Careers Advice for Women and the Shaping of Identities

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This article focuses on representations of women’s work in two sets of articles, both entitled ‘Careers for Women’ that appeared in the Woman’s Record in 1921-22 and the Australian Women’s Weekly in 1933. Each provided advice about careers to potential women workers in traditional fields such as teaching and nursing as well as some relatively new occupations in the world of commerce. Although a range of discourses can be applied to women’s work, the article explains how three in particular – vocation, career and character – were interwoven to represent different occupations. The article argues that although both journals purported to offer little more than ‘practical guidance’ in the matter of occupational choice, they were deploying the discourse of character to construct specific individual and occupational identities for middle-class women workers.

In the fields of labour and feminist history there are many studies of working-class women in specific trades or industries and their contribution to labour movements, but research into middle-class women’s work has tended to focus on teaching, nursing and clerical work. Over the past six years Labour History and Australian Historical Studies, for example, have reflected these emphases. With the exception of two articles on factory inspectors, clerks, teachers and nurses have been the focus of articles on middle-class women’s work. Furthermore, Cowman and Jackson made a similar point about the situation in the United Kingdom in the introduction to a recent special issue of Women’s History Review. They argued that:

little attention has been paid to the diversity of women’s work, or to the extent to which working lives in the past and present have been so vital to self-identity beyond the workplace.

Thereafter, the focus was on middle-class women’s paid work across a range of occupations. Articles about social workers, doctors and businesswomen, for example, investigated ways in which middle-class occupations became markers of identity, and showed how individuals and groups of women negotiated to legitimate their place in the modern world of paid work. Keeping the issue of identity in mind, this article explores two series of articles, both entitled ‘Careers for Women’, in the Woman’s Record in 1921-22 and the Australian Women’s Weekly in 1933.

The Woman’s Record was established in 1921 by some of South Australia’s leading post-suffrage activists who were ‘non-party but wholly patriotic’. This journal targeted middle-class women, namely the ‘society woman, the university graduate and student, the hard-worked school teacher, the housewife, the farmer’s wife’. The Australian Women’s Weekly which was established in 1933, also appealed to middle-class women of all ages from relatively young school leavers, to university graduates and more mature women in the introduction to its Careers for Women series:

So whether it is a woman trying to decide what profession to enter, or one hoping to follow a more humble avocation, or simply a mother
Both journals upheld middle-class women’s rights to paid work but also recognised that marriage and motherhood was the destiny of most women in the early twentieth century. Indeed, the introduction to the Australian Women’s Weekly series asserted that ‘marriage, in fact, continues in Australia to be the greatest career for all women’. The Woman’s Record, however, was circumspect about women’s domestic duties being described as a career. It defined career as ‘specialised work (not merely manual work though this is not excluded) producing sufficient pay for independence, interest, and an outlet for ability, and social status and recognition’, and regretted that ‘home management’ had not yet reached the status of a career. Finally, both journals acknowledged the asymmetrical power relations between men and women, and pointed to men’s resistance to women workers in some occupations. Whereas the Woman’s Record was published during a period of labour market expansion, in the heightened anxieties wrought by economic depression, the Australian Women’s Weekly argued that men’s resistance had intensified, and that there were limited openings for women in any occupation. Like many advertisements of the era, its articles urged women to look beyond current hardships and plan for future work. Economic climate aside, the careers advice in both journals was based on similar understandings about women and men as gendered beings. Such were the similarities that the two series will be considered as a whole rather than separately in this article.

The 40 articles that comprise both the Careers for Women series were explored from a perspective that ‘social reality is produced and made real through discourses’. Phillips and Hardy define discourse as ‘an interrelated set of texts, and the practices of their production, dissemination, and reception that brings an object into being’. While a range of discourses have been employed in the construction of female identities, this article highlights ways in which those of career, vocation and character were interwoven to construct women’s occupational identity. Given that these concepts are historically contingent, gendered and problematic for women, the first section sketches changes over time in each of the discourses, thereby providing a context for further discussion of the careers advice articles. The following sections show how the discourses of vocation and character, and then career and character, interacted to represent different occupations as suitable work for middle-class women. Finally, there is a discussion of several fields of paid work where ‘personality’, a dimension of character, predominated rather than the discourses of career or vocation.

In 1933 the introduction to the Australian Women’s Weekly series was entitled ‘Practical Guidance Offered’. It claimed that the forthcoming articles would canvass a range of ‘vocational possibilities for women’, and provide details about training and prospects for employment. Most of the articles in the Woman’s Record covered the same ground. However, the Careers for Women series offered far more than practical guidance to potential women workers. Both series contained much advice about the personal qualities that were deemed essential for each occupation. In other words, they deployed the discourse of character to simultaneously construct a range of gendered individual and occupational identities for middle-class women who were contemplating entering the workforce, shape the identities of women who were already employed and reinforce women’s ‘natural’ destiny. Identity
construction is a multifaceted, fluid and often contradictory process. Indeed, van Dijk argues that:

people adapt what they say and how they say it, and how they interpret what others say – to at least some of their roles or identities, and to the roles of other participants.

