

Brides, Bicycles, and Ballots: The Political Evolution of
Harper's Bazar, 1867-1912



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Introduction¹

When the Harper brothers founded Harper's Bazar² in 1867, they wanted their magazine to cater to women comfortable in a traditional role, women willing to subordinate themselves to their husbands. Yet social and political events forced them to accommodate emerging women's rights movements. By the end of their tenure as owners in 1913, Harper's Bazar had become a fashion magazine as well as a social and political platform.

Fletcher, James, John, and Joseph Harper owned and operated Harper & Brothers. By 1867 the company already owned two successful periodicals: Harper's, a monthly magazine of literature, politics, culture, finance, and the arts, and Harper's Weekly, a political periodical. With a successful monthly and weekly magazine, a natural expansion would be either to develop or purchase a daily periodical. However, the publishing company turned down offers to purchase the New York World. Instead, Fletcher Harper proposed to develop another weekly, one that was both radically different from and inspired by their then current weekly. Fletcher wanted to create an American version of Germany's Bazar, a widely popular weekly fashion magazine published in Berlin that featured the latest Paris fashions.¹

Fletcher had trouble convincing his brothers that a weekly fashion magazine was a worthwhile pursuit. After all, their then-current publications already included fashion items. They believed they already conceded enough space to clothes, perfumes, and other vanities. However, Fletcher argued that a weekly fashion magazine would be much more than a mere compilation of vanities. The magazine would feature the latest European fashions, but also fiction and cultural literature. The brothers continued to hold out against Fletcher, prompting him to threaten to publish the magazine on his own. His brothers finally conceded to Fletcher's vision. John wrote: "I think brother Fletcher shall have his way, and we shall start the Bazar."²

Harper & Brothers published Harper's Bazar's first issue on November 2, 1867. It was the first fashion magazine in the United States. The brothers sought to establish a "first-class weekly newspaper of fashion ... comprising all subjects that legitimately

¹ *For cover image, see Florence Scovel Shinn, "Some Experiences of an English Suffragette," Harper's Bazar (1867-1912), October 1909, 1006.

² Harper's Bazar added its third "a" in 1929.

pertain to such a journal.” The magazine was an instant success, amassing eighty thousand subscribers within its first ten years of publication. The magazine had a circulation of 150,000 and a readership of half a million by 1900.³

The decision to describe Harper’s Bazar as a “weekly newspaper” was significant. Not only did it report on the latest fashions, it also reported political developments, particularly those regarding American women. The magazine’s political involvement was tentative at first, but it became a consistent and significant element of the magazine towards the turn of the century. The magazine’s political legacy was in part a result of the Harper Brothers’ selection of women as their target audience. But the magazine’s political nature was also established by the appointment of Mary Booth as the magazine’s first editor-in-chief. Fletcher Harper chose Booth because of her well-known literary background. Booth published a book titled the *History of the City of New York* in 1859, which was the first comprehensive account of the city’s founding. The book was acclaimed by historians and went through four editions. Booth also translated a number of pro-Union French works during the Civil War, garnering praise from governmental figures, including Abraham Lincoln. But Booth was also a reformer. Not only was a she friend of suffragist Susan B. Anthony, she served as secretary at the 1855 Women’s Rights Conventions in Saratoga and the 1860 convention in New York City. Booth had tried to get funding for her own women’s rights periodical.⁴

Historian Paula Bernat Bennett argues that from the start Booth recognized the potential for a fashion magazines’ to be a trendsetter. Booth used her own reformist beliefs to advocate for gender reform in the magazine.⁵ But while Booth may have been the first to bring politics into the magazine’s pages, her succeeding editors—Margret Sangster (1889-1899) and Elizabeth Booth (1899-1912)—continued that effort.

Booth, Sangster, and Jordan each contributed to the magazine’s social and political consciousness. Booth insinuated gender politics into the magazine as the magazine’s first editor. Political commentary persisted throughout Sangster and Jordan’s tenures.⁶ This political commentary became more frequent and more explicit as reform movements strengthened.

Harper’s Bazar was not just a repository of vanities. It did address fashion, household duties, romance, and marriage, but it also had a political and social dimension.

The magazine addressed women's issues—including suffrage—as activists challenged the political and social mores of the time. The Harper Brothers started a fashion magazine, but they ended up with a magazine with a much broader, and much more consequential, purpose.

Chapter I: Harper's Bazar and the Independent Woman

Harper's Bazar did not begin as exclusively a women's magazine. The magazine initially defined itself as a magazine for the whole family. It aimed to be the "handsomest, best and cheapest family journal in the world." It promised to focus on a wide range of "domestic" issues, including "fashion...[,] [t]he care of children, household and servants, the nursing of the sick, the preparation of food, hygiene—and, in short, the innumerable arts which fall directly within the province of women." In addition, the magazine aimed to be a "first-class literary journal compris[ing] a great variety of topics interesting to the home circle. It would "exclude ... all vexed questions in politics and religion" and would not admit anything in its columns that was not likely to be "productive of harmony at the fireside."⁷

While they hoped to create a "family" magazine, the Harper Brothers were still focused principally on women. Placing the concept of the "household" in a historical context reveals a subtle and complex meaning. Generally, the nineteenth century conception of the "household" referred to a woman's domain because "household" was an inherent part of what Barbara Welter called the "Cult of True Womanhood." Even the elements of the magazine's mission not expressly aimed at women—those "productive of harmony at the fireside"—related to a woman's domain within the household. This was consistent with the dominant view of women's place within American society: women were simply seen as members of the family, not as individuals. A woman's sphere was limited to the family and the home.⁸

It is easy to see why Harper's Bazar viewed women as the linchpin of the American household. By the late-nineteenth century middle- and upper- class women's role in the household became an important counterweight to the United States' rapidly growing industrial economy. The popular perception was that this growth encouraged businessmen seeking progress and material wealth to adopt a new type of aggressiveness. This perception was rooted in Social Darwinism; the view was that a new American economy was producing competition akin to a survival of the fittest contest. Women became responsible for creating a sense of safety and stability amidst the economic uncertainty. They were to create a home for the men working in the industrial economy

that was “built after the architectural tastes of the heart, was constructed by truth of sentiment, [stood] the symbol of gracious beauty, and [gave] hints of heaven rather than of earth.” A home’s foundation needed to be built upon warmth and compassion, for “the place where the man of abject poverty spends his weary days and still more weary nights can not be called a home. It is a house – no more.” The household was a nurturing environment that stood in contrast to the male’s competitive and aggressive “public sphere.” The female private sphere and male public sphere were two binary environments embodying two opposing values. The developing market economy had no moral dimensions because human affection was inconsequential in a profit-driven environment. Men faced an unprecedented challenge, as noted by “Houses and Homes,” printed in the magazine on January 25, 1868: “the battle with evil is as old as the world. But let this be said – viz, the fight was never as fierce and as general as in our day.” Thus, the household became a moral haven providing men with a much-needed respite from the merciless economy. Women’s domesticity now created the catharsis men required amidst the economic climate.⁹

Women’s domesticity was viewed as being of great consequence in American society, and magazines that preceded Harper’s Bazar celebrated women’s prescribed domesticity. Godey’s Lady’s Book (1837-1898) and Peterson’s (1842-1898) were two of the largest and most successful women’s magazines during the nineteenth century. Sarah Josepha Hale, the influential editor of Godey’s, emphasized women’s domestic role throughout her tenure at the magazine. Her ideal woman served the family within the confines of the home. Hale believed that a woman should be a helper to her husband, a guide to her children, and the moral center of the family. Ann S. Stephens, coeditor of Peterson’s, also believed that the home was a woman’s domain. Stephens encouraged women to pursue literary careers, but only to the extent that female writers helped beautify and enhance home life. Women authors exalted women in their own sphere, but never enticed them beyond it.¹⁰

American women favored magazines espousing domestic values over more progressive magazines. Godey’s and Peterson’s were very popular among American women, both with circulations exceeding 200,000.¹¹ Conversely, women’s periodicals that attempted to entice women beyond their traditional sphere did not enjoy the same

success. The progressive The National Magazine; Or, Lady's Emporium (1830-1831), published by Mary Barney, focused on political commentary. Barney's magazine provided a unique space for women to express their views on the political matters that Godey's and Peterson's avoided. Barney's The National Magazine; Or, Lady's Emporium challenged the boundaries of what a "true" woman could and could not discuss in American Society:

There are some who regard the sciences, among which they rank government and politics as too masculine to engage the attention of female writers however mildly and humbly they may be treated...Still there is no knowledge, of which the elements at least, should be withheld from those who may be wives, mothers, and companions of the hardier sex, and because we have no voice in the government, have we not voice in the nation?¹²

Longing for the sentimental literature to which they had grown accustomed, the magazine's small readership demanded fashion and beauty tips, love stories, and instructions on a wife's proper conduct. Barney wrote in "Editress in a Dilemma" of her many readers who said: "'Oh! I like Mrs. Barney's 'National Magazine,' very much—but there's no love in it.'" Barney reluctantly acquiesced to readers' demands, but it was too late to save her magazine. Barney hinted at having trouble collecting subscriptions as early as December 1830, urging agents to collect payments from subscribers. Ultimately, Barney was only able to publish two more issues before folding the magazine.¹³

Barney had misjudged her audience. She conceded that she "relied, more perhaps than was justifiable or prudent, upon the hope that the intrinsic merits of her work would be the best and surest passport to the public favour; and that public favour would be, necessarily followed by the only unequivocal evidence of it – patronage and support."¹⁴ The National Magazine; Or, Lady's Emporium's short life shows how difficult it was for a progressive women's magazine to succeed in the nineteenth century. It seemed that women were content to consume the domestic social mores promoted by women's magazines.

