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'The Sheep and the Goats': Interwar Women Journalists, the Society of Women Journalists, and the *Woman Journalist*

Sarah Lonsdale

By the outbreak of the Second World War, women made up approximately 20 per cent of journalists in Britain, doubling their participation in mainstream journalism since the turn of the twentieth century. They were mostly employed by women's magazines, were precariously freelance or confined to the newspaper 'women's page', and faced resistance from the powerful National Union of Journalists, which imposed limitations on women's access to newspaper newsrooms. Women journalists had emerged from the First World War with prominent bylines on popular newspaper leader pages; however, many women struggled to maintain their elevated status through the interwar years and either retreated into, or were pushed back into, the women's sections. Using content from the *Woman Journalist*, newspaper and magazine articles, and memoirs, this chapter will examine the role, status, and professional associations of interwar women journalists to piece together their lives and attitudes to work. There is no doubt that, as members of a subjugated group, women journalists faced many struggles, but this chapter will ask whether these struggles were outweighed by the opportunities for adventure and financial independence that journalism offered them. It will also examine whether female journalists' contributions to interwar newspapers and magazines reinforced media messages limiting women's lives to 'hearth and home', thus contributing to women's 'symbolic annihilation' from the public sphere.[1] It will also ask whether the professional organisation, the Society of Women Journalists (SWJ), and its organ, the *Woman Journalist*, helped women journalists challenge gender barriers or encouraged gender stereotyping in their work.

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The Historical, Professional and Economic Context

Journalism had been a popular pastime for middle-class women of letters during the nineteenth century. Barbara Onslow's impressive survey recovers some 'several hundred' female contributors to Victorian newspapers, magazines, literary monthlies, and periodicals, although most wrote pseudonymously or anonymously (2000: xi). Despite these numbers, and a claim by prominent journalist Barbara Bodichon that

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two thirds of the contributors to *Chambers' Edinburgh Journal* were female, most women journalists worked sporadically and from home (Onslow 2000: 9–12). The arrival of the mass daily newspaper press after the launch of the *Daily Mail* in 1896 began a process of profound change in the practice and nature of journalism as a genre, which evolved from essays, sketches, and verbatim parliamentary reports to news reporting, interviews, and consumer features (Chalaby 1998; Lonsdale 2015). Journalists were increasingly required to leave their 'scissors-and-paste' and desks and go out to report on events and interview people (Jarlbrink 2015). By the end of the nineteenth century, every national newspaper employed at least one female writer on its staff (Hall 1976: 96). The phenomenal rise of the mainstream newspaper and consumer magazine press during the early years of the twentieth century gave women writers and journalists unprecedented employment opportunities. During the interwar years, the combined circulations of daily newspapers rose from 3.1 million in 1918 to 10.6 million in 1939, with the popular *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail*, *Daily Mirror*, *News Chronicle*, and *Daily Herald* leading the field (Wilson 1985: 322). The Sunday newspaper market was even more buoyant, with sales of 14.9 million by 1938, nearly half of which was accounted for by just two popular newspapers, *News of the World* and the *People*, each with a circulation of over 3 million (Political and Economic Planning (PEP) 1938: 5). By 1936, the British were the largest consumers of newsprint in the world at 59.8 lb per head, higher even than American readers (PEP 1938: 35). By 1938, the combined circulations of the most popular women's weekly magazines (*Woman*, *Woman's Own*, *Home Notes*, *Woman's Weekly*, *Woman's Illustrated*, *Home Chat*, *Woman's Companion*, and *Woman's Pictorial*) had reached over 2.3 million.[2] The women's pages attracted advertising in a way the news pages could not and the popular newspaper and consumer magazine press required numerous contributions from women journalists to provide editorial matter to accompany display advertisements for fashion and domestic items, a major and growing source of newspaper revenue (Bingham 2004: 18). In the 1931 census, 3,213 women self-identified in the category 'Author, Editor, Journalist, Publicist' (around 17 per cent of the total numbers for this category) up from 1,249 (around 9 per cent) in 1901.[3]

