THE SOCIAL ROLE OF THE CONFESSION MAGAZINE

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"The confession magazine was born amidst the revolution in manner and morals in the decade after World War I." (10, p. 278) It grew out of readers' first-person accounts of intimate problems and true experiences written to Bernarr Macfadden's *Physical Culture* magazine.

"Broken-hearted women sent us letters . . ." wrote Mary Macfadden, "after they had done two hundred knee bends, twice a day, and had thrown away their corsets, only to find that the Greek gods wouldn't give them a tumble . . . There were girls who confessed their sexual mistakes and thought they were fallen women until they had taken up dumbbells (the iron kind) and gone in for carrots which had given them bright eyes . . .

"These are true stories," she claims to have told Macfadden. "They come from the following you have attracted . . . Let's get out a magazine to be called *True Story,* written by its own readers in the first person. This has never been done before. The idea has a correlative force. I studied correlativity in school . . . It's the kind of thing that helped to make the British Empire." (6, pp. 218-219)

It was. By the turn of mid-century, some forty titles in the romance-confession field tried to lure advertising sponsorship with a guaranteed circulation of 16 million copies. The first 18 titles reported an average sale of over 7 million copies per issue. (13, 14) Still, the empire as a whole lacked substantial business support. Twelve women's service magazines attracted about twice as much advertising as sixteen leading confessions. (1)

The confession was first written by, and always edited for, what the *Saturday Evening Post* was to call ruefully "Macfadden's anonymous amateur illiterates." For some time Bernarr insisted on "stories only from the common people," and had the thousands of manuscripts pouring in screened by amateur "consultants." If a narrative sounded too "highbrow," he might ask the elevator man to read it. "If it was over his head, it went back to the author. A wag on the editorial staff had written a piece for barroom reading entitled: 'How I was Demoted to Editor of *True Story* and Worked My Way Up to Elevator Man Again!" (6, pp. 223-224)

So, while never lacking in readers, the editorial formula attracted, from the beginning, persons who probably had never before read magazines, persons with little education or purchasing power, persons whom other publishers had neglected because they were not the sort that advertisers were especially interested in reaching. (10, pp. 275-276) In the course of time, blatant amateurishness changed into the fine art of creating the illusion of homely authenticity. But the target audience remained the same. And it remained for the post-World War II marketing revolution to discover the commercial and social potential of an essentially working class reading public.

The Confession and its public. Reader research and distribution data (2, 5, 9) indicate that small towns, the South, and the Midwest furnish more than their share of romance-confession readers who are most likely to be young women from wage-earning families. For example, 56 per cent of *True Story* readers reside in towns of less than 25,000 population where only 17.6 per cent of Ameri-

cans live. Sixty-nine per cent of the readership, but only 60 per cent of the U.S. population, lives in the South and Midwest.

Indicative of the composition of confession readership is that, for example, 64 per cent of *True Confession's* readers come from the homes of labor which about one in three own. More than half of them are housewives with children under six, and one in four with children under two. Sixteen per cent also hold down an outside job. Five per cent attended college, but 18 per cent never went to high school. Seven out of ten own automobiles, but only six out of ten have telephones, and almost as many own sewing machines. Sixty per cent live on an annual family income under $4000, with the median about $3600 a year.

Comparable figures for the *Ladies Home Journal* and *McCall's* show seven out of ten owning their homes; one out of ten having children under two; 30 per cent having attended college; nine out of ten owning automobiles, but only 13 per cent sewing machines. Sixty per cent live on family incomes of over $4000 a year, and one-third come from the top fifth income bracket.

Readers with presumably little money to spend hold little attraction to advertisers. The editorial recipe must, therefore, bear a double burden; it must maintain the magazine's social appeal to its reader class, and must also be spiced with ingredients worthy of business sponsorship. Furthermore, the entire operation must be buttressed by the education of advertisers about the market trends of the past decades.

