

"The men did not care for us women"

How Women Lost Out in the Creative Departments of Advertising Agencies in the 1950s and 1960s

ABSTRACT The emergence of commercial television advertising impacted women working as copywriters and artists in the creative departments of London ad agencies. Looking at the period 1955 to 1968, this paper discusses whether the observed fall in the proportion of women in creative departments was on par with a broader national "problem" of fewer and fewer women in professional occupations, or whether women in this sector were particularly hard hit. The research concludes that women copywriters and artists did not benefit from the advent of commercial television advertising. Their careers were limited by disparaging attitudes held by the younger generation, and changes in processes and creative skills required by the new medium. It also illustrates, however, that new opportunities for women did open up in television advertising production, in both advertising agencies and the wider production industry. **KEYWORDS** advertising, advertising agencies, media history, television history

The quote that titles this paper is from an interview with Doris Gundry, who joined the advertising agency J. Walter Thompson (JWT) in 1934 and stayed until 1963, rising to become one of three female copy group heads. In her interview for Tom Rayfield's anecdotal history of JWT, Gundry blames the young men who joined the agency after World War II for pushing women out of the creative departments.¹ She argues that these new male entrants resented women like herself who had joined the agency in the interwar years, perceiving them as blocking their promotion opportunities.

This article focuses on Gundry and other women who worked in the creative departments of advertising agencies during the early years of commercial television. It will illustrate that Gundry was correct in believing that men were replacing women in the creative departments of advertising agencies in the 1950s and 1960s, and that this was part of a broader decline in the numbers of women college graduates attaining professional and executive positions in this period in the UK. We will also encounter evidence that the advent of

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commercial television had an additional detrimental impact on women working as artists and writers in advertising agencies.

The interwar period was a turbulent time for women; more than 750,000 British men died in World War I, leaving many women without the financial support they could have previously expected from husbands, fathers, and brothers. Finding paid employment became a necessity. After the long struggles of the suffragettes, women over thirty years old gained the vote in 1918, and media, such as women's magazines, began to promote alternatives to the traditional roles of homemaker and mother. From the moment of its launch in 1932, *Woman's Own* placed a particular focus on social issues and the rights of women. But women were receiving mixed messages from the media. Homemaking, rather than outside-the-home work, was reinforced by established women's magazines like *Woman's Weekly* and the BBC, as Michael Bailey comments: "During the inter-war years [BBC Radio] addressed its women audience as housewives and mothers. . . . Women were exalted to identify the domestic realm of the home with the political and social well-being of the nation."² Although the public voice of the BBC may have promoted homemaking, the BBC employed many women, and some gained senior positions.³ The Great Depression of the 1930s also saw women criticized in the press for taking jobs in industry. They were encouraged to stay at home or take domestic work so that the male breadwinners could find work during this period of high unemployment.⁴

It was in this context that barriers to women entering the professions began to be removed. In the 1920s and 1930s, the Royal Institute of British Architects and the central government's civil service allowed women to gain professional qualifications and attain managerial roles. Gundry was part of this generation of professional women who began their careers in the period from 1921 to 1931, described by researcher Michael Fogarty and his colleagues as "a classic decade of breakthrough." Women took advantage of these new opportunities, and for the first time, more women than men were entering the professions. Nevertheless, "women who fought their way through the barriers of discrimination had to be exceptionally tough."⁵ The barriers included a formal marriage bar (in other words, women had to leave their jobs when they married) in many sectors where women were employed in significant numbers, including the civil service, teaching, and banking. Although the interwar period provided the opportunity for some women to enter a wider range of professions, 65 percent of women with higher education became teachers or lecturers, and a further 15 percent went into medicine and dentistry.⁶ The launch of the National Health Service and a public policy focus on the health of women and

children encouraged women in Britain to enter medicine and establish careers as general practitioners in community practices.⁷ In other words, most graduate women were limited to a narrow range of socially acceptable career options.

Advertising is a small industry, and agencies frequently merge or disappear completely. There are no archives comparable to those of the BBC, Lever Brothers, or Cadbury in the advertising industry. The few advertising agencies' archives that exist do not include personnel records. The archives of the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (IPA), the representative organization for the advertising industry, is the only source of personnel data, but it does not have any data available for the years before 1945. Nevertheless, there is a body of evidence that supports the argument that the aforementioned breakthrough for women in the professions was mirrored in the advertising industry.

The group Women in Advertising and Communication London (WACL) was set up in 1923 for senior women in the industries of advertising, publishing, and public relations. Interestingly, it was founded by men, including John Cheshire, managing director of Lever Brothers, and Sir William Crawford of Crawford Advertising. This was not a purely altruistic gesture; an international advertising conference was being planned for London in 1924, and American advertising agencies were bringing female delegates, so an organizing committee was required to welcome them. WACL was, however, managed by and for women from its inception, providing an opportunity for networking among the growing number of senior women in advertising and media. Marion Jean Lyon, advertising manager of *Punch*, was its first president, and in 1924 WACL had fifty members, all senior executives, including Olive Hirst, who became managing director of Sells Advertising, the first woman head of a major agency.⁸ A number of female directors of advertising agencies, including Hirst, Margaret and Florence Sangster, and Ethel Wood, variously stood as presidents of WACL.⁹

In 1926, Ethel Wood, then a director of Samson Clark, in her article "Advertising as a Career for Women," stated: "There are many women directors of advertising agencies, at least two of whom have been in the business for nearly thirty years, and have advanced steadily by the sheer weight of their ability from subordinate positions to administrative posts, and in one case to the chairmanship of a great advertising organization."¹⁰ The article appeared in a volume promoting a modern approach to advertising in Britain, and in this context, establishing advertising as open to women may have reinforced the "modernity" of the industry.

Margaret Mackworth, 2nd Viscountess Rhondda, a prominent campaigner for women's suffrage and founder of *Time and Tide* magazine, concurred.



FIGURE 1. Olive Hirst, managing director of Sells Advertising, late 1950s. Image courtesy "History of WACL: 1960s," <https://wacl.info/about/wacl-history/history-of-wacl-1960s/>.

She described the advertising industry as "just about the one profession in which women have equal chances with men. There is no difference in prospects and salaries, especially in the higher branches. At one time advertisers did not care to deal with women, but that prejudice has almost entirely disappeared."¹¹ There is no doubt that the Sangster sisters, Olive Hirst, and Ethel Wood were exceptional women. They managed agencies with prestigious clients such as Aspro, the Milk Marketing Board, and Waterman Pens.¹² As will be illustrated presently, most women employed in advertising were in junior and secretarial roles. Nevertheless, advertising does appear to have been open to women taking senior management roles in the interwar period. Perhaps it seemed attractive to women as a white-collar occupation with no marriage bar. It was also possible that a cosmopolitan London-based industry was less prejudiced to women taking senior positions. London was the nation's center for advertising, magazine publishing, the BBC, and other media-related activities such as public relations. As the membership of WACL illustrates, these were areas in which women had been

successful in gaining senior positions. This resulted in some women being in management positions at advertising agencies at the launch of commercial television in 1955.

