Amy Erdman Farrell, *Yours in Sisterhood:* Ms. *Magazine and the Promise of Popular Feminism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

In "Personal Report from *Ms.*" published in January, 1973, the editors enumerated the *Ms.* philosophy to their readers: "If you asked us our philosophy for ourselves and for the magazine, each of us would give an individual answer. But we agree on one thing. We want a world in which no one is born into a subordinate role because of visible difference, whether that difference is of race or of sex. That's an assumption we make personally and editorially, with all the social changes it implies. After that, we cherish our differences. We want *Ms.* to be a forum for many views" (59). Those lofty, and often contradictory, goals are analyzed in detail in *Yours in Sisterhood*, Amy Erdman Farrell's history of *Ms.* from its launch in 1971 until 1989, the year that the magazine published its final commercial issue.

Though *Ms.* has been alternately lauded or scorned by media and cultural analysts alike for daring to venture into mass-market periodical publishing with a liberal feminist agenda, Farrell's monograph is the first comprehensive study of the magazine. This study is all the more groundbreaking in that few media historians or cultural studies works devoted to American women's magazines engage with the contemporary products, preferring instead, to focus on the origins of the format, and the early years of the traditional standard bearers, the *Ladies Home Journal* and *Good Housekeeping*. Here, Farrell explores what she refers to as a "revolutionary hybrid" which dared to propose that a commercial, mass-market magazine could have, as its key editorial hook, a feminist message. Farrell provides historical context about both the second wave feminist and anti-feminist currents in the United States during the era. Ultimately, she illustrates that *Ms.* was both a product of its time and a gutsy challenge to the periodical industry.

Ms. was launched in 1971, in an era where women's movement newsletters and small magazines were increasingly common. The trio of founding members – Gloria Steinem, Elizabeth Forsling Harris and Patricia Carbine – dreamed of creating a woman's magazine that would successfully challenge and change the genre, create space for non-sexist advertising, and serve as a means to disseminate feminist ideas to a mass-market of American women. Energized with idealism about a woman-controlled, woman-run periodical (a radically different concept at a time when even the major women's magazines were, primarily, headed by male editors and all were financed and controlled by male advertising and circulation departments) the trio envisaged that *Ms.* would both "mainstream" and popularize feminism. It was to be a forum for American women.

Furthermore, a critically important piece of their vision was that this would be a periodical that women could find on newsstands, sitting cheek by jowl,

with *Cosmopolitan* and *Redbook*, not a specialized product available only through subscriptions. It is to Farrell's credit that she adroitly deals with both the lofty ideals and the crushing realities – the unfulfilled and impossible project of creating a universal sisterhood of readers and, perhaps more dire, the commercial challenges from advertisers which would eventually cause *Ms.*' demise.

Farrell offers readers an excellent case study of how to write a history of a popular culture product because she successfully and literately weaves together the three major issues: production history and personnel; the text; and reader reception. Based on extensive archival work, along with oral histories with *Ms.* stalwarts, and close readings of the text, she is able to demonstrate the tensions and complexity involved in staffing, producing and marketing such a revolutionary product. Her behind-the-scenes portraits into how the editorial offices were organized, with their emphasis on non-hierarchical office space and editorial meetings (particularly in the seventies) provide a colourful portrait of the founders' naiveté and their idealism. It was also, ironically, in the editorial offices that the issues of the privileging of white, heterosexual, middle-class and extremely well-educated women's voices and perspectives were first challenged, long before reader's demands for diversity and recognition of multiple points of oppression were articulated. In keeping with their unconventional organization of power in the editorial offices, the editors and writers quickly carved out a space for themselves as a politically motivated women's magazine that refused to conform to the standard format of women's magazines. Unlike other women's "service" magazines, *Ms.* refused to include departmental features (food, fashions, beauty) which, in effect, were editorial pages that supported the advertisers' products. Nor did *Ms.* focus primarily on women's private lives.

None of this is new, but what Farrell is skilled at illustrating is how these radical decisions had very specific editorial and financial repercussions. In the seventies, in particular, the editors' resistance to the traditional women's magazine format both energized editors and writers, and produced healthy readership numbers. At the height of their popularity, *Ms.* had half a million subscribers and nearly 3 million readers per issue (1). However, this circulation success which should have translated into advertisers wanting to "buy into" *Ms.* fell flat. At first the lack of skilled advertising personnel, *Ms.*' demands for "non-sexist" advertising copy and their refusal to run departmental material meant that advertisers refused to buy space in the periodical because it was not as supportive as the traditional women's magazines. Nor could advertisers, realistically, afford to re-work their advertising campaigns just for one periodical. However, in the eighties as the periodical attempted to make itself both more accessible to a new generation of younger, less political readers and to modify

its content to attract advertisers, the advertisers continued to resist because they had branded the periodical as too political and hence not a good fit for their material. In the words of the editor of *Good Housekeeping*, "*Ms.* has remained a cause in the eyes of a lot of advertising people rather than being a marketing opportunity" (181).