Rather than trying to gloss over the working class status of their market, confession publishers make it the basis of their appeal to both readers and advertisers. Class lines, they declare in the title of a recent booklet written for the trade, are *The Invisible Wall—The Social Factor in Mass Selling.* (7) Wage Town, confession publishers assert, comprises 54.8 per cent of all the families in America. "Wage Town millions," the advertiser is told, "speak a different language and respond to different stimuli." (8)

In an office memorandum, "On the Subject of Social Class and its Relation to Magazines," written by Everett R. Smith, director of research for Macfadden Publications, the Family Behavior Magazine (as the trade now prefers to call the confession) is defined as the magazine of Wage Town. "These people can be reached effectively only in terms of their interests

. . . When one of our editors got off the track and began running some stories which would have been excellent and fitting in *Cosmopolitan* or *Ladies' Home Journal,* the readership of those stories was the lowest in years . . . That editor was given his walking papers . . . In this America of ours there is no iron curtain, but there are distinctions of interest as different as those of the Texas cowboy and the Boston aristocracy."

Elsewhere, the advertiser is asked to consider the findings of research which show that "Fundamentally . . . Behavior Magazine reading is largely a matter of class status . . ." and "Essentially the people who read Behavior Magazines are working-class people—in both the occupational and social sense of the word." He is requested "to ponder the point that a different market requires a different media approach and a different kind of magazine concept," in order to "move your goods and services—in ever increasing quantities—through The Invisible Wall!" He is then reminded

of the potential for sales that lies beyond: Wage-earners receive 56 per cent of all personal income, buy 56 per cent of all major appliances, have 62 per cent of all "loose money"; they also "marry younger, start earning faster (because they leave school earlier), have larger families, more children, thus spend more." (8, 11)

Some managerial assumptions. In an economy which depends upon new sales and new markets, confession publishers regard their magazine as performing a vast economic service. They also view it as having a unique cultural task and delicate social mission. Perhaps the most lucid statement revealing a management view of this multiple function, seasoned with a bit of individual philosophy appeared in a booklet by Fred Sammis, Editor-in-Chief of *True Story* Women's Group. The booklet is entitled *The Women That Taxes Made; An Editor's Intimate Picture of a Large but Little Understood Market.* (11)

Mr. Sammis dedicates his appeal in the hope "that my brief picture of these particular Women That Taxes Made will help the men who run American business to a better understanding of how to sell them." In it, he develops a thesis calculated to attract his potential advertising clients.

Briefly, it is this. The "redistribution of wealth through high taxes and bulging payrolls" in the past decade created a revolution in marketing. The classical image of the working class has, at least for merchandising purposes, given way to that of a new middle-class market, with anxieties and aspirations to match. The new "woman that taxes made" no longer cries herself to sleep with problems like "the roof leaks," or "I can't pay the doctor bill," or "we can't afford this new baby." Hers is no longer the life of "family labor" with few tools to help. "But she does not default in her vital role as *heroine* of the family. She simply takes on new problems." The problems that "fill her mind by day and worry her thoughts at night" are more likely to be "Nancy is going around with a wild crowd," or "Johnny will get killed in his hot rod," or "they say Jim is dating a girl on the swing-shift."

These new women from the homes of labor find the white collar world strange, uncomfortable. Uncertain, often bewildered in their new roles, they have a burning interest in "reading how other women—like themselves—solved *their* problems." They form a "huge and responsive market of young-labor families who need everything American business can tell them about."

"Remember," writes Mr. Sammis, "these women never were, and never will be, the avid readers of textbooks nor the patients of psychiatrists . . . They *cannot* and *do not* often read the conventional woman's magazines. They read very little that is not written in their conversational language . . . Their interests are almost entirely in people . . . The abstract is seldom discussed.

