



BRITANNIA
Sue

Britannia and Eve, 1926–1957

Teaching Pack

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Britannia and Eve, 1926–1957

Introduction

Britannia and Eve was a women's magazine published during the early to mid-twentieth century. The publication provides a window into the changing roles of the "modern woman". *Britannia and Eve* also provides key insights into the history of fashion, gender history, and the history of British print culture.

The primary sources included within this teaching pack represent a tiny sample of the material in the collection. They reveal how women were presented in print media during a pivotal era in British social history and provide commentary on women's beauty, motherhood, and the working woman.

The activities contained within this teaching pack could easily take **around 40 minutes**, though the exact duration will depend on reading time and the breadth and depth of accompanying discussion.

Learning Objectives

1. Understand the role that the media has played in shaping women's physical appearances.
2. Evaluate the societal expectations of women during the early to mid-twentieth century.
3. Explore the negative responses that emerged during the 1920s in response to Britain's growing female workforce.

Historical Background and Context

Formed in 1929 following a merger between *Eve: The Lady's Pictorial* (established in 1926) and *Britannia* (established in 1928), *Britannia and Eve* was one of the various “sister” titles owned by *The Illustrated London News (ILN)*. From the outset, *Britannia and Eve* marketed itself to a predominantly female readership, especially to wealthy and conservative women.

Throughout its existence, it maintained a particular emphasis on fashion, beauty, motherhood, and the home. It also featured contributions from some of the most influential female artists and writers of the time. Published between June 1926 and January 1957, there are over 350 issues.

Britannia and Eve served as a cultural barometer, addressing the shifting roles of women through pivotal moments, such as in the aftermath of the First World War, following the passage of the Representation of the People's Act of 1918, during the interwar years, and in the aftermath of the Second World War.

SOURCE ONE

Source Intro

Britannia and Eve frequently focused on fashion, beauty, and women's physique. The following sources represent just a handful of examples of beauty advice advanced in this publication. Source A, titled "If You Dance... dance for Health and Beautiful Limbs" within the "Physical Culture Section", is from the May 1929 issue; Source B, titled "Make Your Form Fit The Fashions", is from the January 1932 issue; while Source C, titled "How Will You Look When He Returns", can be found in the January 1945 issue.

Source

A: "If You Dance... dance for Health and Beautiful Limbs", 1st May 1929, [image 140](#).

B: "Make Your Form Fit the Fashions", 1st January 1932, [image 68](#).

C: "How Will You Look When He Returns?", 1st January 1945, [image 39](#).

A:



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Physical Culture Section

rail, and keeping the upper part of the body perfectly upright, exercise each leg in turn, kicking it quickly as high as possible in front, at the side, at the back, about ten times in each direction. Point the toe: it is not only more graceful, it is a valuable ankle exercise. The body must not jerk spasmodically as the leg beats. You will find it almost impossible to keep steady at first; but this will come in time. You should also be able to beat a little higher each day. The girl in the photographs is at the initial stages.

The battements give great flexibility to the whole body. The trunk and waist muscles are severely tested in holding steady while the leg moves. The legs themselves become well developed and soon lose superfluous fat.

Skiping for Grace and Pretty Ankles.

The ordinary movements of skiping are good for poise and general grace of movement, as well as for clumsy ankles, which, if exercised enough, may be perceptibly fined down provided their thickness is a matter of tissue and not of the formation of the bone. Very few homes, however, have any room in which skiping can be indulged in without risk to life and furniture. Go through the foot-work of skiping without a rope, therefore, for five minutes at a time, at odd intervals throughout the day. Skip from room to room whenever there is no one looking—and keep your heels off the floor. That elementary rule of good dancing—dance on your toes—will strengthen the ankle and in time give even a flat foot an arched instep.

Dance with Your Arms.

As you skip, exercise the arms and train them to graceful movement by flinging them—not violently, but joyously—from side to side. First the right arm out, and the left arm across the chest. Then back, and left arm out, the right across the chest. As you perform this exercise the arms must at no time be perfectly straight, nor must the elbow stick out, sharp. A flowing, curved line should be maintained. Practise repeatedly in

front of a looking-glass till you have it absolutely right. And remember to keep your back in while you're doing it.

Are Your Wrists Dainty?

The next two exercises for this month are very simple ones for the wrists. If these are already shapely, they will give you flexibility.

First hold the arms extended in front of you, and keeping them quite motionless beat your hands up and down without stopping, until your wrists are exhausted. Then rest. This can be done at any odd moment, sitting or standing.

The second exercise is to extend the arms in the same way hands palm downwards. Turn the hands inward on the wrists till they are extended palms upward, and then turn them back. Repeat this until tired.

In both these exercises it is essential to keep both wrists and fingers quite relaxed. If they are stiff and tight the whole purpose is defeated.

Bending—Backwards and Sideways.