This article locates the Careers for Women series as site of discursive struggle and argues that advice about careers was constituted through discourses that shaped women’s individual and occupational identities in the 1920s and 1930s.

Introducing Discourses of Vocation, Career and Character

‘Vocation’ is derived from the Latin term vocatio, a call toward a dedication to prayer and meditation, and is also embedded in understandings about professions. Indeed, Mangion states that a profession in medieval and early modern times was constructed as a ‘sacred calling’. Under Martin Luther’s reformist Christian philosophy, however, vocation shifted its focus to productive work that might be undertaken according to God’s will. Subsequently, the concept of vocation was reoriented with the processes of modernisation:

These processes included immense demographic upheavals; industrialisation, rapid and often cataclysmic urban growth; the emergence and continual expansion of systems of communication; the capitalist world market and its drastic and continual fluctuations.

In this atmosphere of constant change, spiritual worldviews were replaced by scientific explanations and there was a secularisation of the discourse of vocation. Young men were advised to carefully select an occupation to which they were suited, ‘however grand or humble it might be’, and commit to it as a life-work or secular calling. Given that paid employment in large organisations was becoming increasingly common in the modern world, the discourse of vocation translated into an appeal to work hard, thereby achieving personal fulfillment, and serve society according to one’s position in the hierarchy. It implied a broad, long-term set of commitments that contributed to both individual and social progress.

The processes of modernisation left some marks on the discourse of vocation but more on the discourse of career. Career was originally linked to fast and continuous action, but it gradually came to mean a regular and life-long occupation. With changes in the relations of work that were brought about by industrialisation and urbanisation in the nineteenth century, the concept of career also became oriented towards the future. In the 1890s the Funk and Wagnall’s dictionary defined career as ‘a course of business or activity, or enterprise: especially a course of professional life or employment that offers advancement or honor’. The man who pursued a career, therefore, was obliged to assess and improve his status relative to those above and below. Bledstein describes this modernist orientation towards the future as the ‘vertical vision’ and in the last quarter of the nineteenth century the most readily available avenues for fulfilling it were in the expanding numbers of bureaucratised organisations. In Australia, state Education Departments established under mass compulsory schooling legislation readily incorporated the vertical vision. Indeed,
mass compulsory schooling facilitated credentialism, the process by which men's entry into and advancement in white-collar employment was managed. Income was the principal measure of status and both were made publicly visible in material possessions and the capacity to support a non-waged wife and children. One of the problems, however, was that 'the largest number of jobs appeared at the lowest levels of white-collar organisations, where work was routine' and public distinction hard to achieve. Another issue was that the ideal worker in Australia was seen to be 'male, muscular and white' who often laboured in the bush rather than the city. Additionally, the processes of modernisation gave 'new social space and public visibility to women' as consumers and as paid workers. Mass compulsory schooling facilitated the entry of single women into white-collar employment and their presence 'made a symbolic statement to men that the worlds of middle-class work was no longer a male club'. Wilson points out that the resulting division of labour in new organisational hierarchies had a social as well as organisational agenda to fulfill – a proportion of good, secure, 'breadwinning' jobs had to be preserved or created for men.

The Harvester wage case of 1907, along with marriage bars in bureaucracies, institutionalised these understandings in Australia. By the 1920s when the Careers for Women series was published in the Woman’s Record, salaried employment between childhood and marriage had become the norm for women, regardless of social class. However, women were deemed to be temporary workers and mostly denied avenues of advancement that were commensurate with men's. In effect, organisational hierarchies that both secured white-collar men's status in relation to working-class men and preserved the gender order were embedded in the vertical vision.

Rooted in meanings to do with engraving and distinctive markings, Susman argues that there was interest as early as the seventeenth century in what was called 'character'. By the nineteenth century it 'was a key word in the vocabulary of Englishmen and Americans'. Character was originally defined in terms of the amount of 'credit' accorded to a person by the community. However, it lacked an intrinsic or fixed meaning and one's reputation was constantly under negotiation. As with the discourses of vocation and career, the concept of character was reshaped in modernity, and came to denote 'the inner core qualities of the man himself'. Moral steadfastness, determination, self-control and self-reliance were highly valued qualities. Character also included a subordinate dimension that facilitated relationships with others. The man who worked in white-collar employment required both dimensions for his work was rooted in social interactions and social relationships. According to Hilkey, 'it was character, not business-specific know-how, which made the successful man'.

