

The Knowing mother: Maternal knowledge and the reinforcement of the feminine consuming subject in magazine advertisements

Abstract

The caring mother is one of the most recurring images of femininity in post-war advertising. We examine how mothers are depicted as knowing consumers in advertisements in *Australian Women's Weekly* and the United Kingdom's *Good Housekeeping* magazines between 1950 and 2010. Our data suggest that although visual representations of maternal consumer knowledge change over this period, assumptions about the responsibilities of mothers endure in the family-related advertisements in these women's magazines. There is a shift over time, however, from a representation of mothers as passive recipients of advice provided by external experts to a more active representation of mothers as experts themselves within both domestic and private spheres. We trace historically how the trope of the *knowing mother* works as a visual discursive device that helps to reinforce not just patriarchal hegemony, but a particular form of maternal hegemony. The hegemony of motherhood presents a particularly desirable/idealised femininity. However, this visual depiction also serves to gender the very way in which maternal knowledge is to be used. While maternal knowledge is depicted as changing from being merely intuitive or practical to subsuming the technique of knowledge or prescribed expertise; the purposes for which such knowledge is used remain firmly situated within the maternal/feminine realm of nurturing and caring consumption for the family. Despite shifts in discourse that appear to increasingly value mothers' knowledge—there exists an enduring assumption that mothers should use their knowledge for domestic caring and consumption, ultimately reinforcing a heteronormativity of the use of women's knowledge that subdues even expert knowledge for a domestic purpose.

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Introduction

To know motherhood is impossible without understanding the complex intertwining of consumption and the marketplace in their lives and the lives of their children (Cook 2009). The blurring of motherhood and the market is further reinforced by those who refer to how the ideologies of motherhood are disseminated by popular magazine advertising (Johnston and Swanson 2003, 2006). While the caring mother is one of the most recurring images of femininity in post-war advertising, the gendered and social norming representations of the good mother are especially evident in relation to her consumption (Cairns, Johnston and Mackendrick 2013). This body of work is particularly critical of the hegemonic depiction of the maternal femininity (Arendell, 1999) represented and valorized by popular culture. Thus, it has been argued (in particular) by feminist scholars that ideologies of patriarchy, of hegemony of maternal femininity, of intensive mothering, and more lately of the neoliberal consuming mother and of the 'good mother' have all shaped 'appropriate femininities' - the way mothers are expected to know and behave - (Cairns, Johnston and Mackendrick 2013). We build on this work and examine longitudinally and across two cultural sites, what the implications of these discursive formations mean in particular for representations of women and their knowledge.

By identifying enduring themes and key shifts, we trace how the trope of the *knowing mother* is a discursive device for framing both motherhood and the responsibilities of mothers for domestic labour in women's magazines. By *discursive device* we mean the deployment of particular imagery, language, metaphors, and visual tropes that converge on specific desirable

maternal practices and consumption. Despite shifts in discourse that appear to democratise caring work within the family—and increasingly seem to value maternal knowledge—there exists an enduring assumption that mothers *should* be responsible for domestic caring (De Vault, 1991). Mothers are increasingly positioned as required to acquire ever more expertise and skills to professionalise their mothering, thereby becoming informed and engaging in ‘intensive mothering’ (Hayes, 1996). All of this appears to empower the mother in her role. However, this increase in the breadth of maternal knowledge depicted in advertisements from our data in popular culture is displayed as being used purely for maternal purpose. It is this persistent gendered depiction of the use of consumption knowledge (Cairns, Johnston and Mackendrick 2013) we argue that ultimately reinforces the traditional hegemony of maternal femininity (Schippers, 2007; Budgeon, 2014).

We begin by reviewing studies that have examined images of mothers and femininities in popular culture to illustrate how discursive formations in popular consumer culture legitimise specific femininities and practices over others. We discuss the way in which these cultural discourses contribute to what it means to be a mother and identify several research questions arising out of this analysis of the literature. We then shift our attention to the visual analysis of advertising in two popular, long-running magazines in two cultural contexts - placing a discursive lens on shifts in the depiction of mothers in advertisements in *Australian Women's Weekly* and the United Kingdom's *Good Housekeeping* between 1950 and 2010. We identify recurring maternal themes in popular advertising representations of mothers and motherhood and unpack how these referent images change historically over the decades, appearing to sometimes empower and sometimes reinforce existing hierarchies in depicting the mothers. We focus in on one key recurring representation of mothers as ‘knowing’ and knowledgeable. Finally, we identify the exclusionary ways that these representations shape how mothers are

allowed to be seen as 'knowing', and what the kinds of knowledge they are seen as having and using. We conclude by discussing how the use of this one representational trope of the mother in magazine advertisements is a discursive device that continues to emphasise the primary maternal responsibility and the constraining of maternal knowledge.