Obviously it is impossible for anyone to be really graceful unless all their body muscles are flexible. Within the limits imposed upon the majority of us by single jointedness, we should be able to do anything we want to with our muscles; get our limbs into any position. Touching one's toes is a crude example of what I mean. Anyone who can't do that is in a bad way, and had better work at it intensively till the inability is corrected. As another example—few of us want to do the "double splits." The repeated performance of them is even bad for the female anatomy. But we ought all to have our muscles so flexible and under such perfect control that we could do double splits if we wanted to.

Few exercises are better for general flexibility than back bending, illustrated in Fig. C. One should also be able to bend sideways fill the trunk is at right angles to the lower half of the body. Both these exercises should be constantly practised in front of a mirror. It is better to bend a very little way properly than to try too much at once and do it badly.

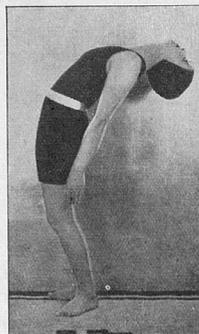


FIG. C.: Try this in front of your mirror. Some people can bend back till their heads touch their knees, but if you can do it as far as this and keep your body as graceful you are on the right road.



This will help you to acquire graceful and shapely wrists. Start with the hands extended, palms downward. Thus.



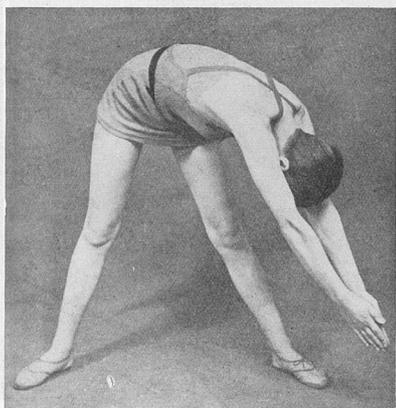
Now turn the hands inward, using the wrists as pivots. Don't take too long over it, and, above all, keep the muscles from stiffening.



This is the final position—the hands cupped, the palms upward. Now turn the hands back, reversing the movement, and repeat the exercise.

B:

MAKE YOUR FORM FIT THE FASHIONS



THE new dresses that mould us closely from shoulder to hips make it very necessary that there should be no superfluous flesh or flabbiness about the diaphragm or the waist. Here are some simple exercises that will help to get rid of the hateful little roll of flesh that is apt to bulge above the best-fitting corset and to ruin the line of almost any contemporary gown.

Above
STAND
with the feet wide apart, the arms raised and thumbs locked and bend slowly over, first to one side then the other

Many women say they cannot wear the new fashions because of some fault in their figure; here is an infallible method of combating one of the most usual

By ANTONIA WHITE

EXERCISE 1

Stand with the feet wide apart and the arms raised above the head, with the thumbs locked. Bend the body slowly over to the left, keeping the head between the arms, until the finger tips touch the floor in front of the left foot. Resume the first position and then sweep over to the right, touching the floor in front of the right foot. All the movement must come from the trunk muscles; the head and arms must not do the pulling, but remain as rigid as possible. Repeat ten times.

EXERCISE 2

Lie on the floor with the arms stretched back above the head and the thumbs locked, as in the first exercise. Breathe in, and raise the head and shoulders from the floor. Breathe out, and slowly lower them. Breathe in again, this time raising the feet and legs, and lowering them as you breathe out. These movements should be done slowly and with great control, so that you can feel a strong pull on the abdominal muscles. Repeat ten times.

EXERCISE 3

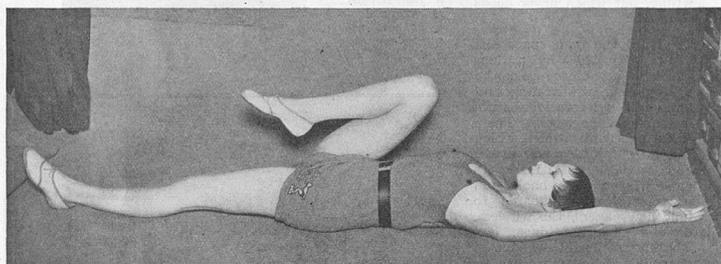
Stand with the feet apart and the hands on the hips. Rotate the whole trunk on its axis, forward, to the right, backwards, to the left and forward again in a slow continuous sweep. Keep the head rigid the whole time, as if it were riveted on your shoulders. Make six complete rotations, allowing one inhalation and exhalation to each circle.

EXERCISE 4

Lie on the back, with arms down at sides, neck and shoulder muscles relaxed. Pull the right knee back to the chest and fling the left arm loosely over the head. Reverse the movement, pulling up the left knee and flinging the right arm back over the head. The pull of the leg muscles should be strong, but the arm and chest muscles should remain loose and relaxed throughout. Repeat ten times.

