thanks in part to its absorption of *Canadian Home Journal* in 1958. By 1970, its circulation increased to 979,000. Even though *Chatelaine* answered the call of many Canadian women for open dialogue about changing gender roles, the launch of *Canadian Living* in 1975 suggests that additional room remained in the Canadian women's magazine market.

The (short) story of *Canadian Living*

In May 1975, Clem Compton-Smith contacted Anna Hobbs about starting a new magazine. As Hobbs (interview, July 31, 2009) explains, "*Chatelaine* was floundering a bit at the time. It had become very 'women's lib,' very 'bra-burning,' and it had lost a lot of readers. They didn't know who [the magazine] was for a while, and we came in as the

practical solution.” Compton-Smith asked Hobbs to develop an editorial lineup for crafts and fashion, which were her areas of expertise. Along with Hobbs, early and noteworthy contributors to the magazine included Carol Ferguson, who produced the food section, and Sally Armstrong, who wrote humour and popular psychology articles, in addition to other editors responsible for decorating, gardening, travel and how-to sections.

While Sutherland (1989, 295) describes *Canadian Living* as “primarily intended to ... remind the housewife she needed to stock up on margarine,” the editors of the magazine saw their mandate quite differently. The 62-page inaugural issue included a short note from the editors. In the note, they refer to the publication as “a new Canadian family magazine” (*Canadian Living*, December 1975, 1). This link to the family evokes Ferguson’s (1983, 104) claim that “[t]he enduring nature, continuing value and desirability of the family as a social institution remained a cultural ideal throughout the 1970s.” *Canadian Living* was launched as a general-interest magazine for English-speaking ‘middle’ Canada, with an emphasis on the home. Cover lines included “Holiday Kitchen Guide to Clip ’n’ Save” and “Your Next Car May Be a Van.” The first cover line recalls the concept of “refrigerator journalism” (Ranly, 1992) outlined in Chapter 3.

Compton-Smith published the first issue of *Canadian Living* in December 1975, with investment support from Labatt’s, and sold it exclusively in supermarkets. Margaret Kelly was the first editor of the magazine, but conflicting reports suggest varying degrees of her involvement in the magazine. Despite several efforts, the author of this thesis was unable to locate Kelly for interviews. Hobbs says she was unsure of whether the fledgling *Canadian Living* would succeed, so she used the pen name Christie Graham for the first several issues. As Griffiths (1993, 1) writes, “[w]hen *Canadian Living* hit the supermarket racks in 1975, it was no match for the sleek, glossy glamour of *Chatelaine*.”

By late 1977, however, Labatt's purchased *Canadian Living* from Compton-Smith. The new publisher was former *Toronto Star* assistant managing editor Kenneth J. Larone. In addition to convincing Hobbs to use her real name and establishing food as the primary focus of the magazine, Larone hired former *Toronto Star* family editor Judy Brandow as editor-in-chief. As Brandow (interview, July 30, 2009) recounts, she "was the first journalist that was involved with [*Canadian Living*]."

When Brandow started at *Canadian Living* in December 1977, the magazine was published quarterly, then bimonthly, and then it became a monthly in 1979. While the publisher bragged a circulation of 400,000 in those early years, Brandow says she suspects it was closer to 150,000 with less than 70 pages per issue. The Print Measurement Bureau (PMB) provides audited and standardized readership data for Canadian periodicals. As Brandow (interview, July 30, 2009) explains, "we went for a couple years before we got PMB numbers, and then the magazine doubled in size because everything we said we were we could prove." As Sutherland (1989, 295) writes, "[f]rom the start, *Canadian Living* ... achieved more than fifty percent of its sales from newsstands, chiefly in supermarkets, where it often beat out such huge-circulation U.S. rivals as *Family Circle* and *Woman's Day*." *Canadian Living* competed with these American magazines, but its mandate was to represent all regions of Canada, whether in recipes, community stories or crafts, while speaking to suburban and rural Canadians. As Brandow (interview, July 30, 2009) says, "there was a void between [Canadian magazines] *Chatelaine* and *Homemakers* of what people needed. They did in-depth stories and women's issues, but nobody was concentrating on the home and particularly recipes. There was a gap there, and we came in the middle. I developed it that way." The main

subjects, also known as pillars, covered in the magazine in the early years included food, crafts, fashion and decorating.

In 1980, a company called Beausud bought *Canadian Living* from Labatt's. Philippe de Gaspé Beaubien of Beausud became the magazine's chair and publisher. Soon after, Beausud bought the Canadian rights to *TV Guide*, and in 1981 *Canadian Living* was published by *TV Guide*, which eventually became Telemedia. Despite this confusing succession of titles under one owner – the de Gaspé Beaubien family – the magazine experienced tremendous growth during the 1980s. The November 1981 issue, for example, was 142 pages, compared to the 226-page November 1982 issue. As Griffiths (1993, 1) writes, “*Canadian Living* ... fuelled by the same can-do enthusiasm that characterizes the magazine's editorial, made the best of its resources and became the Cinderella story of the 1980s, transforming herself from a local rag to a magazine with a national readership of almost two million by 1985.”

The *Canadian Living* brand also expanded during the 1980s, adding specialty cookbooks, *Canadian Living's FOOD* magazine and a fashion publication called *Expression*, and the magazine boasted 13 issues a year. This expansion of the magazine may be at least partially explained by social changes. As Ferguson (1983, 191) argues:

The pendulum of change which swung women away from the home during the 1960s and 1970s [brought] them back to the fireside in the 1980s through such economic forces and technological advances as increased women's unemployment [during the recession of the 1980s] or growth of privatized, computerized, home-based work, shopping and entertainment.

Likewise, Winship (1987) argues that the catalyst for the growth in women's magazines, like *Canadian Living*, lay in the growing financial independence of middle-class women in their twenties and thirties in the 1980s. As Winship (1987, 156) explains, “the steady post-war rise of married women's employment and the effects of sixteen years of the

women's movement have meant that these women tend to have personal spending money beyond the purely domestic sphere." Their spending power, of course, fuelled advertisers to spend more money in magazines that attracted middle-class, married women.

In addition to more pages and more publications, *Canadian Living* also experienced a change in leadership when Brandow's 11-year tenure as editor-in-chief ended shortly after she unsuccessfully ran in the Etobicoke-Lakeshore riding for the New Democratic Party in the federal election in November 1988. Bonnie Baker Cowan replaced Brandow as editor-in-chief of *Canadian Living* in 1988, but she was not new to the magazine. Baker Cowan started at the publication as copy editor in 1979 and worked as the coordinator of the food department and managing editor before assuming the role of editor-in-chief.

Baker Cowan added new departments, such as health and parenting; new columnists, such as Peter Gzowski; and insisted the magazine perpetuate its Canadian identity by providing Canadian sources and continuing to represent all regions of Canada. During her tenure, the magazine was named Magazine of the Year by the National Magazine Awards and "published 32 cookbooks and a craft book, all best-sellers, with total sales of more than 2.5 million copies" (*Canadian Living*, May 1999, 6). It also produced a series of parenting books, a daily television show, a radio show, a website and special-interest publications, and managed a mail-order shop called *Canadian Living's* Marketplace as well as hosting culinary classes. As Baker Cowan (interview, July 30, 2009) explains, she saw her role as "more or less ... the visionary, writing three- or five-year plans. This consultant came in and said you need somebody who is just in charge of the magazine and someone who is just in charge of the franchise." From the February to May 1999 issues, Baker Cowan is listed on the masthead as editorial director/vice-

president, and Charlotte Empey is listed as editor, even though Baker Cowan continued to write the editorials. In Baker Cowan's final editorial entitled *Mothering a Magazine*, she introduces Empey as the new editor (*Canadian Living*, May 1999, 6):

And Charlotte Empey, who has been treading water in the *Canadian Living* culture since last November, will be your new editor, starting with the June issue. Charlotte, formerly publisher of *Modern Woman* magazine, has really come home, having been our beauty and fashion editor 10 years ago. We welcome her to the family.

What no one knew at the time was that Quebec-based Transcontinental Publications would purchase *Canadian Living* through an acquisition of Telemedia's magazine publishing division in early 2000. Rather than signalling a time of growth, the new owners scaled back the editorial department by almost 30 percent. The May 1999 masthead, for example, lists 50 people (no interns) in the editorial department compared to just 34 people (plus six interns) in May 2001. The readership in 1999 had surpassed two million (Print Measurement Bureau, 1999). By the July 2000 issue, Anna Hobbs, who had been with *Canadian Living* since 1975, and Baker Cowan were no longer listed on the masthead, but Empey remained as editor-in-chief.

Before *Canadian Living*, Empey's professional experience included *Flare*, *Chatelaine*, *Images*, *HealthWatch* and *Modern Woman* as well as several weeks as director of fashion/beauty for *Canadian Living* in late 1989. Empey says she believed the magazine's editorial content consisted of fundamental pillars, particularly food and parenting, and that readers were increasingly interested in health issues, so she decided that health and family would become two stand-alone pillars with separate section editors. She also wanted to make the magazine more polished and contemporary but not sophisticated because *Canadian Living*, she says, was not in the A market, which was urban-based and, at the time, targeted by *Chatelaine*. *Canadian Living*'s B and C markets

were suburban and rural respectively. As Gough-Yates (2003, 60) explains, “[i]n the post-1945 period ... it was common to base market research on socio-economic groupings derived from the Post Master General’s classification system. This classified people according to their social class, dividing the population into five different categories, labelled A (at the top) to E (at the bottom).” Empey also sought to make the magazine’s tone less earnest. As Empey (interview, July 29, 2009) explains:

I wanted to add a sense of humour to the package. I wanted there to be not humour ha-ha, not a humour column, but a sense that life’s like that and we’re all in this together. And sometimes it’s great, and sometimes it seriously sucks, but on the whole, how lucky are we to be women in this place at this point in history? That was what I wanted to bring to it.

The May 2005 *Canadian Living* was Empey’s final issue as editor-in-chief, and her successor, Susan Antonacci, once again came from within the ranks of the magazine. Since 1990 Antonacci has appeared on the masthead of *Canadian Living* as business manager, production/business manager, editorial manager, managing editor and currently editor-in-chief. Her prior experience included business manager at *TV Guide* and “floating” production consultant within Telemedia publications, including *Canadian Living*. Antonacci oversaw the magazine’s 30th anniversary issue in October 2005, which included a redesign of the contents as well as the overall appearance. By 2005, the *Canadian Living* franchise included publications such as cookbooks and seasonal craft books, a website, a presence at consumer shows and broadcasting partnerships, and its readership had risen to 4,449,000 (Print Measurement Bureau, 2005).

Antonacci shared at least two things in common with her predecessors. First, with the exception of Brandow, all the editors-in-chief had previous experience within the magazine’s culture. They had all worked at the magazine before taking a leadership role, so they were all familiar with the work culture as well as the intended messages in the

texts and how the identities of readers were constructed. Second, Antonacci and her predecessors all continuously developed a profile of the *Canadian Living* reader through research and often instinct. As Antonacci (interview, July 28, 2009) says, “when we’re looking at a story idea or actually looking at the finished product, my thought is, Okay, who is this going to appeal to? It all comes down to the information that you have.” The “information” Antonacci refers to is information about the reader gathered from such sources as market research, focus groups, website activity, circulation numbers, Letters to the Editor, and personal communication with readers via email, telephone and public encounters – and a dash of instinct. As Ferguson (1983, 128) writes, editors “believe themselves to have special of sacred knowledge about the nature of their particular audience and the messages it wishes to read.” Data from the Print Measurement Bureau, however, often reinforces this “sacred knowledge.” The next section will outline the *Canadian Living* reader based on original documents and interviews.

The *Canadian Living* reader

The key to longevity in magazine publishing is retaining readers while also acquiring new readers to compensate for those who have outgrown the publication’s ‘ideal type.’ Magazine publishers, often with the help of advertisers, employ all kinds of data to develop the ideal type. Despite this balancing act, the *Canadian Living* reader of the 1980s is remarkably similar to the reader of 2005. Before this section provides details of *Canadian Living*’s ideal type, it is worthwhile to briefly outline how magazine publishers have developed understandings of their archetypal reader.

The tools of market research have experienced some significant changes in the post-war period. Socio-economic or demographic data, such as household income, education

and age, have long been considered too restrictive to properly assess magazine readers. As Gough-Yates (2003, 61) explains, “this approach concealed significant differences *within* socio-economic groups, especially variations in taste derived from people’s cultural and educational background.” Motivational market research gained popularity in the 1950s and 1960s. Quite distinct from socio-economic data, motivational market research employs behavioral psychology to construct a picture of readers. *Canadian Living* and *Chatelaine* readers, for example, are similar demographically, but they each want a different approach to the same subject. As Empey (interview, July 29, 2009) explains, “[i]t starts by saying here’s a market, in this case women. [Then] here’s the *Canadian Living* market. I need to know that woman inside and outside. I need to be able to spot her in a lineup of 10 women of the same demographic.”

In her study of *Chatelaine* magazine in the 1950s and 1960s, Korinek (2000) outlines the findings of an evaluation prepared by the Motivational Research Institute in New York City of the *Chatelaine* reader in 1958. As Korinek (2000, 76) argues, “[s]ixty-one per cent of those interviewed reported that they read ‘magazines for the main purpose of acquiring new skills in the various phases of homemaking, and for simple suggestions of ‘how-to.’’ Other chief concerns were ‘being modern,’ ‘assistance with child-care,’ and ‘inter-family relationships.’” Again, the results do not adequately differentiate the differences between *Canadian Living* and *Chatelaine* readers, for example, because these motivations describe any number of magazine readers.

Motivational market research was used until the mid 1970s, when, as Gough-Yates (2003, 2) explains, “[i]t was replaced by ‘lifestyle’ segmentations produced through qualitative research techniques. ... [L]ifestyle research emphasized the differences between consumer groups in cultural, as well as economic and motivational terms.”

Lifestyle segmentation is similar to what Empey and Baker Cowan both refer to as “psychographics.” As Baker Cowan (interview, July 30, 2009) says, “I believe that we had two readers, but the one thing that they had in common was that home and family was important; they were nest-builders. It had more to do with lifestyle/personality profile than age. It was more psychographics.”