"Except for daytime serials (such as Ma Perkins, Road of Life, which can handle only ONE behavior problem at a time over a period of several weeks) no other medium deals in the problems, lives, or language" of these women, writes Mr. Sammis, "the more than 10 million that we have gathered together with one careful editorial formula . . ." Thus, he states, "there is no comparable way of reaching this great mass of women who spend more than *thirty billions* of dollars annually!"

A note of warning about this reader adds the element of urgency to the magazines' appeal for business

support: "She is exposed, *far more* than her white collar sister, to demagoguery, labor agitators and radical philosophies! Yet American business, rarely, if ever, runs its institutional messages in the magazines read by these women . . . I believe it is an economic sin to default in the enlightenment of the more than ten millions of women who live and learn by our behavior magazines."

Such, in broad outline, are the managerial assumptions with which the "behavior magazines" approach what they conceive to be their economic, cultural, and social mission. Implicit in these assumptions is a double-barreled editorial formula. It is tailored to a feminine psychology in a working-class setting, with fears, anxieties (and pocket-books) raised to the middle-class level. Of special interest to advertisers is the fact that economic grievance has been minimized as not befitting the market status of "the woman that taxes made"; that the appeal of social resentment has been structured to revolve around "behavior problems" usually within the family; and that "economic enlightenment" can diagnose today's ills as the price paid for "the redistribution of wealth through high taxes."

One barrel of the editorial formula aims at the insecurities of working-class life in a world of middle-class consumption pressures. The other barrel is loaded with editorial ammunition designed to minimize the risks of this appeal by making social protest appear to be out of place, unrelated to the insecurities of working-class life.

Depth studies help publishers take sharper aim. They trace the "invisible wall" that separates confession readership from that of the white collar magazines. They spell out social issues in terms of personal troubles. They help reduce internalized conflicts into the desired policy capsules.

A recent study by Social Research, Inc. (7) found, for example, that the confession reader does not feel as much the center and prime mover of the family as does the white collar reader. She is more emotional about her job as a mother, and is torn by a conflict between that job and her role as a wife to a greater degree than is the middle class woman.

Presenting these findings to advertisers, the confession publisher illustrates the difference in social attitudes and values by contrasting "Built in Baby Sitter" with the confession story, "I Killed My Child." The former, taken as a "representative" story from a white collar woman's magazine is a "superficial problem, which does an excellent job of entertaining. But inherent in its situation, its manners, its artwork, is a social sophistication that is not to be found in Behavior Magazine stories.

" 'I Killed My Child' is a stark title. It is also the true story of a young mother who saw her child killed by an automobile. Because she had taken the child with her when she left home in a fit of anger after an argument with her husband, she could never thereafter escape the sense of personal guilt she had for her child's death."

The confession reader, notes the report, looks upon men as more powerful, dominant, sexually active and demanding than does her white collar sister. "Since she sees her husband as more independent and self-sufficient, she does not seem to feel, as white collar magazine readers do, that her mother role will necessarily stably tie her man down . . . [Her] family is based on two rather separate sets

of relations—that of woman to man, or wife to husband; and that of mother to child. . . . This split in her own social personality can give her trouble." She finds her troubles reflected in stories like "Torn Between Duty and Desire," "He Locked Me Out," and "The Devil in My Man," which has the subcaption: "Facing the truth at last I knew my husband was destroying my children and me, but he was my lover, and I could not let him go."

The appeal of identification and realism, stressed in the findings of Social Research, "is one reason why editors employ the techniques that are the hallmarks of the Behavior Magazine format," the advertiser is told. Instead of "To Catch a Man," or "The Lover I Dreamed Of," a confession story in the same vein is titled, "I Want You." The make-believe and the academic is usually avoided. "Photographs instead of the more idealized techniques of oil, tempera, or water color. The 'I did' or 'I was' type of headline rather than fancier, more subtle ones."

"And," businessmen are reminded in the same presentation, Social Research reports that "importantly, the factor of self-identification . . . seems to carry over with equal force into advertising."