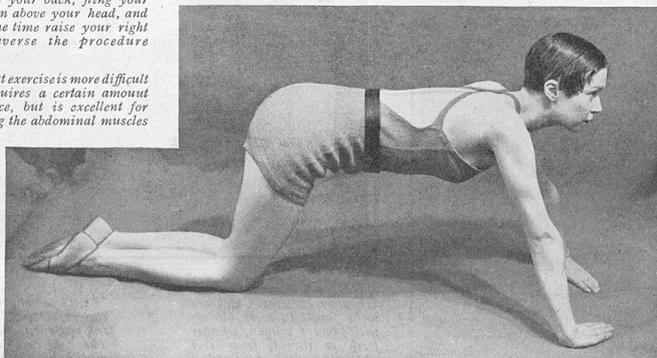
EXERCISE 5

Sit back on your heels with your knees on the floor and your arms stretched out in front of you, shoulder width apart, and palms on the floor. Lift your body (keeping your hands and knees in the same position, but raising your elbows), and move it forward so that you are lying full length. Lift body, without moving hands or knees, back to the first position. Rock to and fro in this way five times.



Above
LIE on your back, fling your left arm above your head, and at the same time raise your right leg. Reverse the procedure

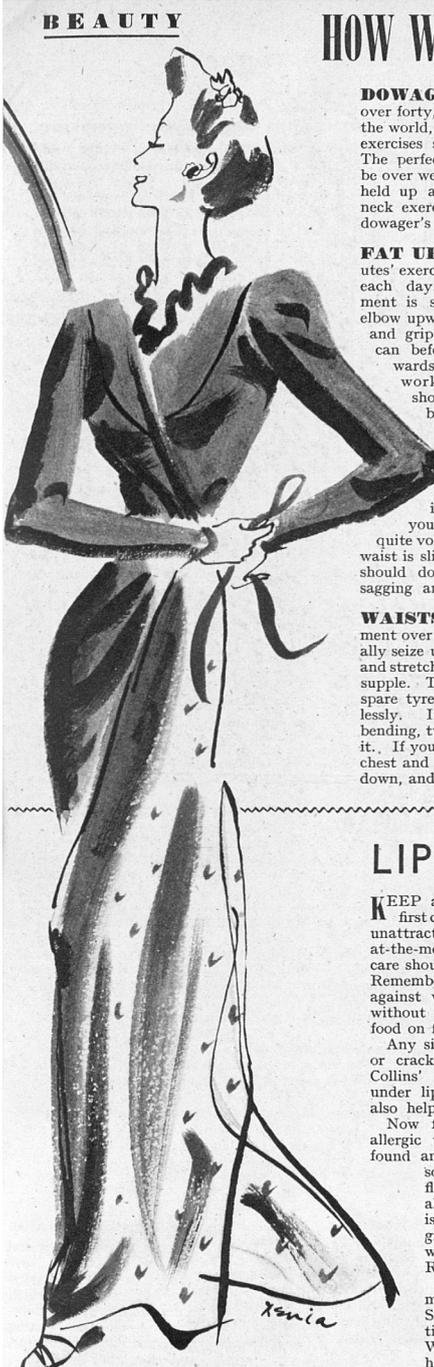
Right
THIS last exercise is more difficult and requires a certain amount of practice, but is excellent for controlling the abdominal muscles



C:

BEAUTY

HOW WILL YOU LOOK WHEN HE RETURNS?



DOWAGER'S HUMP. If you are over forty, your dowager's hump may tell the world, so watch it. Posture and neck exercises should keep it under control. The perfect neck posture is for ears to be over well-held-back shoulders, the chin held up and back. This posture, plus neck exercises done daily, removes that dowager's hump.

FAT UPPER ARM. Do five minutes' exercise and five minutes' massage each day. The first massage movement is strong pressure strokes from elbow upwards, using the opposite hand and gripping the flesh as hard as you can before you slide your hand upwards. The other movement is working upwards from elbow to shoulder with fat-pinching action by the opposite hand. Use slimming cream or lotion if you have it.

A PLUMP BOSOM. This need not be ageing, nor, if well-brassièred, need it ruin your silhouette. You can have quite voluptuous curves, providing your waist is slim and your posture good. You should do breast exercises to prevent sagging and to keep the bust youthful.

WAISTS are always ready for improvement over the age of thirty. As we gradually seize up with age, we forget to bend and stretch and keep ourselves sinuous and supple. That is unwise. If you have a spare tyre, pinch and pummel it mercifully. If you have a thick waistline, bending, twisting and exercising will slim it. If you want a wasp waist, hold your chest and diaphragm up, keep your hips down, and stretch as often as you can.

STOMACHS are often distended through muscular collapse, fatty deposits, or incorrect posture. Contract the muscles of your stomach. You can feel the iron strength of them under your layer of fat. Now feel the topping tissues and you will be able to decide whether they are too fat or not. If they are, it is a matter of a little dieting: not so many cups of tea with your breakfast, nothing between meals except hot drinks, less puddings and porridge. Pinch and squeeze the fatty deposits until they disappear. You have to keep on at it.

If the fat is not on the surface, check up on your bowel action, do exercises for posture and for the stomach muscles.

HIPS respond to a rolling massage exercise, because self-massage is too wearying. In fact, most hip exercises are done on the floor and have the pressure of the hips on the floor as the slimming action. Skipping, tap-dancing, high kicking are sure cures for unwanted hip curves. Do ten minutes' hip exercise night and morning until the inches are down, then five minutes regularly.

