A Turning Point for the Weekly and a Turning Point for Women? The Debate About Women and University in the Australian Women’s Weekly in 1961

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In 1961, the Australian Women’s Weekly (AWW) was at the height of its popularity as the most widely read magazine in Australia. While it has been used an ideological text to explore representations of women as active consumers in the postwar period, it has not been used as a cultural and social text to represent the contradictions in women’s lives at that time. By focusing on the debate in the Weekly in February and March 1961 about the usefulness of a university education for young women, this paper demonstrates the magazine’s importance as a major form of social discourse among women and its influence in shaping and reflecting their aspirations. In placing this debate in a wider social context of rising expectations of women generally, the paper also shows how the Weekly represented, albeit unconsciously, contradictions in many women’s lives that were beginning to surface in 1961. Yet because of its engagement with new forms of consumerism, it could only respond in limited ways. The paper concludes that 1961 was a turning point for women and the Weekly in finding new directions in a booming postwar economy.

INTRODUCTION

Every time I give a presentation on the Australian Women’s Weekly I am inundated with stories from women of my generation about its influence in shaping their identities and destinies. This is not surprising. In 1961 it sold 800,000 copies every week and was found in one in four Australian homes.1 It was more glamorous in appearance than its major rivals, Woman’s Day and New Idea, and far outstripped them in sales and circulation (Griffen-Foley 1999, 299). Every woman in the postwar era, it seemed, except my mother, read the Women’s Weekly.

Despite its cultural dominance, the Weekly has not been the subject of a major study of how it both reflected and shaped, in a dialectical interplay,
the lives of Australian women in the postwar period, or even how it was read. Yet the 1950s are now a major site of historical research, the Weekly has been available on microfilm for nearly two decades, hard copies are available in the National Library of Australia and most State libraries and there is a lively “in house” history which provides a lot of information about its personnel, modes of production and circulation (O’Brien 1985). So it is odd that only two published studies have used the Weekly as a primary source to analyse the construction of “woman” in the postwar era (Sampson 1973; Bonney and Wilson 1983).

In their pioneering study of Australia’s commercial media, Bonney and Wilson (1983) surveyed random issues of the magazine in the 1940s and in 1953 and 1954. They found that in the early 1950s it represented women as consumers who could take an active role in constructing masculinity and femininity through advice columns on etiquette and manners; as white democratic women who were encouraged to imitate or “level” up to middle-class values in relation to the family; and as subjects of the Cold War, obsessed with the monarchy and in particular Queen Elizabeth II (240, 246–247).

At the other end of the postwar period, Shirley Sampson conducted a study of the Weekly for the year 1971, to see how it represented the re-entry of married women in the workforce over the preceding decade and the aspirations of young women in terms of education, marriage and career (Sampson 1973). She found that women were represented as young females in search of a husband; as wives focused on “keeping” their husbands; and as mothers raising happy children (17). Yet as Sampson noted, the social reality of many married women’s lives was that most had completed childbearing by the age of 26 and were returning in droves to a workforce that clamoured for their labour. “The fact that the AWW almost entirely ignores this facet of the life of Australian women seems highly significant” (17).

While these studies have demonstrated ways in which the Weekly can be used as an ideological text, they have not indicated its richness as a cultural and social text. In this paper, I will read the Women’s Weekly as social historian researching representations of women in the early 1960s and as a young, white, urban, middle-class Australian woman remembering the debate about women and university that appeared in the magazine in February and March 1961. In doing so, I will demonstrate the importance of the Weekly as a major form of social discourse among women and its influence upon my aspirations at that time. In placing this debate in a wider social context I will also show how the Weekly represented, albeit unconsciously, contradictions on women’s lives in relation to work and family that were beginning to surface in 1961. Finally, by exploring the Weekly’s commitment to new forms of consumerism, I will show how it could only respond to these contradictions in limited ways.

