When women want a National crusade for equal rights and equal pay, they use the news columns. A well-known woman attacks men, and casts grave doubts on the real ability of the Parliamentary male to govern.

There is a hurricane of diverse opinions, and the Press is kept busy day and night distributing news about women’s challenge to men’s authority. Just the publicity women want to draw attention to their grievances!

*Home Chat*, 19 April 1924

We are trying to blend our old world with our new. Trying to be citizens and women at the same time. Wage-earners and sweethearts. Less aggressively feminist than independently feminine. It is a difficult balance to strike.

*Lane 7*

The achievements of female suffrage on equal terms with men, women’s entry into parliament, local government and at all levels of the work force, including professions, such as law and medicine, meant that when the first issue of *Woman* was published in June 1937 women’s public presence as citizens was already evident. The novelty of female entry into what, until the first decades of the twentieth century, had been predominantly a masculine public realm did not pass unnoticed in the commercial press, and from the early 1920s women’s achievements in sports, the arts, and government, as well as the latest innovations in female dress, were regularly splashed across the media, including newspapers and magazines.

Successful modern women were a favorite subject of popular editorial photo-features in women’s magazines. Aviatrix Dorothy Spicer, *Pageant*
Master Gwen Lally, fashion designer Elsa Schiaparelli, and the novelist G.B. Stern were typical of those featured in “Names that are News” in the monthly Modern Woman (9), while the “Sports-girls line-up” in Woman included swimmer Joyce “Mermaid” Cooper, aviation’s Jean Batten and tennis player Alice Marble, daringly wearing shorts (23). Modernity, as Robert Graves and Alan Hodge observed in their perceptive history of the inter-war years, “had become synonymous with lively progress” (113); women were emblematic of both. Women, moreover, as Adrian Bingham has pointed out, became “a talking point” (“Stop” 29). “The hurricane of diverse opinion,” as the penny weekly Home Chat put it, about whether or not women should “vote, smoke, bet, sit in parliament or attend boxing matches kept the press busy day and night” distributing news about “women’s challenge to men’s authority,” signaling a modernity that was, at once, controversial and progressive (“Women are News” 119–120). This increased media presence meant, meanwhile, that the boundary between “public” and “private” was fundamentally redrawn as, in addition to images of women, their voices – not least those of the growing number of female journalists writing for newspapers and magazines – became central to public debate and opinion-forming. By 1924 “women” were, in the words of Home Chat, “most definitely ‘News’.”

Scholars who have studied the treatment of women in the press, however, have assumed that magazines promoted an “uncomplicated domesticity” in which women of all classes could find fulfillment in the performance of wifely and maternal roles (Bingham, “Stop” 19). The idea was established in 1970 by Cynthia White’s memorable phrase “the return to dear housewifeliness” (100) in her influential history of women’s magazines, and developed by Deirdre Beddoe (1989) in Back to Home and Duty, a social history of women’s lives in the inter-war years. Beddoe, in particular, sees a return to order and “traditional” gender boundaries after the blurring experienced during the war. Both accuse the mainstream press of endorsing the image of the housewife and mother to the exclusion of any other, nullifying the opportunities that opened up for women as a result of the war and the women’s rights movement. It is a view that has been reproduced more recently by Michelle Tusan in her book on the suffrage press (33–34).

In recent years, however, others have suggested different readings of the feminine and domestic interests and values that characterize women’ magazines. Those working on the impact of modernity on women’s lives, in particular, have turned away from “high culture” and the public sphere, which principally describes the experiences and