THIGHS generally link up with hips, and the same exercises are reducing here, too, but you can add a five-minute beating treatment. Clench your fists and, using them as little sledge-hammers, beat up and down your thighs.

CALVES need massage, massage and more massage. All the slimming lotion you have stored away can be put on and massaged in. Sit on the floor for it, and keep it up for five minutes on the one calf, strong, pulling strokes from ankle to behind-the-knee.

LIP READING

KEEP an eye on your lips. Your first care should be that you have no unattractive lip mannerisms, no down-at-the-mouth expressions. Your second care should be the health of your lips. Remember that lipstick is a protection against winter winds; don't go out without it, and put a smear of skin-foam on first if you are dry-lipped.

Any signs of inflammation, dryness or cracking should be treated with Collins' Antiseptic Lotion, applied under lipstick during the day, and lavishly on cleansed lips at night. This will also help to combat cold sores.

Now for the veneer of beauty-lipstick. If your lips are very sensitive and allergic to even the best brands of wartime lipsticks, persevere until you have found an Elizabeth Arden "Natural" lipstick, a new creation on an inert base, so that it cannot aggravate the most sensitive of lips. It is a most natural, flattering and yet gay red. There are three other new Arden lipstick shades, all trying to cover a host of colour schemes intelligently. Radiant Peony is a bluish-toned lipstick perfect for wearing with black, white, purple-blues, greys, plum, wine, petunia. It is especially good on the grey- or white-haired woman. The other new shades are Cinnabar, rich with autumn shades; and Red Feather, a vivid balanced red.

Don't try to make your lips too big, too bowed, too dramatic. The medium-large, good-tempered, up-at-corners mouth is the most attractive. Start with a large dot in centre bottom lip, two large dots in top bows, two tiny dots in top corners, and two not quite so far out in bottom corners. Work this in to your mouth shape (you may need a heavier application if you have to make a bigger top or bottom lip than you have naturally), then powder, blot off the powder and re-apply your lipstick.



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Britannia and Eve, 1926–1957

Questions for Discussion

1. How do these sources define the “ideal” female body and appearance? What assumptions about femininity underlie these expectations?
2. Analyse the role of print media in creating and maintaining societal beauty standards. To what extent is beauty a social construct?
3. How do the beauty ideals presented in *Britannia and Eve* compare to contemporary representations of beauty in magazines and on social media? Consider the role the media plays in shaping current perceptions of beauty.

SOURCE TWO

Source Intro

During the First World War, women entered the workforce in significant numbers. This marked a turning point for women's labour. While many women returned to domestic roles after the war, the 1920s saw a continuation of women participating in certain professions. This trend was accelerated by the onset of the Second World War, as women took on crucial roles in industry, administration, and the military. After the war, many women remained in the workforce. Women working became a hot topic of conversation in the mid-twentieth century—many people held strong views and this topic was discussed regularly in print media. Below are two sources which examine the experiences of married women balancing professional careers and domestic responsibilities. Source A, titled "Thus The Career Woman", was published in January 1953; Source B, titled "Home or Career?", was published on 7 December 1928.

Source

A: "Thus the Career Woman", 1st January 1953, [images 12–13](#).

B: "Home or Career?", 7th December 1928, [image 48](#).

A:



Thus

To the woman who has made the home her sphere the career woman is something of an enigma. Who and what is she? Is she a force in our social development or an accident of circumstances? Here is PAMELA FRY's summing up.

THE married woman with a job is often regarded as a rather glamorous and fortunate creature. Her sister wives tend to think of her as the girl who manages to eat her cake—the very *best* cake—and have it, too. Hers, all the fun, none of the chores; all the best of marriage and none of the fuss of baby-raising. She has joined the Married Womens' Union, but she somehow avoids paying her dues. She may be frankly envied for her luck, or briskly criticized for her cavalier approach to wifehood. Sometimes both.

This is the popular concept of the career woman. But what happens when we look behind-the-scenes. What, exactly is a "career woman"? What does she do—how does she live? And last but not least, how did she come into existence?

Official statistics provide us with some surprising information. One out of every four married women have jobs and nearly half of *all* the women who go to work are married. And what do they work at? Well, just under fifteen per cent of working wives are directly or indirectly involved in factory work. About thirteen per cent are in the "distributive trades," which in everyday language means the business of buying and selling, retail and wholesale. A little item called "miscellaneous services" takes up another nineteen per cent—and this includes everyone from your daily char to the girl who sells you a ticket at the local cinema. 5.5 per cent are busy with public administration and defence; 2.2 per cent are in transportation, i.e. lady bus conductors, etc. Only one meagre 11.5 per cent who are listed under professional services could be accurately described as "career women."

In other words the majority of married women continue working because they need or want extra money, and not for sheer love of their job. It is hard to get a creative thrill out of washing anyone else's floor, or running the same machine in the same factory five days a week, fifty-two weeks a year.