In following this approach, I have drawn on the work of Susan
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Sheridan who argues that women’s magazines in the 1950s represented a woman’s world at a time when not much else was visible. Apart from women’s radio serials and popular fiction, other women’s magazines and outings to the pictures, most Australian women had no other avenue of pleasure and escape. In this context, a magazine like the *Australian Women’s Weekly* was a lifeline to their emotional survival (Sheridan 1995, 2000). I have also drawn on the work of Betty Friedan, whose groundbreaking study of women in postwar America used women’s magazines as a major source of information about their private and public lives. She claims that women’s magazines played a significant ideological role in shaping and representing femininity in the 1950s (Friedan 1965).

**THE AUSTRALIAN WOMEN’S WEEKLY AS SOCIAL DISCOURSE**

In early 1961 and nearing my eighteenth birthday, I was coming to the end of a year working on the switchboard at Bebarfalds furniture store in Fairfield, a working-class suburb on the south-western outskirts of Sydney. After completing the Leaving Certificate at Fairfield Girls’ High School in 1959, I had taken a year off to earn some money before starting an Arts degree at Sydney University. As the youngest and least experienced of the three “girls” in the office, I had much to learn.

The oldest, Merle, was in her mid-twenties, already married and planning to resign within a year to begin a family. Joan, in her early twenties, was about to marry and, being a Catholic, expected to start a family almost immediately. They had both left school at 15, and by the time I arrived in the office they were “seasoned” white-collar workers and ambivalent about the prospect of their lives as married women in the home. I also expected to marry, but I planned to complete university first. This different kind of future not only made me the odd one out, it threatened the lives of my workmates in ways that I did not understand at the time.

In this work environment which offered no future for any of us, the *Australian Women’s Weekly* (*AWW*) saved our lives. Each week we read the *Weekly* at morning tea to test our knowledge in the advertisements for furnishings and home decor, because we worked in a slightly upmarket furniture store and had inside knowledge about particular homeware products such as floor coverings, blinds, bedding, furniture, crockery, glassware and cutlery. We also shared stories about the lives of movie stars, the quizzes about marriage, the features on musicals like *West Side Story*, as well as the advice column, the fashion and fiction. We also noted the increase in information about diets (*AWW*, 4 and 11 January and 22 February 1961), articles about travel (*AWW*, 18 January 1961) and full-page colour advertisements for washing powder (*AWW*, 1 and 8 February 1961). We did not know that the Packer family had bought shares in World Travel Headquarters, a major travel company that regularly advertised in the magazine (Griffen-Foley 1999, 239). But
we should have guessed that the Weekly had signed a major contract to advertise Surf washing powder (Blackburn 1992, 65).

Above all, the Weekly enabled us to share our dreams of escape into a future away from the dreary office. While Merle and Joan placed on lay-by the best quality linen and kitchenware and imagined how their homes might look with the addition of floor coverings and lounge suites, I bought a record player, a reading lamp and a hair dryer. They had no illusions about their future and relied on the Women’s Weekly to advise them about managing their husbands and raising their children. By contrast I was immensely excited about the future and relied on the Weekly to advise me about clothes and hairstyles.

THE VALUE OF A UNIVERSITY EDUCATION FOR WOMEN: FEBRUARY 1961

As I was eagerly preparing for the start of the university year, the Weekly featured a story, “Do Women Really Benefit From a University Degree? Education – Burden for Women,” by Maren Lidden, BA, LLB (AWW 8 February 1961, 27, 31).

Lidden was not a staff journalist with the Weekly. Rather, she was a graduate of the University of Sydney and had received a copy of the 20-page questionnaire, sent to 1569 married women graduates from that university by the Department of Tutorial Classes and under the auspices of the Social Science Research Council. The survey was designed to capture basic data of these women—their family background, the school they attended, their university careers, their marriages and their family life, their leisure pursuits and reading habits, their religion and politics, their participation in community activities and organisations and their work (Dawson 1965, xi).