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Despite, or maybe because of, women's increasing participation in journalism, the National Union of Journalists, which was fast becoming a powerful 'closed shop' on Fleet Street and on provincial papers, conspired with proprietors to restrict the number of girls accepted on newspaper training schemes, to restrict women's pay, and to support an informal 'Marriage Bar' system (Gopsill and Neale 2007: 36–40). Freelance contributors' rates were scandalously imbalanced, particularly for popular newspapers where, ironically, the women's page earned the newspaper far more money than the news or literary pages. In 1927 the *Daily Mail*, for example, paid between £2 2s and £3 3s for a 400-word article on the literary pages, but between 10 shillings and sixpence and 25 shillings for a women's page article. Similarly, the *Daily Express* paid between £1 1s and £2 2s for a literary page article, but only between 15 and 21 shillings for a women's page article. Other papers had similar discrepancies.[4] Restrictions to girls' education even after the 1870 Education Act, with girls' classes focusing more on domestic skills than literacy, meant that journalism for interwar women was an almost exclusively middle-class profession (Holloway 2005: 9). Nonetheless many interwar women journalists deviated, sometimes widely, from the social norms expected from women as homemakers, wives, and, if employed,

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nurses, governesses, or teachers. They were often their family's major breadwinner; some openly flouted sexual convention; some ventured into the broiling cauldron of European foreign correspondence, reporting on the rise of Nazism and the Spanish Civil War (Lonsdale 2016: 185–9). A woman journalist, Clare Hollingworth of the *Daily Telegraph*, was the first British journalist to report the German invasion of Poland on 1 September 1939 (Hollingworth 1990: 14). But these are extraordinary exceptions. Much of women's journalistic work for the mainstream press tended to stereotype women journalists and their readers as being 'interested solely in knitting jumpers, in caring for their complexions, in looking after babies, in cooking' (Peel 1933: 227).[5] Even though the majority of women journalists who wrote for the mainstream newspaper press, particularly the popular dailies and women's consumer magazines, helped to shape mainstream contemporary cultural values, they remain an overlooked professional group. Striving to assert themselves in the very male world of Fleet Street journalism, 'word by word, edition by edition, [they were] helping to create the public opinion of this country' (*Woman Journalist* Nov 1923: 11).

The Society of Women Journalists and the *Woman Journalist*

The SWJ was founded in 1894 by Joseph Snell Wood, director of the *Daily Graphic* newspaper (Kent 2009: 11). During the first few months of its formation, 200 women applied to join, paying a one guinea subscription, which gave them access to the Society's suite of rooms in New Bond Street for social gatherings and the chance to attend lectures and training classes in typewriting, shorthand, and writing skills (Kent 2009: 12, 18).[6] The Society's bimonthly journal, the *Woman Journalist*, began publication in 1910 but declined during the First World War and closed in 1921. It began publication again in January 1923 with subscription free to members of the Society, whose numbers remained at around 200 throughout the 1920s, growing slightly through the late 1930s. Contributions to the *Woman Journalist* suggest that it enjoyed a wider readership than this. From a researcher's point of view, the most rewarding editions appeared during the 1920s: after June 1928 the numbers of pages reduced from twenty to twenty-four pages, to four to eight pages, with very few articles over 200 words long. One reason for this is that its editor Miss Helen Inman retired at the end of 1926. An explanatory note in the November–December 1928 issue also informed readers that reducing the pagination of the magazine saved the Society £40 a year. There is scant scholarship on this journal, apart from a brief descriptive chapter in Sylvia Kent's *The Woman Writer: The History of the Society of Women Writers and Journalists* (2009). One reason for this is that most of the Society's archive was destroyed 'in fires, floods and during several wars' (Kent 2009: 13). Another is the lack of interest, until recently, in the evolution of women's newspaper journalism, a 'neglected' part of scholarship into the history of women's writing (Clay 2012: 211). Within the *Woman Journalist*'s pages is to be found a wealth of information on the pay, practices, and associational culture of a new professional group battling to maintain and build on its tenuous foothold in its chosen field.

Membership of the Society included some of the period's most prominent popular fiction writers and women's magazine editors, including Clemence Dane, the popular novelists Marie Belloc Lowndes and Dolf Wyllarde, Rita Shell (editor of the *Lady*),

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and Alice Head (editor of *Good Housekeeping*).[7] The Society's founding members – who were still running the Society's council in the interwar years – were women who had grown up professionally with the Victorian notion of journalism being part of a broader field of letters, and tensions between 'old' and 'new' styles of journalism are revealed in contributions to the *Woman Journalist*. While early interwar membership consisted mainly of serial fiction writers, a wider range of journalists began to join from the mid-1930s, including women's page contributors, women working for provincial newspapers, as well as those who contributed to more traditionally male areas of journalism. Membership included few feminist or highbrow women writers and journalists of the period and the journal did not engage with contemporary feminist or political debates.