Yet, there were important, but nascent movements aiming to change the traditional dogma. One of these movements was the Dress Reform Movement, which aimed to modernize women's fashion. Dress Reform rested upon three main arguments. The first focused on the health concerns of current garments. Dress reformers argued that

women's long skirts picked up dirt off the street, corsets displaced organs, and tight garters interrupted circulation in the legs.¹⁵

Dress reformers' second argument was that women's dress "incited immorality." Dress reformers emphasized how the provocativeness of then-current styles detracted from women's purity. Waists tightly compressed by corsets emphasized and enhanced women's bust and hips. Low-cut bodices and bare arms "encouraged men's imaginations." Women's flowing skirts fostered peering for "they gave glimpses of white-clad ankles when a woman boarded an omnibus or swung in the waltz, or as they outlined their owner's legs in a stiff breeze." Purity was an imperative facet of a woman's identity in the mid nineteenth century, for a woman was not a "true" woman without it. Its absence in a woman's character was perceived as unnatural and unfeminine. Thus, current dress needed to be reformed to curtail male objectification of women and so that "women's purity would have a better change of survival if male passions were not aroused."¹⁶

The third argument was that women's tortuous clothes were the tools of a male conspiracy to make women subservient by cultivating what historian Robert Reigel describes as a "slave psychology." They believed that women's garments undermined their ability to enter and participate in society as equals of men.¹⁷ Susan B. Anthony stated, "I can see no business avocation, in which woman in her present dress *can possibly* earn *equal wages* with man."¹⁸ Constricting clothing physically prevented women from being able to earn a living outside the home. Thus, the then-current styles fostered women's domesticity because if women were immobile and, therefore, unable to work, they needed to rely upon a husband for survival.

These three arguments caused the Dress Reform Movement to create "Bloomers." Amelia Bloomer promoted bloomers in her temperance magazine after the garment's introduction in 1851, sixteen years before Harper's Bazar was founded. Bloomers consisted of full Turkish trousers gathered at the ankles with a short overskirt falling just below the knees. This design offered both mobility and modesty.¹⁹

While dress reformers approved of the Bloomers' design and adopted the style, its adoption was not widespread. In fact, the majority opinion among both men and women was negative. Opponents lamented the absence of women's flowing garments, which,

they said, gave women their mystery and attractiveness. They complained that the style deemphasized gender differences, which allegedly could inflict “potentially catastrophic results for the American family and hence for all American civilization.”²⁰

Dress reform met with such animosity because it aimed to change the position of women in American society. If women were able to earn their own wages with the mobility Bloomers provided, they would no longer be dependent on marriage for their survival. Additionally, they would be able to choose their husband based on traits other than economic desirability. This potential agency was threatening to men. The media portrayed reformers as anarchists who were intent on obliterating the United States’ existing social order.²¹

Women who chose to wear Bloomers publicly faced public vitriol. Women encountered stares, whistles, catcalls and laughter for adopting the reformed dress. In addition to facing such hostility from the “coarse brutal man,” women also faced the disapproval and embarrassment of their friends and family. Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s son asked her to wear long skirts rather than Bloomers when she visited him. Lucretia Mott’s daughters refused to walk in public with Lucy Stone clad in Bloomers. Critics even followed a woman for several blocks and pelted her with stones and mud for wearing Bloomers.²²

The harsh experiences of women who appeared in public wearing Bloomers and the unattractiveness of the garment itself led women to abandon Bloomers. Bloomers’ were off the shelves after only twelve years.²³ Their demise seemingly marked the end of the Dress Reform Movement as well. The movement failed to establish widespread reform for a number of reasons. First, very few women were willing to incur the aggressive ridicule that had the potential to ruin their reputation as a “true” woman, for “it takes a strong-minded woman to defy fashion and abide by advice that makes the best of herself *individually*.”²⁴ Second, Bloomers were so strongly associated with radical reform movements beyond the Dress Reform Movement, movements that critics said threatened the prevailing and culturally entrenched rights, duties, and responsibilities of American men and Women. The vitriol women who wore reformed dress encountered indicates that much more than fashion was at stake. Dress reformers touched a nerve

within the patriarchy; the radical appearance of women wearing Bloomers associated them with an extremism that genuinely threatened male privilege.²⁵

The introduction of Bloomers was a precursor to more dramatic change in gender relations. The movement sowed the seeds of change, and Harper's Bazar's political trajectory illustrates this. The magazine initially portrayed women as an appendage to men and children. This meant that the magazine's content engaged women as wives and mothers, serving someone other than themselves. Articles in the magazine asserted that finding a husband was paramount for the American woman. An article "How to Find a Husband" preached to women: "Your proper study is to make yourself the best possible wife for your best possible husband, by educating your soul and mind and body to the best of your abilities." A woman's "dearest earthly hope" was marriage, for "the tendency of modern society is to regard marriages as 'the great end and justification of a woman's life.'"²⁶ The magazine often implored women to get married. An example is an article titled "The Sanctity of Marriage," which claimed that women were to derive power and honor from their submission to their husbands:

But let those who will speak ill of marriage, it ill becomes any woman to do so, for it is to its institution that women owe nearly all the rights and blessings that they have. It has been wrested by slow degrees from barbarism, and has brought all beautiful and happy possibilities with it. It has set a crown of honor and equality upon the head of woman, and it is not for her to deny it, or to utter the light word or do the thoughtless act that shall serve to bring upon it on iota of disrespect.²⁷

The magazine portrayed marriage as a vehicle for women to become equals with their male counterparts.

Women did not yet have any individual identity in the pages of Harper's Bazar. The first image of a woman in the magazine was that of a bride – the ultimate image of servitude and dependence. The magazine argued that a woman's worth was intrinsically dependent upon her subservient nature, for a single woman without a man was not entitled to the same authority as a married woman. An illustration showed a woman responding to her father's warning. The illustration's caption read:

Mr. Boffin (fiercely). 'And you must remember, Miss, that it is a very solemn thing to be Married.'

Miss Boffin (reflectively). 'Well, I should think it's a much more solemn thing not to be Married, Pa.'"²⁸

The message to women was clear: it was better to be married than not.

The magazine told women again and again that they had to suppress their character to support and serve their husbands. The article, “How to Find a Husband,” advised that women suppress their “natural desire” of making themselves an “object of interest to others” and “overlay this propensity with the faculty and the habit of taking a real interest in the thoughts and characters and experiences of [their] fellow-creatures.”²⁹ The article encouraged women to ignore their own interests and take an interest in their counterparts to be the sounding boards society demanded they become. More importantly, a woman should never attempt to overshadow her husband’s abilities with her own:

Tolerate this person’s faults, repress your impulse to obstruct his egotism by the display of your own abilities; pass by opinions you could vigorously and perhaps successfully combat; wait till you can respond to something with which you cordially sympathize.³⁰

The article advised women to repress the qualities, knowledge, and skills that they possessed as individuals so that they could become perfect foils to their superior men.