It was this questionnaire which annoyed Maren Lidden. She wrote: “While attempting to answer all 84 questions honestly and dispassionately, it occurred to me out of the entire questionnaire a single question—the old but still burning one—stands out: ‘Do women really benefit from a university education?’ ” To test her own question, Lidden carried out her own survey of 18 women graduates. She concluded that “the answer is very often, No”: “Many women graduates feel they have not really benefited by their education. Indeed they believe it can prove a distinct disadvantage, both before and after marriage.” She continued:

Do not urge any girl to take a university degree unless her desire for a professional career and her abilities are both outstanding—outstanding to the point where she would be prepared to forgo marriage for her career. Otherwise you are doing her no good service. Finally you are needlessly handicapping her chances of marriage, as well as narrowing the field of possible husbands. (AWW 8 February 1961, 27)
As evidence that a university degree handicapped a woman’s marriage prospects, Lidden quoted Mrs A, a former economist, now married with two children:

Your university degree is anything but an added attraction to men. It makes them think because you earn a high salary yourself, you’ll expect them to keep you like a duchess. My husband did not like the idea of a working wife, and made it clear there was room for only one breadwinner in the home.

Mrs D, once a mathematician of promise, now mother of three children, agreed: “If you want to get a husband, you have to act as the original dumb blonde.” “Hide your degree as if it was a guilty secret. The vaguer and sillier you are, the more men like you.” As evidence that a degree could narrow the field of prospective husbands, Maren Lidden also quoted Mrs E, a former industrial chemist, now mother of two sons:

After all, you can’t really marry a labourer if you are a scientist yourself, can you? Nor are there all that many professional men who want to marry you. If you earn as much as they do, you mean competition, both professionally and socially, and that is an affront to masculine vanity. They don’t call it womanly. Australian men, anyway, still think it is feminine to scrub floors, but not feminine to use a slide rule.

Mrs F, a former psychologist, and twice married, added:

My first husband, a fellow undergraduate, was less intelligent than I. We married young because of a strong physical attraction, but when I passed examinations and he failed, he began to hate me. This sense of competition and the feeling of inferiority it gave him broke our marriage in less than two years.

Lidden then recounted the stories of two women who found the conflict between professional and family life intolerable. Mrs H said:

I can’t look forward to a future of nothing but housework, broken only by afternoon teas and hit-and-giggle tennis parties. I’m prepared to give up my profession till all the children are at school, but surely I can do something then?

But Mr H said “If you wanted a career, you should not have married. It is as simple as that. You can’t have the best of both worlds. Children are your full-time responsibility till they are adults. I should not permit you to work if I considered our children suffered by it in the slightest degree.”

Maren Lidden considered that the professional woman was constantly torn between her real wish to be a satisfactory wife and mother and her desire to obtain again the status and independence of her profession:

But if she forgets her university training and settled down to domesticity, won’t that mean her long and expensive training has been thrown away? Modern education programs place little emphasis on making girls more efficient and more effective as wives and mothers. It is made plain that any reasonably intelligent girl
must follow some career, be something. In effect think like a man. This contradiction, which also suggested that marriage and family did not qualify as a career, accounted largely for the attitudes of Mrs I and Mrs J, law graduates with young children: “I cannot bear to stay home,” said Mrs I. “The four walls, the monotony, the dreary minds of other housewives drive me mad. So I put my children in nurseries and go on with my profession.” Mrs J reported that “I resigned myself to living like a vegetable during the children’s early years.”

While it was often claimed in theory, said Lidden, that university training made for more effective motherhood, broadened cultural interests, offered a well-paid job to fall back on, they did not work in practice:

In cases like that of Mrs I, the first is immediately cancelled out. No woman can possibly be a more effective mother, if the greater part of her life is led away from home. Also, any woman who tries to run both a home and a profession cannot give her whole mind to each. As for both “broadened cultural interests,” since marriage and family must absorb most of her time, rarely can the woman graduate follow intellectual pursuits in anything but a desultory way.