Editorial Prescription. The search for fresh material makes it desirable to publicize editorial needs and specifications. This is done mostly through writers' magazines and market publications. Out of a survey of this material consisting of articles such as "I Sell Confessions," "How to Hit *True Story,*" "The Truth About Confessions," and out of editors' own descriptions of their market needs in the yearly, *Writer's Market,* emerges a more detailed picture of the editorial prescription and social role of the romance-confession magazine.*

Reader identification is a key quality required of the material. "We use," advises one editor, "strong, hit-home confession stories that are sincere, gripping, and might have come out of the readers' lives, so that they readily identify themselves with the narrator."

Identification through the first person point of view and the flavor of authenticity requires settings congruent with that of the target audience. "Central characters must come from workshirt backgrounds," runs through all market advice. "Our heroines are waitresses, wives of mechanics, file clerks—not heiresses or glamourous career women," and "usually not college girls." And: "People in our stories take out the garbage, have linen problems, need to wash the floors . . ." One writer warns the aspirant that "If you cannot identify yourself with a workshirt character, you shouldn't be trying this field."

The goals, motives, horizons appropriate to the "workshirt background" of that machinist's wife or file clerk, and befitting her "new status" on the consumer market, are spelled out in detail. She is, the writer is told, "a homemaker whose idea of decor extends as far as the large flowers on her wallpaper and no further. The woman's wants and ambitions are small ones: appliances to make her home comfortable; a freezer full of food because it's food that represents security; chintz and linoleum rugs and net curtains. A steady job with reg-

*The following portion of the study is based on some 22 articles and market capsules which are not cited here in the interest of space. These references may be obtained by communicating directly with the author.

ular pay is all she requires of her husband—that and fidelity."

Empathy is taken to be strengthened through sympathy. Editors are as reluctant to use unsympathetic leading characters as art directors would be to run unattractive girls on the cover. "Who," writes one of them, "wants to be identified with a bitch?"

Sympathetic characterization is not an easy task when combined with the requirements of realistic flavor in sordid situations. "The problem in the confession story is how to get basically decent persons into these messes," explains one writer. It calls for human insight.

"You cannot write the truth unless you understand it," comments an editor. Others hasten to add, however, that understanding the heroine's motives, even when mistaken, or deeds, even when wrong, does not mean that *she* should gain insight into herself too soon or too broadly. *We* writers and readers, "have to know why she is hungry for love, or *why* she sticks by a brutal husband, why she doesn't escape from what she thinks is an impossible situation."

Obviously, "in the good confession story the reader does not escape from life. She does not want to. She wants to read about an emotional life-experience that could have happened to her (and maybe did), or might happen to her next door neighbor." Even if readers do "turn to our magazines for entertainment and escape," another editor remarks, "the story must give them more. This then is the mission of our writers: to give our readers what they want plus constructive instructions on how to be happy."

The romance-confession path to "happiness" is long and rocky. And it leads through hell. The agony of the journey is made plausible only by the underlying assumption that life can be terrible if we grant that the world is a hostile jungle. The empathetic reader travels this path through the eyes of the first person narrator. The "I" sins and suffers, stumbling inevitably into booby-traps of common nightmares and universal fears placed along the road. She could then say, runs the editorial prescription, " 'Why, that's what happened to me,' or else, 'I wonder what I'd do in a situation like that?' In other words, the story can be about a universal problem, or it can be about a rare occurrence, such as a baby being kidnapped from a hospital, which mirrors a common fear."

Despite the frequently hair-raising content, the story should be told "with warm breathlessness of a girl confiding to a friend across the kitchen table," says one successful writer describing the genesis of her first big sale, a sleeping pill story—"Side Door to Hell." "I wrote it straight across the kitchen table . . . In the breathless rush of words, grammar, syntax, correct antecedents went overboard. Where they didn't, I went back and threw them out. The story sold . . . And then I knew I had it—the thing every published confession story shares with every other. That's the manner of telling."