Harper’s Bazar periodically encouraged its female readers to pursue education, but only to serve their husbands more effectively. Husbands needed to be “humored and cosseted,” and a woman needed a “fair amount of intellectual culture to perform this wifely duty at all acceptably.” However, the young magazine cautioned its readers not to let higher education lead them beyond their prescribed sphere. An editorial published on September 12, 1868 denigrated “fast girls, whose eccentricities are becoming daily more remarkable and alarming, and who are destined, if not checked in their growth, to have a disastrous effect upon social manners and morals.” Those “fast girls”—more specifically unmarried, educated American women—and their developing sense of agency could thwart American society’s foundation. These women—if unmarried—are “permitted to remain mistresses of their own time” as they are no longer “held in subjection to a systematic discipline of study and conduct” and are “prematurely emancipated from parental control.” The article titled “Higher Education and Husbands,” published on January 12, 1901, reflected upon concerns about educated women: “One of the terrors

which higher education for women continues to present to the Average Mind is the thought that thus women are advanced beyond the attractions of matrimony.”³¹

The magazine gradually focused on women independent of their husbands. The magazine provided a place for women to pen individual progressive articles and literature espousing the emancipation of women from their virtual house arrest. Thus, articles early on began questioning women as the weaker sex and the necessity for men to protect them. Comments like this repeatedly appeared in the magazine: “In all ages all civilized races have loved, cherished, and protected the gentler sex.” Various periodicals gave physicians the opportunity to articulate both the social consequences of women’s alleged “weak” constitution and the “natural” life plan for women.³² These physicians asserted that weakness was an essential element of women’s nature, as is reflected in articles written by women about women’s nature:

There are a great many women who seem disposed to accept the title of weaker sex, and conform their characters to it in every respect. This term, however, like softer, gentler, or tamer as is meant, and other expressions of the same sort, were first applied by man to woman to indicate his won affected superiority.³³

Beginning as early as 1868, articles within the magazine also started to push back against the male “expert’s” authority. “The Weaker Sex” bluntly stated: “Women should scorn all such enfeebling appellatives as insults to their nature, and strive, in accordance with their original organization, to become robust physically, morally, and intellectually.”³⁴ The editorial began to poke holes in the ubiquitous masculine ideology:

It is common to think and not uncommon to speak of women as the timid sex, and they are likely to afford men a good deal of amusement and not a little gallant disteem by reason of their supposed timidity. Men like to think of them as precious cowards, and often say that fearlessness is a masculine virtue which it would be unfortunate and unattractive for a woman to possess. They unquestionably enjoy her susceptibility to fright, for it often yields them an opportunity to act as her protector at very small expense of spirit.³⁵

Articles within the magazine also began to question the central tenets of what it meant to be a “true woman.” “Sentimental Women” in 1868 articulated the essence of the “true woman”: “The whole tendency of the prevailing influence of society upon woman is to make her sentimental. Her vocation is supposed to be to feel, not to act.” But by

1878 the magazine was publishing articles that celebrated women's courage and heroism. "The Courage of Women" asserts that while women may be "the timid sex in some things, they are the heroic or heroic sex in others, and these usually the greater things. In many of the grave trials of life they are dauntless and distinguished, when man, their boasted superior, is craven and abject."³⁶

As it grappled with changes in society, the magazine's editorial content was redefining what it meant to be a woman. Elizabeth Maejory Banks wrote to "Editor Harper's Bazar" in 1867 stating that she was having trouble creating a hero for her impending story. Banks had tried to shape her male protagonist based on her convictions of whom a hero should be and how he should act, but her attempts proved to be futile and she decided to try to find inspiration from real men on the street. Bank ultimately concluded that creating a heroine was an easier task:

A heroine is easy enough: anything over fifteen and under thirty that has orbs and braids (I do so love fine writing!) will make a superb heroine without the least trouble; for if the author's brains refuse to give her any character he can dress her with a dozen stokes of his pen, and no more is needed.

Banks' portrayal of what it meant to be a heroine in literature circa 1867 is quite one-dimensional. While she was searching for a hero who embodied dynamism, she did not seek the same qualities for her heroine. A female character only required a "dozen strokes" of the pen before she was complete. Bank's commentary gives us the impression that female characters in nineteenth century literature did not need to be complex; rather, they were appendages to their male counterparts, just like in real life. Women were inferior to men in both life and literature.³⁷

Banks' heroine became less and less ubiquitous towards the end of the nineteenth century as women began to question traditional gender roles. Articles began to imagine a woman's life beyond the confines of the home. Articles began to advocate for dress reform, suffrage, higher education, and occupational training. But most immediately, the magazine advocated for the right to defy the domestic and submissive societal standards that claimed women as hostages of the home:

No man, it is probable, can ever realize the happiness of an independent woman, because no man knows any thing that can compare with the dependent condition of most women, and few men, in their

preoccupations, pay an attention to the state of mind of the women about them in relation to their dependence.³⁸

The magazine's content increasingly asked women fight for their happiness and expect more of themselves and from their country. Articles such as "The Need for Training Women," demanded that women receive occupational training for jobs unrelated to housework so that they could "be saved from the blank ennui of the lives which idle women endure, and will become members of society of value to themselves and others."³⁹ The magazine fostered an atmosphere of opportunity and freedom for women that previously did not exist. Articles began to argue that women could aspire to new heights and envision a life outside of the home. Representations of women idly watching, waiting for their husbands to return after a day of work were less frequent. Rather, women were presented as being able to take control of their own destiny:

Let me not urge upon men
Trivial wishes, or though
That perchance could be bought, or again
Make myself less than a woman –
As only a woman can –
by reaching half-heights as a man.
Only my birthright is mine.
To be free that my Soul may aspire
Even higher and higher
To star-heights divine.⁴⁰

By proclaiming her birthright as her own, the poem asserts that a woman has the privilege to aspire because it is her right by birth simply because she is a human being. The dominion of the sentimental woman, a "helpless woman sin tears yielding to despair," is usurped by the pioneering woman with "dry eyes and a strong arm" who "battles spiritedly with her destiny."⁴¹

Harper's Bazar further encouraged this new perception of women by institutionalizing favorable columns, such as a recurring editorial column in 1900 focusing on the heroines of nineteenth century fiction. This compilation of ten studies of various prominent nineteenth century authors documented the emergence of strong and complex female protagonists in contrast to Bank's one-dimensional and superficial description of a heroine. William Dean Howells, an author and social critic, notes that as the series analyzes women in novels published closer and closer to the turn of the

century, “women in fiction become more and more interesting, and are of greater consequence than the men in fiction, and the skill with which they are portrayed is more and more a test of mastery. By this test the romantic novel shows its inferiority.” This endorsement of literature that portrays women as complex and multifaceted protagonists departs from the romantic and moral stories published in Godey’s and Peterson’s. Howell, the author of the series, promoted women’s consumption and appreciation of “fiction which is faithful to life, for no other fiction has paid the homage and done the justice done to women, or recognized their paramount interest.”⁴²

The debut of the “Heroines in Nineteenth Century Fiction” series coincided with the magazine’s articulation of a new identity for the magazine. It explicitly described itself as a “weekly magazine for women”⁴³ for the first time in the May 5, 1900 issue – twenty-seven years after the magazine’s 1867 debut. The magazine was now a women’s magazine focused on documenting and reporting women’s interests.

TEN CENTS A COPY FOUR DOLLARS A YEAR

HARPER'S BAZAR

A Weekly Magazine

for

WOMEN

SECOND EDITION



MAY 5, 1900

SPECIAL FEATURES IN THIS NUMBER

Heroines of Nineteenth-Century Fiction
Illustrated by H. C. CRISTY W. D. HOWELLS

Told in Trust. A Story of the Future Life
EDDARITH STUART FIELDS WARD

The Outlook for the College Woman
PRESIDENT DAVID STARR JORDAN

The Problem of the Young Person
MRS. SCHUYLER CROWNINSHIELD

The 20th-Century Baby and His Care
(First Page) MARIANNA WHEELER
Head of the New York Balboa Hospital

Early Summer Fashions A. T. ASHMORE

HARPER & BROTHERS
Franklin Square, New-York.

Figure 1. Harper's Bazar's May 5, 1900 cover. This was the first time the cover read: "A Weekly Magazine for Women."⁴⁴

Chapter II: Harper's Bazar and Dress Reform

Harper's Bazar shifted from presenting women as dependent on their husbands to women as independent individuals because the demands and expectations of its readership changed as the larger society changed. The magazine initially defined itself as a fashion periodical. In an editorial titled "Our Bazar," the Harper brothers boldly stated in their first issue: "In a word, we propose to make the Bazar a first-class weekly newspaper of fashion—the only one in existence in this country—comprising all subjects that legitimately pertain to such a journal."⁴⁵ It did not just feature fashion plates and related articles, but these were its primary features. Unlike its counterparts, it purchased fashion plates directly from the German Der Bazar, as publicized in the November 2, 1867 issue:

The Publishers have made arrangements, at great cost, with the most celebrated of the Fashion Papers of Europe, especially with the famous Bazar of Berlin, which supplies the fashions to the leading journalists of Paris, to furnish the same to them in advance, so that henceforth the fashion will appear in Harper's Bazar simultaneously with their publication in Paris and Berlin – an advantage enjoyed by no other journal in the country.⁴⁶

Its ability to receive the latest fashions from Europe distinguished the magazine from other periodicals that featured women's fashions, such as Godey's and Peterson's. Women who could afford the latest European styles wanted to see them immediately rather than wait a year for what had become passé fashions. The Publishers' business relationship with Der Bazar established the magazine as the preeminent fashion authority among women's magazines in the United States because it was the only magazine displaying the newest fashions.