The discourse of character was entwined with both the discourses of vocation and career. Firstly, with regard to the discourse of vocation, Weber argued that for some the 'call' to an occupation came through 'inner charismatic qualities' while others talked about having a 'natural aptitude' for particular kinds of work. Embedded in the discourse of vocation, then, was a set of 'natural' qualities and positive dispositions towards one's work. This article will show that within the discourse of vocation there were descriptors that could readily be applied to women as workers in some occupations. Indeed, there was considerable overlap between maternalist discourses and those of vocation and character.
Character was also integral to the career discourse. Bledstein argues that:

Character was the internal and psychological symbol of continuity that corresponded to the sociological course a person ran in a career. Character and career were the two faces of a single phenomenon.²⁵

Attributes such as will-power, ambition and an intellectualism borne of scientific rather than religious explanations of the world facilitated the vertical vision in hierarchical organisations. Yet success also required the appropriate presentation of the self to others.²⁶ In the first years of the twentieth century, fueled by the new science of psychology, this dimension of character became referred to as ‘personality’. The emotional and relational qualities of personality such as tact, cheerfulness and enthusiasm ‘ranked below reason and enlightened self-interest yet were essential to the complete development of the self’.²⁷ Susman argues that character was about ‘self-control and self-mastery’ whereas personality was about presentation of the self to society in such a way as to make oneself ‘well-liked’.²⁸ In effect character denoted independence and personality interdependence. Subsequent discussions will demonstrate that personality as a dimension of character was constructed as the key to a successful career for women in a range of occupations in the 1920s and 1930s.

The Discourse of Vocation and ‘the aptitude of women’

In both 1921/22 and 1933 there were six articles in which the discourse of vocation was predominantly deployed to represent occupations. Along with the obvious one of the ‘Christian Ministry’ it was in police work, social work, nursing and journalism that the discourses of vocation and character were most often combined to construct them as suitable occupations for women.²⁹ The articles on police work, social work and nursing in particular pointed to a set of ‘natural’ qualities as prerequisites for the occupation. These included ‘sympathy’, ‘patience’, ‘gentleness’ and ‘understanding’. Thus the contribution on police work asked ‘is there any calling where the aptitude of women for sympathetic insight and for unconquerable patience can be better utilised?’³⁰ The requirements of a successful nurse were portrayed as ‘patience, sympathy, understanding combined with a high degree of practical intelligence, commonsense and reliability’.³¹ In these articles, therefore, the woman worker was constructed ‘as a particular kind of knower, who derived her insights primarily through her natural capacities’ and aptitude for the occupation.³²

As far as preparation for paid work in these occupations was concerned, the main requirements were seen to be a general education and ‘practical intelligence’ acquired from on-the-job experience. For example, the foundation for police work was previous experience in another occupation and the article on social work claimed that

most of the field worker’s duties would be picked up by a woman of good general education, and trained or untrained there must be a good fund of sympathy and commonsense, the more intelligent the worker, the more valuable the training, both in saving time and fertility of suggestion.³³

Finally, the nurse ‘received her training in exchange for her work’ over a three to
five year period during which she ‘learns to use science and knowledge to perfect these womanly instincts and give full value to their expression’. 44

In occupations where the discourse of vocation predominated, however, women’s aptitude and practical intelligence were not sufficient to ensure success. Rather, a strong and persistent disposition to be of service to others was an essential criterion. Potential nurses were advised that

if any woman is considering nursing merely as a method of making a living, well, there are many other careers, and to ‘make good’ a nurse has to have a live interest in her work and to give herself wholeheartedly to it. 45

Those who were contemplating police work were warned that ‘it is a strenuous life – so strenuous that as a means of livelihood it can offer few attractions against the many other occupations for women’. 46 Each of the occupations entailed long working hours and the salaries were not seen as equivalent to the services rendered. Yet service was not burdensome. It was not associated with servility or drudgery. Instead, a continuous commitment to serving others generated personal fulfillment and contributed to the progress of society more generally. In the case of the woman in police work, ‘her intervention may mean the saving from social destruction of human beings, who in the ordinary course might go permanently on the rocks’. 47 The discourses of vocation and character could thus combine to construct these occupations as paid work that had both personal and social value.

In both the 1921 and 1933 articles on journalism the discourse of vocation played out differently from the previous occupations. Journalism was constructed as work in which it was ‘hard to gain a footing’ as there was much ‘prejudice against women at the newspaper office’. 48 Potential journalists were advised to ‘start by taking any position such as telephone work, proof reading or at the desk’ and gradually work their way into the literary department. 49 Their success in this endeavor depended on ‘their natural aptitude or flair for writing’. 50 In 1921 it was claimed that

if a girl is gifted, and is determined to adopt the calling – and it is a calling, a consecrated following of the ‘light that never was on sea or land’ – then she should write at every opportunity and write from real life. 51

Although writing was portrayed as ‘purely a gift and cannot be acquired’, wide reading, a general education and experience ‘in the school of life’ were seen to enhance that gift. The 1921 article also argued that a ‘strong personality’ was an ‘indispensable asset’ to the potential journalist. 52

Having completed a four year apprenticeship as a cadet, the Australian Women’s Weekly pointed out that there were ‘some lucrative positions as social writers on metropolitan newspapers’ and advised that ‘we employ women to deal with such subjects as mothercraft, culinary, needlework, health, music, sport, fashions, matters of interest to children and a dozen other subjects’. 53 In the field of journalism, then, women utilised their gift for writing to serve other women. In much the same way women in police work, social work and nursing were constructed as routinely interacting with women and children rather than men. The article on police work claimed that ‘there are aspects of social and domestic trouble which can only be
relieved by the tact and gentleness of women'.