This "manner of telling" avoids the abstract, the analytical, and, in fact, almost anything that could not be said "breathlessly." Events, facts, ideas are to be personalized; people talk about people, not principles; individuals face no systems or discernible social forces, only the inscrutable, immovable, treacherous world.

Warm-hearted characterization and breezy, conversational intimacy counterpoint visceral themes of human misfortune. Summed up in the words of practicing writers and editors, "one

simple formula underlies three-fourths of all published confession stories—a simple, trustful human is faced with a complex, real and brutal world." And: "Characters make their discovery of truth by bumping up against bad trouble as they rush headlong down the line of least resistance."

Understanding, empathy, and even a sense of compassion for bewildered victims of society—villain as well as suffering heroine-narrator (who are sometimes the same)—that is the underlying social appeal of the romance-confession editorial formula. The submerged protest inherent in this appeal, even when disguised as "sex," is no secret to writers. In one of her stories, an author explains, "a girl contends with ignorance that calls her cerebral palsied sister an idiot. In another, a girl unknowingly marries a homosexual. Her contention is not with him as villain but with the fact of his nature, and indirectly, with society which has molded that nature. In 'I Lived With Evil,' the third story, an idealistic girl finds out that her grandmother is running an abortion hospital. But it is society, not the grandmother, which makes abortion mills profitable."

The editorial formula contains its own antidote to the risk of strong social medicine inherent in this prescription. Aside from such "economic enlightenment" as can be imparted breathlessly across the kitchen table (or through service features and institutional ads), this antidote is in making the "simple, trustful human" remain simple (even if not so trustful) till the end; in making her act of defiance a crime or a sin; in making her suffer long and hard; in making her, not society, repent and reform; in permitting her only to come to terms, and not to grips, with the "brutal world" in which she lives.

"Usually," explains the expert, "this basic formula—simple trustful human versus brutal world—dovetails neatly with the old sin-suffer-repent standby formula. In fighting back against brutality surrounding her, the heroine first sins, then suffers, then repents. In the cerebral palsy story . . . when the pressure of society becomes too great, the heroine runs away, changes her name, deserts her family, suffers, and finally repents.

"In real life, she also lost her mind."

The final episode of the real event might have pointed to one possible consequence of adjustment to the unbearable. It was cut out of the story. Sheer, passive suffering, however, is permissible: "In $1105 worth of my stories," writes the author, "my protagonists neither sinned nor repented, but only suffered. They were sinned against—the innocent faced with unbearable evil . . ."

Analyzing why some of her stories *didn't* sell, the writer discovered that in the rejected stories, "my heroine was trying to wrest events about to suit herself, instead of dazedly watching them go by. The story lacked the theme: trustful, confused human against the world."

The price for human dignity and compassion is the basic irrelevance of the narrator's desperate and confused protest. Buffeted by events she cannot understand and is not permitted to "wrest about to suit herself," the heroine's headlong flight "down the line of least resistance" leads to her inevitable "sin." As she has no conscious relatedness to the larger social context with which she must, in fact, contend, her act becomes irrelevant as social protest. It only brings calamity to her and to those she loves. Her suffering is a spine-tingling object lesson in bearing up under relentless

blows of half-understood events. Through her agony comes not insight into the circumstances of her act, transcending the immediate causes of her misfortune, but, if anything, a remote glimpse of such "happiness" as might be had in coming to terms with an unbending, punitive, and invisible code of justice. Responding to hidden authority rather than being permitted to be selfdirecting, her "problem-solving" becomes an unreflecting drift toward adjustment. Specific blame falls on people; most often on a savage father or a weak mother, rarely upon conditions. People, not society, must yield to what are assumed to be the inflexible hazards and demands of human life. Such are the implicit ingredients of the editorial formula with which the confession magazine tries to satisfy the objective requirements of its market position, and to pursue its assumed social mission.