Harper's Bazar emphasized then-current fashion trends by modeling its articles on the way newspapers reported news events. The magazine featured a column titled "New York Fashions" in every issue, beginning with the very first issue in November 1867. This column detailed the new fashions that designers were creating for the approaching season. It reported on even the smallest fashion changes. For example, the May 25, 1872 and June 1, 1872 issues both discussed the prevalence of toilettes and polonaises as stylish design additions to adorn spring suits.⁴⁷

The magazine created a cyclical editorial archetype that ensured their readers' dependence by emphasizing continuous change in fashion styles. The magazine educated readers that designers often changed their fashion styles. Upon learning this, readers yearned for news of the new styles, and the only magazine that could report something close to real time was Harper's Bazar, which increased demand for the magazine.

While "Common-sense in Fashion" printed in 1868 may have seen "the dominion of fashion as baseless" due to its seemingly arbitrary trends, Harper's Bazar was tapping into the psychology of newly affluent Americans who were benefitting from rapid economic and social change. The magazine targeted an elite segment of American women. Its readership included middle- and upper- class white women. These women were an important business sector within the rapidly growing industrial economy. The increase in the production of consumer goods and the fall of prices after the Civil War established a "consumer's millennium." Upper-middle- and upper- class women did not have to work outside the home. Their relegation to home molded these women into ideal consumers of periodicals, such as Harper's Bazar. Not only did they have the leisure time to read such periodicals, but they also had the disposable income to purchase consumer goods, including clothing.⁴⁸

Some of the magazine's early content was cognizant of and reflected upon the larger economic changes within American society. The article, "All is Change" on May 9, 1868, in discusses the rapid pace of change: "We are in a constant state of transition, changing our places of abode, our houses, our furniture, our modes or worship even, with the same facility as we put into off and on yesterday's and to-day's dress." The writer's comparison of fashion's transient nature with life's newfound transient nature suggests the development of a superficial materialism alongside the United States' economic growth. One can interpret the article's mention of the "spice" of life as the material spoils of rapid industrial production. The article worries that "too much of the spice will spoil the taste for the more simple and substantial constituents"—a fear that has been "very much the case" amongst Americans. Regardless of the consequences, the magazine encouraged women to give in to their longing for news of the latest fashions. The magazine portrayed fashion as irresistible as there was "no use to ignore it; it can hardly be worth any woman's while to resist it."⁴⁹

The magazine was also explicit in portraying the damaging power of fashion: “Fashion leads us all more or less by the nose, and makes us do pretty much as she pleases. We surrender ourselves, body and soul, to her guidance, and the form and motions of the one, as well as the character and principles of the other, are to a great degree governed by her directing hand.”⁵⁰

There were costs to fashion’s irresistibility. Specific components of women’s styles, such as corsets, inflicted harm to women’s bodies. Fashion’s “absolute authority” meant that for women, “the whole body is yielded up to her without resistance, and the wooden figure of the jiggling puppet is no more in the hand and at the pull of the showman than is the human frame under her control.” Just as women were to submit to the authority of their husbands, they were forced to “the bidding of Fashion to torture themselves, and submit...to self-inflicted pains and sufferings of so exquisite a kind...” Even as the magazine focused on women as individuals, it viewed them as peripheral beings in a male-dominated society.⁵¹

These comments on fashion’s repercussions are reminiscent of the Dress Reform Movement of the 1850s. Although some scholars consider the Dress Reform Movement dead with the abandonment of Bloomers, women continued to call for amendments in clothing construction. Arguments in favor of the Dress Reform Movement—particularly those regarding health concerns—resurfaced. Articles began recounting the painful repercussions of women’s dress. An article in 1877 tellingly titled the “Inconvenience of Fashion” corroborated the horrors of women’s dress:

The body is bent here, stretched there; the head is oppressed with great weights; the waist is constricted by ever-tightening bands, until the ribs crack and give way, the internal organs are forced from their natural places and hindered in their functions, and the life-blood is stopped in its course; the limbs are manacles, and the feet, forced into small and unyielding boots, and thus squeezed into lifelessness, are set to totter under an overweighted body upon the impossible support of long and narrow heels.⁵²

Women continued to campaign against the gruesome health hazards garments created. *Harper’s Bazar* provided a natural place for women to assert the need for continued dress reform. Juliet Corson in “Dress in Relation to Health” on December 27, 1884 stated “the preservation of the natural symmetry of all parts of the body is

imperative to health, and it is quite possible to accomplish this without producing conspicuously ugly results.” Corson argued against fashion’s absolute—and harmful—authority over women by specifically critiquing the corset’s hegemony and its destruction of women’s muscles: “the custom of wearing corsets has been spoken of as a usual one; to most women the present modes of dress seem to make them necessary; but this would not be the case if the muscles which they are now required to support had not been weakened by their use early in life.” Corson’s denouncement of women’s tortuous clothing mirrored the dress reformer’s argument that women’s clothing was purposely designed to weaken women. Not only did the corset enslave women to its use by making their bodies dependent upon its effects, it also enslaved women to men for their economic survival. Articles calling for dress reform were also accompanied by undergarment advertisements emphasizing their reformed construction. Harper’s Bazar featured eighty-eight undergarment advertisements featuring the phrase “dress reform” between 1875 and 1895. Articles and advertisements published within the magazine up to forty-four years after the birth of the Bloomer demonstrates that the dress reform spirit never truly died.⁵³

Discussions about dress reform occasionally resorted to slave and emancipation rhetoric. With the Civil War and Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments fresh in their minds, writers in Harper’s Bazar used this slave and emancipation rhetoric to describe women’s lack of individual economic agency: “Few husbands, evidently, give this subject sufficient thought; the greater number are accustomed to feel, when they think of it all, that their wives are as dependent on their bounty as any slaves would be...” Such rhetoric was also invoked to call for the “emancipation of woman from household drudgery.” Fashion presented an alternative outlet for women’s rights, for “there is no law, either human or divine, which obliges a woman to wear a bonnet.” Just as the emancipation of slaves altered the social structure of the United States, women’s rights had the potential to alter an unstable society transformed by the industrial economy. Thus, a mass movement espousing the use of the Safety Bicycle for women supported the sporadic articles calling for dress reforms within the magazine.⁵⁴

Chapter III: The Safety Bicycle Craze

The Safety Bicycle craze of the 1890s transfixed women and Harper's Bazar alike. Emma Moffet Tyng in "Exercise for Women: II—Bicycle and Tricycle" on August 9, 1890 observed that "wheeling as an exercise for women had gained a deep hold." The Safety Bicycle featured equal-sized tires, which made it easier to ride than its predecessor. The "ordinary," or high-wheeled bicycle featured an enormous front wheel combined with a single small back wheel. This drastic size and height difference between the front and back wheels meant that the bicycle was not very stable and was dangerous and difficult to ride. A bump in the road could cause the rider to be thrown off the bicycle. It also was impossible to ride the high-wheeled bicycle in a skirt. Thus, the high-wheeled bicycle was a product designed solely for males. The Safety Bicycle was a gender-neutral product; its equal-sized tires and superior construction allowed both men and women to ride it. It also brought a new form of transportation to the middle class, who previously could not afford a horse.⁵⁵

The Safety Bicycle raised new troubling social issues. It offered a new mobility specifically to women; it enabled women to transcend the private sphere and enter the public sphere. Suffragist leader Frances Willard referred to her bicycle as an "implement of power" and "rejoiced in perceiving the impetus that this uncompromising but fascinating and illimitably capable machine would give to the blessed 'women question.'"⁵⁶ Mary Sargent Hopkins in "How the Bicycle Won its Way Among Women" on March 14, 1896 illustrates how the Safety Bicycle provided a welcome change from the drudgery of the home:

Every woman who was fortunate enough to possess one found that a new and wonderful element had entered into her life – an element of freedom and joy in living ... The novelty tempted women out of doors; and once out, so interested did they become in the exhilarating method of locomotion, so fascinated with the new and pleasant sensation of walking six inches above the ground, that in spite of themselves, they staid out, returning when they must to the environment of four walls.⁵⁷

Opponents derided women riding the Safety Bicycle just as they derided Bloomers. Physicians, such as J. West Roosevelt, noted with specific references to biking that "there are certain anatomical and physiological peculiarities which make it far more dangerous for a woman than for a man to undergo excessive physical strain..." This

distinction between men and women's anatomy prompted Frances W. Oakley in "Scientific Saddles" to quip: "Suddenly the slight difference between the male and female pelvis in certain anatomical measurements was magnified into a vague and portentous mystery." Even worse, opponents feared that, once again, women could potentially erase gender differences and become "masculinized" female bicyclists. Physician E. D. Page described bicycling as being "too mannish to be proper for a woman."⁵⁸

Opponents of the Safety Bicycle had good reason to fear the bicycle's influence. Select literature within the magazine already expressed women's frustration with marriage's role in inhibiting their ability to interact with the world:

Dear Frederic, am I to blame
That you've such odd opinions,
And fancy wives were only meant
To be their husbands' minions?
To stay at home from morn til night
And shun the world's enjoyment?