THE POSTWAR ADVERTISING INDUSTRY AND IMPACT OF COMMERCIAL TELEVISION ON ADVERTISING AGENCIES' CREATIVE DEPARTMENTS

World War II left the advertising industry in a precarious state. Advertising did not disappear during the war but expenditures plummeted, and after the conflict there was no quick return to growth.¹³ Advertising requires media, and in the early 1950s, even if their clients could be persuaded to advertise, there was little media for them to buy. More than half the poster sites in Britain had been destroyed by bombing, there was a shortage of film stock for cinema advertising, and of the prewar commercial radio stations broadcasting from the Continent, only Radio Luxembourg came back on air in 1945.¹⁴ The result was that press advertising accounted for 85 percent of media expenditure in Britain.¹⁵ However, newsprint rationing remained until 1956 and demand far outstripped supply; the members of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce complained that “supply is likely to remain inadequate for the next three years. . . . Colour pages of the popular magazines have required booking almost a year ahead.”¹⁶

Until the advent of commercial television in September 1955, more than 90 percent of media in Britain was based on static, paper-based media offering both black and white and color. The dominance of paper-based media led to a process-driven production-line approach to the development of advertising, led by the writing and literary skills of the copywriters. The artists merely illustrated the words; they were not part of the original “creative idea” development. In the early days of his career, Brian Palmer worked at Charles H. Higham Advertising, a venerable London agency, and described this process: “A requisition for advertising copy would be sent to the Copy Department who would write it and scribble up what it might look like. The Head of Art would allocate it to a visualiser, who would rough up the ad, and it would then be shown to the executive. So it was a sort of production line.”¹⁷ Palmer later became head of television at Young and Rubicam Advertising and wrote the first commercial broadcast on Independent Television (ITV), as commercial television was named in Britain.

While women may have filled roles left by the men who joined the military, after the armistice, agencies were required to reinstate staff returning from war service. However, with no growth in the industry, there was little opportunity to employ new recruits of either sex until the period of postwar austerity ended

in the mid-1950s and media, including commercial television, became more readily available. With the advent of a new advertising medium, commercial television, creative departments suddenly found themselves tasked with creating ideas involving sound and movement (although then still limited to black and white). Production processes needed to shift accordingly. For television commercials, creative departments in advertising agencies develop the advertising idea, a script, and a storyboard. They are dependent on independent production companies to cast and shoot, and on the expertise of a freelance director to offer input on the final shape of the commercial. Advertising agencies thus do not require in-house hands-on film production expertise, but the shift from paper to film still challenged their skills and disrupted their working practices.¹⁸ The agencies could expect no help in this respect from commercial television companies; their relationship with the broadcasters was solely via their media buying departments.

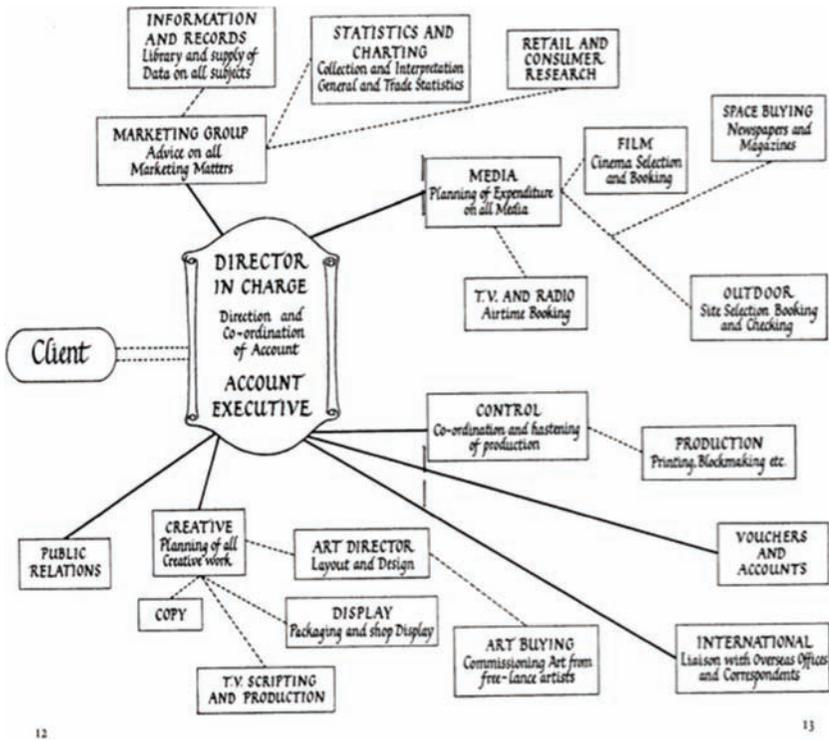


FIGURE 2. Organizational chart of a full-service advertising agency, from the pamphlet “A Career in an Advertising Agency” (London: IPA, 1958).

The IPA's 1958 pamphlet "A Career in an Advertising Agency" included a diagram, reproduced as figure 2, illustrating the structure of a large advertising agency of a type known as "full service," in that it could provide all the marketing skills that a client might require.¹⁹ "Creative" in this diagram includes four separate departments: copy, art direction, display, and TV scripting and production. While here "scripting" is shown as part of the television department, in the early years of commercial television, what the television department actually did varied by agency. Some television departments were wholly responsible, from idea creation to commissioning the production company, of all television commercials. Others had a more limited role, involved only the commissioning of production services. Sociologist Jeremy Tunstall worked in an agency in the early 1960s and concluded that "these different approaches to the making of a television commercial are signs that in this field the creative organization is—as the creative people are fond of saying—in a state of flux."²⁰

As the diagram illustrates, the TV scripting and production department was an appendage to the main creative department. Not all agencies had been confident that commercial television would succeed, and they attempted to ameliorate the risk by setting up their television departments as entities separate from other parts of the organization. If commercial television failed, this department could be quietly closed down without impacting the main creative department. The television department was often physically separate from the main agency, on a different floor or in another building. Also notable in the IPA's diagram is the division of the copywriters into separate departments from the artists and art directors. This separation of copy and art was both physical and cultural, as Julia Matcham, an artist at Mather and Crowther, described: "In those days there was a terrific division between the copywriters and the artists. Copywriters told the artists what to do, the artists didn't like it at all, they thought they were superior and had creative talents and all that. The artists thought the copywriters were a toffee-nosed lot from university. . . . So there was an attitude problem."²¹ Even three or four years after commercial television had launched, the continuing dominance of press advertising sustained the "production line" described by Brian Palmer. Advertising agencies seemed loath to change a model of working that had been successful since before the war, and which had led to the opportunity for women, like Gundry, to work successfully as copywriters.