Background and Context

Women's Magazines as a Discursive Context

Women's magazines represent a popular cultural forum for discourses about how women should perform their maternal/domestic identities. The moral discourses around motherhood have helped to construct particular maternal femininities focused around normative class, race, and gender elements (May, 2008; Perrier, 2012; Pickard and Rogers, 2012; Törrönen and Rolando, 2017). Magazines have over time repeatedly positioned women in terms of their domestic responsibilities such as cooking and cleaning, highlighting their subject position in the context of family life (Törrönen and Rolando, 2017: 796). DeVault (1991:1) specifically implicates the image of caring, consuming women as being key to this construction of women's social reality in family life.

In the Australian context, writers from Germaine Greer (1971) to Susan Sheridan (2001) have highlighted the role of women's magazines in shaping feminine subjectivity in the consumer era. Central to this identity construction is the depiction of the role of the mother in the domestic sphere of consuming for the family e.g. her knowledge of cooking, caring, and cleaning 'correctly'. Women's magazines have played a key part in helping socialise women into these specific roles. Hochschild (2003) and Takahashi (2014) identify women's magazines as cultural intermediaries that not only instruct mothers in correct maternal

practices but serve as a space for comparison to ideals which, in turn, establish normative and idealistic benchmarks of maternal practice. Knowing how to consume correctly for the family has become a major definer of female identity. As Miller and Rose (1996) contend, creating maternal and familial responsabilisation for health and wellbeing through appropriate consumption was key to creating demand for consumer goods at the household level. This contributed to the economic purposes of the new consumer goods industry; and helped reconcile women to staying at home in the suburbs during the post–World War II period (Arendell, 2000).

The Discursive Maternal Consuming Subject

Cultural discourses help to produce particular imagery within the popular imagination of what a mother should know. Discourses of mothering are produced through “practices, ideas and representations of what it is to be a mother” (Woodward, 2003: 21). When readers identify with this depicted ideal and choose to aspire to it as a norm, they become subjected to the discourse.

The maternal subject is produced, at least in part, by the circulated referent images of consumption in magazine advertisements (McCracken, 1993; Odland, 2010; Winship, 1987). The imagery is dynamic and changes with the times and shifting cultural discourses. More recently, we have witnessed an increasing emphasis on individual responsibility in maternal consuming knowledge (Rose, 1992; Schneider and Davis, 2010a,2010b).

Individual Responsibilisation of the Maternal Consumption Intermediary

In the past, appropriate maternal knowledge was offered by magazines via their advertisements and advice columns, backed by a (male)expert (e.g. doctors, dentists,

nutritionists, celebrities, psychologists, and specialists in child care). The ‘good’ consuming mother would follow the expert’s recommendations of a particular brand of toothpaste, vitamin, laxative, behavioural treatment, diet, or dress. She would assimilate this knowledge to consume correctly (Keller, 1994). The prescriptive/instructive tone of many women’s magazines of this period reflect moral aspects of choosing certain lifestyles (Rose, 1999).

However, this form of expert knowledge/instruction to mothers has changed over the decades. Apple (1995: 94) uses the phrase “ideology of scientific motherhood” to describe how scientific knowledge comes to involve “normalising judgements.” (Murphy, 2003: 438). Scientific ‘truths’ are thus discursively used to move mothers toward ‘choosing’ socially desirable maternal practices. These discourses are disseminated widely within popular consumer culture to normalise specific (not exclusively scientific) consumer knowledge in the context of managing families. Apple (1995) describes this as a movement from a strategy where mothering is shaped by professional/scientific experts, to one where the responsibility for the family’s consumption comes to rest squarely with the individual mother and her knowledge. Lemke (2001: 201) shows that responsabilisation serves as a technique for self-regulating risk in populations whereby the individual becomes responsible for self-care across a range of domains (e.g. ill-health; unemployment and poverty). Authoritative knowledge may be offered on why one consumption choice may be superior to another, and yet the maternal consumer seems to make a free/ informed choice. The market place is thus organized “*through acts of choice*” (Rose, 1993: 295–296). In this context, mothers in commercial advertisements are represented as consumption intermediaries. This is not unlike Takahashi’s (2014) view of mothers as being ideologically constructed as cultural intermediaries who connect their families to the cultural world. Mothers are seen as also managing this “commodity frontier” for their families (Jennings and Brace-Govan, 2014: 89)

mediating the family's interaction with the consumption world.