Although *Time and Tide* notably launched the career of Rebecca West, most women without the support of a wealthy family or other sources of income could not rely on contributions to this, and other specialist or highbrow journals, to earn a living (Hall 1976: 93). While *Time and Tide* required articles of between 400 and 1,000 words and paid 'from one to two guineas per thousand' and the *Woman's Leader* paid one guinea a column, popular newspapers and magazines paid vastly higher rates. A 400-word article for the *Daily Mail* literary pages, for example, paid up to three guineas; a 1,000-word article for *House and Garden* on 'interior decoration, architecture and gardening' also paid three guineas.[8] Nor did the Society attract some of the more pioneering women news reporters such as the *Daily Mail*'s 'star reporter' Margaret Lane, the *Evening Standard*'s first female parliamentary correspondent Edith Shackleton, or Shiela Grant Duff who reported on the rise of Nazism from central Europe for the *Observer*.

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The *Woman Journalist* was conservative, optimistic, and international in outlook, with articles about women's journalism from throughout the world. It was very clearly the organ of a marginal group requiring permission to exist from the wider masculine world of journalism and politics. The *Woman Journalist* provides evidence of how subjugated women journalists found themselves to be. The president of the SWJ was Viscountess Burnham, wife of the proprietor of the *Daily Telegraph* and chairman of the Newspaper Proprietors' Association. The previous president had been Viscountess Northcliffe, wife of Lord Northcliffe, founder and owner of the *Daily Mail*. These were well-connected wives representing the powerful press barons who dictated the terms under which women were permitted to contribute to the mainstream press as freelancers employed to write cut-price copy to attract advertisers. Articles in the *Woman Journalist* include an interview with Sir John Le Sage, editor of the *Daily Telegraph* (Jan 1923); an interview with the author Max Pemberton, head of the London School of Journalism (Mar 1923); and an interview with literary agent Leonard Moore (May 1923). The language of the women interviewers suggested deference and supplication. Sir John Le Sage was asked to respond to the question of whether women journalists could expect to advance in Fleet Street:

> 'I am sure,' replied this authority of unrivalled experience, 'that in future they will go very much further and that their contribution will, with the advance of women in the professions and in the political sphere, be of great service in the discussion of Imperial and International affairs. *But where I see the greatest scope for their work is in relation to the domestic interests . . . education, the care of the sick and infirm, and the well-being of children*.' (*Woman Journalist* Jan 1923: 10–11; emphasis added)[9]

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He makes it clear where he sees the true value of a woman journalist to his paper. This may be why the younger generation of women news reporters were not members of the Society. They may well have benefited from the associational culture of Society-organised lectures, 'the dainty tea, the light and warmth, the talk of interesting people under the most delightful conditions' (*Woman Journalist* Nov 1923: 12), and their absence from these functions was commented on in the journal.

Two regular columns in the *Woman Journalist*, 'Members' Work' and 'The Press World', provide stark contrasts between the achievements of Society members and the great goings on in the rest of Fleet Street. The 'Members' Work' column listed articles members published in national newspapers and magazines, such as 'A Necklace from Sealing Wax' in the *Daily Mail* and 'How to make Shell Flowers' in the *Daily Express* (Sep 1923: 11). Similar articles included 'Fasting Wisely in Lent' in the *Weekly Dispatch* (May 1924: 17), 'How to Choose a Piano' and 'The Children's Hour' in the *Sunday Chronicle* (Jan 1926: 16). These examples reflect the range of themes of members' journalism: handicrafts, religion, and the domestic sphere. In contrast, the 'Press World' column reported on the appointment of men to the highest positions on national newspapers and magazines, for example Hannen Swaffer as editor of *The People* (Mar 1924: 21), T. P. O'Connor as editor of *Cassell's Weekly* (Nov 1923: 19), and Sir Laming Worthington-Evans, J. P. as editor-in-chief of *The Financial News* (Mar 1924: 21).