In articles where the discourse of vocation predominated, women workers were being offered occupational identities that reinforced their gendered individual identities. They could lay claim to personally and socially valuable niches but their involvement in the modern world of work was circumscribed by the gendered division of labour. In effect, the discourses of vocation and character worked together to construct some occupations as suitable work for middle-class women while maintaining the inequalities between men and women.

Career and the 'ambitious worker'

Among the 40 articles that made up the Careers for Women series, were seven that privileged the discourse of career. In most of the occupations that were constructed by this discourse, the chief prerequisite for employment was a university degree. Two articles in the Australian Women’s Weekly outlined some of the benefits and issues pertaining to university study and the subsequent prospects for employment. The first article pointed out that women were not debarred from study in any university department and urged potential students to be clear in their own minds whether they wish to train for a specific vocation (such as medicine or architecture) or whether they will take a general course such as that given by the Faculty of Economics.

The second article problematised university credentials in relation to future employment: ‘Both men and women should realize that there is prejudice and resentment among many business people towards University graduates, and that a degree does not guarantee immediate employment’.

While a degree trained the mind and ‘indicated a certain amount of knowledge’, both essential to the character discourse, there was ambivalence on the matters of ‘tact and wisdom’. The Australian Women’s Weekly claimed that there were ‘a good many prigs’ amongst university graduates. University study seemed to enhance self-mastery but was less useful in developing the capacity to engage with others, an attribute of character that was required for success in the modern workplace. These articles conceded that university study did ‘open many careers’ to women, and graduates were cautioned to be confident in their ‘special knowledge but also realize its limits’. As with discourse of vocation, the discourse of career was entwined with that of character in the provision of careers advice to women.

In 1922 the ‘sister professions’ of law and medicine were publicised in the Woman’s Record. As far as the potential lawyer was concerned, university training was seen to be ‘largely theoretical’ but supplemented by practical experience as ‘an articled clerk’ for up to five years. This stage of a lawyer’s career was seen to entail a great deal of ‘strain’. Strain or ‘neurasthenia’ was identified as a disease of the modern age that afflicted middle-class brainworkers. According to the Medical Journal of Australia in 1923, ‘the condition is brought about when the daily exposure of nervous energy is greater than the daily income’. Professional men, journalists and teachers were thought to be most susceptible to strain. As far as lawyers were concerned, the woman with ‘a strong constitution’ overcame the effects of strain, ‘rising to managing clerk or junior partner with extra responsibility’. The vertical
vision, therefore, was reproduced in the lawyer's career: 'It is the conscientious and ambitious worker who eventually reaches the pinnacle of this great profession'.

Unlike vocations which called upon the aptitude of women for sympathetic insight:

the career [of medicine] requires the pure flame of impersonal zeal, which is not yet as common with women as with men, as well as the firmness of character that can carry on our shoulders the responsibility for the lives of human beings.62

The university training 'involved more strain than for any other profession' and potential doctors were advised to complete a BA prior to medical training to enhance their sympathies and understanding of 'social problems'. The article mentioned several 'opportunities for promotion' in the medical profession and pointed out that the country doctor in particular 'needs a motor, as well as a home of sufficient dignity to assure patients of the status of their medical attendant'.63 It seems that if potential members of the sister professions had the requisite character to mediate the strain of their initial training, then promotion, status and material rewards would follow.

There were articles on pharmacy and dentistry in both 1921/22 and 1933 and in all cases they were represented as problematic 'because of the old-fashioned prejudice against women qualifying for professional occupations'. 'Good health' along with intelligence and accuracy were prerequisites for both occupations 'on account of the great amount of standing one has to do'.64 But 'if a girl has any definite leaning towards a scientific career, there is no doubt that pharmacy offers a responsible and interesting calling for intelligent girls'.65 Unlike law and medicine where status was measured in terms of the vertical vision, the establishment of a pharmacy or dental surgery marked status in these occupations:

To succeed in the dental profession, in addition to overcoming the prejudice against women dentists, a girl must be prepared to furnish her surgery with modern dental equipment. Not only does such equipment make her work easier and more expeditious, but it gives patients an impression of capability, and this is a matter of material consideration.66

By 1933 the prospects for potential pharmacists to establish a business were even more complex 'because of competition from chain stores'.67 Dentistry and pharmacy were thus portrayed as contentious occupational choices in 1920s and 1930s.

In 1933 the discourses of career and character were deployed to construct the position of 'private secretary' as a suitable occupation for women. The article began by stating that 'secretarial work offers a pleasant and remunerative goal with dignified status for both the girl seeking employment and the ambitious clerical worker desiring to improve her position and prospects'. This occupation did not require a university credential but for the ambitious woman 'training in accountancy and secretarial courses is recommended'. The article clearly delineated the vertical career path from 'junior stenographer' to 'higher paid positions of private secretaries' which were 'generally the reward of several years' diligent service'. However, achieving the status and remuneration of a private secretary was not just a matter of credentials, proficiency and ambition. Success in hierarchical organisations required
the dimension of character that facilitated social relationships: ‘Since the secretary is the point of contact between her employer and the outside world, an obliging disposition, charm of manner and a good appearance are necessary’. Although of a different status from the work of a lawyer or doctor, the position of private secretary was constructed as one of the ‘most remunerative posts’ in this sphere of employment.68

In essence, in articles where the career discourse dominated, the occupations were mostly constructed as new fields of employment for women that had become available once they acquired university credentials. They also encapsulated some of the tensions that were part and parcel of the processes of modernisation. Whereas articles that incorporated the discourse of vocation mostly assumed a gendered division of labour, those that focused on the discourse of career highlighted men’s ongoing resistance to women workers whose occupational identities might be constructed around the vertical vision. The discourse of career was not gender neutral. Rather, its elements including the vertical vision also worked to maintain unequal power relations between men and women.

