

## West Trust Blog Post: “Always the Bride Never the Bridesmaid”

By Zarinna Davila

Fashion was once considered the main concern of women in society. While this concept is out of date in modern thought, there are still strict binary advertising strategies that market fashion for women. Whether through clothing, makeup, hair, or the model, these advertising strategies are still common. Specifically, the choice in the model, oftentimes fashion models reflect the standard of beauty and while the standard of beauty has not fully developed into a broader spectrum, it has made significant advances. The physical requirements of models are something commonly observed through decades by the general public, the "consumers."

However, in further validation of the 31st volume of *Advertising & Selling* (1938), a magazine presenting tips and tricks to companies to better reach their consumers, a young woman is posing as a bride with the text attributing her with being the model most photographed as a bride. She is considered the perfect model because she is youthful, white, innocent, and unmarried in real life. The text goes on to further elaborate that in her contract she is forbidden to marry until the year 1942. While this clause isn't the standards, advertising companies hold to their models today, this was an egregious infringement of Margaret Lane's life. The text also states that Lane is frustrated with this contractual detail proving that it did negatively affect her life, which is an extremely inappropriate act of the company.

At this time in the United States, this type of infringement was acceptable due to strict societal standards. This transgression goes further than just the social standards of a woman's place in the home, this contract is heavily impacted by the residue of the Great Depression, which ended in 1933, and the struggle for married and unmarried women to support themselves and whoever else depended on them. Margaret Lane's contract could have easily been influenced by the Great Depression which only ended five years before this picture was published and probably only a few years prior to the formation of her contract.

During the Depression, women had a very unique and frustrating struggle in the workforce. For married women, their husbands were losing their jobs or having trouble finding one and in most cases, they had children that needed to be cared for financially. Their attempt to make ends meet caused them to be the scapegoat for the frustration of the unemployment of men and single women.

Since attaining a job was difficult for all people at this time in history, married women whose husbands were also working were seen as selfish and a waste of money. Single women had difficulty finding jobs and considered it unfair that married women, whose husband was also working, could be in the workforce receiving two sources of income while single women struggled for one source. Unfortunately, all women were villainized for working during the Depression because men were the breadwinners and there were more job opportunities for women, causing the women to become the providers of their household.

The jobs that were lost in the Depression were mainly occupied by men while the positions women occupied continued to persist, such as seamstresses, teachers, secretaries, nurses, and

working as a maid or cook. Additionally, teaching, nursing, and clerical jobs also had bans on their marital status during and before the Great Depression. While these jobs were consistent the wages women earned were reduced and since there were not many labor unions that included women there were not many regulations on proper wages enforced. Consequently, women's pay was significantly cut and women of color's wage were even lower than the average white woman.

Women occupied jobs that were viewed as "women's work" and were not jobs that men would have occupied regardless of the Depression. At this time, there were no male nurses, teachers, secretaries, or seamstresses, so the aggression married women received from the general public for working while their husband was unemployed was something they couldn't actually change.

When a woman and her husband were both working there was additional aggression towards married women from single women who were unemployed. These single women believed that it was extremely unfair that married women with working husbands were in the workforce and held strikes demanding their removal.

Especially since, married women's wages were often viewed by the public as "pin money," which is a term used to depict the use of the small wages women receive and their use of it on expensive and lavish items. This idea that during the Depression women were going to spend their money on eccentric items instead of necessities was contrary the mindset of women during this period, everyone was conserving what they had and it all started at home where the "women's work" takes place. Women would mend clothes instead of buying new and make their meals last longer. The idea that women would spend money on lavish items instead of the necessities is absurd.

Before the Depression, there were work ban laws on women in some states since the late 1800s. However, due to the outrage of married women in the workforce during the Depression, policies and laws were put into place in more states to prevent them from working. While the Depression ended in 1933, the Marriage bar was not fully prohibited by the U.S. government until 1964.

While there has been a huge progression of women in the workplace, Margaret Lane's story depicts the nonsensical aggression towards married women in the workforce. She was prohibited from getting married until her contract was up and it is easily presumed that once she was married, she probably stopped working due to the notion that a woman's place is in the home. Whether the stipulation in Lane's contract was put due to the influence of the Depression or merely to keep some bizarre type of consistency in their advertising, this action was an infringement on her life and rights; and is merely seen as a little quip in the text under her photo. This infringement is diminished because this bar on her personal and professional life was once considered law.

References:

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