While the general impression created by these two columns, which appeared within a page or two of each other in the journal, is of women's tenuous and tolerated presence in an overwhelmingly masculine industry, the *Woman Journalist* nonetheless documented the gains being made by women journalists. In November 1924, it recorded that Miss Alice Head was appointed 'Managing Director of the National Magazine Company Ltd' (21) and Miss Stella Wolfe Murray became 'Lobby Correspondent for the *Daily Sketch*', noting that 'Hitherto few – if any – women have had regular access to the Press Gallery of the House of Commons' (17). The December–January 1929 issue reported that for the first time in the history of the Newspaper Society a woman member, Miss J. H. Willmer, editor of the *Birkenhead News* had attended the society's general meeting (3). The August–September 1934 issue reported the appointment of Mary Alderson as air and motoring correspondent for the *Queen* (1). The February–March 1935 issue celebrated the appointment of Joyce Townsend, 'A.R.I.B.A.' (Associate of the Royal Institute of British Architects) as the new architectural editor of *Good Housekeeping* (4). This distinguished role came at a time when less than 1 per cent of architects were women (Beddoe 1989: 77–80). The *Woman Journalist* in this way provides an important record of the granular changes, the inch-by-inch gains in women's participation in mainstream journalism during the interwar years, at a time when the profession was rapidly mutating. It records 'the achievements born of persistent struggle against the odds' which characterise much of the unspectacular but steady progress of women during the interwar years (DiCenzo 2014: 423).

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Engagement in Contemporary Debates in Feminism and Politics

Throughout the interwar period the magazine celebrated the achievements of women journalists around the world. This internationalist approach was shared by many women's organisations during this period, as part of a global search for 'honest co-operation

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and friendly understanding' in the wake of the Great War (Margery Corbett Ashby quoted in Gottlieb 2014: 442). News from women journalists working in Cairo, Shanghai, Cape Town, Wellington, and Toronto – many reporting they were among the first or only women on their newspaper – emphasises the importance of the interwar period as a time when the professional woman writer was presented with hitherto unheard of opportunities. Miss May Hill, for example, reported from China on her joy at being made leader writer for an English-language newspaper in Tientsin (*Woman Journalist* July 1926: 11).[10] Mrs Sutton, editor of the *South African Women's Weekly*, was the only woman in a party of thirty-five journalists covering the progress of the Prince of Wales's tour through South Africa in 1925:

> Accordingly a party of 35, thirty-four gentlemen and one lady sat down to a splendid lunch at the Royal Hotel on the 7th June. The Manager had entered into the spirit of the occasion, and provided rolls in the shape of the Prince of Wales feathers, and, being press-men all, a very jolly time was spent. (Sep 1925: 17)

Some articles compared journalism in Britain with practices in other countries. 'Journalism in Denmark' by Carla Luise Anderson suggested that the reason why there were far fewer women journalists in Denmark (ten professional women journalists, spread thinly among 300 newspapers) was because Danish newspapers did not have the resources to employ women 'only interested in questions affecting women': '[A woman journalist] must be an all-round journalist, able to do interviews, articles on sport, literature, theatre, social questions, politics etc.' (Sep 1923: 14). Despite the apparent equal distribution of work, male journalists in Denmark could gain a staff position after two years of casual work on a newspaper, whereas Anderson noted that she 'had to work hard for seven years to become eligible'. The *Woman Journalist* also carried news of cases of inequality across the world. In January 1924, it reported on an arbitration court decision in Wellington, New Zealand, which gave women journalists, no matter how long their service on their newspaper, the same pay as a male junior reporter in his first year (21). Later that same year, Miss Spon of the *Egyptian Mail*, Cairo, claimed: 'Conditions, climate and tradition have ordained that men shall fill the majority of the posts . . . I am always hoping that I may come into a fortune and be able to start a good English evening paper' (Sep 1924: 20–1).

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The journal avoided overt association with the campaign for equal suffrage and interwar feminist movements in general, even though it published articles showing ample evidence of unequal pay, as indicated in a headline like 'The Sheep and the Goats' (Jan 1924: 21). While it noted the arrival of the first women parliamentary correspondents, including Edith Shackleton for the *Evening Standard* in 1923, Stella Wolfe Murray for the *Daily Sketch* in 1924, and Rebecca West for the *Daily News* in 1925, the journal did not carry any articles on the expanded opportunities for political reporting either in the approach to or after the arrival of equal suffrage. The journal covered the International Council of Women's meeting in London in 1929 and the SWJ gave a tea to press delegates of the council. The report of the meeting, by veteran Society member Sarah Tooley, trod carefully in terms of contemporary feminist debate:

> When [the Council] met here thirty years ago no woman had a vote . . . I recall how patiently and guardedly some of the speakers pleaded for reforms which our

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> miscalled new citizen, the 'flapper' takes as a matter of course today. But I hasten to say that the International Council is not concerned only with what is called 'feminist propaganda'. It embraces every kind of religious, political and social work in which women are engaged. (Apr–May 1929: 1–2)

This description, in 1929, of calls for women's suffrage as 'feminist propaganda' is typical of contributions in the journal and underlines the SWJ's conservative attitude towards further calls for equality.