A splendid creature I should be
To pass my time as you'd like!
A sweet domestic nondescript,
Insufferably prude-like!
No, thank you Fred: I freely own
The frailties of a woman,
Quite unashamed because my tastes
Are social, Sir, and – human!

Imagine what a pleasant fate –
The very thought is shocking! –
To have no higher aim in life
Than darn the household stocking!
To pay not visits; to attend/ No balls; to keep no carriage;
To give no dinners – wear plain clothes –
Oh, mockery of marriage!⁵⁹

The Safety Bicycle provided the perfect alternative to women already uncomfortable with the proscriptions of marriage. Only one person could ride the Safety Bicycle, meaning that women had an easy excuse for leisure time that did not involve men. Time apart from their "superiors" provided women with a chance to think for themselves outside the confines of their husbands' domain:

The bicycle ... is a great benefactor to her, for it takes her out of herself and her heretofore narrowed environment, and in so doing teaches her that 'man's inhumanity to man' and 'woman's cruelty to woman' are much more mythical than she has been taught to believe ... she sees precedent and prejudice melt away; she sees the shackles of environment and dress slacken ... she sees that through this means she can cause man to forget her sex to the extent of leading him to treat her as an intellectual equal ...⁶⁰

Fear spread that the accessibility of the Safety Bicycle would dismantle gender roles by granting women freedom of movement beyond male surveillance and control.⁶¹

Opponents of the Safety Bicycle could not rely on women's dissatisfaction with the product to help prevent its widespread adoption, as was the case with Bloomers. Instead, they framed their attacks upon the Safety Bicycle in sexual terms. One particularly interesting medical critique of the Safety Bicycle was the seat could potentially be used as a tool for female masturbation.⁶² Physician W.E. Fitch declared:

The moment speed is desired the body is bent forward in a characteristic curve and the body's weight is transmitted to the narrow anterior half of the saddle, with all the weight pressing on the perineal region...If a saddle is properly adjusted for slow riding and in an unusual effort at speed or hill climbing, the body is thrown forward, causing the clothing to press against the clitoris, thereby eliciting and arousing feelings hitherto unknown and unrealized by the young maiden.⁶³

By associating female bicycling with masturbation, critics labeled female bicycling as illicit by association. They presented bicycling as masculinizing and threatening to sexual purity.

But bicycle manufacturers wished to sell them to as many people as possible, women included. They had to make bicycling socially acceptable for women in an effort to appeal to a female audience, meaning that they had to convince the public that riding a bicycle was not inherently masculinizing. Manufacturers created a gendered bicycle once again—but this time there was an appropriate bicycle for both men and women. The differentiated bicycle models using the diamond-shaped frame for men and the drop frame for women, which allowed for riding in skirts. Manufacturers also addressed the potential dangers women faced when using bicycle saddles through their advertising. An advertisement in Harper's Bazar for The Sager MFG. Company's bicycles states:

"Women who ride a wheel know that it's foolish to pay a hundred dollars for a bicycle

and endure an uncomfortable, perhaps dangerous, saddle. The Sager Pneumatic Saddle is the perfection of comfort and physical endorsement of prominent physicians for anatomical reasons...”⁶⁴

The advertising-dependent magazines also presented bicycling to its readers in a way that favored the manufacturers. Magazines provided an attractive advertising audience for new products, and publishers, editors, and advertisers all shared a common interest in the up-to-date world of commerce. Advertisers increasingly underwrote magazines, as advertising increasingly became a prominent source of funding for periodicals following the financial crisis of 1873-78. The financial crisis prompted magazines to build their advertising business to survive. Thus, advertising played an important role in the “commercial rehabilitation” during the 1880s and into the 1890s.⁶⁵

Publishers, editors, and advertisers shared a common interest in the Safety Bicycle. The intertwined relationship between these entities is illustrated by fact that periodicals contained so many bicycle-related articles and advertisements that bicycle ads constituted ten percent of all national advertising in the 1890s.⁶⁶

The information included in bicycle advertisements did not always implicate the social consequences of using bicycles—that was the magazine’s role. Defusing the bicycle’s dangers through articles and fashion spreads in mainstream magazines—such as Harper’s Bazar—made it easier and more acceptable for women to take up bicycling.⁶⁷ Mary Sargent Hopkins explained the role played in the bicycle winning its way among women in the magazine on March 14, 1896:

The joy in temporary freedom from care, the new-found beauty of nature, the steady gain in physical strength, the pleasure found in speed and ease combined, were the first incentives which led to women’s adoption of the wheel. But something more was needed to make this popularity universal and permanent ... It came when the magazines devoted page after page to writing up and illustrating the theme: when the society women, impelled at first by curiosity, tried the new sensation, and found it contained an aggregation of pleasure seldom before brought to her.⁶⁸

Harper’s Bazar featured many bicycle fashions and related articles promoting women’s use of the Safety Bicycle in the early 1890s. It printed a thirty-two-page supplement—titled “Harper’s Bazar: Bicycle Number”—on March 14, 1896 devoted solely to bicycles. This supplement was twice the size of the traditional sixteen-page

weekly and featured twenty-five bicycle related advertisements—thirty-five percent of the total advertisements in the issue. This endorsement of the Safety Bicycle forever altered the magazine's political trajectory. The bicycle supplement covered fashion pertaining to both clothing and social trends. This approach established the magazine's precedent for documenting change in American society. The magazine's bicycle supplement presented a distinct deviation from its previous tendency to occasionally feature opinionated articles covering a *mélange* of topics, including dress reform, gender roles, and suffrage. The bicycle supplement was entirely different—it was a collection of articles, illustrations, and advertisements espousing women's use of Safety Bicycles. The bicycle supplement's publication eclipsed the magazine's encouraging, but ultimately noncommittal, attitude regarding social issues and sparked the magazine's enduring interest and commitment to documenting women's issues.



Figure 2. *Harper's Bazar's* Bicycle Supplement cover.⁶⁹

This supplement included articles and fashion illustrations of proper cycling attire. An article titled “Bicycling Costumes” discussed the various possible bicycling outfits for women. The text stated that the young bicycling “custom has somewhat blunted our sensibilities so that we pay little attention to the erstwhile remarkable sight of a woman in knickerbockers or bloomers speeding along the crowded avenues of the city.” Bicycles began to accomplish what the Dress Reform Movement could not: wider acceptance—better characterized as tolerance—of new costumes including bloomers and other similar garments. While these radically different garments were not particularly advocated within Harper’s Bazar—which did not hesitate to express its “repugnance to costumes so unfeminine and so unbecoming,”—women who did wear bloomers and similar knickerbockers did not experience the same harsh reactions as the dress reformers of the 1850s.⁷⁰

Bloomers were an ideal bicycling outfit as “they are safe; they are comfortable; they are entirely modest, despite criticisms to the contrary.” Other women, as typified in “Requisite in Dress Reform,” lamented their lack of beauty, for “few things...could be devised more ugly...although it is undoubtedly both healthy and comfortable.” “The Outdoor Woman” indicates that appearance and attractiveness were important criteria for women regarding dress. Women were “too anxious about their personal appearance to be willing to wear what their own eyes is ugly, and, though it took a little time to discover it, this was the unfortunate adjective which nearly always applied to bloomers.” But Harper’s Bazar responded to women’s desires by offering an alternative dress to the bloomer that was still suitable for bicycling after determining that “it is possible to have a costume for bicycling that will be becoming, suitable, and inconspicuous...” The magazine promoted a new skirt pattern suitable for bicycle riding that utilized box-pleating to accommodate bicycles. The back of the skirt in this design was made with “two box-pleats calculated to fall nicely over the saddle when the rider is seated—an obvious advantage over the single-box pleated garment.” The six illustrations of female bicyclists accompanying the “Bicycling Costumes” article exclusively featured this new innovative design.⁷¹