Questions and Research Approach

Arising from this our research pursues two key questions: First, what are the key discourses around mothers/mothering in magazine advertisements that persist historically across the decades? Second, do these changing discourses emphasise particular consumer representations of mothers/mothering over others? Finally, after identifying the 'knowing mother' trope from our initial analyses, we examine in detail the way maternal knowledge is represented in these discourses.

In this study we elicit common discursive devices across two cultural contexts: Australia and the United Kingdom. Our purpose is not to see how readers respond to these discourses. Rather our purpose is to unpick how these representations, shaped by the commercial world of magazine advertising, place particular emphasis on what mothers can, should, need to know; and, how this maternal knowledge is depicted as being used over time. Our analyses are of how some maternal ways of knowing are discursively constructed as ideal by advertising images and text in two magazines. We see discourse as more than just "practices which systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault 1972: 49). Discourses of maternal representation in magazine advertisements have powerfully constitutive outcomes (Litosseliti and Sunderland, 2002:13). In addition, we examine how the maternal reader is invited to examine her own consumption practices compared with this ideal. In this way we uncover how particular discursive devices are circulated to privilege specific forms of maternal knowledge.

Method

We chose Australia and the UK as sites which are geographically distant but share historical/cultural links, to see whether similar discourses appear in both sites. If discursive themes appear in one site longitudinally, but not in the other, we could establish the use of the device within a localised cultural context and explore reasons for any divergence across the two sites. We chose Australia's *Australian Women's Weekly* (*AWW*) and the United Kingdom's *Good Housekeeping* (*GH*). *GH* and *AWW* have largely equivalent readerships in terms of age, class, and circulation. *AWW* is a national media institution. In 1950s and 1960s, *AWW* had the highest circulation per capita of any women's magazine in the English-speaking world (Sheridan, 2001). Its print circulation may have diminished in the online era, but with several online related publications (such as *AWW Food*) it still has close to 1.5 million print readers and nearly 1 million online readers. It is the women's magazine with the largest print readership in Australia (Roy Morgan, 2017)¹. *AWW* is focused on women and the domestic sphere. The magazine's original aims were explicitly "to create interests for women", to help with "home worries, personal worries, social and dress difficulties" (*AWW*, 10 June 1933, p. 2). Today it describes itself as "the trusted voice of Australian women for over eight decades" (Bauer Media Group, 2018). *Good Housekeeping* (*GH*) was chosen for similar reasons. Its declared purpose is to be the source of "information, entertainment and expert advice from cookery, the home and family, to fashion, relationships, plus, health and beauty" (Magstore, 2018). *GH* is also identified by Johnston and Swanson (2003) as having a high subscription amongst women of childbearing age.

¹ <https://www.baueradvertising.com.au/brands/australian-womens-weekly/>
2018 print readership: **1,481,160**; online readership **871,495**; social connections; **947,611**

Please see how Australian print magazine readership has bucked the conventional trends and remained relatively stable over the years. <http://www.roymorgan.com/findings/7307-australian-magazine-readership-june-2017-201708101556>

In collecting content from *AWW* (Australia) and *GH* (United Kingdom) we primarily sampled advertisements but also examined editorial columns/ articles on the topics of motherhood, mothers, children, family and the home. In this analysis we focus primarily on the advertisements but utilise the contextual threads from surrounding editorials to understand the overall purpose or context for the advertisements. As McCracken (1993, p.3) suggests in the genre of women's magazines, advertising and editorial are inextricably intertwined to create meaning. Thus, we analysed the advertising within the landscape of the surrounding and related editorials. Utilising a historical slice sampling approach, we used non-advertising content to contextualise the advertisements in terms of identifying key social, political, and cultural trends and movements (Martens and Scott, 2005; Sheridan et al., 2002). For *AWW*, we included the first year of each decade from 1950- 2010 and every weekly issue each month until 1980, then each monthly issue in 1990, 2000, and 2010 (monthly publication commenced in 1983). In the case of *GH*, we sampled all monthly issues for the year included in the sample (1950, 1960, 1970, 1980, 1990, 2000, and 2010). We investigated each decade to establish the shifting constructions over time during this very significant post-war seven-decade period. As Martens and Scott (2005: 384) show in their study of changing representations of cleaning in *GH*, such an approach seems to capture key turning points in each decade, allowing for the identification of discursive shifts. This data is therefore an important collection of sociocultural representations of popular thinking of the times depicted in these two sites.