In relation to the third concern, that women in the professional paid workforce faced lively prejudice, Lidden quoted Miss N, a lawyer:

From the time you start out in your profession, you get the feeling you are handicapped because of your sex. You feel you are blamed because of all the “traditional” female insults. You hear arguments that women are an unreliable labour force, they are less capable of objective decisions, they become too emotional, that men will not work for women executives. All these arguments are brought forward when a man is promoted over your head in any profession. If you’re a woman, you have not got to be just as good as the next man, you have got to be spectacularly better.

According to Maren Lidden, all these opinions indicated that women graduates saw many disadvantages deriving from their university education. Many felt they would have been better had they never attempted to invade the professional world, which pre-eminently remained a man’s world. “If I have not quoted one woman prepared to state she has not wholly benefited by her university training, the reason is simply this, I was unable to find any such woman.” She concluded: “Don’t make your daughter a sage, Mrs Worthington. She’ll be far better off in the home.”

Merle and Joan showed me this article with glee. Here was living proof that I was wasting my time going to university. I was startled by the menacing tone of rebuke and bitterness in the article. I gained the impression that young Australian women like myself needed to be protected from our aspirations.
CHANGES IN WOMEN’S PAID WORK AND DOMESTIC LIVES IN 1961

Yet the article appeared at a critical moment in the history of women’s employment and higher education in Australia. In 1959, women teachers in New South Wales had won the right to equal pay, to be phased in over five years, the first major breakthrough in women’s wages since World War II (Ryan and Conlon 1975, 146–147). And the percentage of women graduates from the University of Sydney had increased from 15 per cent in 1951 to 25 per cent in 1960 (Dawson 1965, 216). In 1961, women comprised 25 per cent of the labour force, the first significant increase since 1947, and married women comprised 17 per cent of that group (Mumford 1989, 6).

The article also appeared at a critical moment in women’s domestic lives. In 1961 the marriage rate for Australian women had reached its highest level in Australian history with only 4 per cent of women and 8 per cent of men never marrying during their lifetime. This marriage boom was largely responsible for the highest levels of childbearing in the twentieth century. At the same time divorce had reached its lowest ebb since World War II, providing the conditions for the introduction of a uniform divorce law in 1960 (McDonald, Ruzicka and Pyne 1987, 43).

In this rapidly changing and contradictory environment, it could be argued that 1961 was a turning point for women.

Lidden’s argument that graduate women experienced discrimination in the workforce had substance. Norman Mackenzie supported her claim in his study, Women in Australia, published the following year (Mackenzie 1962). He noted the restricted opportunities for women graduates in jobs and long-term careers. Many employers were only interested in male graduates and fewer women than men sought additional qualifications (MacKenzie 1962, 126–127). Most arts and science women graduates became secondary-school teachers, yet they had achieved the principle of equal pay only in New South Wales. He also found that the marriage rate among women graduates was consistently lower than of the female population as a whole, and that they had a “greater propensity to work after marriage” (130). He also estimated that about 4 per cent of women graduates went overseas to further their careers. From his findings, he suggested that, perhaps in line with Judith Hubback’s survey of graduate wives in Britain, women were not well advised about the kinds of course they could take at university and that some “fresh thinking” in this area would be rewarding (132).

Despite these concerns, MacKenzie concluded:

Women with degrees... have a distinctly better occupational persistence than those without. It is not true, as it was once said, that a university degree is a passport to spinsterhood; but, equally it is not true that the financial and intellectual investment is wasted by massive retirement on marriage. The majority of women who
Women secretaries and nurses in the pages of the *Weekly* reinforced these contradictory experiences of women in the workforce and their dissatisfaction with life. Under the heading, “The Teenage Rage to Live,” the letters column in the Teenagers’ *Weekly* supplement on 22 February 1961 supported a letter from “To Live” published on 11 January. She claimed that, despite her wonderful family, a good education and an interesting job, she desperately wanted to leave home and “live.” S.J.C. from Adelaide agreed:

*I also am 17; it’s a great relief to read that someone also feels as unsettled and confused as I do. At present I am nursing and the life is fantastic. I adore it, but I don’t feel satisfied. I’d like to be entirely independent and live, live, live. I am sure there are many more teenagers who feel as confused as I do.*

So too did J.J.P. from Melbourne:

*I am exactly in the same position as this teenager of the same age. I have had a wonderful education and now hold a responsible situation as a secretary. My parents are very good to me, but I am still not satisfied with life. Can someone try to explain this feeling of restlessness and sometimes, I think, inferiority?*

“Teen” from Caboolture, Qld, was even more distressed: “Today the thought of living all one’s life in the same job, marrying, and settling down is enough to put panic into the heart of anyone who wants to live freely and fully.”

The *Weekly* offered no advice to these cries for help. But the following week as well as publishing 37 responses to Maren Lidden’s article questioning the value of a university education for women, it also carried a full page colour advertisement promoting travel to Europe (*AWW* 1 March 1961, 22). Travel, it seemed, was the solution to young women’s discontent.

**RESPONSES TO THE ARTICLE ABOUT THE VALUE OF HIGHER EDUCATION FOR WOMEN: MARCH 1961**

Of the 37 responses to Maren Lidden’s article (*AWW* 1 March 1961, 6–7), the 26 letters that disagreed with her views heartened me. Broadly speaking, they claimed higher education for women benefited family life and raised national standards of culture. They also pointed out that women at university were engaging in a wider and better educated marriage market, and that it was not only women graduates who suffered from boredom in domestic life. They also queried whether educated women threatened men.

In relation to higher education benefitting family life, Mrs Ruth Hoadley, BA, DipEd, Doncaster, Vic., wrote:
I am an intensely happy graduate mother. So is my doctor mother. I can think of no better preparation for an interesting and culturally rich marriage, and for serving the community, than studying suitable subjects in the university environment.

In relation to the boredom of domestic life, Betty Kavies from Como, NSW, wrote:

It would seem to me that Maren Lidden based her article on two false assumptions. First, that only women graduates suffer from the boredom of domestic life. Secondly, that, had these said graduates not gone to university, they would have attracted dozens of men and been delighted to wash socks.

In relation to the right of women to a university education, two readers put the matter in two different ways:

May I hope that every mother who reads Maren Lidden’s advice about discouraging her daughter from going to university recognises that advice for the superficial and dangerous nonsense that it is. We simply cannot afford to waste 50 per cent of our potential by banishing women to their kitchens. (Margaret Suddaby of Watson’s Bay, NSW)

A woman has as much right as a man to go as far as her brains allow her. (Mrs F. Rigg of Cheltenham, Vic.)

In relation to university being a marriage market, E.S.P. of Indooroopilly, Qld, pointed out:

In 1959 at Queensland University, 593 men and 154 women graduated. Thus statistically, the university provides excellent opportunities for a girl to meet an acceptable marriage partner, especially since most of the students are between 18 and 25 years and are eligible.

Mrs Margaret Stuart, BSc, from Bass Hill, NSW, questioned the view that men preferred “dumb blondes”:

Recently a scientist friend of mine told me that because his wife lacked a university education she was not a complete companion for him and in fact he has to try to be two completely different people; at work the scientist and thinker and at home the simple-thinking husband.

Best of all was the letter from a 14-year-old, “All for Education,” of Elwood, Vic.: 

I am only 14, but I think a university education is a must for girls who definitely have the ability, and if possible, I intend to go there myself. Girls who leave school at 15 and work behind counters at a reasonable salary until they marry are all right, I suppose; but what happens later, when, with a family, a girl has to go to work? She has no qualifications; she is useless to support any more than two people at the most.

Most boys don’t seem to worry either way whether you’re a genius or a complete dumb-bell, but I think they are more inclined
to scoff at the latter.

The theory that males prefer useless dumb blondes might be all right if you ARE blonde and wide-eyed, but for the rest of the girls I say go to the Uni. It’s terrific fun, anyway!