But the lady with whom we are mainly concerned comes under that 11.5 per cent in the "professional services" column. She may be an artist or an actress, a doctor or a dentist, a journalist or a novelist. She may be in one of those specialized fields which have fallen almost entirely into feminine hands, such as social work, physiotherapy, occupational therapy. She may be a radiographer or a dietitian. She might easily be a teacher: sixty-two per cent of all teachers are women. Or perhaps a woman engineer; a profession which has enjoyed a major feminine invasion as the result of two world wars. She might even be one of the brave few who have stormed the august precincts of the law courts; three per cent of all practising barristers are women, two per cent of practising solicitors. Not an impressive figure, but we have at least gained a toe-hold.

BUT whatever her occupation; whether she is one of those unbelievably boneless ladies who decorate *Vogue*, or one of the twenty-seven female dignitaries gracing professorial chairs at English Universities—if she is married and working, she shares common problems. She is doing two jobs instead of one. She is bound to develop something of a split personality and to become somewhat of an expert in the art of

The Career Woman

compromise. Even if she is among the fabulously successful few, there will inevitably be moments when the demands of her career clash with the needs and exigencies of family life.

Of course, there are always the exceptions to the rule, those miraculous females who accomplish these slight-of-hand-of-marriage-cum-job without disarranging a hair of their sleek heads. But for a more realistic and human glimpse of behind-the-scenes, let us take the comfortable average: the professional woman who has achieved moderate success. She enjoys her job, she loves her husband, she dotes on her children. She may have been lucky enough to have found a reliable housekeeper, but it is more likely that she manages her household with daily help. The children go to school or to day nurseries, depending on their age. Most of the laundry is sent out, most of the shopping is done by phone. Husband and wife have probably agreed to some amicable division of household chores and parental responsibilities.

So far so good. It all sounds very nice and well-organized. In actual practice it works out rather differently. Keeping a job and a family going demands a highly efficient routine with little room left for manoeuvre. If you have an office job, you can just manage to make breakfast, take the children to school and get to work on time, providing everything operates on a split-second schedule. If you are a writer, and work at home, you learn to juggle editorial deadlines and family mealtimes with remarkable dexterity. Of course, the more specialized your job, the more likelihood of its demands overlapping into your private life: a family outing is disrupted by an unexpected board meeting; a very necessary shopping expedition is made impossible by a last-minute request for an article. And there is always a moment when the whole precarious house of cards is threatened with collapse: illness at home coincides with a crisis at the office and the sudden disappearance of the daily help. You can cope with it, of course—very easily. All you need to do is nurse your children, soothe your husband, outrage housewifely instincts by ignoring the dust in the

sitting-room, mollify your business associates and take a couple of aspirin!

ONE thing that distinguishes the working mother from all other species, male or female, is that she is always in a hurry. Her life may be her own, but her time belongs to everyone else. During the week she concentrates on being a quick-change artist: career woman during the day, wife and mother during the evening. She must be at her best with her family, because they see so little of her. She must be on her toes at work because it is professionally unethical (also impractical) to use family problems as an excuse for inefficiency. And, of course, she must keep up appearances; one can hardly arrive at the office with unset hair, unpowdered nose and ancient carpet slippers!

There is no question about it—running a job and a family is a strenuous routine—and it takes inevitable toll: witness the high incidence of divorce among married women with careers. But it can work, and for those who succeed in making a go of it, there are very nice compensations. There is the pleasure and satisfaction of working at a job you genuinely enjoy. There is the plain fact that two incomes *do* go further than one; and both necessities and luxuries are more

easily come by. One learns to develop tolerance of one's own and other people's shortcomings, and to be generally more philosophical about life's little problems. As a purely protective measure, one develops a sense of humour, because it's often so much easier to laugh than to howl with rage. One is less likely to take either husband or children for granted, because time with them is limited. And the relationship between husband and wife gains in depth and understanding because there is none of the division of interests which can easily occur between housewife and wage earner. (Continued on page 50)



A wider social orbit and the assurance acquired through her cultivation of it is the career woman's compensation for the loss of basic advantages which the domestic life has to offer

B:

December 7, 1928 BRITANNIA 943

Britannia Universal Service,
The Woman's Section,
Inveresk House,
Strand, London.

EVERY regular reader of "Britannia" is invited to make full use of this free Service Department. In order to facilitate matters as much as possible, readers who wish to avail themselves of it are invited to enclose a stamped addressed envelope with their enquiries, which should be addressed as above.

Envelopes should be marked according to the nature of the enquiry within—e.g. "Home," "Colour Schemes," "Beauty," "Fashion," etc.

J. C.

The Woman's Section

Edited by
JULIA CAIRNS

Cookery—Home—Garden
Beauty—Children—Fashion
AND
COMPLETE SERVICE

MEN have always had the best of both worlds. They have had their homes and they have had their careers.

So remarked Vera Brittain the other night at a meeting of the Women's Group of the Fabian Society. It is at present occupied in a survey of the eventful road stretching from the twentieth century back into the nineteenth, noting the landmarks of change in the position of women. The opening lecture, which she gave, was concerned with women in the professions.