Analyses

We used a method of visual discourse analysis based broadly on Gillian Rose's (2016) ideas. Few consumption studies have used (visual) discourse analysis, and this paper builds on these

(Davis et al., 2016; Maasen et al., 2006; Marshall et al., 2013, 2014; Rose, 2016; Schneider and Davis, 2010b; Schroeder, 1998, 2003; Schroeder and Zwick, 2004). We use *visual discourse* in the sense of a cultural reading centred on visuality and representation that shapes what these representations are urging us to see as well as not see (Rose, 2013: 30–31). In attempting to keep the complexity of (dis)continuity and (dis)appearance of the key threads of discourse distinct, we examined visuality as well as visibility of the image and its accompanying (con)textual landscape (Rose, 2013: 32). In doing this we attempt to reveal the complex weave of “(l’ensemble) of discourses actually pronounced” (Foucault, 1989: 27, 45). The three UK based authors independently coded the *GH* data, and the *AWW* data was independently coded by the two Australian authors, to ensure cultural familiarity with the content/context. We initially focused on becoming familiar with the texts and images by reading and viewing and making initial notes on the advertisements. We then coded the images on mothers/motherhood and the context individually (Miles and Huberman, 1994: 9). Using Odland’s (2010) frame we included all mentions of the words *mother/ mom/ mum*, all images depicting woman and child(ren) together and uses of ‘*you*’ in advertisements for children’s products where ‘*you*’ appeared directed at the mother. During this analysis we read the related articles and columns focusing on recurring words and images (Rose, 2003: 159). We then re-examined the data to identify the main themes based on the previously identified keywords/ images. Finally, we compared the key themes to arrive at a consensual and consistent essential set of themes.

Results

In this section we first present the overall theme of ‘knowing’ and then turn to the varied representations of maternal knowing that emerged from the analyses across time. In the early

years of advertising, maternal knowledge was portrayed as instinctive knowledge, (Apple 2006 and Ehrenreich and English 2005), drawing from some communal, intergenerational innate women's understanding. In our sample we trace the changes in the way in which maternal knowledge has been depicted since. In advertisements from the 1950s we uncover the construction of scientific motherhood (Apple, 1995), in which (mostly male) experts instruct mothers on how to care for their children. For most of this period caring knowledge remains a woman's domain, whereas scientific knowledge remains in the powerful male domains of medicine/ science. Following the Feminist movements, in the 1960s- 1970s we see women distancing themselves somewhat from the home, and caring knowledge. However, scientific expertise remains held within the masculine domain (Zaslow, 2012). In the 1980s- 1990s and beyond we find mothers managing the multiple demands of their home and work domains.

In the next sections we discuss the advertisements in more detail.² We describe illustrative samples of the key discourses around maternal knowledge and identify particular representations of mothers and divergences across the two sites. The main themes that emerged from our coding are listed in Table 1. The three predominant themes are mother as protector; mother as professional self; mother as informed expert. We do not claim that these advertisements represent all magazine advertisements during the period. We suggest that visual display and descriptions of gendered knowing allow us to show how women, at different points in time, have been invited to view knowing how to consume for the family. In particular, we find the visual and textual material useful for reflecting on the relationship between representation and a maternal knowing.

² Unfortunately, because of copyright restrictions we are unable to reproduce any visual images from the advertisements themselves but we have provided links to some of the AWW advertisements where available from the National Library Australia digital archives (TROVE Collection)

Serial Constructions of the Knowing Maternal Subject

(Note: Due to copyright restrictions we are unable to reproduce the advertisements themselves. For the AWW we have included links for the 1950, 1960, 1972, 1980 ads from the National Library of Australia Digital archives)

Our analysis uncovers the changing constructions of motherhood across time and cultural contexts. Although the caring, the working, the independent, the informed, and the guardian mother all appear at various points in time, some recurring and enduring meanings tie the periods together across both sets of data (see Table 1).

[Insert Table 1 about here]

In looking at the key tropes in the two magazines over the decades between 1950- 2010 (see Table 1), we identify changing representations of maternal knowing, as being informed, and solving problems.