Keeping with a more qualitative approach to reader profiles, Brandow developed profiles during her tenure as editor-in-chief. In her Reader Profile from 1983, Brandow combined an intuitive approach with demographics. The following excerpt indicates how the producers understood *Canadian Living*'s ideal type (Brandow, 1983):

The woman we think of when we are planning and writing our stories is:

- Married
- [M]ay or may not have children, but usually we think of her as having two or three. The children may be younger or teenagers...
- She works. She may have a career or a full-time or part-time job.
- She is active: She may be a baseball mom or Brownie leader. She may be active in her community – PTA or ratepayers. She may be taking extra courses...
- She may not be totally fit, but she tries and is at least involved in some form of activity. If she doesn't go to dancercise class, doesn't run or swim – she probably walks or cycles fairly regularly...
- She entertains.
- She enjoys her home and is interested in improving it.
- She most likely lives in a suburban area like Erin Mills [Mississauga, Ont.]
- She pictures herself as being active, sophisticated and knowledgeable, but appreciates the kind of advice that *Canadian Living* offers her.
- If she is involved in all of the above she may not be involved too deeply in hobbies. However the family is probably into camping, boating, sports activities. The time she has to spend on craft projects, shopping, or hobbies is likely to be regarded as very special time for her.
- She is a very busy, active lady. She is not unlike the people in our own office – although percentage wise she will not have the education or the professional expertise that we do as a group...
- One of her main problems is trying to do everything.

The two-page typewritten report also relays demographic data about the reader, including that she is a “suburbanite,” between the ages of 25 and 45 and “at least comfortable financially” and outlines reader expectations for food and crafts. *Canadian Living* relied on this profile during the mid-1980s to determine the content and focus of the magazine.

While the lifestyle of the reader was initially understood through more intuitive methods, pressures from publishers and advertisers required more definitive data. As McRobbie (1996, 180) writes, “[m]agazine culture [since 1986] ... [has invested] heavily in market research, as an ongoing source of information and confirmation that they are doing it right. This information allows the readers to be further ‘shaped’ so that they can also be delivered to the advertisers....” Earlier in this chapter Brandow expressed the need for PMB figures to confirm *Canadian Living*’s claim to advertisers about its readership, and she credited the growth of the magazine to the presence of this data collected through more objective methods than intuition. This experience suggests that the growth of a magazine as a business is at least partially reliant on market research.

This reliance on market research suggests that the editorial content of the magazine is shaped to fit business interests more than the editors like to admit. Recalling Chapter 3, Fiske (1998) argues that a cultural commodity, such as a magazine, circulates within two economies: financial and cultural. In the financial economy, the magazine is a commodity that is sold to advertisers, and then the magazine becomes the producer of a commodity – the audience – which is also sold to advertisers. In the cultural economy, the audience becomes the producer of meanings. Regarding the financial economy, the producers of *Canadian Living* insist the readers were not “shaped” for advertisers. As Empey (interview, July 29, 2009) argues, “I need to know exactly who [the reader] is, and I have to know the role she wants this magazine to play in her life. If I deliver that, she will buy my magazine. If she buys my magazine, and I have this huge readership, then there’s an advertising base that wants to target that readership.” While Empey claims the producers of the magazine are passive in the financial economy (Fiske, 1998), the content analysis in Chapter 6 suggests the producers prioritize consumerism over the betterment of readers.

Baker Cowan says the publishers were continually researching the reader through such costly avenues as focus groups and market research, but the editorial department also used personal communications with readers, such as Letters to the Editor, to develop their own understanding. As Baker Cowan (interview, July 30, 2009) explains:

Anticipating [reader] needs and where people were at in their lives was what we were trying to do. If there's a 23-year-old who has a child and is working still, she needs to know how to make budget meals from scratch, she needs to know what to look for in day-care, that sort of thing. It was looking at their lives and listening to what they said in those letters. We read them thoroughly and dissected them to understand where people were.

Interviews suggested that while editors employed a range of techniques for understanding the reader for the purpose of developing editorial content, PMB figures remained the primary source of information about the reader for the business side of the magazine. It may, however, be suggested that the weight of PMB findings have come to devalue the more intuitive profile of the reader developed by editors. Future research could usefully develop a clearer understanding of this dynamic.

PMB prepared an empirical reader profile for *Canadian Living* in June 2005 (PHD Canada Research, 2005). Further confirming McRobbie's observation that magazines invest heavily in market research, the report states that PMB is "used extensively by advertising agencies to plan [and] buy media" (PHD Canada Research, 2005, 1). At the time, *Canadian Living* and *Homemakers* magazines shared the same editor, Empey, and considered *Chatelaine* as their main competitor in Canadian mass-market women's magazines. As a result, the 29-page report compares and contrasts the readers of all three publications based on "demographics, media habits and preferences, leisure activities, psychographics and attitudes [that] provide insights into readership" (PHD Canada Research, 2005, 1). The data was collected from a total sample of 25,000 English-

speaking women aged 18 and over. The following excerpts are taken from the section titled “Overall Observations: *Canadian Living*” (PHD Canada Research, 2005, 29):

[*Canadian Living*] readers have the highest education and incomes, have high powered careers, high-end homes and are more likely to have young children and teens. Exclusive readers are more clearly 35-49, live in smaller markets and have teens or babies.

A gourmet – she entertains frequently, loves to cook, and is the heaviest baker (from scratch). She typically, but not always uses a shopping list, doesn’t buy food strictly on price, and spends the most on groceries per week. She shops at specialty food stores, [The *Canadian Living* reader] is well informed about nutrition and is open to alternative medicine.

[The *Canadian Living* reader] is the most active at health and fitness clubs. She walks/swims/does Aerobics, Yoga and plays golf frequently. She also enjoys crafts, sewing & dressmaking.

[The *Canadian Living* reader] also loves to garden, decorate and improve her home and cottage and is happy to DIY [sic].

While the age of the reader, whom the producers call “Donna,” has increased slightly since 1985, it is striking that the reader in Brandow’s profile, based largely on intuition and personal communication with readers, is markedly similar to the profile created by PMB. For example, while Brandow states that the reader “entertains,” “is involved in some form of activity” to keep fit and “enjoys her home and is interested in improving it” (Brandow, 1983), PMB notes that the *Canadian Living* reader “entertains frequently,” “is the most active in the health and fitness clubs” and “loves to garden, decorate and improve her home” (PHD Canada Research, 2005, 29). There are, however, some important differences: while Brandow (1983) notes that the reader does not have the same “education or professional expertise” as the producers of the magazine, PMB notes that readers “have the highest education and incomes” and “have high powered careers” compared to other readers. This may be at least a partial reflection of the gains of women in Canada over a span of 20 years. These similarities between Brandow’s profile and the

objective data of PMB illustrate that the producers of a successful service magazine, such as *Canadian Living*, possess an accurate understanding of the magazine's reader. They have a sense of her interests, knowledge, goals, social status, grievances and fears.

The producer-consumer relationship

Interviews with producers of *Canadian Living*, including the four editors-in-chief – Brandow, Baker Cowan, Empey and Antonacci – as well as section, associate and senior editors, revealed many aspects of the producer-consumer relationship. A key dynamic that arose from the interviews is how the producers see the consumers as extensions of themselves and their friends. This is key because possessing a clear understanding of the audience is crucial to producing successful service journalism. Recalling Chapter 3, service journalism is successful when the information is useful, usable and used (Ranly, 1992). If producers see themselves as the ideal type, then they are more able to present information that is useful and usable and, ultimately, used. In preparation for the content analysis in Chapter 6 and its consideration of the expectation of action in the production and consumption of service journalism, this section will briefly consider how producers of service journalism view the producer-consumer relationship.

As Abrahamson (2007, 669) writes, “[w]hen contemplating the typical relationship between the magazine journalist and his or her readers ... it is quickly evident that something special is apparent. 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.” While Abrahamson portrays this interwoven image of producer and consumer as a positive aspect of magazine journalism, feminist scholars may see it in a different light, particularly how gender construction is more seamless when the producers and consumers

are the same gender (Damon-Moore, 1994). As McRobbie (1996, 181) writes, “[t]his relationship of proximity ... informs staff recruitment policies which require that the prospective employee should also embody the ideal ... woman. In this way an ‘imagined community’ of producers and consumers is constructed in the pages of the magazine.” The history of *Canadian Living*, as outlined above, and the magazine’s tradition of hiring from within or from similar publications confirm McRobbie’s (1996) statement about recruitment policies. However, the significance is not whether the community is “imagined” or not; it is simply that the producers genuinely believe this community exists.

In this dynamic, the editors imagine their readers as friends or even as themselves. They project the same elements found in a friendship, such as shared interests and experiences. The following excerpts from interviews highlight this dynamic.

One of the successes for *Canadian Living* when we started was that we were [the reader] – I was the exception, I was single, so I didn’t fit the profile, but I was the one who came from a journalistic background. Everybody else was living it as they were writing it. I think that was the magic. – Judy Brandow (interview, July 30, 2009)

[The staff] all came from pretty average family backgrounds. We were pretty representative of the reader. We weren’t all born in downtown Toronto. Some people came from rural areas, from small towns.... – Anna Hobbs (interview, July 31, 2009)

I felt like I knew that reader like my sister. She was women like us. There was that real connection. The *CL* reader was so connected to the magazine. – Christine Langlois (interview, July 27, 2009)

This notion of connectedness affects the editorial content of a service magazine, such as *Canadian Living*, because if the producers do not consider a topic, source or piece of advice useful and usable, that element is typically excluded from the magazine. Indeed, this notion affects the editorial content, as highlighted by the following excerpts.

I like to think that I’m approaching the experts on behalf of all the parents who have these questions, including myself. – Cheryl Embrett (interview, Aug. 14, 2009)

We didn’t put anything into the magazine that we didn’t intuitively believe was useful. – Charlotte Empey (interview, July 29, 2009)

I put myself in the shoes of the reader and ask how it's useful to them. What can my reader do with this information right now? Is this interesting to me? Could I apply this in any way? No? Then it's not a story. – Kathy Ulyott (interview, July 28, 2009)

This notion of connectedness with the consumers further affects the content because there is a sense that a higher level of candor is required if giving advice to a friend as opposed to a stranger. Like any adviser relationship, this dynamic involves trust and communication, as highlighted by the following excerpts.

Treat [the reader] like you're a trusted friend in the business. – Charlotte Empey (interview, July 29, 2009)

That level of trust that started with the food has extended into other areas. We enjoy an amazing relationship with our readers. They trust us on anything. – Donna Paris (interview, July 28, 2009)

There's a sense that we're all together in this. We have this club. We have the same interests. We have the same values. We're sharing this information. And you don't betray a member of your club. – Kathy Ulyott (interview, July 28, 2009)

While these excerpts are only examples, it points to a notable consensus among the producers that they are indeed the same as their readers. In some ways this may be true: they are women, after all, and share many of the interests of other women, and most of them are working mothers, which is similar to the readers. A significant difference, however, is that they are journalists. A common strategy in the journalistic process of story development, research and writing is to pretend one is talking to a friend. However, by virtue of being professional journalists and “gatekeepers” (Shoemaker, 2009) in women's magazines, they are not the reader. As journalists, they have access to information, expert sources and behind-the-scenes details, and readers must depend on them to relay that information accurately. Nonetheless, this sense of community has contributed to the voice of *Canadian Living* throughout its evolution. This perceived connection between the

producer and the consumer raises important questions about whether service journalism in *Canadian Living* was a conscious effort in social constructionism, which will be examined in the content analysis presented in Chapter 6.

Conclusion

This chapter began by briefly outlining the developments in magazine publishing that led to mass-market magazines. While American magazines impinged on the Canadian market, their success may have contributed to the creation of *Canadian Living*. The magazine's founder, Clem Compton-Smith, identified a gap in the Canadian magazine market: no Canadian magazine was addressing Canadians' interests in the home. With the help and knowledge of experts in areas such as crafts and food, Compton-Smith published the first issue of *Canadian Living* in December 1975. Since then, three corporations have managed the publication and four editors-in-chief have shaped its content. While each editor had her own approach to the magazine, they each had a similar understanding of the magazine's ideal type. The reader was at first developed through intuitive methods, which were later confirmed through empirical data. The fact that all the editors perceived their readers as friends, or even as themselves, raises important questions for Chapter 6. How does this projection affect the production of service journalism, particularly within the expectation of action, which is the essence of service journalism? And how accurate is the editors' understanding of the reader, and how does this understanding affect the consumption of service journalism?

Chapter 6

The Production and Consumption of *Canadian Living*

Earlier chapters in this thesis outlined the evolution of service journalism through the women's periodical press and provided a functional understanding of service journalism as well as a conceptual explanation for its rationale. This thesis has also considered how service journalism has contributed to the social construction of the feminine ideal and motherhood through women's service magazines. Social constructionism intersects service journalism at the point of action; the social constructs portrayed in women's service magazines tell women *whom* they should and show them *how* to be it. However, the literature on reader agency suggests that consumers interpret the meaning of texts in ways not always intended by the producers. With this in mind, Chapter 5 provided a history of *Canadian Living*, a women's service magazine and case study for this thesis, and presented how the producers see themselves as the consumers.

The goal of this chapter is to present and discuss the results of primary research of *Canadian Living*. The objective of the interview portion of the primary research was to explore and characterize the producer-consumer relationship between editors and readers of *Canadian Living*. The interviews also sought to examine how producers of service journalism understand the genre in general and how the notion of action affects their production of service journalism. The objective of the content analysis portion of the primary research was to investigate the relationship between the action prescribed in the magazine's feature articles on the subject of parenting and the subsequent actions taken by readers. These questions were answered by examining the prevalence of action in parenting articles, and then examining Letters to the Editor to assess if readers take action as a result of reading service journalism. The results of the primary research provide

insights into how the expectation of action affects the production of service journalism and whether the consumption of service journalism involves action.

Although the core characteristic of service journalism is that readers take action, primary research strongly suggests that the editors of *Canadian Living* do not follow up with readers to determine if any action was taken. Instead, editors rely on the bond they feel exists with their readers, in which the editors insist they know the readers, as presented in Chapter 5. Moreover, although *Canadian Living* relies on market research, it is not clear if questions are asked about actions taken as a result of reading the magazine. There appears to be a large gap between the stated purpose of the magazine, which is Smart Solutions for Everyday Living, and the reality: the magazine's prime motivation is promoting consumerism rather than the betterment of readers.