As another war loomed, in February 1939 the SWJ identified itself with Moral Re-Armament, a pro-appeasement movement united under the term coined by the Oxford Group in the spring of 1938. Moral Re-Armament had already attracted the scorn of more outspoken anti-fascist feminists including Labour MPs Ellen Wilkinson and Mary Agnes Hamilton (Gottlieb 2014: 446). However, many women's organisations were very late converting from pacifism and appeasement to support for the war effort and the Society is not unusual in this regard, even after the Munich Crisis of autumn 1938. The Society's call for Moral Re-Armament through the agency of women journalists emphasising their 'responsibility for the nation's homes' was published in the February–March 1939 issue of the *Woman Journalist* (3). What is noteworthy is the journal's and the Society's insistence at the very end of the interwar period that women journalists' responsibilities lie wholly in the domestic sphere, despite the significant advances of women writers and politicians by this time. There is further evidence of the journal's troubled relationship with feminism in other sections.

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The 'Our Bookshelf' column was a list of recently published books on topical subjects, including items such as Philip Gibbs's memoir *Adventures in Journalism*, and St John Adcock's *Gods of Modern Grub Street*, a compilation of sketches of thirty-two prominent contemporary writers including Rudyard Kipling, Arnold Bennett, and Frank Swinnerton, as well as two female writers Sheila Kaye-Smith and May Sinclair (Nov 1923: 18; May 1924: 18). There is no mention of works on women's suffrage or the women's movement in general, such as Ray Strachey's *The Cause* (1928) or her edited collection of essays *Our Freedom and its Results* (1936), although the journal did record the publication of *The Woman's Year Book 1923–1924* in the January 1924 issue, noting the book contained seventy pages of women's employment opportunities. The journal's note on the new cheap edition of Sylvia Pankhurst's *The Suffragette Movement* offered an ambivalent review, noting: 'From whatever standpoint this necessarily *ex parte* history of the militant suffragist campaign may be regarded, no one can deny that it is of very great interest. It tells of much to be admired and much to be deplored' (Feb–Mar 1933: 3).

While the journal may have expressed ambivalence about the Suffrage movement, its treatment of one-time member Radclyffe Hall indicated downright disapproval of sexual non-conformity. The journal had previously praised Hall's earlier novels in its 'Members' Work' columns. For example, the May 1925 issue reported that *A Saturday Life*, 'is getting excellent reviews and bids fair to equal the great success of this author's last book *The Unlit Lamp*' (Sep 1925: 15). The August–September 1928 issue informed readers that 'Radclyffe Hall's new novel *The Well of Loneliness*, with a commentary by Havelock Ellis is withdrawn from publication' (3). In the following issue, the journal reported that copies of the novel had been seized by customs

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officials at Dover and that the publisher was taking legal action (Oct–Nov 1928: 4). There was no coverage of the ensuing obscenity trial but the December–January 1929 issue carried a rather barbed reference to 'the modern novel' and

> the small nastinesses [*sic*] dragged in for their own sakes or to flout the code of manners hitherto observed by the well-bred. Gratuitous references to the lower details of daily life are daubed about as mud is daubed on fresh paint by dirty boys . . . It is worse than wicked – it is vulgar (4).

Either the Society quietly blacklisted Hall, or she resigned in disgust at its lack of support. Either way, no mention of Hall or any of her subsequent novels made the pages of the *Woman Journalist* again.

Women's Journalism and the Public Sphere

Feminist media scholarship in the last fifty years has almost without exception demonstrated the barriers to gender equality, over time and in a wide range of media.[11] Both in promoting idealised images of women as homemakers and mothers, and through the 'absence, trivialization or condemnation of women in media content', mainstream media undermine women's participation in democratic public spheres (Gallagher 2014: 23). What few of these studies acknowledge, however, is the role women journalists have played in erecting these very barriers that they themselves have struggled hard and against the odds to overcome. Certainly, the testimonies of interwar women journalists suggest a pride in their work and 'the special privilege of the woman journalist' in helping the housewife manage her duties to husband and home (*Woman Journalist* July 1925: 17). They do, however, also argue for a better recognition of the political nature of domesticity. In an article for the *Woman Journalist*, celebrated contemporary cookery expert Mrs Charles Marshall argues:

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> It will occur to all thinking individuals that upon the well-being of the home depends, largely, the well-being of the nation. The household page, therefore, should be regarded as of importance, and the contents should rank higher, in relation to journalism than the culture of fashion or even of sport. (July 1925: 17)