Others noted that “when you educate a man, you educate a man; but when you educate a woman, you educate a family” (Miss J. Marshall, Killara, NSW).

But nine readers supported Lidden’s views. Only one, “Lucky,” from Toongabbie, NSW, raised the issue of workforce discrimination:

To most employers a married woman with a degree is not to be employed unless she will accept a position far below her qualifications.

They prefer to give a less qualified, but male, employee any position of responsibility.

She may even have difficulty in finding a lower position as her qualifications are “too good” for them.

Another reader bemoaned the fact that men did not like educated women. “Bachelor of Arts,” Cannington, WA, wrote:

I myself have come up against many of the problems mentioned by Maren Lidden; for example, the limited selection of males, their unwillingness and almost open hostility to anyone who is anything other than just a giggly female.

I have a great admiration for the giggle girls, perhaps even a little jealousy.

After all, they have all the world to choose from, while we poor university-educated girls have only those of our equal or above our education standards.

Excluding the married men, that leaves us approximately five per cent of the male population.

It is, in my opinion, absolutely tragic.

“Just Mum” from Bedgerebong, NSW, agreed:

If you have a superior intellect you must hide the fact if you want a happy marriage.

With a husband and five sons, I’m not left in any doubt of this fact.

Mrs E.M. Smith of Chadstone, Vic., considered that women would be better off spending “three years at a Domestic Science school instead of going to the university”:

Strangely enough, most of the girls in this group are all happily married, have families, and have no desire to go out to business.

Here,—too, are less neglected children.

And Miss D. Carter from Meckering in WA considered, that “though a higher education may not be a handicap it is definitely a waste to a girl who chooses marriage and children.”

May E.D. Moore, BA, of Roseville, NSW, had a solution to the problem of the bored housewife, graduate or otherwise: “Housework with brightly painted cupboard interiors, neatly labelled and stored foodstuffs, efficiently
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cared for linen, and artistically arranged simple treasures, art from mud and
driftwood plants and colour is never dreary.”

Two men also wrote. Alan B. Cohn, BCom, from Bentleigh, Vic., noted
that “many women, through envy or other motives, are scornful of other
women who want to use their brains. Perhaps educationists could provide
courses for girls that are stimulating but not a copy of the training given to
boys.” And Peter Chin from Ashfield, NSW, argued for university-educated
women as wives: “A psychologically balanced and intelligent man would
definitely prefer an intelligent wife, with whom he can discuss problems, do-
mestic and international, big or small, and with whom he can have both men-
tal and physical union.” But he had a word of warning to women graduates:

> It is the kind of women who insist that they are superior to men,
and tell them so, that are left on the shelf. Men do not like to be
humiliated.

> It is not the excess, rather the lack and the inadequacy, of the
right kind of education that becomes a millstone on the necks of
scholarly spinsters.

These responses seemed to indicate that it was acceptable for young women
to attend university as a marriage market for potential husbands.

The following week, the *Weekly* featured an article “Beards, Black
Coffee, and All That University Jazz,” in *Teenagers’ Weekly* (AWW 8 March
1961, 4–5). Written by Peter Ewart, a tutor in Psychology at the University of
Sydney and an irregular contributor to the *Weekly*, he had useful advice for
the 16000 Australian teenagers entering one of the eight Australian universi-
ties that week. He told us how university was different from school in that we
had to take charge of our own lives and develop sound study skills. He also
told us how to take lecture notes, how to ask questions in class, how to de-
velop skills in critical thinking and how to develop our other interests such as
drama, bushwalking or cricket by joining at least one of many social and rec-
reational clubs on campus. Above all he told us not to be scared, and to make
our university years the most interesting and exciting in our lives.

Six humorous cartoons of “typical” male university students sur-
rounded Ewart’s article: the scientist, the lawyer, the sportsman, the musician,
the doctor and the philosopher. Ewart may have intended women to be part of
his story, but our absence in the cartoons made it clear that university was a
male domain in which women were of no consequence.