Home or a career? Apparently, nearly every one there thought a woman might have both.

An interesting survey was given by Vera Brittain which was of the changes during thirty or more years, most significant perhaps in its figures. In industry, women are still underpaid, restricted and less well-organised than men. In domestic work, pay is better than it used to be and the hours are shorter, but the limitations are still much what they were. At home, women are better educated and more respected by their husbands, their fathers, their sons. In public, they participate in many activities.

Parasites Banished

INDICTMENT of the social butterfly was severe: "Women who take a great deal from life and who don't give much back." For the most part, the parasitical position has been left behind. With its departure has gone, too, the attitude that despised woman if she had to work and did work.

Seventy years ago there were no women doctors, lawyers, engineers, veterinary surgeons, scientists, social workers, other than philanthropists, but a few writers like George Eliot, and for the rest, underpaid and bullied governesses, underpaid and ill-treated nurses. In 1891, there were over 50,000 nurses of a kind, 150,000 teachers of a kind, 18,000 women clerks and secretaries; in 1895, actually 60 women members of the Institute of Journalists. In 1911, engineers, barristers and solicitors were

HOME or CAREER?

ISN'T IT A QUESTION OF "HOME WHEN THERE ARE CHILDREN," AND "A CAREER WHEN THERE ARE NONE"?

Making Homes

SHALL it be, then, home or career? The professional woman who wants to marry has every right to do whatever she elects. Her position remains unchanged unless she has children. Then most certainly, the greater service comes before the less, for no matter how well-paid and efficient helpers may be, they can never make the real home. True mothers alone can achieve that, and it is a full-time position—we must not let any tie interfere with this business.

Britain needs real homes. There only can the finest types of sons and daughters be nurtured. It does not mean going back to the parasitical position of women. It does not mean wider relationships submerged once more in the merely personal. It does not mean that the professional woman retrogrades from the position she has achieved to one she despises. It is precisely the professional attitude which is required to transform those old houses of ours, miscalled "homes," from the counterfeit to the true.

The professional woman does not go back to the stultifying routine and limited circles of domesticity. She transforms them because she has become different.

The Real Mother

AFTER all, the professional attitude is almost concentration on the immediate job in hand to the exclusion of everything else. Children want so much, and for the most part receive so little because to give it means that knowledge of mind which belongs only to the expert psychologist, that breadth of acquaintance with affairs which only a woman who has mixed and mingled with the world can give, that insight and understanding for education given by a profession, and that sweetness of a boundless love only to be found in the heart of the real mother. Isn't the answer to the question, "Home when there are children," and "Career when there are none"?

RANA.

still conspicuous by their absence, but there were 477 women doctors, 2 veterinary surgeons, 7 architects and 3 Nonconformist ministers. A great change was wrought by the Sex Disqualification Removal Act of 1919. In 1921, there were 1,253 women doctors (Dr. Stella Churchill from the chair later pointed out that there were 33,000 medical men), 24 veterinary surgeons, 49 architects, 147 ministers of religion, 46 engineers, 20 barristers, 17 solicitors, though 86 per cent. of the women in the professions were still nurses and teachers. In 1926, women barristers had increased to 77.

Behind the Throne

THOUGH there was comparatively little prejudice against women as such in journalism, there were very few editors except of women's papers, very few women leader writers, and very few writers on foreign affairs. According to Lady Rhondda, of the 27,000 company directors in England but 300 were women. The British diplomatic and consular services had no women, unlike some other countries. There was a ripple of delight at the "In diplomacy, women work behind the scenes. It does not matter how hard she works behind the throne as long as she doesn't make any attempt to sit on it."

And now to the debatable points at first issue and at last. At least three of Vera Brittain's remarks are double-edged swords. "The professional attitude . . . (of) . . . professional work?" "Women's progress is incidentally subsidiary to personal relationships. The only remedy is in the woman herself. We must not let any tie interfere with our business." "The only thing we can do is to violate our consciences and put the greater service before the less."

Questions for Discussion

1. Compare the similarities and differences between the 1928 and 1953 articles on women and careers. Were the views consistent after 25 years?
2. Consider how the articles frame the “career woman” as both a social anomaly and a symbol of modernity?
3. Why do the articles emphasise the idea of “compromise” in the life of a career woman? In what ways does the statement, “Her time belongs to everyone else”, reflect the cultural values of the 1950s and align with broader feminist critiques of women’s societal roles?
4. Compare the challenges faced by career women in the 1920s/1950s, as depicted in the articles, with those faced by working women today. What has changed, and what has stayed the same?

SOURCE THREE

Source Intro

The increasing prevalence of female workers in Britain following the First World War generated some strong opinions in society. This article, titled “Woman-Ridden England”, heavily critiques the increasing societal influence of women in England. Published on 19 October 1928, the piece criticises changes in women’s fashion, social behaviours, and economic participation.

Source

“Woman-Ridden England”, 19th October 1928, [images 48–49](#).