The tendency to associate women journalists with domesticity was exacerbated by the close relationship between much 'women's journalism' and newspaper advertising departments. A popular 'how-to' manual of the interwar years encouraged women journalists to write about topics that could attract advertising:

> In this subject [infant and child welfare] we have a feature which possesses a strong human interest, and at the same time has a business end to it. The kingdom of the child is linked up at so many points with the enterprise of the manufacturer and the turn-over of the retailer. Big display spaces for the advertising of infant foods, and other specialities, are associated usually with baby feature articles. (Peacocke 1936: 82)

The situation was further complicated by the split between an older generation of women journalists who were content to write domestic articles and younger women

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who 'want[ed]to do something better' (*Woman Journalist* Dec 1927: 7). This anonymous article, 'Women Journalists Confer', offered an account of a discussion between 'more mature women journalists', and concludes that the younger journalist 'makes no effort to disguise her contempt for the work on a newspaper for which women are especially fitted . . . her great desire being to report football matches' (7). It is difficult to know how representative these views were, but this report suggests some senior women journalists resented and disapproved of the younger women who strained at the restrictions imposed on them by their industry.

Women journalists became implicated in, and were no doubt affected by, criticisms of the negative impact that women, as readers and consumers, were having on the quality of the press more generally. There certainly seems, in the interwar years, to have been a concerted effort among male commentators to disparage how 'womanised' the newspaper press had become. For example, Arthur Baumann in his essay, 'The Functions and Future of the Press', argued:

> To one man who buys a paper nowadays, there are perhaps 10 women. For the majority of women there is but one topic of interest, namely clothes . . . It must be obvious that women have exercised a deteriorating influence on the press. (*Fortnightly Review* Apr 1920: 626)

In another essay for the *Spectator*, the critic St John Ervine also blamed 'the advent of the woman reader' for the decline in newspaper standards: 'how womanised the popular press has become . . . everything [women] do is lavishly announced and advertised, even when the same thing, though done better by men, is ignored or briefly mentioned' (29 Nov 1930: 836–7). Popular newspapers especially disparaged the idea of women working for a living. A particularly cruel portrait appears in the *Evening Standard* on 1 January 1923 describing the 'desiccated lives of emancipated woman [*sic*]' (3).

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While it seems women were tolerated on the women's page after the First World War (although the memoirs of *Daily Mail* women's page editor Mrs Charles Peel reveal that even there she suffered discrimination), their presence on the more prestigious 'leader page' was severely diminished.[12] A survey of the *Daily Mail* leader page both before and after the First World War reveals an interesting pattern first of inclusion and then of exclusion. The number of female bylines on the *Daily Mail* leader page during the first two months of 1914, 1919, 1924, and 1929 went from zero in 1914 to fifty-two in 1919 (indeed the number of female-authored pieces on the leader page grew steadily during the war). However, in 1924 the number of female bylines dropped dramatically to twenty-one and rose to only twenty-six female-authored pieces in 1929.[13] Some evidence of 'progress' in subject matter can be identified when comparing 1929 with 1924 and 1919. For the two earlier years, female-authored articles on the leader page were restricted to 'women's' issues such as marriage, women and work, child-rearing, and the battle of the sexes. In 1929 some female-authored pieces were of more general interest: 'Dramas of a Diamond Rush' by the 'traveller and explorer' Diana Houghton-Rogers (8 Jan 1929: 8); 'Better Theatres Must Come' by Heather Thatcher (12 Jan 1929: 8); and 'Why Sniff at the Suburbs' by Ethel Mannin (28 Feb 1929: 10). Newspapers, by their very nature cautious and reactionary, thus mirror the slow acceptance in interwar society of women in more active, public roles. These rare examples of women's writing on more general non-gendered topics in mainstream newspapers contrast greatly with more specialist interwar magazines and periodicals

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such as the *Woman Engineer*, the *Pinnacle Journal* (the journal of the women's mountaineering movement) and the Quaker *Friend*. These papers all carried lengthy and detailed female-authored articles on women's engagement in science, mountaineering, and overseas humanitarian activity, often undertaken at great physical risk. However, contributions to this kind of journal were either poorly paid, or written gratis and therefore could not offer the professional woman writer the means to earn a living.