Figure 3. Sketches of new bicycle costume designs.⁷²

Bicycling forced other changes to female fashion. It required that corsets be modified to allow women to move and breathe while using the bicycle. As Adelia K. Brainerd—a columnist for the magazine—said, for “what pleasure there can be in the exercise to one whose gown is so tight that she has trouble in drawing a long breath it is hard to discover, but the ways of some women are truly past finding out.” In this way, bicycling and Harper’s Bazar forced women to think of fashion in practical terms. Brainerd commented on the increased “allowance of common-sense” towards women’s dress as a result of the bicycling craze. She documented the emergence of a modified corset: “heavily boned waists are more comfortable than corsets to ride in, but for those

who do not choose to discard the latter, there are now special designs, made shorter and more flexible than those for ordinary use.”⁷³

Both skirt- and corset- design changes did not present radical departures from their predecessors’ designs, but they were examples of dress reforms that built upon the goals of the Dress Reform Movement’s goals, which focused on alleviating the health concerns presented by women’s garments, particularly the corset. Although “heavily boned waists” were a version of corsets, they were more comfortable and a more forgiving iteration of the constricting corset. Just as the “heavily boned waist allowed women to breathe more easily, the two-pleated bicycle skirt allowed women to move freely while riding. These fashions mark a distinct departure from antebellum fashion, when clothing diminished women’s “power of locomotion to the minimum necessary to getting in and out of a carriage with the aid of a helping arm.”⁷⁴

Reformers saw antebellum fashion as reinforcing women’s relegation to the private sphere. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, a suffragist, stated in 1857:

Women’s dress [...] perfectly describes her condition. Everything she wears has some object external to herself. [...] Her tight waist and long trailing skirts deprive her of all her freedom of breadth and motion. No wonder man proscribes her sphere. She needs his aid at every turn. He must help her up the stairs, and down, in the carriage and out, on the horse, up the hill, over the ditch and fence, and thus teaches her the POETRY of dependence.⁷⁵

Harper’s Bazar did not promote the radical fashions that the Lily tried to popularize. It evaded the Dress Reform Movement’s mistakes. The general public considered bloomers too radical. The magazine’s status as a popular magazine made it responsive to public opinion, but by devoting itself to documenting fashion, it also positioned itself as a trendsetter with an inherently futuristic perspective. By featuring bicycle fashions, articles, and advertisements, it endorsed women’s use of the Safety Bicycle and, thus, took a stance on this social issue that had political implications. Martha McCulloch-Williams said that, “Cycling breaks down all sorts of artificial barriers—caste, convention, the superstitious reserve between the sexes. It helps women to be good fellows—with each other even more than with other good fellows. In fact I want to preach a sermon a week upon how much it makes for righteousness and the good of the race.”⁷⁶

Chapter IV: Harper's Bazar's Political Evolution

Harper's Bazar's first foray into the political realm was an indirect discussion of politicians' wives' clothing. An article featured in the November 30, 1867 issue was aptly titled, "A Chat about what the French Empress Wears." In "Inigo in Washington," Inigo—an occasional contributor between 1867 and 1868—commented on her trip Washington "in the interest of the Bazar, to attend to the fashions, report the receptions, and ornament and elevate society generally." These articles were consistent with the magazine's stated mission to be "neither a political nor a sectarian journal" and to exclude "all vexed questions in politics and religion."⁷⁷ Mary Louise Booth, Harper's Bazar's editor-in-chief from 1867 to 1889, was loyal to the mission statement. She denied that the magazine had a political agenda, insisting that it stood above the fray in 1884:

It has been a cardinal principle with the *Bazar*, as a home journal, conservedly to abstain from the discussion of vexed questions of religion, politics, and kindred topics, and, while maintaining a firm and progressive attitude, to endeavor to promote harmony at the fireside for which it was designed – to bring peace, and not a sword.⁷⁸

The magazine's publishers and editor-in-chief clearly did not intend for it to report on current affairs.

Just as Harper's Bazar had to adjust its content over time to chronicle new fashions of the day, the magazine had to adjust its agenda over time to stay relevant as women's perception of their role in American society changed. Women's suffrage was not yet a broad-based political movement when it was created. Suffrage's limited base prompted Booth to state that discussions of suffrage and the like were off-limits in 1884: "it has always been thought inexpedient to advocate woman suffrage ... either explicitly or implicitly."⁷⁹ Therefore, Booth and the magazine proceeded to report the latest fashions accompanied with articles that targeted women in their private sphere to maintain their audience at that time. But as the idea of women's suffrage became a more popular movement, the magazine began to deemphasize its focus on women in the household.

The suffrage movement gained momentum after the Civil War. Suffragists supported the fight for emancipation of African Americans, but they wanted to fight for

their own emancipation. Some women believed they were entitled to enfranchisement because of their contribution to the Union's victory and slavery's abolishment. About 200,000 women throughout the North mobilized to raise money, gather supplies for soldiers, and collect books, clothes, and food to provide for freedmen.⁸⁰

The drafting of the fourteenth amendment provided an opportunity for suffragists to campaign for women's enfranchisement. Just as African American's had been considered to be three-fifths of a citizen due to their race, women were not considered full citizens either. Charlotte Perkins Gilman recounts a popular position that pervaded American nineteenth century society by quoting Grant Allen in the magazine: "Here is so well-known a scientist as Grant Allen ruthlessly stating one popular position: 'Woman is not the race—she is not even half of the race, but a sub-species set apart for purposes of reproduction merely.'" It is therefore not surprising that the Republican Party refused to include women's suffrage within the fourteenth amendment. Additionally, abolitionists feared that fighting two battles at once would hurt the amendment's viability.⁸¹

Suffragists' failed effort to convince abolitionists to campaign for women's suffrage prompted them to organize an independent campaign for the vote. Elizabeth Cady Stanton said that a woman "must not put her trust in man" when seeking her own rights. There was urgency to this independent political effort because suffragists realized that they had to take advantage of a new period of social reform. If not, another generation might pass "ere the constitutional door will again be opened." Thus, the suffrage movement positioned women as agents and beneficiaries of gender and political reforms.⁸²

Harper's Bazar was first published during this period of social and political opportunity and it became increasingly difficult to ignore the political debates regarding women's suffrage. The suffrage movement quickly became a burning issue in the political discourse among both men and women. Although men and women joined the debate, men's voices were louder. General periodicals were not even-handed in their coverage of the movement, and most were opposed to the women's suffrage movement. Frederick Sheldon of the Atlantic believed that women were committing a folly for abdicating the throne of beauty by plunging into politics. Many periodicals also made fun of the suffragists' efforts. Punchinello, a satirical magazine, identified itself as an enemy

of the “strong minded woman.” Its comedic writers were hostile to the movement, referring to the 1870 convention of the Equal Suffrage Association as “the annual Hen convention of Antediluvian Fossils.” Punchinello’s comedians also nicknamed Sorosis, a pioneer of the woman’s club movement, the “Sore-eye Sissies.” Even Harper’s Weekly roasted the movement. The magazine featured a long-running commentary opposing women’s suffrage, which included a full-page satirical drawing by Charles G. Bush called “Sorosis 1869.” The drawing pictured a women’s political convention in which tea-time and speech-making are one in the same, and men sit on the steps leading to the convention hall, caring for the children. This illustration projects a fear of the feminization of both American politics and men.⁸³

Puck, another humor magazine, printed an extravagant satirical double-page cartoon with an accompanying sonnet in 1878. The cartoon depicted suffragists Lucy Stone, Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Anna Dickinson, Mary Walker, Isabelle Beecher Hooker, and others as geese flocking around the Capitol building in Washington, D.C. The Sonnet accompanying the cartoon declared:

Shame unto womanhood! The common scold
Stands railing foul-mouthed in the public street;
And in the mart and ‘fore the justice seat
Her shallow tale of fancied wrongs is told.
No woman these such as our hearts enfold,
Held of all men desirable and sweet,
Who have our love and service at their feet;
Mothers and wives are cast not in this mold,
Nor of this likeness. Rather such are meet
To herd with them whose love is bought and sold,
Whose passionless pulses to no purpose beat:
For these have hearts as empty and as cold,
And all their lives are like them; incomplete,
Unfruitful and unbeautiful and bold.⁸⁴

The sonnet perpetuates a very different fear than Harper’s Weekly’s illustration, but both fears were a product of women’s political participation nonetheless. Rather than fearing the feminization of American politics and men, the writer of the sonnet fears the defeminization of women. Rather than being “desirable” and “sweet,” women participating in the political process would become “bold” and “foul-mouthed.”