Primary research suggests that *Canadian Living* currently prioritizes consumerism over reader action in the following ways. First, *Canadian Living* does not test for action taken as a result of reading its features. Second, the content analysis revealed a disconnect between the subject of features in the magazine and the interests expressed by readers in Letters to the Editor. Specifically, home/garden and fashion/beauty features appear most frequently after food over the 30-year span of the study, while food, family/life and health were the most prevalent interests expressed by readers through Letters to the Editor during the same period. As discussed below, this disconnect suggests that service is not currently the prime motivation for *Canadian Living* and that the readers' desire for practical information carries less weight than the editors' desire to please advertisers. How can the two sides of this dichotomy be reconciled?

The key may lie in a more nuanced understanding of service journalism by dividing it into 'hard' and 'soft' service journalism. As detailed below, hard service is prescriptive

and explicitly *tells* the reader how to do something specific, while soft service is more inspirational and tends to imply holistic actions. This distinction between hard and soft service journalism reflects characterizations drawn by Hermes (1995). Hard service journalism contributes to the “repertoire of practical knowledge,” which allows readers to rationalize the consumption of women’s magazines for their useful and practical information. In contrast, soft service journalism contributes to the “repertoire of connected knowing and emotional learning,” which connects readers to a broader imagined community of women and provides guidance on womanhood.

The first section of this chapter will outline service journalism in *Canadian Living* and will draw from interviews and the author’s own experience, as outlined in Chapter 1. This section will also draw on Korinek’s (2000) study of *Chatelaine*, a women’s service magazine and main competitor of *Canadian Living* since the mid 1980s. Korinek’s (2000) study does not focus on service journalism specifically, but she does refer to the genre frequently. What is particularly helpful about Korinek (2000) is her understanding of reader interpretation and its effect on how readers interact with the content of *Chatelaine*. This section will also recall elements of service journalism discussed in Chapter 3 and examine the producers’ understanding of action. The second and third sections will outline the methodology for the content analysis and present the findings along with discussion. Analysis from the primary research is summarized and put into the broader context of the production and consumption of service journalism in Chapter 7.

The production of service journalism in *Canadian Living*

Recalling Chapter 3, service journalism delivers information coupled with an expectation of action, which differentiates service journalism from other forms of journalism. While

journalism in general delivers information, service journalism is about the application of information. Service journalism may be judged on whether consumers act upon the advice provided in the magazine. Recalling Ranly (1992), producers of service journalism should generate useful and usable content. As Ranly (1992, 139) argues, “[y]ou have done your job even better if the reader does something as a result of the information.”

Canadian Living is a monthly women’s service magazine. The focus of the magazine is home and family life, and the service journalism in it addresses a number of subjects, which the producers call pillars. The pillars of *Canadian Living* are food, crafts, fashion and beauty, health, life and community. The slogan on the spine of the magazine since 1999 embodies the producers’ perception of service journalism: Smart Solutions for Everyday Living. The slogan before 1999 was Your Family Magazine, and the slogan was changed in April 2010 to Inspiring Ideas for Everyday Living. The following excerpts from interviews with producers of service journalism in *Canadian Living* illustrate their approach to service journalism and their rationale for the genre.

Our philosophy was, We do your homework for you. More and more women, at that time, were starting to work and didn’t have as much time as they had before. They wanted help. They wanted someone to do the research, and they didn’t have the Internet [in the 1970s]. They might get a little bit in the newspapers, but they weren’t providing what they wanted. The whole thing we were doing was service, so much so that we didn’t think about it. – Judy Brandow (interview, July 30, 2009)

[People] don’t need more information. They need information that’s packaged in a way that’s more accessible and easily digestible. People need information packaged in a way that addresses their needs, tells them how to do things faster, easier, smarter. – Cheryl Embrett (interview, Aug. 14, 2009)

Service journalism is the body of journalism that enhances my enjoyment of life, my ability to pursue the life I want, to find solutions for whatever predicament I’m in. – Doug O’Neill (interview, July 28, 2009)

Part of the aspect of service ... is that it is very indispensable. We use a lot of words like must-have, new, must-know. It’s being sold as things that you not only want to know or be interested in but things you must know in order to live your best life. – Kathy Ulyott (interview, July 28, 2009)

As Ranly (1992, 138) outlines, service journalism is “an approach to presenting information that: quickly shows the reader that the information is useful; gives information to the reader in the most usable way; and tells the reader how to take action or how to get more information.” Producing a piece of service journalism that is useful and usable depends first on the producer’s knowledge of the audience, including the readers’ interests, levels of knowledge and demographic details, as well as the quality of research, sources, quality control and editorial judgment of the producers.

A second component is how the information is presented. Service journalism tells the reader what to expect. This is achieved with such statements as, “10 ways to...,” or “Here’s how to...” As detailed in Chapter 3, sidebars, bullet points, pull quotes, charts and explicit headlines and decks (secondary headlines that appear below the headline) help the reader assess the usability of an article and enhance comprehension. Pulling the reader into the story by using the second pronoun also contributes to the usability.

The final component – action – is the focus of this thesis. Action in service journalism may take numerous forms. As discussed in Chapter 3, a service magazine is a business, so the primary action is to buy something, which includes buying the magazine as well as the products advertised in the magazine. Advertisers request their ads be placed beside a story that is relevant to the advertised product or of interest to the target consumer. As Korinek (2000, 53) states, “it was clear that the business of *Chatelaine* was to promote consumption.” Similarly, the business of *Canadian Living* is to sell magazines to consumers and to provide an avenue for advertisers to reach consumers.

Readers may also be encouraged to buy something through the editorial content of any pillar in the magazine. Editorial content in these pillars may overtly encourage readers to buy something, such as a beauty feature with product photography, retail prices and

shopping information, but subtle suggestions to buy something are more common. An example of a less overt call to action is including the name of a book written by an expert source quoted in a story. The action in this sense would be finding more information as a result of buying the book. As Korinek (2000, 218) explains, “[t]he most successful service material – food, gardening, household advice, and the parenting column – provided readers with practical information. In those features, the commercial nature of the material was often subtle.”

Action may also be the act of following instructions, which encompasses three consequences. First, recalling Chapter 5, *Canadian Living* established its credibility by producing recipes that were “Tested-Till-Perfect,” as the magazine claimed. The fundamental action to be taken from reading a recipe is preparing the recipe. Second, the consumer nature of this pillar is not explicit. A recipe may call for a countertop appliance, for example, so acting on the advice presented in the article may require the reader to buy something. Third, following instructions also speaks to women’s service magazines’ role in the social construction of the feminine ideal. By preparing the recipe and modelling the example of the feminine ideal portrayed in the magazine, a reader acts on these guidelines. As Ferguson (1983, 99) argues, “[l]earning to be a woman still involves teaching yourself to *improve* on your standards of femininity and *achieve* a better performance in all your womanly roles,” and women’s magazines such as *Canadian Living* help women “improve” and “achieve” through “Tested-till-Perfect” instructions.

Less measurable forms of action include changing a behaviour, such as quitting smoking or reducing the amount of television viewing hours, and adopting a new strategy, such as holding family meetings or employing communication skills. The following excerpts illustrate the producers’ overall understanding of action.

We didn't tell people what to do, didn't fix things for them. We gave them the tools and inspiration to take action on their own. – Bonnie Baker Cowan (interview, July 30, 2009)

Canadian Living is classically service in the fact that there is some action to be taken at the other end, and it's inspirational not aspirational. It has a particular mandate. – Charlotte Empey (interview, July 29, 2009)

Good service journalism is crafted so that action, if it speaks to that particular reader, is easy. The article simplifies the taking of that action. – Doug O'Neill (interview, July 28, 2009)

Despite the producers' understanding of action, interviews show that producers did not follow up with readers to determine if action was taken as a result of the reading or even to determine if the action taken as a result of reading was the action prescribed. As presented in Chapter 5, the producers develop a detailed understanding of the reader through a combination of intuition and market research. The Print Measurement Bureau (PMB) reports on the circulation and readership of Canadian magazines. The producers of *Canadian Living* employ numerous tools – PMB, reader surveys, focus groups and Letters to the Editor – to ensure the magazine is interesting to the consumer, which maintains high circulation numbers and advertising dollars, but they stop short of finding out if the information is used. Recalling the producer-consumer relationship presented in Chapter 5, the editors see the readers as their friends or even themselves and therefore believe what they find useful is equally useful to readers. Interviews with producers did not uncover any active attempt to assess action. The following excerpts illustrate this point.

We would hope that there was more proactivity besides reading it, that perhaps because of an issue that we had published, it made a change in her life for the better. Not just the way she thinks but her attitude. But do I know that? No. – Bonnie Baker Cowan (interview, July 30, 2009)

If your subscriptions are down and your newsstand sales are down, that's sending you a message that people are not interested in and therefore they are not using or do not think it is useful information you're giving them. – Charlotte Empey (interview, July 29, 2009)

As the excerpts illustrate, the producers make no attempt to assess reader action beyond the act of buying the magazine. This is left up to the reader to communicate. What all this suggests is that producers prioritize consumerism over reader action. They invest in PMB, reader surveys and focus groups to determine if the magazine is interesting and worth purchasing but do not use any of these tools to determine if the advice is used.

It is worthwhile to note the personal recollection of Cheryl Embrett, one of the interviewees and a freelance writer for *Canadian Living*. In the interview, she recalled her own experience of taking action as a reader of service journalism in parenting magazines, which suggests readers do take action as a result of reading service journalism.

I read parenting magazines, and I followed a lot of the advice. The parenting magazines had such a friendly tone. They didn't talk down to me. It was real sensible advice. There was no finger wagging. There was tons of information that I used.
– Cheryl Embrett (interview, Aug. 14, 2009)

Two studies provide further insight into the notion of action. First, Korinek's (2000) study of *Chatelaine* magazine examines, among other things, reader interpretations of texts. *Chatelaine* magazine is, like *Canadian Living*, a women's service magazine. She says the phrases "do something" and "improvement" were key to much of the service department material in *Chatelaine*. To support the claim that service material was useful and well read, the publisher of *Chatelaine* gathered Starch figures, which were the industry standard and also used by *Canadian Living*. As Korinek (2000, 54) explains, the Starch reports "claimed to measure the amount of action generated by the ad and editorial material." The main goal of Starch figures was to show advertisers that readers took action, which would encourage media buyers to purchase ad space in the magazine. Action was defined as a purchase, an interest or acting on the advice in the editorial content. However, as Korinek (2000, 54) argues, "[w]hen 80 per cent of respondents

[said] ‘they took some action,’ all this really meant was that the magazine had some impact on the reader.” Being interested in the content of a magazine and even buying the magazine do not suggest the readers took action; all it says is they like the magazine. As Korinek (2000, 182) concludes, the Starch reports, “[reflect] how many women had ‘noted’ or ‘read most,’ *not* purchased or ‘acted upon’ the information” [emphasis added]. Indeed, quantifying action is a challenge.

The second study relevant to this discussion of reader action is Hermes’ (1995) study of readers of women’s magazine. Hermes (1995) identified several repertoires that readers use to make texts meaningful and argues that some of the repertoires feed fantasies about doing something more than they develop the skills to do something. Recalling Chapter 4, Hermes (1995) found readers placed value on magazines for their practical use. She says the arguments readers put forward for reading magazines, such as they are useful, do not necessarily reflect what they do with the magazines. As a result, she identified the repertoire of practical knowledge and the repertoire of emotional learning and connected knowing. As Hermes (1995, 40) writes:

In the case of the repertoire of practical knowledge the fantasy is of a very rational and practical self. In fact, the whole repertoire can be seen as the rational explanation of ‘why someone would read women’s magazines.’ They are useful, they are not expensive; one may pick up handy information. The repertoire of emotional learning and connected knowing ... is its emotional and sentimental counterpart.

The repertoire of practical knowledge may also be described as hard service journalism, which is prescriptive and explicitly *tells* the reader how to do something. A good example of hard service is the following headline and deck: “When Good Kids Do Bad Things: Even the best-adjusted teen goes off the track sometimes. Here’s what you should do” (*Canadian Living*, Oct. 8, 1984, 151). Recalling Eide and Knight (1999) from Chapter 3, the text suggests a potential risk that the reader’s teenager may “do bad things” and

promises to prescribe the appropriate measures to fix the problem within the private sphere. Recalling Ranly (1992, 138), the headline and deck “shows the reader that the information is useful,” the sidebar with bullet points of “Dos and Don’ts for Parents” presents the information “in the most usable way,” and showcasing a book for further information tells the reader “how to get more information.” The producers all present a firm understanding of hard service journalism, but they also demonstrate a degree of respect for reader agency. The following excerpts illustrate this point.

It’s very important with parent and family [service] journalism that we remind the reader, ‘You have to do what’s right for you. If this doesn’t feel right for you, then don’t do it.’ – Kathryn Dorrell (interview, July 27, 2009)

Here’s the deal, and here’s how you can own it, should you choose to do so. And to me it was always the ‘should you choose to do so’ wrapped around this. That, to me, is ultimately good women’s service journalism. – Charlotte Empey (interview, July 29, 2009)

Not all service articles speak to every reader. We would be naïve to think that every service article is going to spur someone to action. It has to speak to that reader. – Doug O’Neill (interview, July 28, 2009)

The latter repertoire identified by Hermes (1995) – emotional learning and connected knowing – may be described as soft service journalism, which is more inspirational and tends to imply actions. While the magazine as a package contributes to emotional learning and connected knowing, a specific example of soft service journalism is an article illustrated by the following headline and deck: “Parents on Board: New Brunswick leads the way with parent-driven school councils. Now Mom and Dad decide what their kids learn and where the funding is spent” (*Canadian Living*, October 1996, 60). The purpose of this story, which is a narrative with no sidebars or information boxes, is to outline what other parents have done with respect to the education system, which may inspire readers to adapt the actions to their situations. In this sense, *Canadian Living* excels at service journalism. Even hard service pieces contribute to Hermes’ repertoire of

emotional learning and connected knowing by outlining the *how* of being a woman or, in the above example, a parent. Fashion/beauty features, for example, instruct women on what to wear and how to look. Similarly, home/garden features instruct women on how to decorate their homes and what their personal environments should look like. Interviews with producers revealed a tension regarding soft service, despite the magazine's prolific use of it. Most editors indicated value for its less prescriptive approach; others regarded it as unhelpful. The following excerpts illustrate these points.