Content. How is this formula reflected in the actual content of the stories? Wilbur Schramm once read and analyzed a random sample of 100 confession stories. "It proved unnecessary to read that many," he wrote in his unpublished report on "The World of the Confession Magazine." (12) "The results stabilized by the time 30 had been read. Indeed, the consistency and sameness of these magazines is one of their outstanding characteristics."

Identification and authenticity were the first two qualities Schramm noted. "Basic to the formula . . . is the deliberately induced sense of reality . . . In effect, the reader of one of these stories is being invited to eavesdrop or peep on a very personal scene which would otherwise be hidden from him."

Nearly half of all characters appeared under Schramm's "business" category, but he noted that most of these were wage earners, such as clerks, bookkeepers, and stenographers. Having eliminated class status from his categories, and having noted that "laborers live pretty well and show signs of rising in the world," Schramm concluded that "Social class, therefore, is not very important in the confessions." We have seen that social class is the basis of the confession formula; but it might be noted here that the world of the confession magazine, as the world of all mass media, over-represents sales and service employment and virtually ignores the laboring class of basic heavy industry.

The setting of the stories is also likely to avoid places dominated by large-scale industrial organizations. Schramm found small towns and cities and the South and Midwest relatively favored locales. (As we have seen before, this is fairly representative of the geographical distribution of *readership.)*

Schramm noted as "rather surprising" that "the chief goals and values stated were worldly rather than spiritual," and that "so relatively little attention among the worldly goals should be paid to economic striving." But economic striving in the world of the confession magazine is not the Horatio Alger type; it consists of stretching the paycheck to meet the monthly payments. It does not mean raising social aspirations above that of its reader class. (Social Research found that "Behavior Magazine readers . . . cannot, and do not want to, live up to every aspect of the value systems . . . found in white collar magazines." (7)

Schramm did find, though, that where economic striving (rather than spending) was the goal (in about 15 per cent of the stories) it had a 50-

50 chance of involving the character in crime. Unmistakable, again, is the implicit moral of no escape—either into understanding or into success—from the conflicting pressures of society.

In this connection, another study by Johns-Heine and Gerth (14) sheds some light on the consequences of economic striving. The authors contrasted the fate of the career woman in *Ladies Home Journal* and *True Story* fiction, and noted that the heroine model of both magazines suffers for her success. But "in *True Story,* contravention of the moral code results in extraordinary suffering," they wrote. "In the one the positive symbols of safety and security predominate; in the other, negative and harshly punitive symbols. It is the difference between threatened loss of social position ('what will people think'), of such vast symbolic import for the middle-class reader, and threatened physical injury where not status but physical and moral integrity are imperiled."

Schramm found these perils of life involving the characters in endless trouble and misery, most of it focused on family life. While "the most frequently stated goal in these stories is a happy and secure family life," he also observed that "Family life . . . is —to put it mildly—troubled. Broken homes played significant parts in the family history of 38 per cent of the narrators, and 44 per cent of them reported their own marriage . . . on the verge of breaking up . . . 21 per cent of the narrators remembered unpleasant scenes in the marital relationship of their parents."

Violence is always around the corner, and illness strikes frequently in the world of the confession magazine. In his 100 stories Schramm counted 25 accidents (17 fatal), 16 fistfights, 14 murders, 12 violent quarrels, 8 rapes, and 4 suicides. One out of three stories referred to serious illness, and one out of five to mental illness.

Since most of this savagery takes place in a context limited to the family, the most consistent remedy takes the flavor of family counseling. "When one reads a number of these stories consecutively . . .," wrote Schramm, "one gets the sensation of eavesdropping on a marriage clinic."