Teaching: ‘a profession hopelessly damaging to their matrimonial prospects’

In both 1922 and 1933 there was one occupation, namely teaching, which was by no means a new occupation for women. Teaching had long been women’s work in the home, in tiny ‘dame schools’ that were attended by working-class children and in young ladies academies, but with the creation of bureaucratic Education Departments in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the location of most women teachers’ work shifted to state school systems. Indeed, women constituted 70 per cent of primary school teachers by the beginning of the twentieth century, and by the 1920s they were also securing niches as kindergarten and secondary teachers.69 In this occupation the discourses of vocation and career, both entwined with character, were applied to different aspects of the work.

The discourse of vocation was used to guarantee women’s place in the occupation. An article in May 1922 located teaching as ‘a delight, as much a “call” as a man may feel to the ministry’. Some women were ‘born teachers’ for whom teaching meant ‘service and enthusiasm rather than income’.70 In 1933 it was stated that the potential teacher ‘had to have a lot of womanliness about her’ and an ‘understanding of the child, child likes and child requirements’.71 Kindergarten teaching in particular was constructed as an occupation ‘suited to women’ who ‘have a true love for children and a keen desire for their welfare’.72 Each article also upheld the social value of this occupation. The article on kindergarten teaching in the Woman’s Record stated that ‘the education of the child is a matter of national importance’.73 Likewise the Australian Women’s Weekly asserted: ‘How important are the duties which devolve on the teachers may be gauged from the fact that the future welfare and destiny of approximately 1,000,000 young Australians annually is in their care’.74 Here the modern discourse of vocation was entwined with character. It was grounded in a natural aptitude for teaching and expressed as an integrated set of commitments to serving children, education and a secular nation rather than God.

The discourse of career came to the fore in discussions about training and qualifications. From the early twentieth century a ‘strenuous’ two year course of training at a Teachers College was required for kindergarten and primary teaching.
A university degree or a three to four year College course entitled women to seek employment as secondary teachers. Indeed, the majority of graduates became subject specialists in secondary schools. The *Australian Women's Weekly* also argued that the introduction of domestic science into state schools and the establishment of technical colleges in the early twentieth century had created a demand for specialist domestic science teachers. In one article about 'cooking' as an occupation, the discourse of career was used to raise its status and promote it as a suitable occupation for middle-class women. The article argued that whereas 'cooking' was once a skill 'learned in the home kitchen, 'the certificate gained after a three year course' in domestic science qualified its holder to seek more prestigious positions such as 'chef', 'dietitian' and teacher. Another article argued that modern 'domestic science' was 'not a drudgery, but a well-paid vocation'. Two articles promoted teaching as an occupation for 'girls proposing to take up the higher branches of domestic science as a career'. In essence, discussions about the qualifications required for the various branches of teaching were embedded in the career discourse.

Whatever their initial qualifications, there was much opportunity for change and promotion for the ambitious woman in Australia’s vast, bureaucratic state school systems where most women teachers found employment during the 1920s and 1930s. There were 7,000 women teachers in New South Wales state schools alone in 1933. In this state department the vertical vision had long been institutionalised as a service ladder, each rung of which was accompanied by increasing status and income. However, every article acknowledged the limitations of the vertical vision for women by stating that their career paths were truncated. In addition:

> the salaries paid to women teachers are only four fifths of those paid to men, [but] they have the satisfaction of knowing that their tenure is fairly secure until they reach retiring age or marry.

And on the matter of marriage there were particular concerns about women teachers in the 1920s and 1930s.

Of the occupations mentioned thus far, the issue of marriage was only raised in relation to doctors and teachers. In the case of doctors it was argued that the proportion of women who marry is as large or larger than other professions but there was ambivalence about teachers’ marriageability. The article on kindergarten teaching in the *Woman's Record* asked not 'when' but 'if the student marries what better could fit her for the duties of motherhood than working with little children and the study of their needs?' This article implied that there could be dissonance between women's individual and occupational identities. In the same edition as the second of its articles on university women, the *Australian Women's Weekly* elaborated the concerns about women teachers. In 'Why can't those brilliant girls marry? Too old - or too clever?' it was stated that 'a University training is for all girls a heavy handicap in the marriage market'. The 'average young man was 'alarmed' by university women's 'intellectual attainments' and thus graduates were confined to seeking 'congenial partners' from within their professions. Suitable matches could be found in law and journalism, for example, but not teaching which had long been constructed as a last resort for men who had failed to gain entry into more prestigious occupations. The *Australian Women's Weekly* argued that in the case of women teachers:
Their work simply does not give them the chance of meeting suitable men ...