To the concern of sociologists and government think tanks, the interwar decade of advancement for women in the professions did not continue after World War II.²² The think tank Political and Economic Planning (PEP) carried out research and produced a number of books and papers in the 1960s and 1970s

attempting to understand why women were under-represented in some professions, especially at senior levels.²³ The most comprehensive of these reports was Michael Fogarty, Rhona Rapaport, and Robert Rapaport's *Sex, Career and Family; Including an International Review of Women's Roles* (1971), a particularly useful publication for the purposes of this research, as it not only analyzed census and other government data from the 1950s and 1960s, but also carried out a new survey in 1967 among women who had graduated in 1960. A previous 1956 PEP survey of graduates excluded women from their sample, as there were so few of them, and the career opportunities open to them were restricted ("industrial firms do not regard women as possible recruits for management").²⁴ Fogarty and his colleagues subtitled the introduction to their book "Are Women a Special Problem?" to which the answer appeared to be "yes." Between 1951 and 1961 the number of men entering the professions continued to rise and the proportion of women fell. The authors characterized this change as a shift "from pioneering battleaxes to nice mice."²⁵

Elizabeth Wilson argues that there was a desire for consensus, among both men and women, after the war that led to "the making of a received wisdom about the position of women . . . that married women would not naturally wish to work."²⁶ To maintain domestic harmony, women would not want to challenge their husbands in terms of professional success or income. The political establishment had similar views; the 1946 Royal Commission on Equal Pay only recommended equalizing salaries for men and women in teaching and the civil service, and saw most women workers as useful, but readily replaceable either by men, who needed the work to support their families, or by younger, cheaper female employees. So the social and political environment was not conducive to a producing new generation of ambitious, career-focused "battleaxes."

Fogarty et al. claimed that younger women entering the professions after the war lacked this "battleaxe" attitude; they also argued that systemic conditions in organizations limited women's promotional prospects. Women were not offered the same opportunities for training or promotion because they were believed to lack commitment to a long-term career. They were also believed to be unsuited to exert authority over men and were therefore segregated into "women's work." Fogarty et al. claimed that the postwar generation of well-educated women, unlike the interwar generation, were not challenging these attitudes because they were not motivated by their education or their employers to take up opportunities and were devalued by unequal pay. This research supports Wilson's views, and suggests that postwar women indeed did not question prevailing cultural assumptions; in fact they were socialized

to accept these conditions and think them normal. This preparedness of women in the 1950s and 1960s to accept discrimination as natural will be discussed later, and illustrated through interviews with women working in advertising. Writers such as Pauline Pinder, writing for PEP, and the sociologist Viola Klein specifically characterized the postwar advertising industry as male dominated.²⁷ Pinder's report concluded, "However equitable pay prospects may appear on paper, there are occupations—usually higher competitive ones, such as journalism and advertising—in which women felt strongly that they are relegated to the bottom segment of any salary bracket."²⁸

However, the studies by Fogarty et al., Klein, and Pinder do not provide evidence to support Gundry's view that men were forcing women out of advertising agency creative departments; drawing on their interviews and research, the reports concluded that managerial attitudes discouraged women from seeking promotions or executive roles. To provide more detailed evidence on the situation for women in advertising agencies, the quantified data from the staff censuses carried out by the IPA was analyzed for this article. Not every advertising agency joined the IPA, but all major agencies were members, and IPA agencies accounted for more than 80 percent of media spend in Britain in the 1950s and 1960s. The IPA archives are held at the History of Advertising Trust Archive, and the first census available is for 1957, followed by three further studies in 1960, 1966, and 1968.

WOMEN IN ADVERTISING AGENCIES IN THE 1950S AND 1960S

In 1957, when commercial television was only available in the major population centers of London, Midlands, Northern England, and Central Scotland, the IPA census showed that there were a total of 16,124 employees in IPA agencies. Of these, 6,094 (38 percent) were women, and more than a third of those were secretaries. Women accounted for 97 percent of secretaries, 30 percent of staff in media departments, and more than 50 percent of staff in research and marketing. Media and research required numeracy, administrative, and analytical skills, but workers in these areas did not have the status of copywriters or account executives. Nevertheless, advertising agencies were not an exclusively male preserve; women had presence in all agency disciplines, as figure 3 illustrates.

Outside of the IPA employment census data, there is little research on advertising industry personnel in the 1950s and 1960s. To address this gap, this article utilizes material from the trade press, agency in-house magazines, privately printed memoirs, and twenty-three interviews carried out by this author among people who worked in the advertising industry during the first ten years of

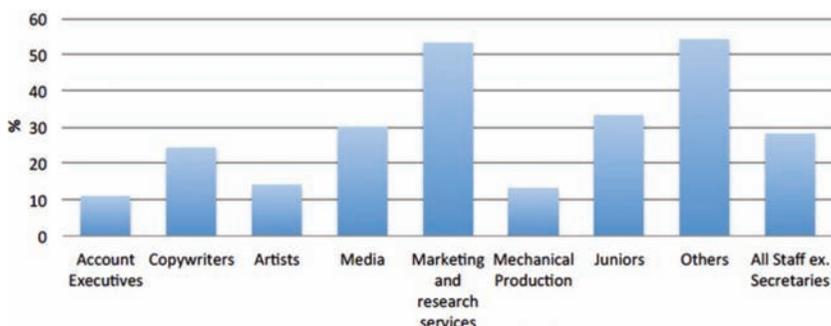


FIGURE 3. Institute of Practitioners in Advertising census analysis of the proportion of women by discipline, 1957. Source: IPA Agency Survey 1957, HAT/IPA 261.

commercial television.²⁹ Reliance on personal interviews among a small group of individuals reflecting on their careers more than five decades ago inevitably provokes questions of memory accuracy and suspicions of a tendency for the interviewees to place themselves at the center of events when most were in junior roles. Nevertheless, both men and women had insightful views on the impact of the launch of commercial television on the advertising industry, and there was a high degree of consistency in their recall, particularly in terms of shifts in the status of personnel and changes in the processes of creative departments. However, women interviewees proved difficult to find, as few had long-term careers in the industry, and most had married and changed their names. In the end, only six of the twenty-three interviews were with women. These individuals did at least hold a variety of roles, including copywriter, artist, account director, TV production assistant, and personal assistant (PAs) to senior managers.