1950s–1970s: Mother as Protector

1950s: The Knowing Mother as Caring and Nurturing

A 1950s advertisement for eggs from *AWW* (19 August 1950, p. 70)

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/aww/read/319234#page/70/mode/1up>

shows a happy, wholesome looking mother by a farmhouse wearing a gingham dress with a basket of eggs. To her right is a signpost prominently declaring “Made and packaged by Nature Ltd”. To the left is a male doctor/expert (his white coat signifying his professional

expertise) pointing to the eggs. The text below is offered “from a medical point of view” and reads “Eggs contain vitamins A, B, D, E, F, G, H, K and B12 ... for example it is especially suitable for the formation of haemoglobin in the blood, ..gives your child rosy cheeks, makes her look happy and healthy”. This mother looks happy and secure in her knowledge that her consumption choice is legitimised and “doctor” approved”. Similarly, the Heinz baby foods advertisement in the *GH* 1950 February (and in the April, May, and July issues) shows a gingham-clad mother smilingly gazing toward the reader while holding her healthy looking baby aloft. The copy begins with a reassurance that ‘doctors and clinics recommend introducing strained foods into the diet at this stage’. It then extols the patience of motherhood: “No mother minds how much time she takes over her baby’s food, but the fact is ... few kitchens are equipped ... [Heinz] not only helps you have a happy, sturdy baby but gives you more time to enjoy him” (February 1950, p. 3). The advertisement acknowledges the mother’s maternal caring efforts but suggests that consuming Heinz with its expert knowledge and hygienically produced food protects her family. This echoes Apple’s (1995) depiction of scientific motherhood.

These images highlight the pressures of intensive mothering (Hays, 1996; Henwood et al., 2010). The knowledgeable mother is one who happily sacrifices her time to make the right choices for her family but who knows her knowledge is instinctive so relies on scientific experts.

1960s: Protective Knowing

The protector theme continues into the 1960s. An *AWW* advertisement for Lux laundry flakes (1 June 1960, p. 24) <https://trove.nla.gov.au/aww/read/221024#page/24/mode/lup> shows a fashionable mother in pastels bent protectively over a toddler on her lap, confident

in the knowledge she is keeping her baby safe by washing her clothes with Lux. “LUX IS SO SAFE” declares the text. The mother’s protective figure is turned away from the reader, in a ‘canting’ position (signifying deference or subordination) (Goffman, 1979), as she bends to her maternal role (Donzelot, 1977; Hays, 1996; Woodward, 2003). In a *GH* advertisement for Domestos (toilet cleaner) the aproned/kneeling mother holds her child within her protective arms. The main text reads “The only type of lavatory cleaner that kills ALL germs overnight” (April 1960, p. 105) and reveals the “scientific tests” prove only Domestos kills “all” germs. An image to the right shows the mother scrubbing the toilet. The text declares “protection for children” and goes on to explain “parents are not aware that this may be dysentery, ..frequently caught from hands that have touched the infected parts of the lavatory ... clinical tests tell us so.” The experts inform maternal (consumer) knowledge helping her achieve her maternal caring (Takahashi, 2014).

1970s: Omniscient Mother

Protection, safety and nurturing continue as themes associated with mothers during the 1970s. August, Wednesday 2nd 1972 *AWW* (p. 8)

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/aww/read/225243#page/84/mode/1up>

shows two pictures in an ad for Weetbix. The first, evoking old black-and-white photographs of childhood, shows a little boy and is contrasted with a full-colour picture of a man on skis. The copy reads “Feed the man inside your little boy—with Weetbix ... He needs the kind of food nature meant men to grow strong on— like Weetbix. Now with twice as much thiamine, Riboflavin and Niacin and iron as wheat itself.” Here maternal knowledge is being invited to draw on the scientific (e.g. the listing of vitamins) to help her son to achieve his adult potential. Scientific language is evoked to show how instinctive maternal knowledge can be scientifically grounded and used to protect her son not just today but into the future.

A 1970s *GH* ad exemplifies the mother who has all the answers.. The visual shows an adolescent boy in the foreground with his hands on his hips and a concentrated look on his face (March 1970, p.21). A thought bubble shows him wondering “When do I start going out with girls?” His mother stands behind him, arms crossed looking toward her son. Her eyes have a knowing twinkle as she interprets her son’s posture “I must get more cheese” (seen as a thought bubble). This mother knows what is best for her child’s future. Although this maternal knowing (Ruddick, 1989) is instinctive, it is reinforced by the unseen expert in the text: “Do you know that a boy of 16 needs as much protein as his father?” Here we see two types of knowledge begin to come together. No longer is the mother the passive recipient of expert knowledge; she combines her instinctive understanding with the (unseen) expert’s voice, making her omniscient in her knowing (Murphy, 2003).