WOMAN-RIDDEN ENGLAND

EVER more frequently embittered men lament that England is no longer a free country. One regrets, but they should have thought of it sooner—about a hundred years sooner. Ever since, during the first half of last century, virtue (in the guise of woman) started in to control nature (in the guise of man), “freedom,” as men mean it—that is to say, freedom of the masculine spirit—has been slowly bullied out of existence.

Evangelical parsons bought this poor Freedom a collar; democratic reformers put her on the lead; under the crinolines of the blameless mid-Victorians she breathed with difficulty; the shouts of the Imperialists all but deafened her. Consequently, when the war came, when those who might have defended her were busy defending other things, and every restrictive instinct in the bureaucratic breast was given diplomatic immunity, the miserable enfeebled creature gave in without a struggle and is only now beginning to get about again, if you call it “getting about”; for nowadays, maybe, her lot is the most pitiful of all.



The recreation of a working, fighting world.

With powdered face and skirts above her knees she is trotting around as a symbol of female emancipation; and the world may well marvel to behold our English Liberty—at one time a beacon fire upon the hill of masculine endeavour—now but a coy pink-shaded glimmer lighting the tea-room of a woman’s club.

A Public Institution.

AND this final tragedy is the more futile for having been, as it were, imposed on the personalities of women themselves by one of those theoretical obsessions which from time to time seize upon an epoch and make unwanted history.

Like so many of our loveliest country houses, woman has ceased to be a dignified individual property, and has become a public institution. The transformation was not, as with the country houses, due to economic causes, so much as an inevitable feature of a card-index age. Papers, politics, and human beings alike must be tabbed and docketed if they are to be comprehensible to the so-called “business mind.”

Everything, in fact, is now generic; nothing specific; and women have gone the way of other tropicalities and sunk their personalities

in a phrase. Those who set the tone of this enlightened epoch—drapers, advertising men and journalists—treat women with a sentimentality at once patronising and servile, which one would have thought intolerable. And to women of true quality—I had almost written “to real women”—it is intolerable, so that they suffer more than any man can do from the perpetual degradation to which their sex and aspirations are subjected.

But these women are only a minority, and where ten shrink in embarrassment from the vulgar exploitation of their kind, a hundred see their opportunity for shrill and profitable self-assertion, and grasp it eagerly. Joyously they further the good work of cliché and category. Readily they submit to the flattering of their minds and chests into a dead level of aggressive uniformity. They dress alike; they talk alike; they have the same amusements, the same complaints; and, most serious of all, they are unanimous in wanting the best of both worlds—and getting it.

Having Things Both Ways.

THE most flagrant example of the determination to have things both ways is, of course, the exploitation of physical attraction. Women have always been alive to the power of feminine beauty to bemuse men and to enslave them; and while convention insisted that this weapon be used sparingly and with the discreet ingenuity proper to the privacy of sex-traffic, the world was the more thrilling for its occasional employment.

But now a girl can walk the streets advertising those very intimacies which once were the reward of skilful siege, and (this is the crime) with no more intention of surrendering them than in the days of whalebone and of crinoline. The promissory notes are common as were German paper-marks before stabilisation, and no more easily redeemed.

Women have always symbolised the recreation of a working, fighting world. But whereas formerly they were pipers who, being paid, played such a tune as their employer called, now they must still be paid, but claim to choose the tunes themselves. For which agreeable state of affairs we may in large measure thank America.

Before the war the cities of the United States were the dullest, the most expensive and most vulgar cities in the world, because in them women not only symbolised leisure but governed it. Now that women are aspiring to rule English leisure also the cities of England—and particularly London—are becoming as dull as America, as expensive and even more vulgar, because, being less wealthy the gilt is a little thinner



They dress alike, they talk alike.

on the gingerbread and the illusion of civilisation less complete.

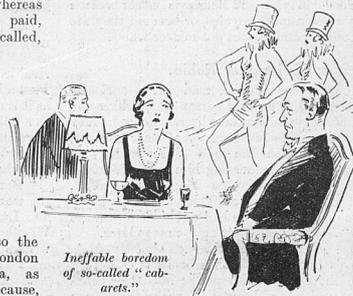
In the race for Americanism women have got off the mark with admirable promptitude. Already it is becoming an understood thing that men should toil to get money for their idle womenfolk to spend. Already the middle-class wife is tending to regard her board and lodging as the minimum tribute to her entrancing personality. Soon she will frankly despise the idea held by her mother and grandmother that marriage has its duties for the housewife as well as for the breadwinner.

Enough for him that she has consented to adorn his house with her presence; and should a lack of domestic help involve her in some of the troublesome duties implicit in the management of a home, he is expected to say a daily “thank you” for what his grandfather regarded—and rightly—as only a fair and natural fulfilment of a marriage bargain.

Lust for Excitement.

NOR is this all. As in America, so here there is growing up a custom of regarding books, conversation and all the adornments of mental life as primarily women’s specialities. In consequence, civilisation (the word is used in its true sense to mean culture and intelligence, not on the debased modern sense of mechanical invention or financial ingenuity) is becoming a feminine civilisation, and no less pretentious and flaccid than feminine civilisation has always been.