By contrast, Harper's Bazar regarded the suffrage movement favorably. The article, "The Champions of Women's Suffrage," published in the June 12, 1869 issue, detailed the history of women's suffrage and was accompanied by illustrations of suffragists, sans beaks and feathers. The portraits of Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth C. Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Ernestine L. Rose, Paulina W. Davis, Antoinette B. Blackwell, Olive Logan, and Anna Dickinson depicted them as honorable heroes, but hardly fashion models, fighting for women's rights:

We take pleasure in laying before our readers this week a group of noble and dignified portraits, comprising some of the most eminent advocates of Woman's Suffrage – a cause which at this moment is largely engrossing public attention, both here and in Europe, and continually swelling the numbers of its adherents.⁸⁵

"The Champions of Women's Suffrage" is the antithesis of the derision Puck magazine on the same suffrage leaders. Harper's Bazar introduced the suffragists to its readers and took pleasure in doing so. This marked the end of Mary Booth's short-lived promise to avoid political discussion in the magazine. Its use of the pronoun "we" when introducing the suffragists to their readers indicates that the magazine—more specifically, its publishers and editors—assumed the responsibility of educating its readers about the suffrage movement's history. This contrasted sharply with the neutrality the magazine had shown previously. Although it had published articles addressing women's suffrage, they were presented as the writer's own opinion piece. Harper's Bazar merely provided the space for women to express their point of view.



Figure 4. Women's suffrage leaders portraits featured in *Harper's Bazar's* "The Champions of Woman's Suffrage" article.⁸⁶

One recurring column written by Flora McDonald Thompson—its title varied between “Her Point of View,” “One Woman’s Point of View,” and “From a Woman’s Point of View”—dedicated itself to commentary on then-current news stories. In her February 3, 1900 piece, “A Woman for Vice-President,” Thompson asked: “Now why not a woman for Vice-President of the United States?” Thompson described the role of Vice President as being “peculiarly fitted to the nature of woman.” She claimed that a woman would be a good Vice Presidential candidate because “the office of Vice-President [was] a glorious sitting part in the government of the nation.” The Vice President’s primary duty was to keep the Senate in order, a legislative body Thompson described as “notoriously disorderly.” While Thompson realized that a woman’s chances of becoming Vice President in nineteenth century America were slim, she did not shy away from asserting the political and social consequences of her bold argument:

What the cause of woman seeks is never so much the spoils of success as the demonstration of the principle of immortal justice, and to the logical mind the office of Vice-President would seem to have been conceived by the fathers of the republic for the sole purpose of one day splendidly reconciling constitutional necessities of good government – men’s liberties – with women’s rights.⁸⁷

While Thompson espoused a progressive point of view, Harper’s Bazar also showcased conservative perspectives. In the May 19, 1894 issue, Jeanette L. Gilder proclaimed she was opposed to women’s suffrage because she believed that women had no place in politics, as it was “too public, too wearing, and too unfitted to the nature of women.” While Gilder did not doubt the mental equality of the sexes, she feared suffrage’s impact on domestic life. Gilder wondered:

What will become of home life, I should like to know, if the mother and the father both are at the ‘primary’ or the convention? Who will look after the children? Hired mothers? But can every woman with political ambitions afford to pay for a ‘resident’ or a ‘visiting’ mother?⁸⁸

Gilder described the emergence of a potential power vacuum within American families if women became enfranchised. The unknown that universal suffrage had the potential to herald had huge, and scary, implications upon the United State’s social fabric. Thus, Gilder believed that the ballot hurt women rather than helped them. Although Gilder recognized that the ballot was just a simple piece of paper, she considered it to be “a

bomb – one that may go off in [women’s] own hands, and work a mischief that [women] little dreams of.”⁸⁹

Thompson’s columns’ various titles all indicated that the text would reflect a woman’s point of view. Women had been dependent on men’s counsel; male doctors, politicians, religious figures, and even husbands told women how to live and act to remain a “true” woman. But just as women began to demand and fight for their own suffrage, *Harper’s Bazar* became a platform for women to express their thoughts about their own concerns and lives. The magazine provided a place for women to share and discuss their political opinion at a time when men’s hegemonic control of American politics could discourage or dismiss women’s political perspective. Women were no longer excluded from political discussion as in the illustration, “Study of an Animated Discussion: Between two Gentlemen of Diametrically Opposite views,” published on April 4, 1868. The illustration features two men in a discussion, while a woman sits to the side and looking at the ground rather than participating.⁹⁰ It offered women from both sides on the political spectrum—suffragists and anti-suffragists—a distinct space to voice their opinions that was hard to find during this period.



STUDY OF AN ANIMATED DISCUSSION
Between Two Gentlemen of Diametrically Opposite Views.

Figure 5. Illustration of two men engaged in an “animated” discussion while a woman observes.⁹¹

Women were criticized when speaking in public. Linguists policed women's intervention in politics by critiquing the way women spoke rather than their speeches' content. Linguist Otto Jespersen laments women's "great and universal influence on linguistic development," particularly when women frequently "leave their exclamatory sentences half finished." Jespersen claims that these sentences are "the linguistic symptoms of a peculiarity of feminine psychology which had not escaped observation." Furthermore, linguists and opponents of women's suffrage used women's "feminine" tone to justify women's exclusion from politics, claiming that the "harsh" American language was softer when spoken by a woman. The characterization of women's speech as "soft" associates women's "feminine" tone to the female body was designed to exclude women from the public political arena due to their alleged weak and fragile nature. Linguists argued that women's speech threatened the American dialect's defining "harsh" tone. Women's speech patterns were believed to erode the American language, prompting concerns that women's speech threatened the United States' future. But linguists also feared the social implications of women's public speech.⁹²

Political campaign locations further reinforced the hegemonic nature of nineteenth century American politics. Political gatherings were held in salons, pubs, and other male-dominated locations that typified and celebrated stereotypical forms of manhood. Linguists and opponents' critique and dissection of women's speech combined with the nature of political assemblies linked masculinity, public languages, and political influence together to justify women's exclusion from politics and the public sphere.⁹³

Harper's Bazar was a periodical that featured content for women, created by women and, thus, had the potential to dismantle men's hegemony over political discourse. The magazine's engagement of women as readers and writers is important, for Charlotte Perkins Gilman argues, "the vocal fraction of mankind is responsible for most of the ideas in the world." Unsurprisingly, women took this opportunity to write about politics. Women could support particular causes, express apprehensions, and persuade other women. The magazine helped remove the boundaries between the public and private spheres by enabling women to participate in the political debate by reading the magazine in the home.

Chapter V: Harper's Bazar as a Political Magazine

Harper's Bazar's political climate changed after the bicycle supplement's publication. The Safety Bicycle allowed for women to move beyond the domestic sphere and out into the world. This movement is very much connected with the women's suffrage movement. For example, the word "movement" suggests an accelerated transformation of a group's consciousness. Women's changing consciousness of their position in American society was symptomatic of their bicycle riding. Their increased physical and social mobility encouraged women to think differently about themselves and this changing consciousness contributed to the formation of women's growing collective power. Bicycling's impact upon women's consciousness prompted was transformative; Dr. Jane Walker considered women's adoption of the bicycle as the beginning of woman's emancipation.⁹⁴

Women's reformers believed that achieving lasting women's "emancipation" required amending the United States' Constitution, for "there is no mention made of woman in the Constitution." The 1890s' bicycle craze and Harper's Bazar's enthusiastic documentation of the Safety Bicycle and its liberating impact upon women was followed by a seventeen-part series titled "Woman and Law"—these "everyday problems" were primarily related to women's issues. First published in the June 1901 issue, the series discussed principles of law and "their application to everyday problems." Topics included the constitution, the three governmental branches, women's rights and privileges when drafting contracts, the distinction between legal incapacity and disability, and the privileges of married women. The first installment of the series states notes "the relation of law to woman, and the relation of woman to the law are both subjects which are receiving at present the widest attention."⁹⁵

Women were not the only ones to express interest in the "relation of law to women"—the magazine's management expressed interest as well. An article printed on May 26, 1900 written by the Governor of Idaho titled "Woman Suffrage in Idaho" began:

I have been asked to give some practical observations on the system in Idaho by which women vote and hold office, and I comply willingly, feeling that it may serve to overcome to some extent misapprehensions which have arisen as to the results of woman's participation in public affairs.⁹⁶

As women begin to see themselves differently, Harper's Bazar's content changed accordingly. Articles discussing women's role in the household still appeared in the magazine, but to maintain relevant and stay ahead of the latest fashions, the magazine had to address women's legal status as the suffrage movement received increased attention from women. Its commission of Idaho's Governor's report on the passage of woman's suffrage's impact upon the State's political life reflects the magazine's interest in understanding universal suffrage's implications upon American life. This interest mirrors the magazine's futuristic orientation regarding clothing trends, for Harper's Bazar sought to know what the United States' future could be like rather than merely speculating. The decision to include a series educating women about their then-current legal status rooted Harper's Bazar within the political discourse, for "Expensive Matrimony" identified periodicals as "the literature of common life, they are grand equalizers of intellect by radiating those general influences that concern everybody's instincts, aims, and characteristics; and hence, if such evils are peculiarly social and domestic are to be remedied, their agency is essential to the good work."⁹⁷

The magazine's discussion of women's legal rights in their "Woman and Law" series set the precedent for a serious discussion of women's suffrage. The magazine featured a written piece by Ida Husted Harper,³ a staunch suffragist, in every issue from January 1909 through January 1912. Harper was an American author and journalist who advocated for women's suffrage through literature and the media. She penned a few long-standing series within Harper's Bazar, such as "What the Suffragists are Doing." The first article of the series provided a general overview of the women's suffrage movement's goals and accomplishments up until that point. Each article in every subsequent issue through January 1910 reported on suffrage-related news and accomplishments, in which Harper would advocate for suffrage movement's ideals.