1980s–1990s: New Woman: Mother as Professional Self

1980s: Multifaceted Facilitating and Knowing Mother

In the 1980s, readers are presented with the efficient mother who knows exactly how to manage her private (family) and professional (work) life without compromising her family (Coste, 2016). An *AWW* advertisement for Scotties tissues (17th December 1980, p.86) <https://trove.nla.gov.au/aww/read/190024#page/90/mode/1up> shows a woman at an office desk, beaming happily, with a diary open in front of her. The main headline reads “I made up my mind’ it then narrates in first person the story of how the working mum in the image - woke up one morning and realised that since her children were at school she did not have much to do, so got herself a job, new clothes and a new hairdo, and how that has changed

things for her. Now she brings this change to the way she shops ‘I look around for things like Scotties tissues. You know Scotties tissues are soft and gentle- they don’t fall apart the minute you use them. And I find that’s a nice change. I wonder why I never noticed them before, I guess I was set in my ways- but that’s all different now” This is reminiscent of Woolf’s depiction of how mothers need to bring their professional skills into the home to manage their family (Woolf, 2009). We begin to see this meshing of the domestic and professional worlds in a *GH* Tupperware advertisement of the 1980s. Neo-traditional and economic nurturer images (Keller, 1994) appear in this Tupperware advertisement from the Thatcher era. It shows a well-dressed woman walking two children and a dog. Detailed text explains how to become a Tupperware dealer: “The beauty of being a Tupperware dealer is the way it fits with your family life. You can work as much as suits you, making friends, having fun and always reaping the rewards for yourself and your family at the same time” (March 1980, p. 27). It ends with the text “Tupperware, where family and pleasure come together.” This mother knows how to combine her multifaceted skills to provide financially, while still foregrounding her family. The 1980s shift toward the professionalisation of the knowing mother. This mother is the efficient manager of her family. These mothers uses their knowledge for the good of the family rather than for individual ends (Ruddick,1983).

1990s: The Knowing Mother as Feminine Multitasker

An *AWW* ad for Edgell vegetables (November 1990, p. 250) is in story format. The colour image (“Real food for real people”) shows a mother serving her ‘blended’ family at the table (echoing the 1950s mother standing to serve her family). A recipe reads “Family meals can be sooo simple.” The story (as a dense textual narrative) follows “Janie Bartlett, busy advertising account director” talking about her inspiration to live healthily and her work for the Lifetrack program for the Australian Cancer Society, sponsored by Edgell. Smaller

images depict Janie as a multitasking career woman who still serves her family nutritious meals while catering to individual preferences. Her professional knowledge from work enables her to nurture her family. A *GH* Filofax ad (January 1990, p. 45) shows a mother in the kitchen with breakfasting children, her suited husband ready to leave for work. The wife/mother on the phone in a ‘licensed withdrawal’ pose (Goffman, 1979), as she holds up her hand to stop her husband from interrupting. It shows the mother/worker how to organise her busy life: “Whether you have to call that neighbour to ferry your eldest to school, or your husband needs that suit cleaned by Thursday ...” The Filofax helps her know how to keep her children/ husband organised, as the text says: “Busy mother seeks Secretary, Accountant, Travel agent, Dietician and Linguist to help organise successful family.” The image shows the multifaceted, all-knowing, professionalised mother (Schowalter, 2012). From the nerve centre of her mothering (the kitchen) she can link her family and professional life using her Filofax. This form of the knowing mother is the epitome of what Graham (1997) describes as ‘the language of consumption’ (p.545) creating a consuming mother, who brought home her professional, organising skills and knowhow to consume efficiently for her family.

2000s–2010s: Mother as Informed Expert

2000s: Serious yet Companionable Knowing Mother

An *AWW* So Natural soy ad (May 2000, p. 187) shows a mother lying on a rug, her head propped on one arm, her daughter astride her back, her son and dog behind her. Her body lies between her children and the viewer. The headline demands, “So you claim your food is natural, but can you prove it?” The advertisement explains that “it’s hard to find companies to back up what they stand for ... So Natural is grown the old-fashioned way, not genetically modified.”. Similarly, so does the *GH* (December 2000, p.259) UpJuice advertisement. It

assumes maternal knowledge of the importance of calcium for growing children, and obscure European fishing policy (even if her children do not care). In the 1950s mothers relied on an expert providing knowledge, now they are required to become experts themselves in negotiating their way around complex scientific facts and sifting through claims about GMO foods. The expert/ mother has coalesced into one person (Murphy, 2003) The mother here knows how to be companion to her children while being exceptionally well informed. Although this seems to indicate a different kind of knowing from earlier decades, and an internalisation of expertise, in which the subject and the authoritative knowledge have merged, the mother is still firmly in the domestic sphere. This appears an empowering representation; however, she is represented not as a nutritionist or agri-scientist (with knowledge situated in the external professional sphere) but as a mother who strives to understand the scientific world, the better to protect her children and family. This professional knowledge is used for maternal purpose in the interest of the family NOT for individual advancement.