To shoulder the burden of responsibility individually rather than collectively as members of society, the characters in the stories must be dominated by some inner, and preferably innate and uncontrollable, urge that drives them inexorably to violate some code of conduct. Schramm found that to be the sex drive. "Typically described as 'overwhelming' and 'overpowering'" the erotic scenes "usually described with gusto, even though covered over with later shame" numbered 40 cases of adultery, 32 of premarital relations, and 4 of prostitution, plus the 8 rapes mentioned above. Historically, this kind of cultural preoccupation with sex is a puritanical one; its object is to bring the punitive inner and external mechanisms of society down upon the individual, destined to suffering by his very nature. One sentence Schramm quoted as typical could have come from the Salem witchhunt: "Once the devil has the soul of a woman, only violence and death can set her free."

Yet the requirements of respect and dignity, of "understanding," and identification tip the scales of sympathy to the side of the heroine. They also prepare the reader for the "natural" (and only available) outcome of her struggle. ". . . The world of the confessions seems to operate under a stern code of justice," Schramm ob-

served, "which demands punishment for every transgression, but will accept repentance, and reward it with peace . . . The goal of self-respect and marital happiness . . . can only be attained by making peace with a puritanical judge, who is neither spiritual nor legal, but seems to operate through the structure of social relations. This is the most common dynamic of the stories."

"Who administers the code?" Schramm asks. "There is very little reference to an ultimate source of wisdom"; the way in which things are looked at, and the manner of telling does not permit the perception of institutional, social processes. "In general the private services . . . appear in a somewhat whiter light than the public services,"* but neither is portrayed as organized social activity subject to judgment, as well as to acceptance. Implicit in the findings of this content analysis is the reflection of the pattern of basic irrelevance, of the lack of conscious relatedness between the individual torn by built-in conflicts and the social dynamic of her anxiety and trouble. "The impression is given," commented Schramm, "that this is the pattern of a behavioristic universe; this is how society works; this is the law of human behavior."

How society works: a random illustration. One story was picked by the simple expedient of taking the first piece in the confession magazine that happened to be on top of the writer's collection of recent issues. It was an anonymous story entitled "How Can I Face Myself? I Let Him Cheapen Me," in the February 1957 *Revealing Romances.*

Narrated by the daughter of a plumber's family, the story opens in the shadow of recent tragedy. Father and brother had been killed in an accident which wrecked the new family car and a neighbor's kitchen. Mama and Marilyn (the heroine) are left with nothing but grief and payments, plus a debt of thousands of dollars for funerals, hospital, and damages. Morrison, owner of the department store where Mama is cashier and Marilyn salesgirl, discovers that Mama embezzled $450 to help pay the debt. He forces Marilyn to submit to his attentions by threatening to send Mama to prison. Marilyn feels she's being made a "tramp" to save her mother, and strikes her in a moment of bitter passion. Mama, ashamed and broken, decides to give herself up; she doesn't know Marilyn has already lost her virginity. But Mama's new resolution gives Marilyn courage not to give in to Morrison again. Marilyn is tortured by her sin, but decides, "I'd bought my soul back" and marries her only suitor, a gruff junkyard operator.

The story illustrates the basic formula, "simple, trustful humans" with cards stacked against them from the outset. But one must shoulder the blame, says the heroine, and take the consequences rather than look for "excuses" in the conditions of life. "I keep wanting to say that terrible thing happened because we still had to pay for the funerals and the accident," Marilyn says. "When you've done wrong, you can't help but look for excuses. My mother was a weak person and—there I go, excuses."

Life is cruel and dull, Marilyn asserts repeatedly. About the only thing you *can* figure is the monthly payment. "Life had been so cruel to Mama . . . Life was dull . . . Dad had always worked hard . . . But like a

*Included in Table 1 of the Johns-Heine and Gerth study (4) but not noted by the authors is the striking decline of *True Story* heroes and heroines connected with the public services: from 17 per cent in the 'twenties to 2 per cent in the 'thirties.

lot of people, our family always owed more than we had. If we wanted something and could figure the payments, we got it."