It's not helpful ... for me to share this woman's story with other women about how she made a difference in Africa unless I am then completing that circle by saying, 'And here's how you can make a difference, if you choose to do so.' It needs to come full circle. – Charlotte Empey (interview, July 29, 2009)

You'd look at [inspiration pieces] and say they weren't service, but I think any area where people are struggling with something – and parenting definitely – to give people someone else's story, as a parent, a woman, a mother, it's teaching you that someone else has been through this. It's not traditionally what we think of as service journalism, but I think it does a great service to people who have been there, or going through that. You get that sense that I'm not in this alone, and I think for parenting that's huge. – Kathryn Dorrell (interview, July 27, 2009)

Whether hard or soft service journalism, the genre is about the application of information. By producing content that is useful and usable, it is expected that the reader will apply the prescribed action, therefore making the content used. It is, however, up to the reader to decide if she will take action. It does not seem that producers of service journalism have systematically attempted to determine if the information presented in *Canadian Living* is used, so part of the goal of the following content analysis is to identify the action prescribed in the magazine and the action taken by readers.

Content Analysis: Methodology

The goal of this quantitative and qualitative content analysis was to track the types of action prescribed in parenting features, the prevalence of articles about motherhood and

the proportional presence of interest and action in Letters to the Editor. As Ferguson (1983, 4) explains, “[c]ontent analysis involves selecting specific categories of subject matter and counting the number of times there is a reference to a topic or category of topics in a particular issue of a particular year.” To this end, this content analysis looked at the March and October issues of *Canadian Living* from 1976 to 2005. The first issue of the magazine was December 1975, so the content analysis started with the first March issue. The analysis involved 60 issues of the magazine over a 30-year period. March and October were chosen because they are generally not affected by seasonal content that may sway results, such as back-to-school articles in September. It should be noted that from 1984 to 1988 the magazine was published 13 times a year. When two October issues were published, the first date was chosen. For example, *Canadian Living* published an Oct. 1 and Oct. 29 issue in 1988, but only the Oct. 1 issue was included in the analysis. It should also be noted that until the magazine was published monthly in 1979, the magazine produced combined issues, such as March/April and September/October.

For the first part of the content analysis, the total number of feature articles was counted in each issue. A feature article was defined as more than one page, not a regularly appearing column and not a series of briefs on a related subject, such as health briefs. While a fashion feature, for example, may not contain much text, it may account for the same number of pages assigned to a health or parenting feature. The number of features was counted under the following headings: fashion/beauty; food; family/life; parenting; motherhood; health; crafts; home/garden; and ‘other,’ such as social issues, travel, civics and community stories. While the degree of journalism incorporated into some of the aforementioned subjects may be debated, developing a more critical measure is beyond the scope of this thesis. These topics are hallmarks of women’s service magazines and

should therefore be recognized in this study of service journalism. The family/life heading represents such topics as adult sibling rivalry, caring for aging parents, relationships, marriage and family life, personal finance, pets, career and education.

Parenting articles were defined by their focus on the relationship between parent(s) and children and the role of the parent(s) in child-rearing from newborns to young adults. Motherhood articles were defined by their exclusive focus on the mother and her experience as a mother. Parenting and motherhood could have been included in family/life, but this thesis is focusing on parenting advice because the application of that information is less measurable than a recipe or craft, which produces tangible results. Parenting features were also chosen because of their expected prevalence in the magazine, which would result in a considerable sample, in addition to their less measurable form of action. Readers often report on successful recipes and craft projects by sending letters and photographs to the magazine. Sharing their successes affirms their belonging in the 'club of the feminine ideal' and provides the opportunity to feel a sense of accomplishment. In contrast, readers were considered to be less likely to communicate an action prescribed in a parenting story because it may confirm that the reader needs help with parenting, which should be 'natural' and 'instinctual' to any mother.

The second part of this content analysis specifically examined parenting and motherhood features. The headline, deck (secondary headline), body and sidebars of each parenting feature were read to identify the dominant action prescribed: buy something, change a behaviour or adopt a new strategy, none, and 'other,' such as finding more information or taking another form of action. Secondary actions were also identified in parenting features. Similarly, the headline, deck, body and sidebars of each motherhood feature were read to identify how motherhood is portrayed in these articles.

The third part of this content analysis looked at the Letters to the Editor in the March and October issues from 1975 to 2005. The goal was to identify the interests of readers as well as the type of action they took as a result of reading *Canadian Living*. Writing a Letter to the Editor is an action in and of itself, but this thesis is interested in the actions that result from the service articles produced by the magazine.

The analysis first recorded the number of Letters to the Editor published in each issue. The letters were then read. Any reference to a subject was counted once and taken to signify interest in that subject. The references were sorted under the same headings as the features: fashion/beauty; food; family/life; parenting; motherhood; health; crafts; home/garden; and 'other,' such as social issues, travel, civics and community stories. The letters were also read for references to types of actions related to subjects or the magazine as a whole. These types of actions included: clipped/kept for later use; made a recipe; made a craft; used parenting advice; shared the magazine; and 'other.' The 'other' category included following any other advice prescribed in the magazine, such as trying a diet plan, donating money to a featured charity or organizing an event.

It is important to note that using Letters to the Editor to determine action has limitations. First, while Letters to the Editor help assess the popularity of certain material, they do not determine the effect, if any, of these articles unless the writer explicitly says how the information was used. Second, the editors select the letters to be published and sometimes edit the letters for length and grammar. As a result, not all letters written are included in the magazine, and the ones that are included may not be exactly what the reader intended. In this sense, the producers act as gatekeepers of this information. As Walker (2000, 43) argues, "magazine editors selected the letters and queries to be printed and thus exercised control over the written record that exists today."

Finally, it is important to recognize that the results of the analysis of Letters to the Editor rest in part on the author's interpretation of reader letters in *Canadian Living*. Sometimes the letters revealed unequivocal action and even included a photograph of a completed recipe or craft, for example. In other instances the author of this thesis inferred the action. The following excerpts illustrate these points. The action in the first letter is clearly stated, whereas the action in the second letter may be inferred.

Thank you for the terrific article on floral arranging ("Splendor in the Vase," Sept. 5 [1987]). I tried the arrangements with both fresh and silk flowers and both worked, to my great pleasure. I never knew how talented I was – until I followed your wonderful instructions. – Joan Steffin, Dartmouth, N.S. (*Canadian Living*, March 19, 1988, 9)

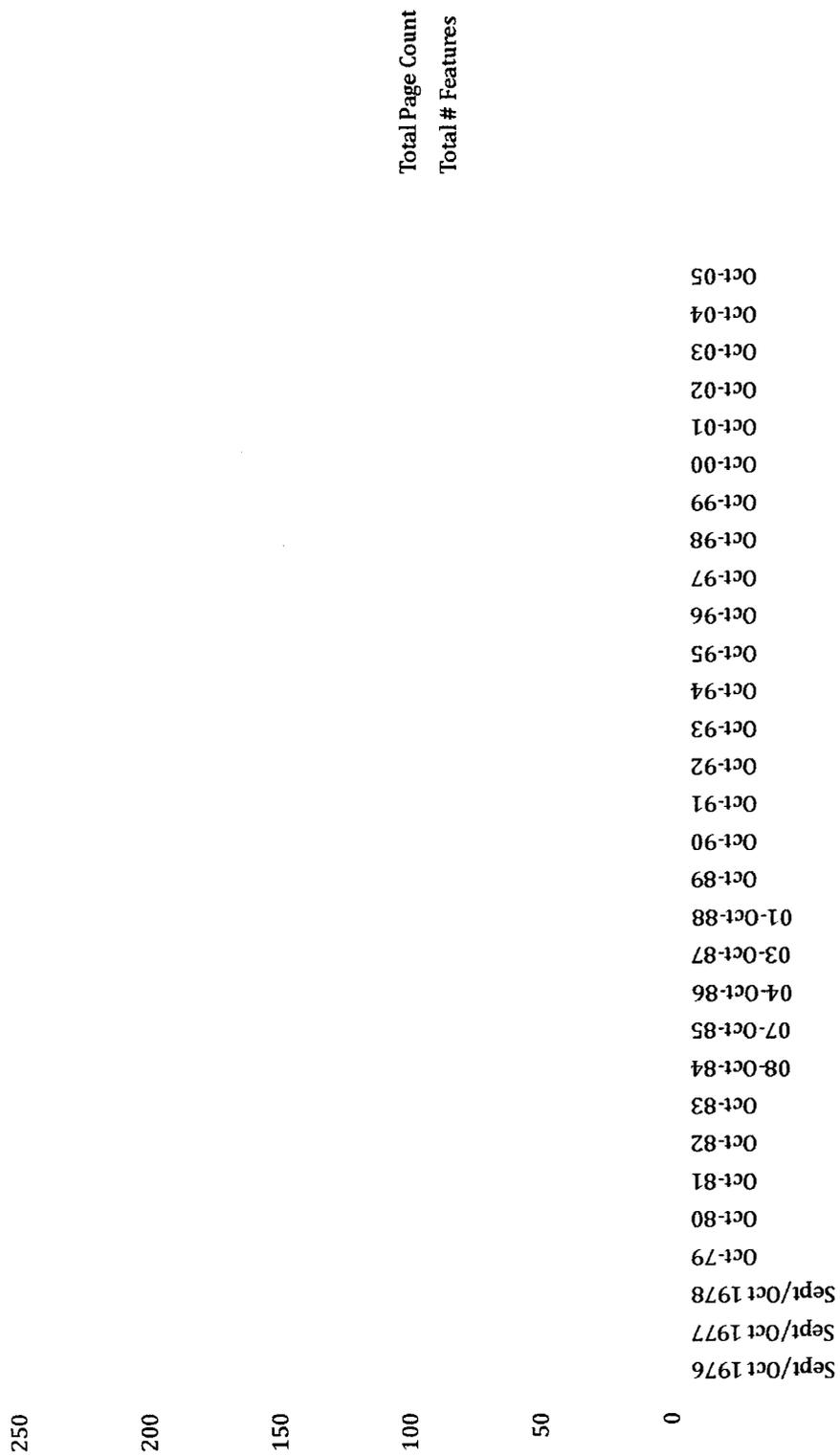
My husband and I have raised two beautiful children, and we would read the "Your Kids" section to help us with all the little things. – Nicola Bishop, Toronto (*Canadian Living*, October 2005, 17)

While assessing the action taken by readers more systematically through interviews with readers would provide a more comprehensive result, the cost involved would have been beyond the resources of this thesis. As Hermes (1995, 10) argues, "we know more about the concerns and views of researchers than we do about the actual practices of women's magazine use and the experiences of other readers." While future research could usefully develop a more rigorous methodology to understand readers and their understanding of action, Letters to the Editor provided a useful point of departure for this thesis.

Content Analysis: Understanding production and consumption

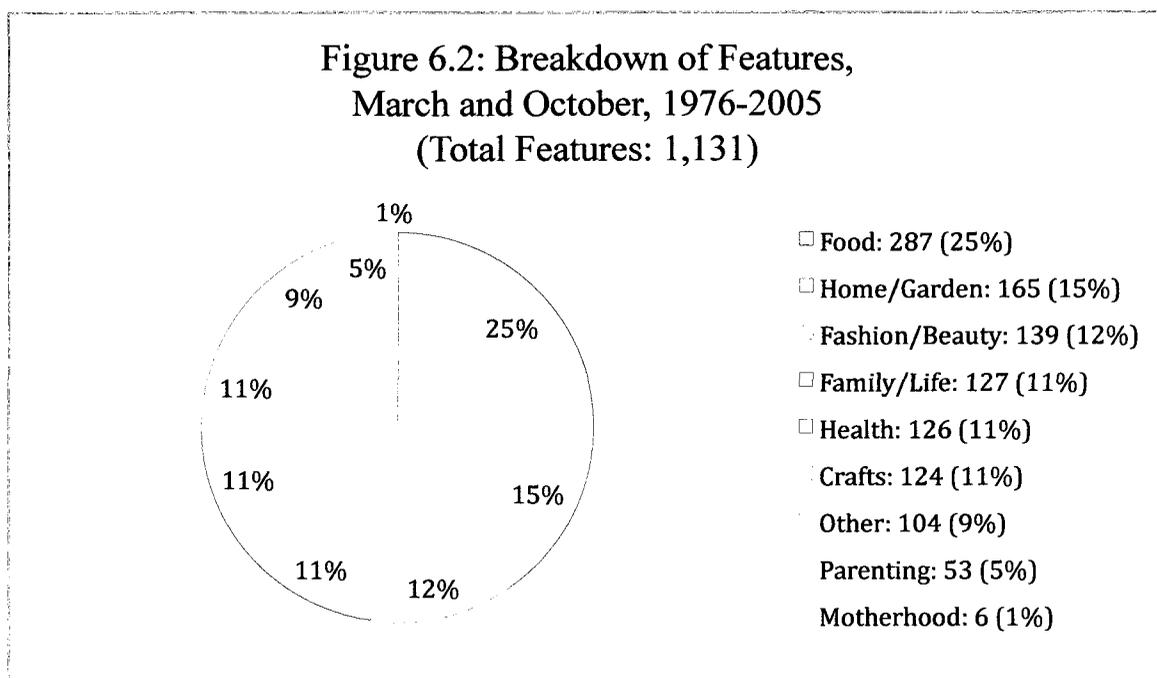
Figure 6.1 (see page 119) shows the growth in pages in *Canadian Living* over 30 years in comparison to the consistent number of feature articles per issue. The smallest issues were 62 pages, and the magazine reached more than 100 pages in 1981. The largest issue sampled was the 30th anniversary issue in October 2005 with 280 pages.