What was common to all six interviews is the gratitude these women voiced in having gained a job in an advertising agency. As well as offering well-paid employment, advertising was *fun*. They enjoyed the company of their colleagues, as Ann Lovell, who worked as a copywriter at JWT, recalled: “It was such a lovely atmosphere at JWT, like a posh club, so relaxed. . . . There were lots of parties and there were always people from JWT there. It was a splendid jumping off ground, it gave you lots of confidence.”³⁰ In contrast, the male interviewees rarely mentioned fun. They enjoyed the competitive cut-and-thrust of the business and the opportunity for entrepreneurship. Several simply loved advertising and the contribution they believed it made to economic growth in the 1950s and 1960s.

Working in an advertising agency, many of which were based in London's Soho, also offered proximity to bars and clubs, as Frances Dickens, a PA in the television department at McCann Erickson, described:

It was the sixties, it was a dizzy time, and it was good money. . . . You'd drink in the French House—Gaston was the owner. I used to walk in there on my own and get a drink. Gaston introduced me to absinthe, and Muriel in the Colony Room, all these exciting people and it was so easy to meet them. I have a lot to thank advertising for.³¹

And the work was interesting. Many of the women, who had graduated from universities or art schools, believed that advertising had “saved” them from a career in teaching. The statistical analysis provided in the 1963 *Robbins Report*, a government-commissioned report on the future of higher education, showed that although more and more women were entering higher education in the 1950s and 1960s, the largest proportion of them were in teacher-training colleges. Only 2.5 percent of women in 1962's age cohort went to university, compared to 3.8 percent who entered teacher training (the comparable figures for men were 5.6 percent to university and only 1.3 percent to teacher training college).³²

Julia Matcham, an artist and copywriter at Mather and Crowther, noted that she had been “lucky” to avoid a teaching career and relished the challenges that working in a creative department offered:

It was the creative bit. You're thinking in ten different ways—you're thinking laterally, vertically—you're thinking in all sorts of ways. It's exercise for the mind. . . . I had ambition to keep being interested and that leads you in different directions. If you get ahead you're pleased because it lets you do something that's more interesting.³³

Gratitude for having evaded a career in teaching was not exclusive to women in agencies. Joy Batchelor, animator and partner at Halas and Batchelor, started her career in a production company that made advertising films for JWT and also narrowly avoided a career in teaching: “Anything but teach. [laughs] Which is what my parents dearly wanted me to do, but I'm afraid I stuck my heels in, and went to London to look for a job.”³⁴ These women had jobs in which they were expected to work hard, but also the opportunity to enjoy themselves and be challenged creatively and intellectually.

In the creative departments of IPA agencies in 1957, there were 887 copywriters, who accounted for 5.5 percent of all agency personnel. Copywriters were responsible for the creative ideas and were very much the senior service within

creative departments. In contrast, although artists were far more numerous—2,667 of them, representing 16.5 percent of all agency personnel—they mainly had a technical or art-school background and much lower status. Winston Fletcher, a Cambridge graduate, was recruited to Mather and Crowther as a trainee copywriter soon after the launch of ITV: “The copywriters were definitely senior—tended to be Eng Lit [English literature] Oxbridge graduates who really wanted to be poets. . . . The visualizers had probably been to art school and probably thought they were great artists, but they were very low down the pecking order, [and] did what they were told.”³⁵

In 1957, 209 (24 percent) of copywriters were women, and of artists, 374 (14 percent) were women, demonstrating that women had been proportionally more successful in attaining the higher-status role of copywriter. Copywriters were all college or university graduates, and most agencies only recruited from Oxford and Cambridge. C. E. Arregger, in her 1966 study of graduate women, wrote that in the 1950s, “only the exceptional girl went to a university, and she could choose Oxbridge [Oxford and Cambridge] rather than a provincial university.”³⁶ Therefore it is likely that the standard for female graduates applying to become copywriters was very high.

The 1960s are often viewed as a liberating time for women, when jobs were easily available and young women had significant spending power. While this may have been true for those with a secondary education, contemporaneous researchers discovered that women with higher education, like advertising copywriters and artists, fared less well than their counterparts from the interwar generation. This was exacerbated in that, after the war, increases in working-class salaries outstripped those for the middle classes.³⁷ One result of the increase in working-class salaries was the higher cost of domestic help and child-care. Arregger argued, “It is absolutely crucial for a working professional woman with a family to be relieved of some household chores.”³⁸ However, by 1951 the proportion of households with full-time domestic help had fallen by three-quarters compared to 1931.³⁹ This continued to fall in the 1960s, with working-class women eschewing domestic work for jobs in manufacturing and retail.

The research of Fogarty and his colleagues is paralleled in the data from the IPA censuses of 1960, 1966, and 1968. Overall, while the proportion of women rose slightly from 1957 to 1968, this was due to women increasing their presence in the category of “juniors” (entry-level roles for trainees or clerical staff) and secretaries. In higher-level roles that were the domain of college or university graduates, including copywriters, the proportion of women fell. The IPA

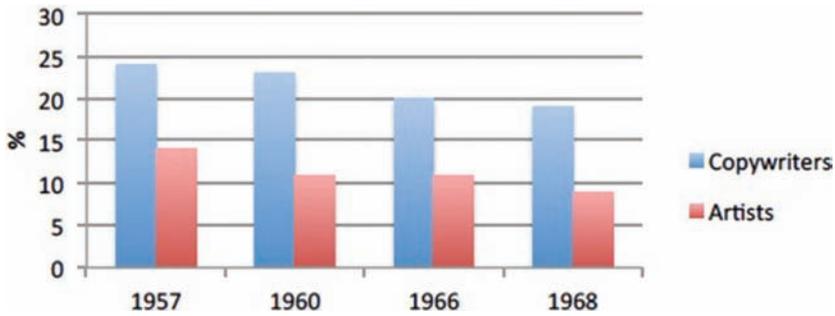


FIGURE 4. Institute of Practitioners of Advertising census analysis of the proportion of women working as writers and artists, 1957–68. Source: IPA Agency Census, HAT/ IPA 26.

data supports Gundry’s view that men were replacing women as copywriters and artists. The proportion of women copywriters declined from nearly 24 percent of all writers in 1957 to 19 percent by 1968, and the proportion of artists declined from 14 percent to less than 10 percent, as figure 4 illustrates.