The women teachers are often the social and intellectual superiors of the men with whom they are working. Moreover, although a teacher's hours are shorter than those of a business girl, her work calls for the expenditure of much more vital energy. A good teacher is rather like a good actress who by sheer force of personality "puts across" an unpopular play. At the end of the day the teacher is drained of vitality, and even if her spare time need not be spent in correction or preparation she is commonly unfit for the give-and-take of general society. School teachers are not born old maids but have single blessedness thrust upon them.85

Teaching for women, more so than any other occupation, 'was a profession hopelessly damaging to their matrimonial prospects'. This article concluded with a warning to 'parents and guardians to face this dilemma' in helping their daughters choose a suitable occupation. Fortunately for readers of the *Australian Women's Weekly* who had such concerns, its Careers for Women series provided advice about a range of occupations that were not seen to threaten women's marriageability.

'Not a career, but until such time as they marry'

By the 1930s the processes of modernisation, namely the shift from 'production to consumption, from manufacturing to service, sales and distribution' were clearly registered in the careers advice being proffered to women.86 The 1933 series contained several articles that focused on employment for young women in commerce and communications, and portrayed these occupations as 'not a career, but until such time as they marry'.87 For example, there was advice for the potential shop girl, radio announcer, girl clerk, mannequin, switch girl and commercial artist. The following discussion will show that 'personality' as a dimension of character was the most important requirement for these occupations.

Perhaps the archetypal occupations for young women with some post-primary education in the early twentieth century were those of the 'shop girl' and 'girl clerk'. Work as a shop girl was the prerogative of the school-leaver ('there were no openings after the age of twenty-three'), and the ideal girl clerk was 16 or 17 years of age.88 The educational qualifications of the girl clerk were 'a good knowledge of English' along with shorthand and typing. However, in both cases and also in the occupation of mannequin, 'the outstanding requirement - apart of course from good character and decent parentage - is good appearance ... not to be confused with good looks'. Modesty in dress, a 'good speaking voice', courtesy, and patience were markers of good appearance.89 These characteristics were associated with personality, which is the presentation of the self in ways that attracted others. Susman argues that "personality" like "character" is an effort to solve the problem of self in a changed social structure that imposes its own special demands on the self.90 Coping with the demands of a developing consumer society required 'complete control over the emotions' in the case of the shop girl, and 'tact' in relationships with others.91 'A quiet efficiency in dress' was recommended to potential girl clerks and they were told that

good looks don't count for much in a business office, and they should not count. Too much artificiality in the matter of lipstick, jewellery and face powder is not only out of place in a business office, but it is actually
offensive to businessmen.\textsuperscript{92}

Keeping in mind that the 1920s and 1930s were known as the flapper era and that the typical flapper was said to work in an office, it could be that the Australian Women's Weekly was warning potential clerks not to succumb to the flapper's preoccupations with the latest fashions, expensive jewellery and make-up as these would detract from her personality.\textsuperscript{93}

The discourses of career and vocation were not represented in discussions about girl clerks, shop girls or mannequins. These occupations in the field of commerce were depicted as routine jobs with no avenues for promotion, which is no vertical vision, and no capacity for service in the sense of vocation. Girl clerks were the only ones portrayed as working with men. The Australian Women's Weekly noted employers' preference for girl clerks as they were cheap labour and 'generally recognised as having a greater capacity for detail than youths'.\textsuperscript{94} Mannequins were seen to be well-paid but shop girls 'wages are low, perhaps lower than any other avocation a girl can enter'. Shop girls, however, had the 'advantage' of keeping abreast of 'the latest in fashions' and being able to work with other young women.\textsuperscript{95} Office work, while not well paid, was also constructed as socially advantageous:

The social opportunities for girls engaged in commercial offices are unrivalled in any avocation, as the personal charm and efficiency of girls in business offices very often results in good marriages.\textsuperscript{96}

In 1933 the Australian Women's Weekly publicised 'a new career for girls who have ambition to rise above the ruck, and would aspire to something more interesting than thumping a typewriter or selling ready-to-wear frocks'. This was the occupation of radio announcer. A 'sound education, wide reading, ripe experience and general knowledge' were seen to be useful prerequisites but 'first and foremost personality, or, rather, personality plus, is the outstanding qualification required'. While 'radio may be said to be yet in its swaddling clothes' its future prospects as an occupation for women were seen to be bright.\textsuperscript{97} Such was not the case with another communications occupation 'where girls now have practically the monopoly', namely that of the switch girl. Both jobs required a 'clear speaking voice'. In the case of the switch girl 'we look for the girl with a smile in her voice' and a 'fair education'. However, potential workers in this occupation were advised that 'there would appear to be no avenue of promotion for the switch girl ... [she is] kept in the same class of work until romance comes along'.\textsuperscript{98}

The final occupation in the world of commerce and communications for which women were deemed to be 'eminently qualified' was the emerging advertising industry. In 1933 two articles promoted advertising as suitable work because 'women take more interest in advertising than men' and 'they are also the bulk of consumers'.\textsuperscript{99} Here, 'women's instinct, their capacity to sense the reaction of other people is an advantage'.\textsuperscript{100} There was some ambivalence as to whether it was necessary to go to art school or 'to learn on the job' in an advertising agency, but both articles agreed that women required similar personal qualities to those of a girl clerk. Indeed, 'the most successful women ... generally look like efficient secretaries'.\textsuperscript{101} Work in the advertising industry was seen to be 'well-paid' and one of the articles pointed out that 'marriage is not a disqualifying state' because 'freelance work' was available.\textsuperscript{102}
This article was the only one in either series that mentioned paid work as an option for married women. Otherwise the fields of employment in the modern world of commerce and communications were conceptualised as temporary occupations.