Figure 6.1: Comparing Total Page Count and Total Number of Features, October 1976-2005



It might be expected that the increasing gap between the number of pages and number of features was filled by advertisements. While more pages do point to more ads, it is important to note that more one-page articles, columns and collections of briefs also filled the gap seen in Figure 6.1 (see page 119). These were not included in the content analysis because they did not fit the description of a feature. Recalling Chapter 3, the increased use of one-page articles and briefs shows an evolution in service journalism by presenting information with less narrative. Also recalling Chapter 3, producers compete in the attention economy by providing readers with shorter bits of information. As competition for magazine readers increases, it may have been thought that presenting information in shorter form would attract more readers.

The first part of the content analysis identified 1,131 features in the March and October issues from 1976 to 2005. As Figure 6.2 (below) shows, food features accounted for the greatest proportion of features with 25 percent.



Following food, the subject of features were: home/garden (15 percent); fashion/beauty (12 percent); family/life, health, and crafts (11 percent each); 'other' (nine percent); parenting (five percent); and motherhood (one percent).

It is not surprising that food accounted for 25 percent of the articles, given the magazine's focus on food. Anna Hobbs, an editor at *Canadian Living* from 1975 to 2000, says publisher Ken Larone determined food would be the focus of the magazine in 1977. In the early years, the magazine was sold exclusively in grocery stores. Even though the magazine targeted men and women, women purchase more magazines than men (Damon-Moore, 1994), and women were more likely to be in grocery stores than men in 1975. Cover testing, which determined the most popular magazine covers, showed that more magazines with food on the cover were sold closer to dinnertime. Further, as Hobbs (interview, July 31, 2009), explains, "[*Canadian Living*] became known and became trusted. In the test kitchen, the recipes were really tested, and you could rely on them."

It is interesting to note how little weight was given to parenting and motherhood features (five percent and one percent respectively). This may be explained by the analysis's definition of parenting features as articles that dealt exclusively with child-rearing and parenting strategies. As presented in Chapter 5, the *Canadian Living* reader was understood to be a mother, so the notion of parenting and motherhood were woven into most of the articles. Health stories, for example, focused on childhood illnesses and the role of the parent in keeping children healthy. Given that just five percent of the overall content of the magazine addresses parenting in sole-themed articles, it does not seem that *Canadian Living* provided a lot of prescriptive advice to readers in their role specifically as parent but instead constructed a picture of motherhood that was subtle and more diffused throughout the magazine's content.

As presented in Figure 6.3 (see page 123), the number of food features remained fairly steady compared to the fluctuations in the total number of other features. Counting the number of food features provided a gauge with which to compare the prevalence of the other departments and, recognizing the magazine's prime focus on food, the weight the producers placed on other subjects compared to food.

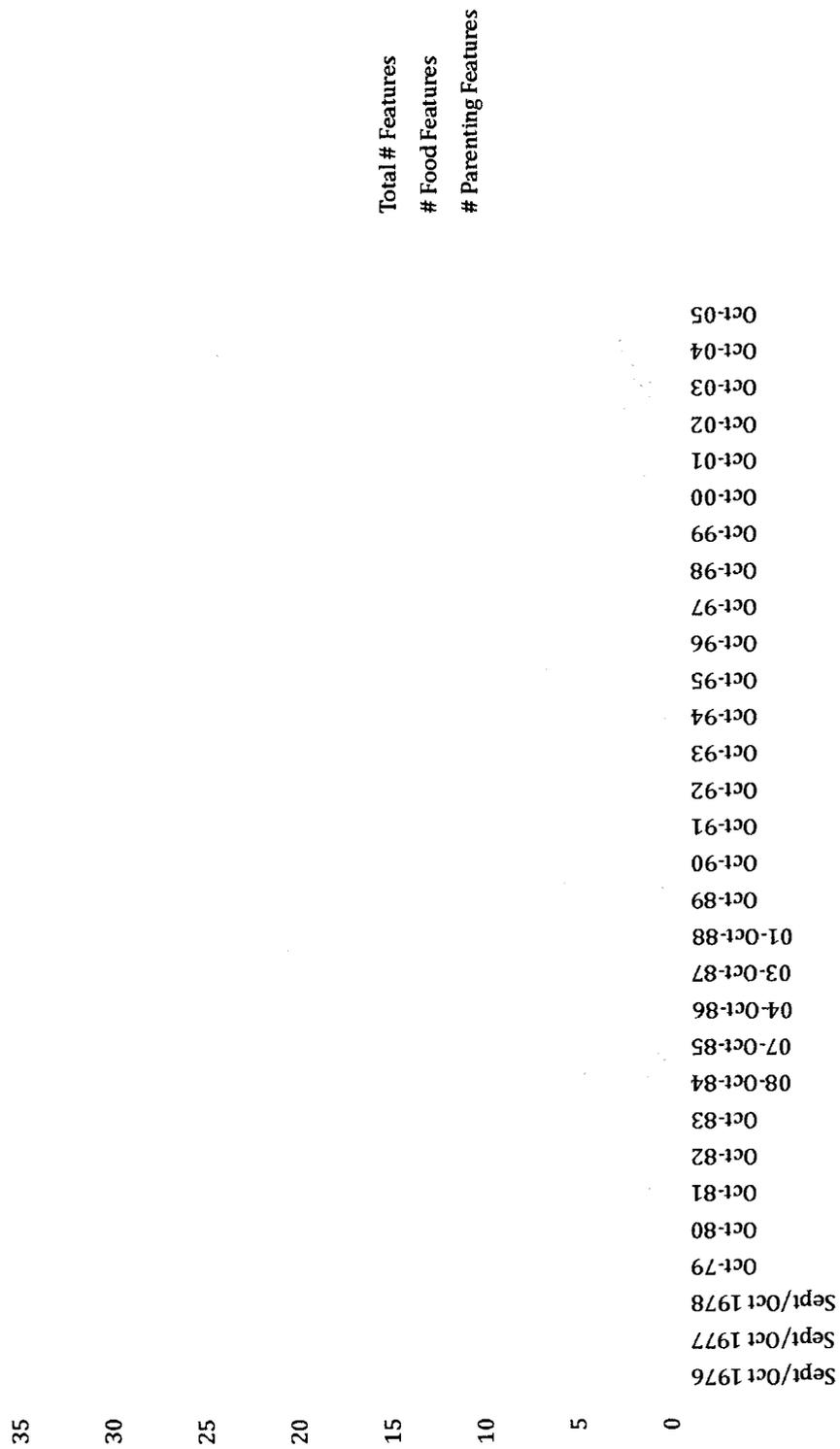
The consistency in the number of food stories compared to the growth in the total number of features may be explained by the expansion of the subjects covered by the magazine. The prevalence of parenting features, for example, increased slightly in 1994, the International Year of the Family. The magazine, under Bonnie Baker Cowan's leadership, began featuring parenting specials. Many of these specials included four or five feature articles about family life in general. Christine Langlois was the parenting editor until the magazine began featuring health specials, when Langlois became the health and family editor. When Charlotte Empey took over as editor-in-chief in 1999, she separated health and parenting into two distinct sections, and Langlois became the family editor. The following excerpts illustrate how the parenting section came to be and the role advertising played in that decision.

The magazine had such a readership for food ... and Bonnie [Baker Cowan] wanted to grow that base and make the magazine have the same level of credibility and connection to the reader, and the thought was a parenting section would work that way. And there were advertising dollars for parenting pages. – Christine Langlois (interview, July 27, 2009)

All our research told us that health was always first or second, and it was family health. We knew women were gatekeepers about her family's health. We knew we had to diversify and make different sections. – Bonnie Baker Cowan (interview, July 30, 2009)

I believed that we had some fundamental pillars that the reader depended on. Food, absolutely at the top, and parenting, but then increasingly health was going to be a major concern. And women are the gatekeepers of their family's health. – Charlotte Empey (interview, July 29, 2009)

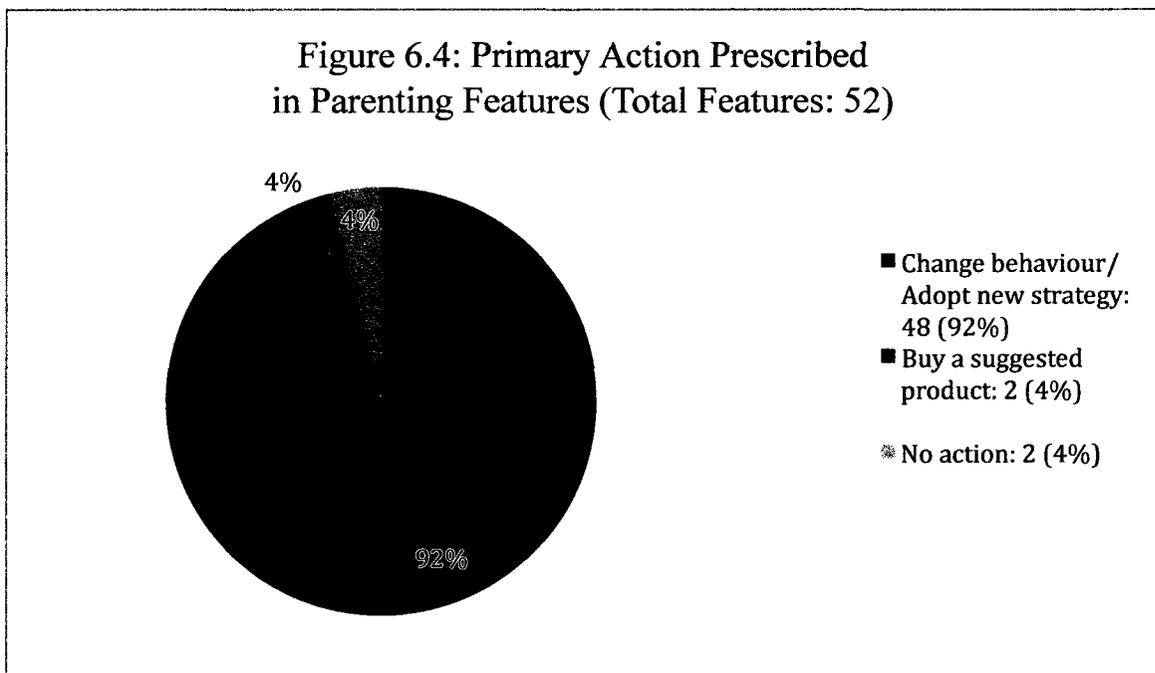
Figure 6.3: Comparing Total, Food and Parenting Features, October 1976-2005



It is also worth noting that the number of parenting features increased slightly in 1999 when the Family section became a monthly section. Comparing Figures 6.1 (see page 119) and 6.3 (see page 123) shows that the page counts did not significantly affect the number of parenting features but rather made room for more subjects in the magazine.

• Action in Parenting Features

Figure 6.4 (below) shows that the dominant type of action prescribed in the parenting features was to change a behaviour or adopt a new strategy.

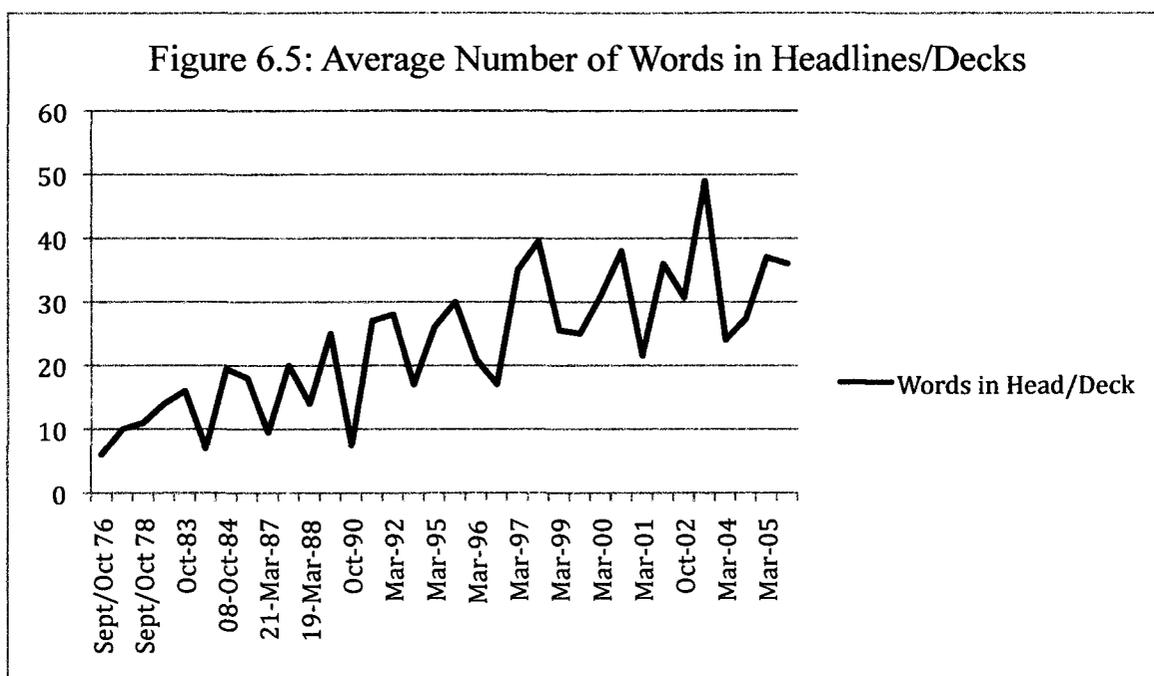


Of the 52 parenting features sampled, 48 features (92 percent) suggested changing a behaviour or adopting a strategy. Only two features (four percent) overtly prescribed the act of buying something: one was a two-page feature that focused solely on baby slings that have “an almost magic effect on fussy babies” (*Canadian Living*, October 1995, 89) and included shopping information; the other was a four-page feature about the “latest takes on four first-year necessities” (*Canadian Living*, October 2001, 161) for newborns

and included full-page photographs of the products and shopping information. Two features (four percent) included no action at all and were more similar to traditional news reporting than service journalism. These articles were found in the Sept./Oct. 1976 and Sept./Oct. 1977 issues, which suggests the genre of service journalism was still evolving in these early issues of *Canadian Living*.