The scarcity of women journalists in mainstream newspaper newsrooms in the interwar years has clearly made identifying their attitudes to their work difficult. This is an important area of study because during this time the mainstream commercial newspaper and magazine press was setting a pattern of operation for the subsequent decades. Interwar newspaper women's pages, for example, with their focus on fashion, child-rearing, and domestic topics are clearly the antecedents of modern newspaper features pages and women's pages.[14] Being very much in a minority and struggling against entrenched attitudes toward women in the workplace, interwar women journalists were highly unusual, often eccentric, and clearly determined. Studies by journalism scholars have concluded that journalists experience a very particular kind of professional tension: journalists believe that ideally news coverage should make society a better place, but actual news is dictated by a story's sensationalism, whether it involves famous people and whether advertising can be sold against it. Another study concludes that ethical journalists are often restrained from their role as truth tellers because this role clashes with the interests of the highly capitalised organisations they write for (Strömbäck et al. 2012: 722; Harcup 2002: 111–12). Unlike those in other professions such as the law and medicine, journalists lack 'monopoly over their worth' and, for obvious reasons, the prestige of compulsory licensing. Therefore, there will always be 'ambiguity surrounding the status of journalism as a profession' (Elsaka 2005: 73). While this is the case for liberal journalists of both genders, the tension for women journalists, who are at once both more deviant and more subjugated, must be more extreme. The *Woman Journalist*'s consistent emphasis on the virtues of the domestic focus of women's journalism and its criticism of women who challenged their stereotyped roles must have been discouraging for journalists who wanted to break out of the features pages and into the news pages.

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Opportunities

Despite women's restricted access to mainstream journalism, it still offered better opportunities than most of the other professions apart from teaching and nursing (Lonsdale 2016: 190). Journalism was a hugely popular profession among young middle-class women. An article in the *Woman Journalist* in March 1926 on the recently launched Diploma in Journalism offered at the University of London reported that half of the eighty students were female (Mar 1926: 13). Freelancing was a regular subject of articles in the *Woman Journalist* and although the precarious nature of the work and income was a constant theme, the freedoms it brought were also emphasised: 'The free-lance is her own mistress, working at home, responsible only to herself' (Mar 1923: 13). The ability to freelance from home allowed impecunious middle-class women to maintain a sense of 'respectability' and, for those unconventional women writers like Rachel Ferguson, Edith Shackleton, and Shiela Grant Duff, journalism offered freedom from boredom and also from marriage. In her memoir Ferguson

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admitted that 'the idea of shortly having to be put on an allowance actually made [her] cry in the middle of Church Street'; however, a secretarial course and her first successful forays into journalism via articles for the *Dancing Times* made her realise she could earn an income through her pen (Ferguson 1958: 118).

Journalism offered excitement as well as much-needed money. In an article for the *Woman Journalist* in the April–May 1933 edition, journalist Sarah Tooley described how, because her husband was disabled, she was 'determined to try to add to [their private means] by writing' (2). Her first article, for the *People's Friend* on Robert the Bruce, brought: 'my little cheque, the first money I had ever earned, but I did not have it framed, it was much too useful' (2). Tooley tells readers she was employed by *Woman at Home* magazine and interviewed Émile Zola and Sarah Bernhardt while reporting from Paris for the journal. Journalism thus brought an impoverished woman from Dumfries into the orbit of two contemporary cultural icons. The need for money expanded her knowledge of the world: 'I explored the worst slums of Paris with a Salvation Army sister and also with the McCall Mission, and spent a Sunday with the rag pickers at Clichy' (3). This combination of financial reward and professional satisfaction is mirrored in other contemporary journalists' memoirs. Ferguson, who became her family's breadwinner after her father died, wrote 'colour pieces' for the *Sunday Chronicle* and *Lloyd's Sunday News* about royal weddings, garden parties, and holiday resorts. She also covered the first Armistice Day service at the Cenotaph in 1921, scrambling out of a high window, down a stepladder, and onto a 'leaded roof in Whitehall' to view the proceedings. Afterward, as '[her] copy was to be front page stuff', she was thrilled to be hammering out her story, which 'trusted to tell thousands of people what the whole ceremony really looked like and how it sounded' (Ferguson 1958: 164). Mary Stott, who later became editor of the *Guardian* women's page, used her journalism to expose the reality of working women's lives for which she later became famous. As a young reporter for the *Bolton Evening News* in 1932 she wrote about the new public wash houses for households without maids and in an early piece of 'gonzo' journalism tried the newfangled machines out for herself. She describes the experience in her memoir, *Before I Go*:

> It was the first time I had ever seen an electric washing machine or dryer and I was very thankful that the attendant kept a kindly eye on me . . . 'Have ye not been here before?' asked my neighbour at the next sink. She told me that 'it used to take me two days to get through my washing at home, and that goes without the bedding. I can get through it in four hours here. There are eight of us, you see.' (Stott 1985: 167)

Stott's privileged position as a news reporter thus allowed her to write vivid, first-person accounts of ordinary women's lives, combining her twin passions of writing and social justice.