Despite this, the article was sufficiently ambiguous in tone and style
to make me feel included. After all, I had a scholarship to university and my
older sister had been there before me. She had already married a university
lecturer, entered a teaching career, borne her first child and expected to return
to her profession. Yet, as a consequence of this debate in the *Weekly*, I began
my university life with ambivalence and did not enrol in honours level sub-
jects for fear I would be left on the shelf.
CONCLUSION

In December 1961, Merle, Joan and I met in the coffee shop near Bebarfalds. We had all left the furniture store and our lives had changed forever. Joan had married and like Merle was expecting her first child. They now relied on the *Weekly* as an escape from their increasingly domesticated lives. I had discarded the *Weekly* in favour of *Punch* and *Nation*. We shared the latest issue of the *Weekly* and were intrigued by the article on how to deal with “housewife blues” (*AWW* 6 December 1961, 51).

Apparentlly it was important for the housewife to get out of the house at least once a day, and find some time for herself. This advice was juxtaposed with a full-page age for Surf soap powder. Merle and Joan, however, believed the remedy lay in planning a return to the workforce. How else could they pay off the mortgage and ensure that their children were properly provided for at school, let alone afford travel to exotic places extolled by the *Women’s Weekly* like New Zealand, the Gold Coast, Hong Kong and Europe?

We realised that the *Weekly* had more to offer us when we were dreaming of our new lives, rather than providing advice on how to negotiate their realities. While we could still escape into the fiction and the films, the inducements of travel, which had increasingly dominated its pages in 1961, were far beyond our means. Merle and Joan complained that it had only a limited response to the domestic and paid work contradictions in their lives.

Denis O’Brien noted letters in the *Weekly* published in 1964 about “a new dilemma” for married women: whether they should feel guilty about staying at home rather than going out to work, but there was a remarkable absence of information about married women in the workforce during the 1960s (O’Brien 1985, 128). Indeed the vast majority of advertisements represented women as housewives and consumers and provided no indication that they had increased their participation rate in the paid workforce from 28.9 per cent in 1961 to 35.2 per cent in 1966 of whom 26.6 per cent were married (Mumford 1989, 6). The *Weekly*, it seemed, preferred to pretend that women were still full-time housewives.

So if 1961 was a turning point for women, it was also a turning point for the *Weekly*. In May 1961, it increased its price for the first time for a decade from ninepence to one shilling (10 cents) per copy. While sales recovered after an initial fall from 820,000 to 788,000, they never again reached the same high levels per head of population (Griffen-Foley 1999, 240, 299). For the rest of the 1960s, the *Weekly* fought to maintain its dominance by publishing special supplements in nearly every issue (Griffen-Foley 1999, 269). It was not only challenged by the resurgence of *New Idea* by the mid-1960s, it was forced to compete with other forms of media like the widespread introduction of television and the appearance of new women’s magazines early the following decade, two of which, *Cleo* and *Cosmopolitan*, were from the Packer stable (Griffen-Foley 1999, 240, 270, 297).
The seeds of discontent in young women’s lives, the ambivalence about university education for girls like me and the concerns that Merle and Joan had about domesticity and paid work represented new kinds of contradictions for women and the Weekly in 1961. Its advice to discontented young women was to travel; its advice to distraught housewives was to leave the home for an hour a day; and its advice to female students was to use the university as a marriage market. While these possibilities of escape from reality were attractive, they offered us no particular future. It was as if the Weekly had become so immersed in new forms of consumerism like soap powder and travel promotions that it could offer only limited responses to our predicament.

In this stalemate, it was only a matter of time before Betty Friedan defined this contradiction as “the problem that had no name” and offered women new forms of advice and a new language of escape (Friedan 1965). It would take the Weekly a further ten years to follow her lead.

NOTES

1 Sales figures were noted on the front cover of every issue of the Australian Women’s Weekly in 1961.

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