THE GENERATION GAP, BATTLEAXES, AND NICE MICE

Fogarty et al. identified two overarching factors holding women back from opportunities for advancement: first, a gap in attitudes held by the young postwar generation toward the pioneering “battleaxe” generation of successful interwar women, and second, the attitudes toward work and career of the postwar “nice mice” themselves. Another PEP report, *Women in Top Jobs* (1971), described a different postwar generational divide—namely that neither men nor women identified with the previous generation of managers as role models. In contrast, they were seen as barriers to the changes required for success in the modern world: “The departure of the elderly of either sex from senior posts is seen without regret.”⁴⁰

These same attitudes were replicated in the twenty-three interviews I carried out with men and women working in the postwar advertising and media industries; all voiced frustration regarding the older generation of agency personnel. Peter Doff went into advertising in the late 1940s and was a producer of television and cinema commercials at Inmedia, a subsidiary of the London Press Exchange, one of London’s largest agencies. He argued that the previous generation was not capable of implementing the changes required to bring advertising and marketing into the modern world: “I worked on an account where the

client was Major Egbert-Cadbury, he had flown bi-planes in World War I, and shot down Zeppelins. They couldn't change, they couldn't move."⁴¹ According to Jack Rubins, who joined Dorland Advertising in 1949, the new advertising medium of television was specifically identified as something that the older generation could not adapt to: "Commercial television changed the traditional way of doing things, many of the old media directors were moved aside at that time . . . and a lot of these young people came through."⁴²

A detailed reading of the interview transcripts, however, shows that while both men and women were critical of what they perceived as the previous generation's inability to adapt, they reserved their most personal and derogatory criticism for the women in professional roles. Fogarty et al. report that, in their interviews, the interwar pioneers were most often described as "battleaxes," and the women and men I interviewed adopted similar terminology, describing their female supervisors variously as "very beakish," "ferocious," and "a blue-rinsed horror." One reason that these women were not seen as desirable role models was that, in order to succeed, they had taken on what the interviewees saw as mannish characteristics, making them "un-womanly." Adrian Rowbotham worked at JWT and described one of these interwar battleaxes with rare admiration:

There were women creative heads. I worked for Ursula Sedgewick. I thought she was fabulous—Mrs. Sandhurst, we used to call her. She'd say in the middle of a meeting, "Excuse me gentlemen, I'm just off to have a baby, I'll be back tomorrow morning at 9.30." She didn't expect anyone to notice she was pregnant.⁴³

Although Rowbotham may have admired Sedgewick, Sedgewick moved out of the creative department in the early 1970s to take on a more traditionally female role as executive assistant to the chairman. For the most part, women in my interviews did not aspire to Sedgewick's battleaxe style. Frances Dickens tried to explain this:

The atmosphere was so electric, I was so happy as a girl there, and I didn't feel any sexism myself or have any problems. But I heard about them, I heard about women that had perhaps been made managers within advertising, but they weren't liked a lot, because they had to be incredibly tough, tougher than men.⁴⁴

I asked Sara Sharpe if she had worked with Doris Gundry, and she responded:

I was astonished when I went to the ladies' [room] on the fourth floor to find some of the old-time writers who were still wearing hats (I couldn't

believe it). . . . I do remember Doris, she was sweet—she did wear a hat—she'd been there a hundred years, and she was a darling. I think she found the new order quite difficult.⁴⁵

This exemplifies how postwar women in agencies appeared to accept male-defined managerial attitudes toward women workers. It was only many years later that Sharpe, who worked as a copywriter at JWT, recognized the prejudice inherent in this division between male and female attributes:

The Y&R [Young and Rubicam] man was charming, but he said something rather mysterious at the end of my interview. He said, "You know you have a very masculine mind," and I thought, what on earth is he talking about? I think it was only fifty years later that I was aware of the exquisite condescension of the remark.⁴⁶

Sharpe was not the only woman I interviewed who realized that she had not recognized male bias and sexist attitudes in the 1950s. Ann Lovell, a copywriter, illustrated her lack of awareness of this prejudice with an anecdote:

I remember going to Rivo Electric Cookers with the reps [account managers]. They went off to lunch with the [male] clients and I was given lunch with a secretary. I was surprised but didn't think anything of it. . . . My feminism didn't get aroused 'till the sixties; before that I was very accepting.⁴⁷

Elizabeth Wilson argues that during this period, feminism as a movement was "imprisoned within the constellation of social democratic beliefs": while there were groups promoting women's issues in health, education, and equal pay, there was no overarching movement against the oppression of women.⁴⁸ My interviews support this argument; at the time these women had little awareness of the institutional prejudice that restricted their opportunities for career development. However, the women interviewed would have rejected Fogarty et al.'s derogatory description of them as "nice mice." In hindsight they recognized the sexism and restrictions around their roles, but they all had careers they were proud of. Nevertheless, none of them attained senior roles at their respective agencies, and all eventually left for other careers or full-time motherhood.

A sample of six women cannot claim to be representative of the thousands of women who worked in advertising agencies during this period, but many of the attitudes and assumptions that Fogarty et al. identified came up in my interviews. Fogarty et al. argued that women were not believed by their managers to be committed to long-term careers, and it is clear that in most cases these

women did regard their employment in agencies as a job to fill in the time before marriage and children. Christine Mitchell noted:

I really did want to get married. . . . I was brought up on that basis. My mother said to me, "You can stay on and go to university, or I'll send you to a dance school" (I was very keen on dancing) "or you can become a secretary—but you'll get married anyway." That was what was instilled in us.⁴⁹

An advertising agency was a place with a large pool of eligible men, and there were married couples working at large agencies, including JWT and Crawford. However, although these women found agency life rewarding, some interviewees commented that they would have struggled to combine it with motherhood. This was reflected in the wider population of graduate women: in 1962, 73 percent of married women without children worked full time, but only 10 percent of women with school-age children did so.⁵⁰

Fogarty and his colleagues censured this lack of career ambition and focus on marriage by describing the postwar generation as "nice mice." The English and Swedish sociologists Alva Myrdal and Viola Klein, in their 1968 book *Women's Two Roles: Home and Work*, also expressed this criticism. Klein and Myrdal had built their own careers during the interwar period, and in this book, comparing the roles of women across four countries, they were disapproving of postwar women's lack of ambition: "The first point to be impressed on young girls . . . is that they must take their future work seriously rather than rely on the mental reservation 'of course I can always get out of it when I marry.'"⁵¹ They were arguing that women's roles were socially constructed and, like Fogarty and his colleagues, they recognized the attitudes and prejudices that limited women's opportunities. Nevertheless, there is a persistent thread of reproach in these reports and books that, even with so many hurdles to promotion and career development, postwar women had failed to emulate the success of the previous generation.

What emerged most clearly from my interviews is a lack of desire or confidence among the women to move upward into senior roles and management. The jobs they had, they enjoyed, but they had little interest in promotion. Christine Mitchell, who eventually ran her own property company, had joined McCann Erickson as a secretary, but was offered the job of account executive. This was very unusual, and a considerable rise in status, but after just a few months she resigned:

One of the directors of McCann asked me if I wanted to be an account executive. And of course that was a real step up for me. . . . I worked as an assistant account executive on a new brand of cigarettes they were launching.