Of the 48 parenting features in which the dominant action prescribed was to change a behaviour or adopt a new strategy, 33 features (69 percent) also included a secondary action of finding more information. The action of finding more information was either implied or suggested and could take the form of reading a book, visiting a website, calling information lines or buying a product. Sometimes a reference book, for example, was written by an expert source quoted in the story or the entire story was excerpted from a reference book, so the act of seeking more information in that book would be implied. In other examples a list of websites was included at the end of the story or the reader was invited to order an information video. It is worth noting that a number of these secondary actions related in some way to the *Canadian Living* franchise, either because the book was available to order through *Canadian Living* or the feature was an excerpt from a *Canadian Living* book. In other instances, readers were encouraged to visit CanadianLiving.com for more information. This reinforces Korinek's (2000) suggestion that the action prescribed in service magazines is consumption, such as buying a book from the *Canadian Living* Family Book series or visiting CanadianLiving.com. Nonetheless, book titles, phone numbers and websites are all tools with which readers may take action, if the subject of the article is interesting to the reader. Many of the secondary actions prescribed, such as contacting a government-sponsored information hotline, did not benefit the *Canadian Living* franchise.

Recalling Ranly's (1992, 138) definition of service journalism that focuses on presenting the information in a manner that "quickly shows the reader that the information is useful," it is worth noting how the headlines and decks, which are the secondary headlines below the main headline, have played a more prominent role in presentation. Figure 6.5 (below) shows the number of words used in headlines and decks in identified parenting features. When the issue contained more than one parenting feature, the average word count was recorded.



This steady increase in the number of words used in headlines and decks suggests an evolution in the magazine's approach to service journalism and an appreciation for the need to communicate the point of the article quickly and clearly. As Ranly (1997, 1) explains, "[p]erhaps the primary rule of writing today is: Did you give the message in such a way as to take the reader the least amount of time?" By including more information in the headlines and decks, the producers of service journalism give the reader enough information to choose if reading the article is worth that individual's time.

• **Motherhood in Features**

The second part of the content analysis looked at features that dealt specifically with motherhood. The goal of this portion of the content analysis was to consider links with the literature on the social construction of motherhood presented in Chapter 4. As stated above, one percent of the sampled features in *Canadian Living*, a women's service magazine whose focus is home and family life, specifically addressed motherhood. However, recalling the definition of soft journalism and Hermes' (1995) repertoire of emotional learning and connected knowing, instruction about motherhood is infused into every section of *Canadian Living*. Letters to the Editor, which will be discussed below, showed that readers do turn to the magazine for guidance on how to be a 'good' mother, which may include feeding, dressing, monitoring, housing, educating and entertaining one's family. In addition to the prevalence of motherhood throughout the magazine, a handful of articles specifically addressed the subject.

Recalling Sunderland (2006), her study of parenthood in parenting magazines surveyed advice features in three parenting magazines. The term *advice features* may be replaced with service features, which most often provide advice. While Sunderland's (2006) study sought to identify the presence of fatherhood, she found that "mother as main parent" was the dominant theme in these parenting magazines. Indeed, the six features that dealt exclusively with motherhood in *Canadian Living* all portrayed mothers as the main parent. Of the six motherhood articles, four could be considered service features; the other two were retrospectives. The following headlines and decks of the four service features about motherhood illustrate how motherhood is presented as carrying additional grievances and risks (Eide and Knight, 1999) when the mother chooses to work outside the home but solvable with the help of the advice in the magazine.

Here's Help for Mom: The 3:30 to 6:30 p.m. solution
(*Canadian Living*, March 1981, 50)

A Woman's Place Is...? Whether you stay at home or dash to the office, mothering is a 24/7 commitment. Spend a day with two moms as they juggle the load and make the tough choices (*Canadian Living*, October 1998, 70)

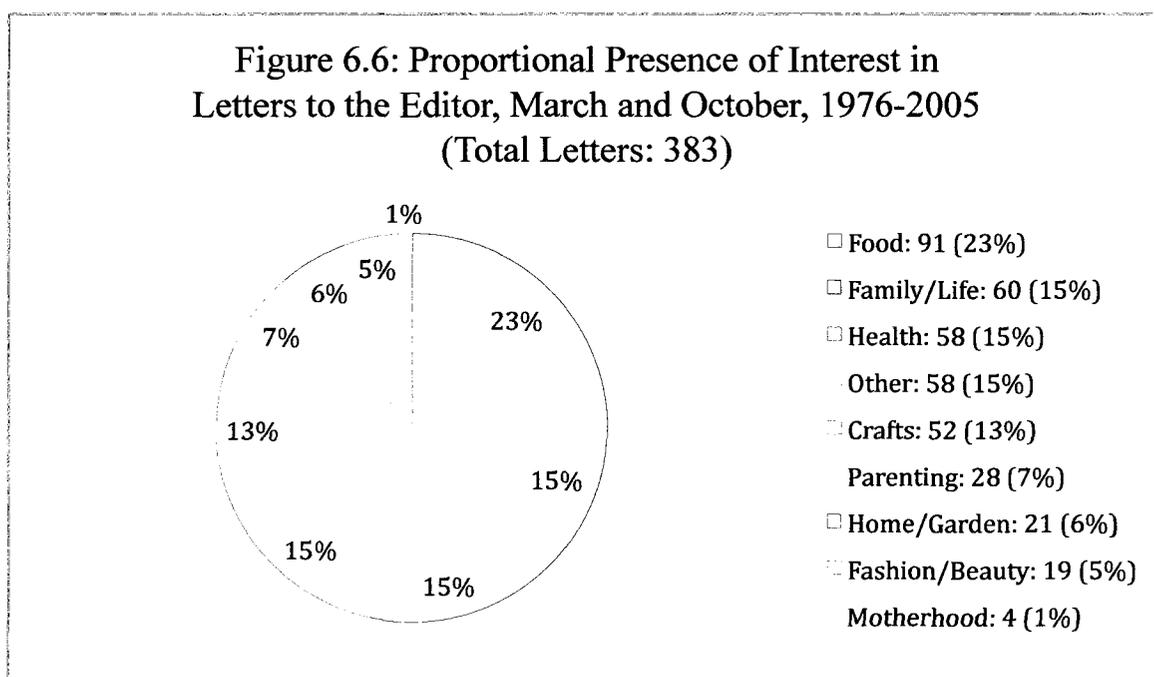
Baby's Here: Will you go back to work? Meet Susan and Don (with baby Henry). Like most new parents, they're facing a huge decision. Writer Marcia Kaye takes them on a tour of their options (*Canadian Living*, March 2000, 116)

Mom, CEO: Think that running a successful business and being a stay-at-home mom are mutually exclusive? Meet mothers who have integrated work and family life, to the benefit of both (*Canadian Living*, October 2003, 185)

While the main goal of this thesis is to consider the role of action, it is interesting to note how action is portrayed in features about motherhood. Recalling Chapter 3, as Eide and Knight (1999, 526) argue, modernity makes “the practice of living problematic and resolvable through the application of diverse and changing forms of knowledge, information and advice.” The main message in the four motherhood service features is that combining work in the public sphere is problematic but doable, finding a balance is the choice of the mother, and working in the public sphere requires the mother to make choices. The service pieces provided instruction on how to deal with these problems, but the message was consistently that parenting is the mother's responsibility. Articles about choosing day-care or preparing meals quickly after working outside the home reinforce social constructions of the feminine ideal. *Canadian Living* missed an opportunity in their role as adviser to offer readers alternative images of motherhood, such as single mothers or the father as main parent. It seems it took its cue from *Ladies' Home Journal*, which set the formula for women's magazines. As Scanlon (1995, 6) argues, *Ladies' Home Journal* “specifically encouraged [women] to read rather than act, to conform to middle-class mores rather than seek out new and possibly more revolutionary alternatives.” In this regard, the editors of *Canadian Living* foster and support these mores.

• **Action in Letters to the Editor**

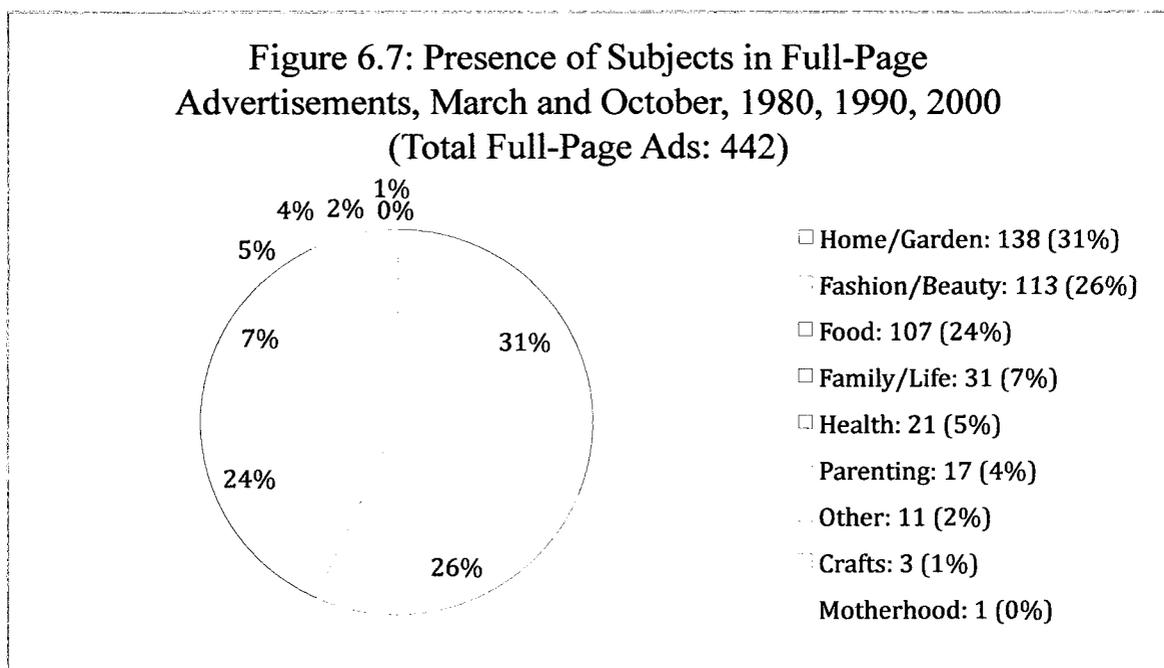
The third part of the content analysis sampled 383 Letters to the Editor in 59 issues (the page containing Letters to the Editor in the Sept./Oct. 1978 issue was not available). The proportional presence of interest in the various subjects was recorded by counting each reference to a subject. As Figure 6.6 (below) shows, food accounted for the greatest proportional presence of interest with 23 percent, followed by family/life, health and 'other' (15 percent each); crafts (13 percent); parenting (seven percent); home/garden (six percent); fashion/beauty (five percent); and motherhood (one percent).



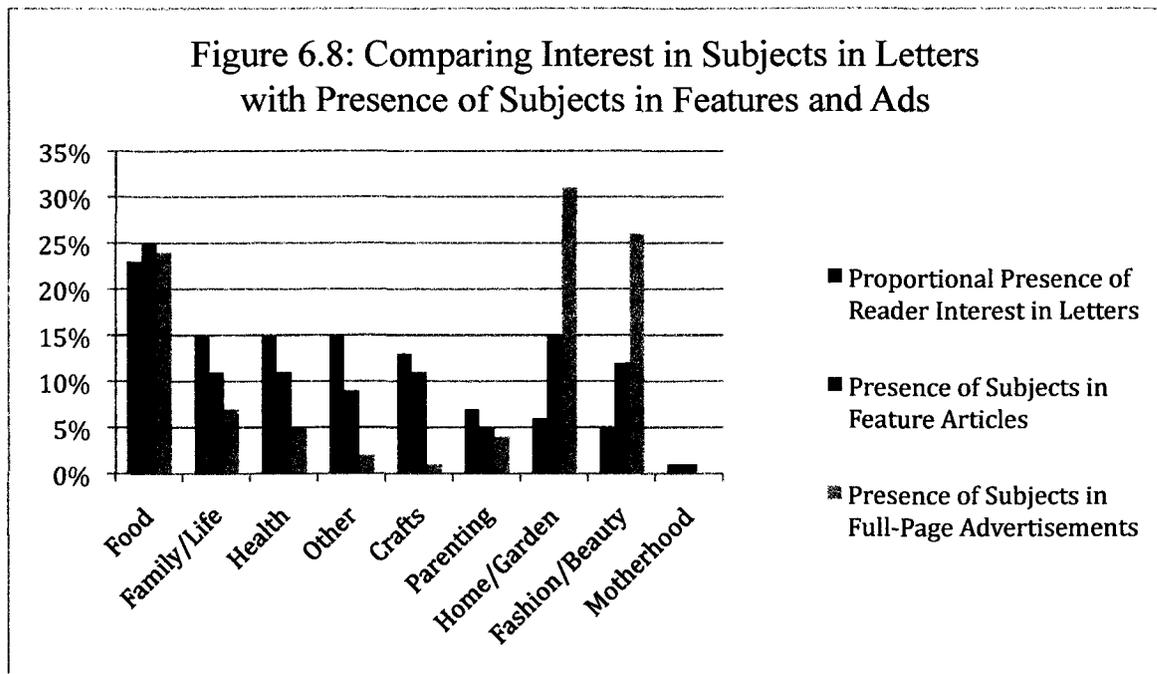
Comparing Figures 6.6 (above) and 6.2 (see page 120) shows that the breakdown of features is not similar to the proportional presence of interest expressed by readers in Letters to the Editor. This suggests the producers either did not have a firm understanding of their readers or did not prioritize their views. First, fashion/beauty features accounted for 12 percent of the features in *Canadian Living*, yet the proportional presence of interest by readers is just five percent. Second, home/garden features accounted for 15 percent of

features, yet the proportional presence of interest was only six percent. Third, family/life features accounted for just nine percent of features even though the proportional presence of interest in Letters to the Editor was 15 percent.

To consider if the subjects of features were influenced by consumerism, the number of full-page ads in the March and October issues from 1980, 1990 and 2000 were counted and divided under the same subject headings used to count the features and presence of interest. Figure 6.7 (below) shows the breakdown of subjects in full-page ads.



Ads on home/garden (31 percent) and fashion/beauty (26 percent) led the subject categories. It is likely that these features command a strong presence in *Canadian Living* because the largest advertisers in these magazines are clothing and cosmetic companies as well as companies that produce products for the home. The presence of home/garden advertisements recalls Chapter 2 and the consumer magazine's ever-increasing role in encouraging consumerism among women readers. Figure 6.8 (see page 131) more clearly shows the dichotomy between reader interest and the subjects of features and ads.