Articles espousing the anti-suffrage movement directly follow four of Harper's articles within her "What the Suffragists are Doing" series. One of these articles, "The Ideal for Equality of Men and Women" by Priscilla Leonard, explains the anti-suffrage movement. She states that suffragists and anti-suffragist primarily differ on one fundamental point—what it means to be equal. The suffragist fights for an equality of "a

³ No relation to the publishers.

like kind,” whereas the anti-suffragist does not desire equality of “a like kind,” but as “like in difference:”

The suffragist wants the rights and position of man. The anti-suffragist desires the differing rights and position of woman. Woman is not a smaller, weaker man. In that case she would be and must remain distinctly inferior. The anti-suffragists believe in a woman’s being a woman, unlike man in vital ways, but co-equal and on some planes superior just because of her sex.⁹⁸

Additionally, granting women the right to vote gives them the ability to participate within the United State’s democracy. Leonard—speaking for the anti-suffragists—argued that women would be forced to share a personal responsibility to participate within the democratic process, even if they did not want to participate in politics. Leonard argued that government was strictly a man’s job and his vote represents a symbol of his service, for “man stand ready, behind their votes, for personal jury service, personal service in case of riot, personal military service in case of war” and in the end, “there are juries of men, sheriff’s posses of men, armies of men, in every civilized government—including that to the United States.”⁹⁹

The anti-suffragists believed that if the right to vote represented true equality, the responsibilities and expectations associated with the right to vote were part of that equality. Leonard asked:

Does woman want the vote? If so, is she willing to do the service? Is that part of her ideal of equality? The anti-suffragist frankly answers “No!” To grasp at the vote without any intention of rendering the necessary service seems to her unfair...Power without responsibility can never be a part of true government.¹⁰⁰

If sexual equality required women’s suffrage, then Leonard asserted that women should step into the governmental sphere, for that was where they would then belong. However, the anti-suffragists believed that women had distinct functions in the community, for the home and society was their realm, while the State was men’s realm and suffrage was not necessary to achieve gender equality.¹⁰¹

Harper’s Bazar featured both suffragists and anti-suffragists perspectives. Harper’s Bazar’s decision to place these articles back to back within the magazine created an indirect dialogue between these two opposing movements and writers.

However, what began as an indirect conversation became a direct dialogue, as both Harper and Leonard explicitly addressed and refuted arguments made by the other.

For example, Harper often reported on women's suffrage outside of the United States, using it as a barometer to measure the United States' progress on the issue. Harper lamented:

The women of the United States can scarcely imagine the humiliation of our delegates as they go year after year to these international meetings with no advance to report, while at every one the delegates from some country come in all the flush and triumph of just having been enfranchised.¹⁰²

After Harper praised an act by Denmark's Parliament granting "women the same municipal suffrage on the same terms as men," Leonard criticized Harper's use of Denmark's progress as a comparison for the United States:

Denmark and Norway, which give some amount of municipal suffrage to women, have so small a number of inhabitants that, taken together, these two countries do not equal the population of New York and Chicago. They have a population, also, so homogeneous that our greatest American municipal problems do not enter into their borders. There is no negro problem in any European state, and the only immigration problem is how to keep the people from leaving for America.¹⁰³

Harper also responded to Leonard's proclamations about the suffrage movement. Leonard denounced the suffrage movement's success by claiming that the "last ten years have seen 155 defeats for woman suffrage." Leonard attributed this number to the suffrage movement's weakness. Leonard's claim prompted Harper to defend the suffrage movement against this assertion: "Now when the opponents say, 'the last ten years have seen 155 defeats for woman suffrage,' they mean simply that the men in power have refused to let the question go before the voters, where it properly belongs."¹⁰⁴ Harper's direct quotation from Leonard's article illustrates the debate and discussion fostered within Harper's *Bazar*. This debate between Harper and Leonard was a far cry from the illustration, "Study of an Animated Discussion: Between two Gentlemen of Diametrically Opposite views," published on April 4, 1868. The illustration features two men in a discussion, while a woman sits to the side and looking at the ground rather than participating. Harper and Leonard's debate published thirty-one years after the

Epilogue

Harper & Brothers encountered financial troubles at the turn of the century. Editor Margret Sangster was replaced by Elizabeth Jordan in 1899 when Harper & Brothers went into receivership and was reorganized. Jordan continued Harper Bazar's editorial formula, but introduced a number of economies. She converted the publication's tabloid layout to a book-like magazine in 1901. Additionally, Jordan issued the magazine monthly rather than weekly. Jordan's redesigns and cutbacks did not bolster the magazine's poor financial state. Ultimately, publishing mogul William Randolph Hearst purchased the magazine in 1913 for a mere ten thousand dollars.¹⁰⁵

Hearst had the financial clout to revive the magazine, and he instituted a number of changes. He completely redesigned the magazine. What was once a text-heavy, dense publication emerged as a modern, sophisticated, and dynamic periodical. Harper's Bazar's pages included more white space, many illustrations of fashionable women in motion, and many photographs. These design changes breathed new life into the magazine. Additionally, William Martin Johnson replaced Jordan as editor of the magazine. This transition of authority represented a definitive shift in the demographic make-up of Harper's Bazar's editors. Harper & Brother's hired three female editors during their tenure. Conversely, Hearst hired six male editors between 1913 and 1934.¹⁰⁶

Harper's Bazar's political character did not change despite these changes. The magazine continued to publish suffrage-related articles. For example, the April 1915 issue included a three-page spread featuring five articles devoted to discussing woman's suffrage. The headlining article was titled "Campaigning for Suffrage in New York." The same issue included an article titled "The Duel of the Sexes" with the caption: "How will the great war affect feminism in France?" Its fashion coverage even adapted to geopolitics as indicated by the February 1915's World War.I related article, "From the Trenches: Paul Poiret, the Famous Couturier." Poiret wrote exclusively for the magazine about the fashions on the war front.¹⁰⁷

The Bazar also included an article titled "Edgelow's Talks with Actresses You Know" in the April 1915 issue. Edgelow, "realizing that the public is always interested in the opinions of its stage favourites," asked four different actresses their opinions on woman's suffrage. Although Edgelow sought to speak with these women about suffrage,

illustration's publication indicates a great shift in women's political participation as well as Harper's Bazar's content shift as the magazine appeals to a new type of woman.

the actresses couldn't resist discussing other topics as well: "Miss Janis elected to talk about London, Miss Hedman preferred love, Miss Starr discussed marriage and Miss Illington insisted on old furniture..." This one quote is emblematic of what the magazine provided women. Women were interested in a variety of topics, including fashion, love, furniture, and suffrage and they could find material on all of these topics within the magazine¹⁰⁸.

Harper's Bazar was not the first magazine to document fashion, furniture, romance, and women's issues. But the magazine did address each of these topics, producing a groundbreaking formula of women's magazine content. Its predecessors compartmentalized the varied topics. Godey's, for example, refused to include Civil War news because Sarah Josepha Hale, its editor, believed that war news was vulgar and not of interest to women. On the other hand, Mary Barney's The National Magazine; Or, Lady's Emporium floundered because of her sparse treatment of fashion, beauty, and romance throughout her political discourse.

Thus, Harper & Brothers' financial demise should not overshadow the singular inclusiveness of Harper's Bazar's editorial formula. By including a number of different topics within the magazine, they ensured that the Miss Janises, Hedmans, Starrs, and Illingtons each had something they wanted to read within the magazine. Hearst's continued use of the Harper brother's original editorial formula is evidence of this. It is fitting that Hearst kept the title of the periodical, unlike when he purchased World Today in 1911, whose name he changed to Hearst's International. Instead, he continued on the path of the earlier Harper's Bazar by offering his readers a range of topics, including politics, breaking new ground only in giving Bazar its third "a."

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