We went over to Holland . . . and I worked over there and then I came back to London and then I left, I resigned. They were asking me to do things, no one showed me how to do them. This was writing reports and such like, I had no experience on that side of things and I just felt inadequate and I decided to leave.⁵²

Mitchell claimed to have no desire to become a “career woman,” but nor was she trained or supported in her new role and soon no longer enjoyed working at the agency. Most of these women were there for the fun, the money, and the intellectual stimulation, and when their agency job delivered on these, they stayed. Julia Matcham, who became a successful artist, also resigned rather than take a management position that she did not think she would enjoy:

They sent me to sort out Colgate because they knew I was familiar with the business. It was alright—we saved the account. And they wanted to keep me on it—that’s when I left advertising. It was just going to be more of the same and I’m not the sort of person with the ambition to be managing director or anything serious.⁵³

Just one of my women interviewees, Sara Sharpe, had some characteristics of the battleaxe generation. She disparaged the fears and concerns of her agency peer group:

When I joined JWT I used to think, what’s the matter with all these girls, they’re terribly nice but they come off a different planet. . . . To my horror they were still deferring to men. . . . They would sit and whinge [complain] in corners. I remember saying to one of them, “Why don’t you stop whinging in a corner and go to your group head and negotiate?” and she flew into a most frightful rage and said, “It’s all very well for you.” What it meant was that she didn’t know how to do it. She hadn’t been taught how to be proactive. . . . I was never brought up to think it was my duty to find a nice husband and get married. So I think that compared to a lot of my generation I had a very different attitude.⁵⁴

Sharpe had somehow avoided the educational and parental pressures that socialized women to accept subordinate positions. Nevertheless, disliking her new boss, she eventually left her agency career “to go and be a vagabond in Greece. . . . I sold my house, got rid of my furniture.”⁵⁵

While Gundry believed that men were forcing women like her out of the profession, it seems that the younger generation of women were not motivated to compete with their male colleagues for senior roles. Social pressures to marry and focus their ambitions on family and children limited their expectations for a

career. The census data illustrates that they were successful in attaining this goal: in 1931, only 59 percent of women 25 to 29 years old in England and Wales were married; this rose to 84 percent by 1961.⁵⁶ However, my final section will argue that, in addition to the broader issues affecting women in professional roles, the advent of commercial television advertising had a detrimental impact on women copywriters and artists.

THE RISE OF THE ART DIRECTOR

As previously mentioned, once television was established as a major advertising medium and significant income generator for agencies, the production line model, in terms of both structure and process, had to change. Unlike press advertising, which had been founded on the written and literary skills of copywriters, television was primarily a visual medium, and the copywriter could no longer be the sole lead. This led to copywriters and art directors working together in groups or paired teams, no longer separated by process and geography. This model of paired and team working was copied from the widely admired agency Doyle Dane Bernbach in New York, where it had stimulated much creative success.⁵⁷ By the mid-1960s most of the major agencies had adopted this mode.

However, the working model of an art director and a writer sharing an office caused a problem for women, as they had always formed a minority of personnel in creative departments and mixed-gender teams were rare. The working relationship between a writer and an art director can be very intense, involving long hours spent alone together, and it was considered shocking, and potentially disruptive, for men and women to work together in creative pairings. Sara Sharpe recognized this prejudice but challenged the status quo when she teamed up with a male creative at JWT: "Mike Kidd and I shared an office and everyone was scandalized."⁵⁸ As most agencies would only have had a handful of women copywriters, the pairings of creative teams would have established a barrier where women might have struggled to find partners in such a strongly gendered discipline.

The earlier business model centered on paper-based advertising required copywriters who could write lengthy, fluent copy, even long editorial pieces. But television required short, colloquial, script-led skills, and many women seemed to find it difficult to change their style, as Sara Sharpe explained: "There was a very nice woman called Jean Currie, who had been a colonel in the war. I think that people like Jean Currie shouldn't have been in advertising at all; they were very

competent writers but they weren't advertising writers. They would have been much better being editorial in publishing."⁵⁹ Working processes changed for artists, too, who now had to work with copywriters, gaining greater status as they became part of the process of developing the creative idea. The result of this was the evolution of the art director working as an equal with the writer. Ronnie Kirkwood was an art director in the new television department at S. H. Benson in 1955, and described this change in working practices: "The major change was for art directors—before TV there were visualizers assisted by layout men. . . . And so the barriers fell, it was like the Berlin Wall coming down."⁶⁰

However, many women artists were from art schools, and thus their skills were in drawing and visualization (drawing up the copywriters' creative ideas), not in the creation of advertising ideas. Rather than try to gain positions as art directors, women artists often chose to remain in a role they enjoyed, as visualizers. In addition, art directors were expected to manage the freelance directors of TV commercials, figures that during the 1950s and 1960s included Joseph Losey, Richard Lester, Karel Reisz, and Alexander Mackendrick, who had already had success in directing feature films.⁶¹ Fogarty et al. argued that women were not offered management roles because they were not perceived as capable of managing men, and there is evidence from my interviews that this belief restricted the opportunities for women in advertising agencies, too. I asked Jeremy Bullmore, who became head of television at JWT, whether women had opportunities to become television producers and art directors. His response was that managing male directors and male production teams was a concern when promoting women into executive roles: "It wasn't because she was a woman that I didn't want to give her the job, but these very powerful egos were hard to manage."⁶²

This research illustrates that women in advertising agencies manifested the problems that Fogarty et al. identified: they were not supported or encouraged to acquire senior roles, and they worked in a corporate culture that did not believe that women could manage men. In the affluent postwar world of the late 1950s and 1960s, where one middle-class male wage earner could easily support a wife and children, it must have seemed overwhelming to fight such insurmountable barriers to career progression: "Crude prejudice certainly still exists. . . . Women will not be considered for senior posts . . . [and] will be treated as a class apart." These postwar educated women "left pioneering to the pioneers, refusing to batter their heads against the ceiling."⁶³ However,

the fall in the proportion of women in creative departments was exacerbated by the changes in processes and skill requirements, and the evolution of the role of art director, introduced by the advent of commercial television advertising.

NEW ROLES FOR WOMEN?