Food is the only subject area the consumers, producers and advertisers agree on: the proportional presence of interest in food stories in Letters to the Editor was 23 percent, and food accounted for 25 percent of features and 24 percent of full-page ads. For family/life, health, 'other' and parenting, the proportional presence of interest was higher for these subjects than what the producers were delivering. Instead, Figure 6.8 suggests the producers delivered just enough of these subjects in features to meet consumers and advertisers halfway. Crafts is the only one of the nine subjects tested in which producers sided with consumers: interest was 13 percent and the presence in features was 11 percent, but the presence in ads was just one percent. In the case of home/garden and fashion/beauty, consumers showed little interest in these subjects, but the quantity of full-page ads has likely influenced the number of features focusing on home/garden and fashion/beauty. The proportional presence of interest in fashion/beauty in Letters to the Editor, for example, was five percent, yet fashion/beauty accounted for 12 percent of features and 26 percent of full-page ads. The prevalence of home/garden and

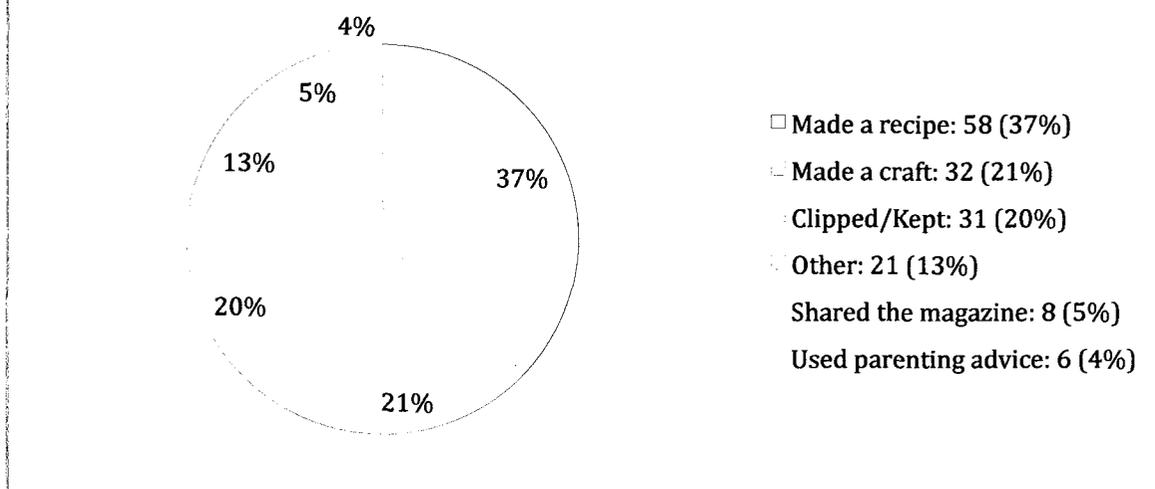
fashion/beauty ads suggests that advertisers do influence the editorial content of magazines more than the producers would like to admit. It also suggests that the prime motivation of the magazine is likely consumerism via ads rather than the betterment of readers via service journalism. It seems the magazine was supplying more information about home/garden and fashion/beauty than the readers were interested in reading.

Returning to Letters to the Editor, the proportional presence of interest in motherhood was just one percent. This suggests readers may not look to service magazines specifically for guidance on motherhood, but, recalling Chapter 2, the following excerpt illustrates how service magazines assumed the role of adviser, particularly the sort of advice shared between mothers and daughters.

When I was a young bride in the early 1970s, my mother decided to buy me the perfect gift, one that she knew would ease my transition into married life and ultimately into motherhood. That gift? A subscription to *Canadian Living*.
– Lorna Archer-Quinn, via the Internet (*Canadian Living*, October 2005, 20)

While these letters reveal the presence of interest, interest is not the same as action. A reader may be interested in family/life articles, but that does not mean the reader follows the advice in those articles. To this end, the final stage of the content analysis portion of the primary research tracked the proportional presence of different types of action in the Letters to the Editor. The proportional presence of action was recorded by counting each reference to the following actions: clipped an article/kept the magazine for later use; made a recipe; made a craft; used parenting advice; shared the magazine with others; and ‘other.’ As Figure 6.9 (see page 133) shows, made a recipe accounted for 37 percent of the proportional presence of action, which was followed by made a craft (21 percent), clipped an article/kept the magazine for later use (20 percent), ‘other’ (13 percent), shared the magazine (five percent) and used parenting advice (four percent).

Figure 6.9: Proportional Presence of Action in Letters to the Editor, March and October, 1976-2005
(Total Letters: 383)



Ranly's (1992) concept of "refrigerator journalism" and Hermes' (1995) concept of the "repertoire of practical knowledge" both underscore the significance of clipping an article and keeping the article or the magazine for later use. As Ranly (1997, 1) argues, service journalism "must present [information] in such a way that people will clip it out and stick it on the refrigerator – or bulletin board, or place it in a retrievable file." Since Figure 6.9 (above) shows that the proportional presence of this clipping action is 20 percent, then it may be argued that the producers of service journalism in *Canadian Living* were successful. However, Hermes (1995) argues the readers may clip out an article for later use but never actually use it. Rather, possessing the clipping affirms their femininity and affords them the sense of security and self-confidence that they could solve any random problem because a particular tip is in a "retrievable file." The following excerpts illustrate these letters and the act of keeping the material for later use.

Here I sit over my lunchtime coffee, tearing up your newest edition. I've torn out recipes, a fashion idea, coupons, a 'how to buy cheese' article, and a design for Christmas decorations. – Mrs. C. Lynne Monsees, Mistatim, Sask. (*Canadian Living*, March/April 1977, 4)

I keep every magazine in a special drawer, and that's my recipe and craft file. Your magazine has helped me in many ways. I've become more nutrition-conscious, I have more confidence in myself, and have organized my home more efficiently. I like myself better because of you. *Canadian Living* has made me proud to be a Canadian.
 – Joanne Fsy, Saskatoon, Sask. (*Canadian Living*, March 1980, 2)

The proportional presence of used parenting advice (four percent) was significantly lower than made a recipe (37 percent) or made a craft (21 percent). It is not surprising that making a recipe accounted for the highest action given the magazine's focus on food. As noted above, readers report on successful recipes and craft projects with letters and photographs. Sharing their successes affirms their 'membership in the club of the feminine ideal' and provides the opportunity to feel a sense of accomplishment. Readers are less likely to communicate an action prescribed in a parenting story or show an interest in learning about motherhood. As Walker (2000, 17) argues, "[a] woman faced the greatest challenges, ran the most risks of failing, and needed the most – and the most contradictory – advice in her role as a mother. By the late 1940s, the concept of instinctual motherhood had been modified to include the possibility – indeed, the likelihood – that a woman's instinctual behavior as a mother might be destructive." Recalling Chapter 4, women's service magazines present motherhood as natural and desirable, while at the same time presenting enough potential "risks" (Eide and Knight, 1999) to compel readers to turn to the magazines for advice, thereby creating a circle of need. Using parenting advice has less measurable results than making a recipe. It would not be acceptable for a reader to photograph her well-adjusted child, for example, and send it in as proof of a job well done. Moreover, the readers do not describe the action taken as a result of parenting features. The following excerpts illustrate how readers used the parenting advice.

I have recently had my first child (my four-month-old daughter, Kate), and your articles on child care have been especially helpful and informative. – Lorrie Kyle, Omagh, County Tyrone, Northern Ireland (*Canadian Living*, October 2002, 14)

I have shelves stacked with *Canadian Living* magazines in their own labeled area in my studio. ... When I had given up on Dr. Spock, I did not despair, as I could reach for a back copy and was sure to find some hints on how to handle my daughter. It didn't matter what her age was as there was always something interesting and helpful. – Gail I. Carter, Ravenna, Italy (*Canadian Living*, October 2005, 20)

None of the letters sampled made reference to buying something promoted in the editorial pages of *Canadian Living*. The following excerpts, however, illustrate how service magazines are complicit in promoting consumption.

Hooray for the *Canadian Living* diary (“A Year of *Canadian Living* Diary 1990”). It captures all the flavor and wonder of each season. I am going to relish using it all through the year. – Linda Amaolo, Dundas, Ont. (*Canadian Living*, October 1989, 9)

I showed my husband the [March 1991 issue] and told him that I loved the way you updated the kitchen and that I thought we could stay on budget by using your suggestions.... We took our time and did everything right – the results were fantastic! – Elfie Derrick, Oshawa, Ont. (*Canadian Living*, October 1991, 7)

The ‘other’ category in this analysis provided the most interesting results because of the types of actions taken by readers. As Figure 6.9 (see page 133) shows, the proportional presence of ‘other’ actions was 13 percent, which is higher than used parenting advice or shared the magazine. This category, illustrated by the examples below, related mostly to the notion of action in service journalism in which an article provides advice on taking action and readers interpret the advice to suit their individual needs. The following excerpts illustrate some of the ‘other’ actions taken by readers.

Your August [1981] article, Great Timing by Sally Armstrong and Dr. Daniel Cappon, gave me some insight into why I hit all the red traffic lights when I'm late for a business meeting. Thanks to the article, I've reorganized my days, and though I'm not sailing through them without a snag, I'm definitely dealing with less hassles and enjoying myself more. – Karen Smith, Montreal (*Canadian Living*, October 1981, 2)

The other day my husband suggested I throw out the [*Canadian Living*] magazines and clip the recipes. I explained that I often reread many of the articles. Several minutes later, I found him engrossed in the November 5 issue. He asked me not to throw it out because he wanted to compare our gas bill with the chart in your article, ‘Gas, Oil, Electricity: Which Fuel is Cheapest?’ – Donna Presz, Montreal (*Canadian Living*, March 25, 1985, 7)

Your interviews with Canadians, both famous and unknown, bring a message of responsibility home to all of us. Because of your article, I plan to become a polite but strong supporter of human rights in Canada. – Ann McAdams, Sooke, B.C. (*Canadian Living*, March 19, 1988, 9)

A neighbour and I picked up the Christmas issue of *Canadian Living* [m]agazine and saw an article about a cookie-exchange party. She handed out the invitations, and all the women came with three dozen cookies, conversation, stories and laughs, and they got a chance to see one another over the holidays. ... Ten years later we are still doing the cookie-exchange party. ... We would like to thank you for a wonderful idea. – Shannon Baynham, via the Internet (*Canadian Living*, March 2001, 11)

I read your article about finding old friends (“Together, Again,” May [2004]). I had been thinking about my old high school sweetheart a lot. We had not seen or talked to each other in about 25 years. I went to one of the websites you listed and registered, and to my amazement, his name was there. ... Eight months later, we are happy and in love again. – Laurie Nadon, Kingston, Ont. (*Canadian Living*, March 2005, 12)

As Figure 6.4 (see page 124) shows, the results of the content analysis indicate that the majority of parenting features do prescribe an action. The most common action is changing a behaviour or adopting a new strategy, and the most common secondary action is seeking more information. The content analysis of the Letters to the Editor suggests that readers’ interests were not identical to the composition of the magazine but that readers did take some action. The proportional presence of using ‘other’ advice is 13 percent. This suggests that the producers of *Canadian Living* were somewhat successful in producing service journalism that was, as Ranly (1992) argues, useful, usable and used.

This section also draws on the results from further primary research. On Oct. 14, 2009, the author of this thesis posted a series of questions on the Family and Parenting forum on CanadianLiving.com. The posting asked participants to comment on the parenting advice in *Canadian Living* and share their own moments of action. From Oct. 14, 2009, to March 28, 2010, the posting was viewed 1,010 times, but only one response was posted. Just 0.1 percent of the readers who viewed the posting took action by responding. This low rate of response is not isolated to this author’s post. One user also

requested advice on Oct. 14, 2009, from other forum users about her husband's siblings. This posting received 1,836 views and two responses. A posting on Aug. 17, 2009, about a teenage daughter received 3,102 views and six responses. This lack of action recalls the attention economy and Scott (1987). In the attention economy, people are overloaded with information and choose what to pay attention to by assigning value to the information. Only one person decided that responding to the posting about parenting advice was worth their time and attention. In addition, as Scott (1987, 6) argues, “[p]eople read first the stories that concern them most directly and immediately.” Answering the post would not benefit the viewers, and this author's thesis research is not their concern.

Moreover, the one response only referred to the advice offered on CanadianLiving.com and not the magazine, which is the focus of this thesis. Nonetheless, it is worth noting two excerpts from the one response received. The first refers to the value of practical advice that was provided by other forum participants, and the second excerpt refers to the role service journalism plays in social constructionism.

I like the parenting practical suggestions and advice. To me the more practical, the better, as then I can take one idea at a time and apply it. The response I got to the question on bullying for example was a big help to me, as it helped know the difference between what is bullying and the changes kids go to, and the different strategies I can follow in communicating with my kids. – Susan Dieter

The name Canada [sic] Living got my attention with my yahoo.ca. During that time my husband was in Canada and I was overseas, on my way to join him along with our kids. Somehow the name attracted me and I felt what better way to learn about Canada and everything about it from a site calling itself Canada [sic] Living, since I'm going to live there. – Susan Dieter

While this posting provides little insight into the usefulness of the action prescribed in *Canadian Living*, it does point to the need for future research, particularly the role of magazine websites and their facilitation of sharing the repertoire of practical knowledge identified by Hermes (1995).

Conclusion

This chapter presented the findings from the primary research undertaken for this thesis. The primary research included interviews with producers of service journalism in *Canadian Living*, a content analysis of feature articles and Letters to the Editor in *Canadian Living* from 1976 to 2005, a smaller content analysis of full-page advertisements in *Canadian Living* in 1980, 1990 and 2000, and posting research questions on CanadianLiving.com. The purpose was to explore the producer-consumer relationship and investigate the action prescribed in features and taken by readers.

Taken together, the findings from the primary research suggest that encouraging action was not the prime motivation of *Canadian Living*. The producers' attempt to create service journalism that they say they believe is useful and usable, and the content analysis shows that they do prescribe action in parenting features. As Ranly (1992, 139) suggests about the production of service journalism, "[y]ou have done your job even better if the reader does something as a result of the information." Yet the producers do not seem to currently make any effort to establish if readers took action beyond the act of buying the magazine. The producers equate buying *Canadian Living* with taking action.