Conclusion

Interwar women journalists working for the mainstream press were a marginalised and exploited group, and even the most successful among them faced sexist stereotyping, both in the workplace and in the articles they were commissioned to write. Even Edith Shackleton, who in February 1923 became the first woman to cover proceedings

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in the House of Lords, was bylined by her newspaper as 'a woman correspondent' and her role was restricted to that of describing the peers' 'noble ladies' in their 'dresses as magnificent as the art of the modern dressmaker can produce, and jewels that suggest the cave in Ali Baba' (*Evening Standard* 13 Feb 1923: 4). Although permitted to enter the wider public sphere through the pages of a national newspaper, Shackleton was circumscribed both by her gendered byline and the subject matter of her report. This type of situation still persists to this day with very few women reaching the most senior positions on mainstream newspapers and a notable lack of female-authored front-page articles (Franks 2013). For many in the interwar years, however, the joy of financial independence and the pleasure of writing were powerful consolations. The *Woman Journalist* provided women journalists from Britain and throughout the world with a forum to discuss professional concerns and opportunities, a rare communal platform in what has always been a 'singularly individualistic profession' (*Woman Journalist* Sep 1926: 14). However, the women steering the SWJ resisted the idea of women news reporters, and the journal failed to campaign for better working conditions or equal pay for women journalists, despite highlighting these very issues for its readers. The journal's cultural and moral conservatism automatically set it against more radical elements of the women's movement. While much of the journalism produced by women in the interwar years was domestically focused and restricted to the 'women's page', this enabled women to read about issues that affected them, from domestic economy to child-rearing. Whether this limited exposure aided or slowed the progress toward equality is highly contested. The achievements of the most successful women journalists of this period did not pave the way for a more generalised access to mainstream newspapers for women journalists. The *Woman Journalist*'s 'don't rock the boat' attitude asked its readers to be patient and grateful for what they did have rather than to campaign for something better.

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Notes

1. The phrase 'symbolic annihilation' was originally coined by George Gerbner in 1972 and has since become a widely used metaphor to describe how media images of women succeed in effacing them from stories of public life (Gallagher 2014: 23).
2. Figures compiled from <http://www.magforum.com/glossies/womens_magazine_sales.htm> (last accessed 2 August 2015).
3. Figures supplied by the Office for National Statistics.
4. These figures are from a comprehensive overview of freelance payment rates published in *The Woman Journalist* (May 1927: 7–8).
5. Mrs Charles Peel was editor of the *Daily Mail* women's page 1916–20.
6. The one guinea subscription rate (half a guinea for women living outside London) was maintained throughout the 1920s and 1930s.
7. Dolf Wyllarde wrote at least seventeen novels between 1904 and 1929, including *The Pathetic Snobs* (1918), *Exile* (1923), and her semi-autobiographical account of struggling women writers, *The Pathway of the Pioneer* (1906).
8. These rates are gleaned from a useful regular section in the *Woman Journalist*, 'The Home Market', which details payments for articles and short stories in a wide range of newspapers and periodicals. The *Time and Tide* payment rate appears in the September 1923 issue (17), the *Woman's Leader* rate in November 1923 (14), the *Daily Mail* rate in May 1927 (8), and the *House and Garden* rate in March 1923 (17).

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9. The author of the interview, Miss M. F. Billington, was an employee of Sir John Le Sage, having worked as 'special correspondent' of the *Daily Telegraph* for the previous twenty-five years.
10. Note that all quotations in this paragraph are from the *Woman Journalist*.
11. The most recent comprehensive overview of feminist media scholarship since the 1970s is in the *Routledge Companion to Media and Gender* (Carter et al. 2014).
12. For an account of her experience see Peel (1933: 229).
13. I have analysed the *Daily Mail* leader pages for a two-month period every fifth year from 1914 to 1929. I selected the months of January and February as this provided the war-free months of January and February 1914. The *Daily Mail* was chosen because it had the highest circulation, it paid freelancers the highest rates, and it consistently gave named bylines whereas many other newspapers still chose to publish articles anonymously.
14. The *Guardian* (then the *Manchester Guardian*) women's page was launched in 1922, for example; the *Daily Mail* women's page, launched before the First World War, evolved into its section known as *Femail*.

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