The pseudo-luxury of to-day, the papier-maché smartness of dance-hall, cinema and



Ineffable boredom of so-called “cabarets.”

By MICHAEL

SADLEIR

restaurant, the costliness, silliness and ineffable boredom of so-called "cabarets," are direct results of feminine lust for excitement and feminine inability to distinguish between matter and manner. And from the latter cause springs also the "gentility" of modern English life.



The costume served admirably.

No man-ruled race wanting to say on a tram placard "Padded Seats on Each Deck" would sink to the bestial refinement of the L.C.C. and announce "Pullman Comfort in Both Saloons." Democracy has always meant snobbery, and the new feminine democracy is insisting that snobbery become genteel.

England is now embarked on at least a century of Americanised euphemism and a vocabulary either grandiloquent or arch. There are, I may add, some ninety-two more years of that century to run.

Compulsory Refinement.

IT is a pity one cannot be really outspoken on this subject of female domination. But if one could it would mean that the domination had disappeared; for one essential aspect of gentility is the suppression of frankness alike in word and deed.

It has already been said that when virtue during the eighteenth-century first asserted herself against natural man, she was in the guise of woman. The costume served admirably until the victory had been won; but it was

then found desirable (and in view of the idiocy of the average male where women are concerned, a matter of no difficulty) to enslave masculine substitutes for the noble task of making refinement compulsory.

For a very excellent reason. Feminine repression, though it is usually exercised on men, is really aimed at other women. In consequence other individual women must be depictable as mean, false, wanton, or greedy, while femininity as an abstract concept must be free to remain the pure and glittering apex of a virtuous race.

Now clearly a killjoy cannot at the same time be a wanton, nor a designing fortune-hunter a ministering angel. Wherefore men were enlisted to apply the necessary discipline,

But now a girl can walk the streets advertising those very intimacies which once were the reward of skilful siege, and (this is the crime) with no more intention of surrendering them than in the days of whalebone and crinoline.

while beautiful womanhood continued to point the traditional road to moral happiness, luring the male animal by her loveliness, elevating his coarse nature by her shining example.

The simple scheme has worked miraculously. A young woman can sit at ease in a Tube and cause the most acute embarrassment to every man on the opposite seat; she is asserting the principle of feminine emancipation.

But if by chance she finds herself alone with a man who proves sufficiently brazen not to be embarrassed, he will, as likely as not, be given in charge, and the other men who arrest, accuse and punish him, instead of taking his side, as they would have done a century ago, and telling the wench to go home and dress



The "Sports Girl" sends an Editor into ecstasies.



A young woman can sit at ease in a tube.

herself properly, will pull long faces over the decay of public manners and declare that this sort of thing has got to be stamped out. Thus is life made safe and sweet for English girlhood.

Feminine Publicity.

OF the male minions of female tyranny none are more servile than the controllers and editors of the popular Press. To begin with, they give the greatest possible publicity to every feminine exploit. When a young woman is brought across the Atlantic in an aeroplane by two men, she gets all the bouquets and the shouting, despite the fact that by her own admission she did nothing but "a good deal of thinking."

Then the "sports girl," in any one of her various and revolting incarnations, can send an editor into ecstasies. Why the "bathing belle" (alias "river girl," alias "sea-nymph") is such a Fleet Street favourite I confess I cannot understand, for she is usually deficient in physique and over-provided with teeth. But there is clearly a "something" about her which gives her entrée to every picture page, and, as the picture-page public is ninety per cent. a public of women, I can only conclude that women enjoy seeing each other in bathing suits.

The Best Thing Ever.

READING this through I am seized with a fear that people will think me a misogynist. Nothing could be further from the truth.

At the shrine of "the new womanhood" I decline to worship; to the doctrine that the modern girl is something quite other than the girls of earlier days—more candid, more courageous, more intelligent and a better shape—I refuse to subscribe.

But real women—women as individuals—remain what they have always been—the best thing ever. Not as mentors, of course; or "good pals"; or untarnished whitenesses on pedestals, but as—well, as women. A pity (as I said before) that one cannot be really outspoken. . . .

Questions for Discussion

1. How does the article reflect anxieties about social and cultural change in the aftermath of the First World War? Consider the cultural and moral arguments presented.
2. The author suggests that women have replaced men and caused societal stagnation. How does this reflect underlying concerns about masculinity and the “crisis of manhood” during the interwar years?
3. What parallels can be drawn between the criticisms in “Woman-Ridden England” and contemporary critiques of women? Are any of the fears expressed in the article mirrored today?

Questions for General Discussion

The following questions are designed to prompt a wider discussion on the events, issues, and themes highlighted in the sources.

1. Using the sources above, discuss how print media during the early to mid-twentieth century portrayed the “ideal woman”?
2. What anxieties about gender, modernity, and power are evident in all of the sources?
3. Compare the portrayal of women in each source. How do their respective visions of “womanhood” align or conflict? Consider the tone of the sources.

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