Sex comes to Marilyn as the cruelest of all the "sharp deals" her jungle society metes out to its prey. "You're doing this only for your mother's sake," says Morrison, whom she describes earlier as "a thin nice-looking, gentle guy, not quite as tall as I." Sex turns him into a beast; shocked, helpless Marilyn into a broken-down tramp. "I let him hold me and kiss me. Passive, I let his hands go where he wanted them to. I saw the awful lust come into his face, making him look like an animal. Then I stiffened myself and closed my eyes for the shock of what followed." Even though when Morrison "made a sharp deal he never talked about it," Marilyn now feels that "I had come to the end of the road, the end of endurance. I, too, had broken down, a weak thing. A tramp! I felt so sick and bitter I couldn't even cry."

". . . In loneliness and debt and grief," Mama also turns . . . "bitter against the world." She cries out in protest: "Jack Morrison's got plenty of money—he's not always honest. Lots of people aren't, and I'm tired of being made to pay for things I'll never have—other people's things I never even saw. I'm tired, Marilyn. I hate—I—hate the whole world."

But she cannot fight back. The only act of defiance available to her is crime; Marilyn's line of least resistance is sin. Torment and lament is their only choice until Mama "rises" to an act of self-sacrifice and offers to accept the punishment of the code. It is now found that society—personalized in the owner, Jack Morrison—is not only a violator of manhood (specifically of womanhood), but can be met on the characteristically contractual terms of its own code:

"You're going to work and you're going to work for me," Morrison tells Mama and Marilyn. "And I'm going to take the money out of your check, so much each week." Marilyn gasps. "She is not going to trial?" "Well, you'll never pay it back in prison . . . She can go to trial any day I want her to," Morrison snaps.

The terms of the settlement arranged, Marilyn reflects gratefully: "He wasn't sending her to prison! Behind his vile language, he's been merciful . . ."

The confession cover. The first confession magazine ever published featured on its cover the swooning faces of a young man and woman and bore the title: "And Their Love Turned to Hatred." In the almost forty years since, this basic structure of outward pictorial bliss and stark verbal reality developed into a consistent and unique feature of the confession magazine cover design. The pictorial emphasis shifted almost exclusively to the radiant image of the confession-type cover girl, while the verbal context became ever more lurid and shocking. A casual glance at today's confessional displayed on the magazine rack reveals a striking contrast between the pictorial image and the apparently unrelated verbal meanings.

A separate study exploring "The Social Anatomy of the Romance-Confession Cover Girl" is reported elsewhere. (3) It found that the mechanics of magazine distribution require the employment of a cover design which attracts feminine empathy through the projection of a reader-image, and which externalizes the inner decency and naivite of the heroine, while relegating the more explosive

social ingredients to the verbal context. The unrelated juxtaposition of the innocent heroine-narrator-reader image with her world of menacing social meanings appears to be outwardly and graphically symbolic of the story heroine's conscious unrelatedness (or unconscious relatedness) to the dark forces of her society.

Some conclusions. The social appeal of the confession story pivots around the heroine's human frailties in a bewildering and punitive world she cannot fully understand. The "truth" of this world is brought home through the inevitable encounter and the final coming to terms—resigned or tragic—with the code of society. The dynamic power of respect and sympathy for confused victims struggling in a web they cannot avoid or escape, or really comprehend, is harnessed to the cause of individual restraint. The flame of rebellion is first kindled, then controlled in scope and divorced from its broader social context, and then doused in jet streams of remorse, sacrifice, and compromise.

The market position and social mission of the confession industry seem to dictate from the outset its role among the "new" women of Wage Town. The essence of this role appears to be the underlying message of social unrelatedness. The solid goals —like meeting the monthly payments, keeping the family together and out of trouble—are in constant double jeopardy. They are menaced both by the brutal anarchy of an inscrutable universe and by the necessary human resistance to its bewildering codes. Wage-town protest—in forms disguised, submerged, and disoriented—becomes senseless individual sin, socially irrelevant in the world of the confessions.

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