While the emergence of television advertising did not benefit women who were copywriters and art directors, it did open up a new role—that of television producer. As a new agency role, it was not, in Fogarty's terms, "sex-typed," and women were successful in moving from secretarial to executive roles in this new position. In 1957 this role was not even included as a discipline in the IPA census, but by 1968, 28 percent of TV, cinema, and radio producers in advertising agencies were women. The role of television producer in an advertising agency was to support the art directors and copywriters, and administrate the finances and logistics of the film shoot; thus it shared many of the same skills as a PA, and was therefore possibly seen as related to familiar "women's work." The role required little direct involvement with the film shoot itself, as the responsibilities of a TV producer in an advertising agency are primarily to interface between agency, client, and production company. Nevertheless, women who had joined television departments as secretaries in the early years now had greater status as producers, as television became a major advertising medium. Sue Bernstein moved from a secretarial role to TV producer at McCann Erickson, and two more of the women I interviewed moved from advertising agencies into advertising film production companies as production assistants, an entry-level role in film production providing support to technicians and producers. Gillian Murray has identified a similar career path for secretaries to become production assistants in her research on women working at ATV, the commercial television station for the Midlands region.⁶⁴

Frances Dickens took a job at Signal Films, a producer of television commercials, but found the environment unpleasant compared to an advertising agency:

People were really unhappy there, because of the director of the company. A lot of very ambitious men, who are very clever, can be quite hard on the staff; they are quick thinking and aren't sensitive and can't be thinking of people's feelings.⁶⁵

After working in an advertising production company, Christine Mitchell went to work for Stanley Kubrick during the production of *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) at Shepperton Studios. She was responsible for a team of

administrators, but recognized that had she been more confident and assertive, she could have acquired a more senior role:

I finished up working for Stanley Kubrick and then I went on to work for Joe Losey and Michael Winner working as a PA and secretary—but I ran all the administration side of the film, and his house, and employed other secretaries. My biggest regret in life, work-wise, is that I never asked Stanley if I could be his producer. I'm sure he would have said yes. . . . Blowing my own trumpet a bit, but I'm pretty sure that if I'd gone to him [Kubrick] and said I want to get away from the administrative side of things it would have happened, but I didn't.⁶⁶

A similar opportunity opened up for women as directors of advertising films at production companies. Unlike feature film direction, which was rarely a female role, a number of women, including Vera Linnecar, Wendy Toye, Nancy Hanna, Joy Frost, and Beryl Stevens, had successful careers as directors of television commercials in the late 1950s and 1960s. But generally they did not start their careers in advertising agencies; instead they had joined film production companies during World War II or shortly afterward to make corporate documentaries, short films, and advertising for cinema. For women, it seems that if they were ambitious for a career in film production, they sought a role in a production company; they rarely transferred from an advertising agency, where the role of television producer required less technical expertise.

WOMEN IN CREATIVE DEPARTMENTS, THEN AND NOW

Gundry was not wholly correct in saying that men were forcing women out; the environment in advertising agencies was impacted by wider shifts in social pressures to focus women's ambitions on marriage and family, and corporate attitudes toward women taking senior management positions. Nevertheless, the advent of commercial television, combined with these wider social and economic pressures, established an environment that was not conducive to women succeeding in building careers in advertising agency creative departments in the 1950s and 1960s.

The advertising industry has seen fundamental changes since the late 1960s, most notably the separation of media buying into specialist, global agencies and the advent of new forms of promotional activity and content, including sponsorship, placement, digital advertising, and search engine marketing (SEM). Terrestrial television is no longer the dominant medium it was from the

1960s to the 1980s, and the full-service agency no longer exists. Nevertheless, advertising has remained an attractive career for women and, by the 1990s, the male-to-female ratio had risen to roughly 50:50 across the industry. However, when examining individual disciplines, the notable exception to this has remained the creative department. Sean Nixon, writing on the gendered culture of creative departments in the 1990s, suggests that “up to 80 per cent of all creative teams were all male. The next most popular pairing were all-female teams, with a smaller percentage of teams being mixed.”⁶⁷

This male bias in creative departments remained a concern to the IPA throughout the 1990s and into the twenty-first century. The proportion of women art directors and copywriters did not grow through the 1970s and 1980s, as it did for other agency disciplines. The IPA carried out studies in 1990 and 2000 to try to understand and address this problem:

As most of those reading this will know, if you walk into the Creative Department of many agencies, a unique culture prevails. The stereotypical laddish atmosphere with pool table is still very much in existence. The Creative Director is almost certainly a man (there are only two women with the title of Creative Director in any Top 20 agency) and female Creatives are few and far between—currently 17% of Copywriters and 14% of Art Directors are women.⁶⁸

The IPA made the point in 1999 that this level of bias to male-dominated creative departments was unique to Britain, and it is disturbing to note that overall women were more successful as creatives in 1957 than 1999. In 2011, copywriters and art directors were combined in the IPA census, but even in the twenty-first century women still only accounted for 22.5 percent of “creatives.”

Postwar women graduates entering the advertising industry were impacted by the factors identified by Fogarty et al., Klein, and Myrdal, and lost out with the changes in processes and disciplines that came with the advent of commercial television advertising. The result of these factors appears to have been the establishment of a discipline within advertising agencies that has remained profoundly unsympathetic to women developing their careers as copywriters and art directors. Nixon’s research suggests that the dominance of male personnel established in the 1960s appears to have been sustained by a belief that stereotypical male characteristics such as errant behavior and childishness are stimulants to creativity, and that these behaviors, and the resultant creativity, are suppressed when women, perceived as controlling and conservative, are employed as copywriters and art directors.⁶⁹

The IPA now hopes that encouraging agencies to adopt more flexible and family-friendly working practices will lead to more women attaining senior management positions. Yet the latest (2016) census report does not make for encouraging reading: “Females account for 30.5% of those in an executive management position, down from 33.1% in 2015. They account for 25.5% of those at the highest level of seniority (Chair/CEO/MD), down from 27.3% and 33.0% of other executive management positions, down from 37.6%.”⁷⁰

While it may not be possible to isolate and quantify the precise impact that the launch of commercial television had on women in creative departments, it was certainly not beneficial according to the available data, combined with our understanding of social and economic factors in play during this period. The decline in the proportion of women in creative departments during the late 1950s and 1960s would persist over the next fifty years, and continues to restrict opportunities for women as writers and art directors. ■

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NOTES

1. Tom Rayfield, *Fifty in 40: The Unofficial History of JWT London 1945–1995* (Radnage Common, England: Rayfield Writers, 1996), 46.

2. Michael Bailey, “The Angel in the Ether,” in *Narrating Media History* (Abingdon, England: Routledge, 2012), 63.

3. Senior women at the BBC included Hilda Matheson, who became director of Talks in 1927, and Isa Benzie, who became foreign director in 1937. See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/historyofthebbc/research/culture/women>.

4. For an overview see “The Inter-war Years: 1918–1939,” Striking-Women.org, <http://www.striking-women.org/module/women-and-work/inter-war-years-1918-1939>.

5. Michael Fogarty, Rhona Rapaport, and Robert Rapaport, *Sex, Career and Family; Including an International Review of Women’s Roles* (London: Allen and Unwin for PEP, 1971), 21, 20, 18.

6. Viola Klein, “The Demand for Professional Womanpower,” *British Journal of Sociology* 17, no. 2 (1966): 183–87; Constance E. Arregger, ed., *Graduate Women at Work: A Study by the Working Party of the British Federation of University Women* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, England: Oriel, 1966), 13.