'The foundation of a good business'

While marriage was considered to be women's destiny, the introduction to the 1933 series stated that women were living 'in an age when fairy princes are few and a job must be sought'.

Although neither series explicitly acknowledged that women other than teachers might not marry at all, they did present a range of small businesses that could be the province of more mature women. These were floristry, hairdressing, dress-making, millinery, real estate, teashops and guest houses. These articles targeted women 'in humble circumstances' who had already spent some years in paid employment, though not the low status 'drudgery' of domestic service or factory work.

By implication, those who managed small businesses would be mature, middle-class women who were not buttressed by wealth or a husband. The following section discusses the occupational identities that were required for success in these occupations.

As with the previous group of occupations, natural aptitude and personality were portrayed as the foundations for success in these commercial endeavours. As far as the potential milliner was concerned, there was little discussion of the specific skill requirements for this work. Rather,

success in this particular profession requires natural qualifications for the work. A milliner must be artistic, have creative instinct, tact and patience. The necessity for infinite patience will be realised by anyone who has had the experience of trying to sell a hat to a difficult customer.

Indeed, most of the articles pointed to tact and artistic talent as markers of the occupational identities needed for success in small business. In hairdressing, for example:

personality and skill count for more in this than probably any other vocation. If a girl is clever and artistic it will not be long before she has a growing clientele. But unless a girl has a pleasing and tactful manner she would not be likely to succeed.

Finally, success in small business required 'initiative', that is the capacity to look beyond immediate needs and plan for the future. A significant amount of previous experience in paid work was portrayed as the main preparation for a small business venture. The potential real estate agent was advised to start with the collection of rents ... In the collection of rents the beginner builds up for herself a connection which if she has the energy and requisite personality, will become the foundation of a good business.

A position as 'an assistant in a cake shop' was seen as 'a sound business training' for the proprietor of a teashop. For the woman who wanted to open a hat salon, 'it is advisable to begin with a well-known business firm or manufacturing milliner'.

This course of action was also recommended to potential dressmakers. Previous work in an office was another means of acquiring the foundations of a good business. None of the articles recommended a university qualification in accountancy or course at a business college. Rather, they advised working women who were interested in establishing a small business to ‘save sufficient for a small capital on which to fall back, and, of course, for a little outlay at the beginning’. Then they should carefully select the location of their business premises.

In representing small businesses as suitable occupations for women, the authors of the Careers for Women series deployed the discourse of character and its handmaiden, personality, but not necessarily those of vocation and career. The vertical vision with its focus on credentials, ascending status and income was absent from the articles on small businesses, and there was no attempt to construct these occupational choices as a calling. Rather, the focus seemed to be on providing practical guidance and an occupational identity to the woman for whom there was no fairy prince so that ‘she can fill her niche in the world’s workplace happily with the dignity that comes of independence and a knowledge of usefulness’. For example, a florist shop was a suitable occupation for a woman who had ‘previously worked in an office ... and felt the urge to do something for herself – get away from the routine’. Dressmaking was ‘a useful occupation’ for the woman with ‘taste, talent and initiative’ but very little capital, as was establishing a guest house in a ‘quiet, restful type of home’. Finally, ‘a girl who has an average amount of commonsense, a good personality, a fair appearance and a practical knowledge of cooking can derive quite a steady income from a teashop’. In essence, the Careers for Women series normalised marriage but also promoted some dignified alternatives, namely small businesses, in the modern commercial world.

'Determinants of the occupational type'

In 1932 American sociologist, Willard Waller, wrote ‘we know that some occupations markedly distort the personalities of those who practice them, for example the lawyer, chorus girl, politician and doctor’. He did not elaborate on these occupations but in a chapter entitled ‘Determinants of the occupational type’, he focused on teaching, a field of employment that ‘leaves no plainer mark than some other vocations, though it is perhaps, a mark which a larger number of people can recognise’. Towards the end of the chapter Waller announced that:

Our theoretical problem should now be clear; it is to account for the genesis of the character traits belonging to the teacher by showing how they flow out of the action of his life situation upon his personality.