Beyond the commercial and editorial tensions, Farrell is at her best when describing the relationship between the readers and the magazine. *Ms.* took their relationship with readers very seriously, devoting multiple pages in each issue to their letters. Again, this was atypical for women's magazines which, at most, devoted only one page to reader commentary and many, like *Vogue*, had absolutely no editorial space for the readers' opinions. *Ms.* was rewarded by readers like this one from the mid seventies who characterized the experience thus: "writing to *Ms.* seems more like sending a message to a comrade or a love rather than a magazine" (159). For others, however, writing to *Ms.* was more about criticizing the privileged perspective given to white, middle-class feminist issues and the failure to adequately embrace diversity. Later, there was considerable tension over the magazine's refusal to address multiple oppressions, in particular, those of sexual orientation and race, although class was another persistent blind spot. Farrell contends that it is overly simplistic to dismiss *Ms.*' brand of feminism as liberal feminism preferring instead to call it "popular feminism" which she defines as "a shared, widely held cultural and political commitment to improving women's lives and to ending gender domination that is both articulated and represented within popular culture" (196). While that might have been the goal of the editors the reality of the magazine's content, its primary readership (who were overwhelmingly urban, affluent, white, well-educated women) and the composition of its editorial staff, meant that it failed to realize their noble goal of "sisterhood."

Ms.'s most successful decade was the seventies, because it fit the spirit of the times in terms of both activism and enthusiasm about the potential of second wave feminism. By the eighties they were facing difficulties, as the magazine market became more segmented, as the traditional magazines desperate to maintain readers began to offer some feminist material, and as a host of women grew either complacent or disenchanted with feminism. The turn to more right wing political perspectives and increasing advertiser intransigence dealt the final death blows. The first *Ms.* era came to an end in December, 1989, when the advertisers pulled out nearly en masse after a controversial issue declaring "war" on those who sought to challenge women's right to abortions.

Farrell refuses to speculate about whether the death of *Ms.* was inevitable given their badly miss-matched challenge to the corporate ethos that dominates women's magazine publishing and advertising in the United States. Rather, she prefers to highlight the challenges *Ms.* provided to the status quo, the space it

provided for women to engage with a commercially, readily available mass-market feminist product, and of the ways in which *Ms.* worked to publicize the goals of second wave feminism. Merely to proclaim its "feminism" from the magazine racks was, according to Farrell, a boldly revolutionary statement. Some might dispute that, and had Farrell provided more space for her post-structuralist and semiotic emphasis on the text and the images from *Ms.* it might have strengthened her case for the revolutionary nature of *Ms.* Equally, though she had access to a vast amount of unpublished correspondence, she is not completely convincing in her assertions that the anger some readers expressed regarding the lack of diversity in the periodical were primarily due the requisite tensions of trying to satisfy a mass audience. Nor is her defense of popular feminism, as opposed to liberal feminism, as consistent with her findings as she might care to admit.

What is clear, is that caught between the juggernaut of advertisers and the noisy complaints of readers, *Ms'* editors attempts to modify their message to make it more palatable to the advertisers was never successful, and indeed, was the beginning of the end of their vision of a commercial, feminist periodical. The first *Ms.* era might have gone out boldly, buoyed up by the fight to maintain American women's reproductive rights but the real end came years earlier when *Ms.* compromised their editorial vision to make themselves a better buy for advertisers. Those caveats aside, Farrell has produced a significant book within the field of second wave feminism and periodical history, and it is hoped that it finds an audience. Those who do find this gem will be rewarded by a study of an icon of American mass-market feminism that is both engaging and provocative reading.

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Harry Oosterhuis, *Stepchildren of Nature: Krafft-Ebing, Psychiatry and the Making of Sexual Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

Responding to Michel Foucault's provocative claim that homosexuality was a nineteenth century medical invention, historians of modern sexuality are showing an increasing interest in the history of medicine, and especially psychiatry. In this context, the much accomplished but little remembered psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing emerges as a key figure, not only in Austria and Germany where his influence was most immediately felt, but in Europe, Britain and North America as well. Krafft-Ebing was on the frontlines of a movement to expand the courtroom role of forensic psychiatry beyond the assessment of