7. Alva Myrdal and Viola Klein, *Women’s Two Roles: Home and Work* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968), 78.

8. See Sells Ltd. history, History of Advertising Trust, <http://www.hatads.org.uk/catalogue/agencies/24/Sells-Ltd/>.
9. "Ninety Years of WACL," accessed January 29, 2014, <https://wacl.info/about/past-presidents/>.
10. Ethel Wood, "Advertising as a Career for Women," in *Modern Advertising*, ed. Rt. Hon. Viscount Burnham (London: Pitman, 1926), 121.
11. Quoted in Terrence Nevett, *Advertising in Britain: A History* (London: William Heinemann, 1982), 148. *Time and Tide* was a British weekly political and literary review magazine that started out as a supporter of left-wing and feminist causes.
12. Stefan Schwarzkopf, "'A Moment of Triumph in the History of the Free Mind'? British and American Advertising Agencies' Responses to the Introduction of Commercial Television in the United Kingdom," in *Narrating Media History*, ed. M. Bailey (Abingdon, England: Routledge, 2012), 87.
13. David Clampin, *Advertising and Propaganda in World War II: Cultural Identity and the Blitz Spirit* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2014), 31.
14. John Pearson and Graham Turner, *The Persuasion Industry* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1965), 1, section 3.
15. Colin Seymour-Ure, *The British Press and Broadcasting since 1945*, 2nd ed. (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1966), 123.
16. "Newsprint Shortages," *Advertiser's Weekly*, January 6, 1956, 4.
17. See p. 74 in *The Impact of Commercial Television Advertising, 1954–1964*, which I will refer to hereafter as HAT 21/572 with the relevant page number following. The document contains the results of twenty-three interviews I conducted with men and women working in the advertising industry during the first ten years of commercial television, and resides in the History of Advertising Trust Archives, Raveningham Centre, Norfolk, England (hereafter HAT).
18. See Walter Taplin, *The Origin of Television Advertising in the United Kingdom* (London: Sir Isaac Pitman and Sons, 1961) 23; Schwarzkopf, "'A Moment of Triumph in the History of the Free Mind?,'" 86–90.
19. IPA, "A Career in an Advertising Agency" pamphlet, 1958, HAT IPA/26.
20. Jeremy Tunstall, *The Advertising Man in London Advertising Agencies* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1964), 61.
21. HAT 21/572, 66.
22. Arregger, *Graduate Women at Work*; Viola Klein, *Britain's Married Women Workers* (London: Routledge, 1965).
23. PEP formed in 1931. Its members included the zoologist Julian Huxley and Israel Sieff, a director of Marks and Spencer. It influenced aspects of postwar planning, including the National Health Service. The focus on women's employment was driven by a liberal, egalitarian view of human rights and social change and a concern that skills were not being utilized for Britain's economic benefit. PEP evolved into the Policy Studies Institute in 1978.
24. Political and Economic Planning, *Graduate Employment: A Sample Survey, 1956* (London: PEP, Allen and Unwin, 1956), 16.
25. Fogarty, Rapaport, and Rapaport, *Sex, Career and Family*, 405.

26. Elizabeth Wilson, *Only Halfway to Paradise: Women in Post-war Britain 1945–1968* (London: Tavistock, 1980), 44.
27. Klein, “The Demand for Professional Womanpower,” 186.
28. Pauline Pinder, *Women at Work* (London: PEP, 1969), 553.
29. HAT 21/572.
30. HAT 21/572, 65.
31. HAT 21/572, 27.
32. Committee on Higher Education, *Report of the Committee Appointed by the Prime Minister under the Chairmanship of Lord Robbins, 1961–1963*, available at <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/robbins/robbins1963.html>.
33. HAT 21/572, 69.
34. British Entertainment History Project, “Joy Batchelor,” n.d., accessed May 29, 2017, <http://historyproject.org.uk/interview/joy-batchelor>.
35. HAT 21/572, 35.
36. Arregger, *Graduate Women at Work*, 8.
37. “The New Middle Classes,” *The Economist*, September 10, 1955, 837–38.
38. Arregger, *Graduate Women at Work*, 61.
39. Harry Hopkins, *The New Look: A Social History of the Forties and Fifties in Britain* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1963), 155.
40. PEP, *Women in Top Jobs* (London: George, Allen and Unwin, 1971), 48.
41. HAT 21/572, 30.
42. HAT 21/572, 88.
43. HAT 21/572, 87. “Sandhurst” refers to the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, where all British army officers are trained.
44. HAT 21/572, 26.
45. HAT 21/572, 93.
46. HAT 21/572, 92.
47. HAT 21/572, 65.
48. Wilson, *Only Halfway to Paradise*, 164.
49. HAT 21/572, 71.
50. Arregger, *Graduate Women at Work*, 13.
51. Alva Myrdal and Viola Klein, *Women’s Two Roles: Home and Work* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968), 155.
52. HAT 21/572, 69.
53. HAT 21/572, 68.
54. HAT 21/572, 96.
55. HAT 21/572, 95.
56. Fogarty, Rapaport, and Rapaport, *Sex, Career and Family*, 56.
57. Sam Delaney, *Get Smashed: The Story of the Men Who Made the Adverts That Changed Our Lives* (London: Sceptre, 2008), 25; “William Bernbach (1911–1982),” *Advertising Age*, March 29, 1999, accessed August 4, 2015, <http://adage.com/article/special-report-the-advertising-century/william-bernbach/140180/>.
58. HAT 21/572, 96.

59. HAT 21/572, 64.
60. HAT 21/572, 93.
61. Films that included *M* (1951) and *Concrete Jungle* (1960), directed by Joseph Losey; *The Man in the White Suit* (1951) and *The Ladykillers* (1955), directed by Alexander Mackendrick; *We Are the Lambeth Boys* (1958) and *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1960), directed by Karel Reisz; and *The Running Jumping and Standing Still Film* (1959), directed by Dick Lester.
62. HAT 21/572, 15.
63. PEP, *Women in Top Jobs*, 3, 61.
64. Gillian Murray, "Glamour and Aspiration; Women's Employment and the Establishment of Midlands ATV, 1950–1968," *Journal of British Cinema and Television* 10, no. 3 (2013): 635–49.
65. HAT 21/572, 27.
66. HAT 21/572, 70.
67. Sean Nixon, *Advertising Cultures: Gender, Commerce, Creativity* (London: Sage, 2003), 117.
68. Debbie Klein, *Women in Advertising, 10 Years On: Findings and Recommendations of a Study Commissioned by the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising* (London: IPA, 2000).
69. Nixon, *Advertising Cultures*, 95–115.
70. "IPA Publishes 2016 Agency Census," February 16, 2016, accessed November 9, 2017, <http://www.ipa.co.uk/news/ipa-publishes-2016-agency-census>.