2010s: Prescient, Problem-Solving Knowing Mother

The 2010s an *AWW* advertisement for Solashop solar energy (August 2010, p. 48) shows the mother holding a child in a green setting, smiling, reassured she has done the right thing by installing solar power. The title reads “Good for your pocket, good for the planet, good for you!” In a *GH* ad for Persil laundry detergent (April, 2010, p. 147), a mother is hanging out freshly washed sheets in a garden. The inset image has two children playing around the sheets titled “small in size, big in results” The main copy reads “have you switched to Persil small and mighty yet? a little goes a surprisingly long way”. The detailed text extolls the savings of using Persil both financially and in terms of less packaging and waste. Both mothers know exactly what to consume for their family. They weigh up the environmental and financial

impact to make expert consumer choices. The mothers are assumed to have expertise and the specialised knowledge that they are represented as using exclusively to consume well on behalf of their children and their environmental future, thus fulfilling their primary (natural) maternal role. In the new millennium, we see the consolidation of expert and mother into one. This new representation of maternal knowledge encompassing the practical and the expert can be seen as a major shift in recognising women's place as holders of scientific knowledge, not just around care of the family but around sustainability, the environment, educational pedagogy, scientific understandings of illness and well-being. However, this responsabilisation is at once individualising and oppressive. It places the mother in a position of personally needing to know everything but being seen to use this professional knowledge for a singular maternal purpose. As Zaslow (2012) and Murphy (2003) point out, mothers who "need to know" resist the experts through their own practices and "carve out the spaces" (Code, 1991) where their knowledge counts and is woven into and drawn from their own practice.

All these advertisements show variant, but consistent themes of maternal knowing in the images. We can trace the transformation of the maternal subject from one who is informed by experts about how to consume for her family to one who becomes an expert herself. However, this knowledge is not used in a professional role (doctor or environmental scientist) but is always shown as knowledge harnessed for a maternal purpose. It is a professional level of knowing acquired, not for professional careers, but to function adequately as a (consuming) mother.

Discussion, Contributions, and Conclusion

This work makes three distinct additions to understanding the way women are represented as maternal subjects in popular culture. Firstly, we identify the distinct, enduring discursive formation of the consuming ‘*knowing mother*’ across two cultural sites. Second, we add to the understanding of how hegemonic maternity is reinforced using this discursive device, Third, within this discursive device, we highlight the use of maternal knowledge as a means of maintaining this hierarchy amongst femininities, privileging the maternal by encouraging the confined use of this knowledge to the consuming for the family domain.

The Knowing Mother as an Enduring Discursive Device

The mother who listens to the voice of the knowledgeable expert—the “ideology of scientific motherhood” (Apple, 1995: 94)—although present in the early decades (1950-1970) is less visible in the later decades. From 2000- 2010, a period corresponding with an intensification of neoliberal capitalism, we see that the authoritative expert is replaced by the mother as expert herself. This mother has a maternal knowing that is both instinctive and scientific, of a professional standard. It is no longer enough to follow an expert’s instructions passively as the 1950s mother did; the mother needs to know enough to be able to question the climate change experts, experts on cognitive development, and the companies producing GMO food. This responsabilisation takes an individualised and consuming form. Each knowing mother is a multi-expert professional who knows exactly how to consume to preserve her children from ill health and germs; to save the planet from degradation; and how to identify GMOs. As we show in our summary of subthemes (Table 1), the type of knowing changes across the seven decades of magazine advertising and the two sites examined. However, in each instance, we see how this device of the ‘knowing mother’ is presented to readers as an invitation to become a knowing mother too. In some (notably the 1970s *GH* cheese advertisement) the

mother seems to be complicit, engaged in knowing/ playful communion with readers (mothers), inviting them into this complicit discourse of knowing consumption. After the 1970s through to the 2010s, the representation shifts from the traditional/ pre-feminist maternal subject (who knows how to consume vicariously for the family) and through the feminist discourses of the 1960s/1970s, to accommodating the multifaceted, professional mother. Finally, from the 1980s we see the emergence of a neoliberal form of the maternal subject who freely chooses to be a knowing mother, making individualised, informed and responsible consumption choices for her family. Because we see this knowing mother appear in various forms across the two cultural sites and consistently across seven decades, we suggest that this is an enduring discursive formation. This knowing mother, we posit, is an idealised femininity that creates a normative discourse of which readers are invited to become a part. Given that our longitudinal examination spanned a 70-year period, we have attempted to develop a historical timeline of images. We reveal how images of the knowing mother are used to present readers with particular depictions: of women using that knowledge exclusively for maternal purpose, and ultimately how that knowledge confines her to the domestic space and purpose. Her knowing is used in the service of her primary role as mother, locking her within the domestic consumption sphere and subjected within the hegemony of maternal femininity and gender.