Yet Letters to the Editor suggest readers do take action from reading service journalism and show an interest in features that provide practical information, such as food, family/life and health. The producers, however, did not respond to this interest. Rather, the producers included home/garden and fashion/beauty features that pleased advertisers more than features that interested readers. This suggests the magazine's prime motivation is consumer-oriented rather than the betterment of readers. It also suggests that readers buy *Canadian Living* for its contribution to the repertoire of emotional learning and connected knowing (Hermes, 1995) that instruct women about the feminine ideal.

These two sides – the interests of readers versus the interests of advertisers – have co-existed in women’s magazines for decades, with the producers lodged neatly in the middle. As Korinek (2000, 181) argues:

The phrases ‘do something’ and ‘improvement’ were key to much of the service department material [in *Chatelaine*], for it fostered an environment in which housewives were encouraged to seek new recipes, new decorating ideas, and innovative ways to solve housekeeping dilemmas. Neither perfection nor contentment could ever be achieved, for there were always new trends, new colours, new types of foods, or changing cuisines with which to experiment.

Perhaps the primary purpose of service journalism in *Canadian Living* is to perpetuate the consumer’s need for applicable information by presenting an unending array of grievances and risks (Eide and Knight, 1999) that are most easily solved – or at least tempered – by reading service journalism. If, as Ranly (1992) suggests, action is the factor upon which service journalism is judged, is it enough that service journalism in women’s magazines simply contributes to repertoires, such as practical knowledge and emotional learning and connected knowing (Hermes, 1995)? Given that the combined proportional presence of making a recipe or craft was 58 percent, perhaps women’s service magazines are most successful at encouraging action that fits within the accepted social construction of the feminine ideal. And given that the proportional presence of clipping an article for later use is 20 percent, it does not seem that the service journalism in *Canadian Living* inspires ‘hard’ action beyond what is necessary to maintain or attain the feminine ideal. As Scanlon (1995, 6) argues, women’s magazines “specifically encouraged [women] to read rather than act, to conform to middle-class mores rather than seek out new and possibly more revolutionary alternatives.”

Chapter 7

Conclusion

The goal of this thesis has been to contribute to a foundation for the academic study of service journalism by filling key gaps in our understanding of it. To do this, this thesis posed the question: How is service journalism socially constructed, produced and consumed, particularly within the context of action? The purpose of this conclusion is to revisit this central question in light of the findings of this thesis, to discuss the relevance of this argument to our conceptual and practical understanding of service journalism and to discuss important areas of future research that could usefully serve to further develop our understanding of the genre.

Service journalism is a highly prevalent form of journalism that evolved primarily in women's magazines and in response to broader social forces from industrialization to the end of World War II, as detailed in Chapter 2. Central to this historical evolution was the demand for practical information that was no longer transferrable between generations. This practical information was delivered through hard service journalism, such as how-to articles, as well as soft service journalism, which contributed to the social construction of the feminine ideal, as discussed below.

Service journalism is also a highly popular form of journalism. As outlined in Chapter 3, discernible components, such as the absence of extensive narrative and the use of alternative story forms, make it a comprehensible and visually intriguing genre. Its functionality can further be explained by understanding grievance and risk (Eide and Knight, 1999) and the attention economy (Thorngate and Plouffe, 1987). Service journalism is popular because it competes in the attention economy by helping readers

respond to their individual grievances and risks within the private sphere. However, does the consumer or the producer of service journalism construct these grievances and risks?

The question of who identifies grievance and risk points to the need for a more critical understanding of service journalism and its role in social constructionism. As presented in Chapter 4, critical understandings of service journalism leave us with a tension. Some scholars (Ehrenreich and English, 2005; Ferguson, 1983; and Friedan, 1997) argue that women's magazines and, by extension, service journalism are complicit in the construction and perpetuation of the feminine ideal. Other scholars (Hermes, 1995; Korinek, 2000; and Meyerowitz, 1994) argue that women's magazines presented myriad images of women, and readers ultimately interpret texts in ways that may differ from the intentions of producers. This is particularly relevant to service journalism because of the importance of the producer-consumer relationship, particularly how the editors see themselves as the readers. This points to a central tension of service journalism between the motivations and the factors influencing production and the process of interpretation and consumption. If the goal of service journalism is to foster action, how does reader agency affect the interpretations of the actions prescribed in service journalism?

Action has been the defining component of service journalism since its emergence as a discernible genre more than 50 years ago (Ranly, 1992; and Scott, 1987). However, this notion of action remains poorly understood by producers and within the literature's very limited treatment of service journalism. Producers presume readers take action. However, producers and scholars have a limited understanding of reader action and the factors that determine what action is taken, if any.

To better understand this relationship, this thesis considered the case of *Canadian Living* magazine, presented in Chapter 5, and primary research involving both interviews

with producers and a content analysis, presented in Chapter 6. The case study outlined the evolution of *Canadian Living* as a prominent example of service journalism in a Canadian women's consumer magazine. Interviews with producers confirmed the relationship that they perceived between themselves and the consumers as well as their belief in their ability to know the reader. This understanding of the reader evolved over time from an intuitive knowing to a more quantified knowing based on empirical market research. The need for empirical research arose from business imperatives that required the magazine to use more objective measures of the reader, which made the magazine more marketable to advertisers. As detailed in the content analysis, however, a disconnect exists in the magazine between the interests expressed by readers in Letters to the Editor and editorial content provided by the producers. Specifically, home/garden and fashion/beauty were more prevalent in editorial content than in Letters to the Editor. These subjects were also the most prominent advertisements in the magazine. This recalls Chapter 4 and the role of service journalism in the social construction of the feminine ideal, which may be considered soft service journalism that resonates with the repertoire of emotional learning and connected knowing (Hermes, 1995) rather than hard service journalism that focuses on prescriptive action. This was a surprising finding of this thesis and one that needs further research.

More striking, however, were the findings relating to action. While the literature on social constructionism would seem to suggest that the primary action prescribed in a women's consumer magazine would be consumption of a product, a content analysis of parenting features over 30 years in the magazine revealed that the primary action prescribed in 92 percent of parenting features was to change a behaviour or adopt a new strategy. In addition, the secondary action was to find more information. While a

magazine is a package that predominantly values consumption, this suggests that non-consumer action may be a central feature of service journalism. Equally striking, however, is the fact that the dynamics of this action remain poorly understood by producers and relatively undocumented in the literature. Producers simply do not know what action, if any, readers take away from their articles. Given the centrality of action to service journalism, future research specifically on how readers use service journalism would be valuable for the understanding of the theory and practice of service journalism.

Research findings

In addition to extensive secondary research, this thesis has drawn on primary research to investigate the production and consumption of service journalism. Primary research included interviews with producers and a content analysis of *Canadian Living* over a 30-year period. The following findings emerged from the research.

- **Consumers of service journalism have a greater appetite for practical knowledge than producers are providing.**

Recalling Chapter 2, early Canadian radio's daytime listening public was comprised of mostly homemakers. Kate Aitken, a radio personality, answered 260,000 letters a year and delivered 600 broadcasts to five million listeners, all about general household lore (Lang, 1999). Recalling Chapter 3, when the editors of *Better Homes and Gardens* started experimenting with more narrative, readers remained interested in practical information about homes, food and gardening (Reuss, 1974). Readers in *Canadian Living* demonstrate an appetite for practical knowledge, particularly food, family/life, health and 'other,' which includes travel, social issues and civics. Despite this long history of consumers

presenting a firm interest in practical knowledge, the producers of women's magazines continue to favour a contribution to the repertoire of emotional learning and connected knowing (Hermes, 1995) within the social construction of the feminine ideal. As Ferguson (1983, 2) argues, this approach rests "on an implicit assumption shared between editors and publishers that a female sex which is at best unconfident, and at worst incompetent, 'needs' or 'wants' to be instructed, rehearsed or brought up to date on the arts and skills of femininity." This suggests the producers prioritize consumerism within the feminine ideal over the betterment of readers.

• Producers of service journalism understand the notion of action but do not currently assess if consumers take action as a result of the reading.

Interviews with producers show they maintain an understanding of action within the context of service journalism. They present a respect for reader agency and accept that not every action prescribed in *Canadian Living* is going to speak to every reader. Yet, the producers believe the information they provide in the magazine is useful and usable because they see themselves as the reader. This projection may distort their ability to produce useful, usable and used information, the main characteristics of service journalism, according to Ranly (1992). Even though producers understand action and have a plethora of available tools to determine if readers take action, they do not seem to currently make any effort to assess action. Rather, they use these market-research tools to create a commodity out of both the magazine and the audience.

The role of the producer is central to this study of service journalism, specifically how the expectation of action affects its production. Action in its most basic form is the act of purchasing a magazine. This is integral to magazine producers. They equate buying

Canadian Living with taking action. They believe the act of buying confirms the usefulness and usability of the content of *Canadian Living*. However, purchasing the magazine is not the same as acting upon the advice.

• **Consumers of service journalism do take some action as a result of the reading.**

As presented in the content analysis, parenting features accounted for five percent of the features over a 30-year period, and 92 percent of these parenting features prescribed the action of changing a behaviour or adopting a new strategy. The content analysis revealed that the proportional presence of interest in parenting in Letters to the Editor was seven percent, which mirrors its inclusion in the magazine. The content analysis also showed that the presence of action regarding parenting in Letters to the Editor was just four percent. When compared with the combined proportional presence of action regarding food and crafts in Letters to the Editor of 58 percent, research findings suggest action is most often taken and/or communicated when it connects to the social construction of the feminine ideal. As Ferguson (1983, 185) argues, “[w]omen’s magazines also provide the syllabus and step-by-step instructions which help to socialize their readers into the various ages and stages of the demanding – but rewarding – state of womanhood. Novices are led through the appropriate attitudes, rituals and purchases to achieve their chosen ends of *femme fatale*, super cook.” Motherhood proved to not be a specific analytical category but instead was shown to permeate all subject areas.

Implications

The findings of this thesis hold important implications for both the study and practice of journalism. Journalism studies needs to engage with and understand service journalism

because of its prevalence and the likelihood that many students will practise service journalism. It is important to teach service journalism because of the broader lessons it teaches about journalism, particularly the significance of the reader, which is a relatively new concept for newspaper journalism (Holmes, 2007). Conceptual understandings of service journalism are also important because of its evolution resulting from social changes since industrialization and what this tells us about the consumer of service journalism. As forms of journalism proliferate, understandings of the attention economy will become increasingly important. A more rigorous and critical understanding of how service journalism has been able to capture the attention of readers could hold broader lessons for the wider study of journalism. Those lessons may not be limited to consumer issues, and journalism studies could usefully understand the appeal of service journalism and how it may be applied to non-consumer issues, such as social action.

Producers of service journalism are not currently tracking the defining component of the genre: action. This raises important questions about the practice of service journalism. Tracking if and how readers take action as a result of reading service journalism could lead to editorial content that is more useful, usable and used (Ranly, 1992). Developing a more systematic understanding of action could lead to a more dynamic interaction between the producer and consumer.

Future research

Due to the breadth and depth of service journalism, this thesis has identified the following areas of future research.

First, future research could usefully develop a more rigorous methodology to understand readers and their consumption of service journalism, particularly within the

context of action. Some scholars (Hermes, 1995; Radway, 1984; and Winship; 1987) have attempted to focus on the readers, but most studies of women's magazines focus on the text. If the success of service journalism is judged upon its ability to motivate action (Ranly, 1992), then determining action is a vital component to developing a better understanding of service journalism.

Second, a comparative study could usefully explore both the genre of service journalism and the expectation of action. Comparing women's service magazines, such as *Chatelaine* and *Canadian Living*, or specialty publications, such as *Today's Parent* and *Canadian Family*, or more non-gendered publications, such as *Toronto Life* and *Cottage Life*, could all provide extensive insight into the appeal and practice of service journalism.

Third, the role of the Internet in service journalism could be a particularly useful area of future research. Many service magazines provide archival material on the magazines' website, and this material is available to consumers. As a result, service journalism must continue to create new and fresh approaches to subjects that have already been covered many times. In addition, many of these sites host reader forums. It would be interesting to consider how service magazines contribute to the repertoire of emotional learning and connected knowing (Hermes, 1995) by providing a forum within which consumers share knowledge, experiences, advice and solutions. In this sense, perhaps the need for greater individual autonomy brought on by modernity has crossed over into service journalism's role as adviser. Instead of turning to service journalism for solutions to grievances and risks, consumers may be turning to one another via these forums.

Fourth, the producers relied on intuition to develop an understanding of the 'ideal type' before they became increasingly reliant on market research. Future research could investigate how the increased importance of empirical research in understanding the

reader has devalued the role and influence of ‘editor’s intuition.’ Perhaps the use of empirical research by outside sources, such as the Print Measurement Bureau, has created a distance between producers and consumers that has affected the circulation of these publications. Letters to the Editor in early editions of *Canadian Living* revealed a sense of genuine familiarity with the producers. Future research could consider how the use of empirical research has affected this sense of closeness.

Finally, service journalism has contributed to the social construction of the feminine ideal. As a result, future research could consider how it has contributed to other social constructs. In particular, the posting on the CanadianLiving.com forum presented at the end of Chapter 6 revealed how a magazine such as *Canadian Living* may contribute to the social construction of the Canadian. Susan Dieter, who responded to the post, explained that she had turned to the website because, “I felt what better way to learn about Canada and everything about it from a site calling itself Canada [sic] Living, since I’m going to live there.” Similarly, as presented in Chapter 2, immigrants to Canadian farms in the late-nineteenth century turned to the women’s pages in newspapers for practical information about a new way of life (Lang, 1999). Future research could explore how service journalism contributes to the integration and socialization of new Canadians.

Ultimately, this thesis has argued that service journalism is a distinct genre of journalism whose presence in the marketplace is matched only by its absence in the literature. Given the wide presence of service journalism, it is essential that journalism studies not overlook it. A more critical and systematic understanding of the functioning and implications of service journalism could hold important broader lessons for the theory and practice of journalism.

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