In effect, Waller was tackling a similar issue, namely occupational identity, as this article. Whereas Waller was intent upon showing how their lives and work produced teachers' occupational identities, my study has explored some careers advice literature as a text that constructed women workers’ identities. The discourse of character was central to this project. When combined with the discourse of vocation, the emphasis was on women’s ‘natural’ qualities, namely their patience, sympathy and understanding as identity markers. A second group of occupations was informed by the career discourse and here the focus was on being knowledgeable,
self-assured and ambitious. The Careers for Women series also promoted a range of occupations in the expanding fields of commerce and communications but deployed another dimension of the character discourse to represent some as the province of young marriageable women and others as appropriate for more mature women. 'Personality' was the key to success in these occupations. In the case of young women it was evident in their appearance and personal charm, that is, their capacity to attract customers, male colleagues and potential husbands with 'natural' qualities such as tact, courtesy and efficiency. Artistic talent, tact and initiative were constructed as distinguishing markers of personality in small businesses which were seen as the province of mature and presumably single workers.

Although the discourse of character was constructing gendered individual and occupational identities that secured women's positions in a range of modern workplaces, these positions were tenuous at best and contingent on remaining single. Of all occupations in the Careers for Women series, there was only one that sanctioned women to combine marriage and paid work. Occupations that were constructed by the interconnected discourses of character and vocation legitimated women's involvement on the basis of their difference from men. In a patriarchal society that meant that women were confined to niches that were subordinate to those occupied by men. Furthermore, a commitment to an occupation as a secular calling or life work left little room to construct an identity that might incorporate paid work with marriage and motherhood. Women were being offered occupational identities that simultaneously upheld their gendered identities and denied their natural destiny. The discourses of vocation and character thus contained a number of contradictory elements. In combination, the discourses of career and character were equally problematic. With individual identities that were constructed around intellectual independence, self-control and ambition, women were seen to challenge men's social power in the workplace. Women who subscribed to the vertical vision also risked their natural destiny. This article has shown that of all occupations teaching was represented as the most problematic career choice for women as it threatened their marriageability, an assessment with which Waller concurred. In occupations where the discourse of career was predominant there was thus an uneasy relationship between women's individual and occupational identities. In effect, each of the discourses of vocation, career and character worked in multifarious ways to maintain inequality between men and women in the modern world of work and to uphold the gender order. And so it was that the Careers for Women series was a site of discursive struggle around identities in the 1920s and 1930s.

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Endnotes

1. This article has been peer-reviewed for Labour History by two anonymous referees. The author wishes to thank them for their very constructive advice.


8. Ibid.


22. Ibid., pp. 171-172.

23. Ibid., p. 111.

24. E. Anthony Rotundo, American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the
27. Rotundo, American Manhood, p. 250.
32. Hillkey, Character is Capital, pp. 4; Bledstein, The Culture of Professionalism, p. 135.
35. Bledstein, The Culture of Professionalism, p. 112.
38. Susman, Culture as History, p. 280.
43. Woman’s Record, vol. 3, no. 5, 1922, pp. 6-7; vol. 2, no. 12, 1922, p. 5.
45. Ibid., p. 13.
46. Woman’s Record, vol. 2, no. 12, 1922, p. 5.
47. Ibid.
52. Ibid., p. 6.
54. Woman’s Record, vol. 2, no. 12, 1922, p. 5.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid.
63. Ibid., p. 5.
68. Australian Women’s Weekly, 8 July 1933, p. 9.
69. Theobald, Knowing Women, ch. 2; Whitehead, The New Women Teachers, chs 1, 3.
73. Ibid.
75. Ibid., p. 9; 7 June 1933, p. 9.
76. Australian Women’s Weekly, 4 November 1933, p. 9.
80. Ibid.; See also Woman’s Record, vol. 3, no. 4, 1922, p. 12; vol. 2, no. 11, p. 8.
83. Australian Women’s Weekly, 24 June 1933, p. 3.
84. Whitehead, The New Women Teachers, chs 1, 3.
85. Australian Women’s Weekly, 24 June 1933, p. 3.
86. Walkowitz, ‘Women with(out) class’, p. 323.
87. Australian Women’s Weekly, 10 June 1933, p. 7.
88. Australian Women’s Weekly, 26 August 1933, p. 9; 9 September 1933, p. 9.
89. Australian Women’s Weekly, 26 August 1933, p. 9; 9 September 1933, p. 9; 16 September 1933, p. 9.
90. Susman, Culture as History, p. 278; see also pp. 279-281.
94. Australian Women’s Weekly, 9 September 1933, p. 9.
95. Australian Women’s Weekly, 26 August 1933, p. 9; 16 September 1933, p. 9.
96. Australian Women’s Weekly, 9 September 1933, p. 9.
100. Australian Women’s Weekly, 18 November 1933, p. 9.
102. Ibid., p. 9.
103. Australian Women’s Weekly, 10 June, p. 7.
104. Woman’s Record, vol. 2, no. 2, 1921, p. 15. For discussions of domestic service and factory work as drudgery see Australian Women’s Weekly, 22 July 1933, p. 9; 4 November 1933, p. 9; 18 November 1933, p. 9; Woman’s Record, vol. 2, no. 4, 1921, pp. 3-4.
111. Australian Women’s Weekly, 16 December 1933, p. 9.
112. Australian Women’s Weekly, 24 June 1933, p. 3.
117. Ibid., p. 376.
118. Ibid., p. 383.