Understanding How Hegemonic Femininity Is Reinforced

Our study charts historically the changing portrayals of mothers that still reinforces the traditional hegemony of motherhood, especially in depicting what kinds of knowledge and how women's knowledge is to be used for specific maternal consuming purposes. Schippers (2007: 94) defines hegemonic femininity as consisting of feminine characteristics "that establish and legitimate a hierarchical and complementary relationship to hegemonic

masculinity and that, by doing so, guarantee the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.” Within this hegemony, idealised motherhood is a particularly privileged femininity (Newman and Henderson 2014). Reinforcing this relational femininity, and central to it, are forms of gendered consuming knowledge. We identify the historically persistent discursive formation of the knowing mother as a means of depicting socially appropriate use of maternal knowledge and show that although this knowledge changes to accommodate shifting values of time and place, it remains bent toward the pursuit of an ideal: the selfless maternal, ultimately strengthening the overall traditional gendered hegemony.

Maternal Knowledge as a means of managing the hegemony of femininity over time

There is a naturalised consensus that feminine thinking is emotional or intuitive (Code 2006). Code emphasises the need to examine how “knowing subjects and communities are themselves socially/communally produced within power-saturated structures of domination and subordination” (Code, 1991: 9). Mothers themselves sometimes push against this hegemony of knowledge in defying the expert/technical knowledge around child-rearing to embrace a more practical lived knowledge (Murphy, 2003). However, we see in our data that this merely reinforces some of the hegemonic ordering around the intuitive kind of consuming maternal knowledge that it is seen as appropriate for mothers to have. Thus, we present the idea of the knowing mother as reinforcing what Newman and Henderson (2014) refer to as the “hegemony of motherhood” and beyond this to an essentialist gendering of maternal knowledge itself. This *hegemony of maternal knowing* is manifest in many variants across the decades of our data. However, the very specific (consuming) ways of depicting maternal knowing are deployed to clearly fence the domains within which such women’s knowledge (especially expertise or professional forms of it) should be practised.

We present the concept of the hegemony of maternal knowing to understand how the idealisation of maternal femininity in advertising in women's magazines over seven decades, remained enduring, morphing in shape, but persistent in its central maternal purpose. Consequently, such an enduring discursive formation held maternal knowledge within the domestic consumption sphere as part of constructing the mother as the key familial 'purchasing agent' (Marchand 1985; Graham 1997).

Conclusion

Advertising provides seemingly empowering, evolving visual displays of maternal knowing over the decades examined. By constructing the image of maternal knowing (both professional and instinctive) in gender bounded ways these advertisements ultimately limit maternal use/display of knowledge confined within the consumption and domestic maternal sphere. Mothers have over the decades been subject to intense ideological scrutiny that has shaped their mothering and consumption practices to primarily focus on how 'correctly' they consume for the family (Cairns, Johnston and Mackendrick 2013).

We build on this understanding of that consuming subjectivity of motherhood as shaped by popular culture and norms, focusing as Cook (2011) suggests on making central not just mothers and motherhoods and their intrinsic linkages to consumption; but looking beyond these advertising representations to see what purposes those discourses serve. The commercial and economic purpose of keeping the mother consuming for the family is clearly articulated by past research, in what Cook (2011) calls the 'inescapability of maternal consumption'. So, we focus on the representational implication of this consuming mother, the images of advertising that holds mothers to knowing in a particular way; holding knowledge of particular kinds and the using such knowledge only in confining contexts.

Advertisements speak empoweringly to their women readers of the possibilities of their knowledge. They also reinforce the feminine purpose of such knowledge, expertise, and professionalism. Moreover, this historical perspective reveals the endurance of particular gendered representations women's knowledge deemed important only in areas seen as domestic and less than that of men's knowledge in key external and public domains, echoing the hegemony of gender itself. Women's knowledge is never used for personal gain/fame but harnessed to the highest purpose: that of maternal consumption for the family. Readers variously accept or resist these representations. However, the strength and endurance of such cultural texts needs to be highlighted.

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The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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