CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY SAN MARCOS

THESIS SIGNATURE PAGE

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULLFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

MASTER OF ARTS

IN

HISTORY

THESIS TITLE: Madame Sylvia of Hollywood and Physical Culture, 1920-1940

AUTHOR: Amanda Regan

DATE OF SUCCESSFUL DEFENSE: May 3, 2013

THE THESIS HAS BEEN ACCEPTED BY THE THESIS COMMITTEE IN
PARTIAL FULLFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS
IN HISTORY.

Dr. Jill Watts	Jill Watts	5/4/13
THESIS COMMITTEE CHAIR	SIGNATURE	DATE
Dr. Jeffrey Charles	Jeffrey Charles	5/4/13
THESIS COMMITTEE MEMBER	SIGNATURE	DATE
Dr. Carmen Nava	Carmen Nava	5/4/13
THESIS COMMITTEE MEMBER	SIGNATURE	DATE

Madame Sylvia of Hollywood and Physical Culture, 1920-1940

by
Amanda Regan

Table of Contents

Table of Figures

Acknowledgments

I am thankful to the many people who have helped me through the writing, research, and completion of this thesis over the last two years. This thesis would not have been possible without the support of my advisor, committee, family and friends.

First, I am deeply grateful for the constant support of my chair and mentor Dr. Jill Watts. In addition to chairing and helping me with this thesis, Dr. Watts has been an unwavering source of guidance and has helped me to prepare for my next steps in a doctoral program. I am lucky to have been trained by such an amazing scholar and I owe her the most sincere gratitude for her long hours and willingness to go above and beyond for her students.

I also am indebted to my committee Dr. Jeffrey Charles and Dr. Carmen Nava for reading drafts of my thesis and offering invaluable advice and critiques. Dr. Katherine Hijar read drafts of my proposal and was also a source of guidance over the last two years.

My loving family was also a source of constant and unwavering support over the last two years. My parents, Mike and Sue, my little sister, Holly, and my dog, Chanel, have all been understanding of my busy schedule and patient with me on stressful weeks. Chanel was a faithful companion and sat with me while I wrote most of this thesis.

I would not have survived this program without my cohort and wonderful friends Andy Aguirre, Mayella Caro, Bree Faulkenberg, Emily Hammer, and Ashley Atkins. Through the late nights and stress filled days they were always there to lighten things up and make a big paper fun. I owe my sanity to them. I am also thankful to my good

friends Devon Barnett, Lauren Cerruti, Nunu Gabarra, Ninus Gabarra, and Sed Zangana who listened intently as I talked about Sylvia and were patient with me while I spent many Friday and Saturday nights in the digital history lab.

I also want to thank Dr. Gerardo Gonzalez and Lisa Bandong of the Office of Graduate Studies and Research who allowed me to work in their office over the last two years. Finally, I want to thank Walter Horch, a personal friend of Sylvia Ullback, for inviting me to his home and for sharing his memories with me on multiple occasions. This thesis would not have been possible without him.

Abstract

Sylvia Ullback, or "Sylvia of Hollywood," was a beauty practitioner and writer in the 1920s and 1930s. An immigrant to America in the 1920s, Ullback's career and discussion of women's bodies and beauty paralleled historical developments in physical culture and beauty. She was trained in European ideas and techniques and she applied this training in her career in the United States. She emerged as the expert on beauty and the body in the late 1920s and represented a shift from the 1920s "reducing craze", a period of extreme dieting techniques. Her methods and philosophies represented a new form of reducing based on healthy dieting and exercise. After departing from Hollywood where she worked with the Hollywood stars, she transformed herself into an author of popular magazine articles and books. Her articles reflected the culture of the Great Depression and contained an empowering message for women during this time. During the depression she became increasingly popular and she published several books in addition to her articles and her radio show. However by the mid-1930s, the attitude toward physical culture began to shift. The rise of Nazi Germany and fascist theories about the "superior" Aryan body and their nationalistic ideal of physical culture led to a decline in the popularity of physical culture in America. Consequently, Ullback began to struggle to maintain her platform and tried to shift her discussion of the body and beauty. Ultimately, she was unsuccessful and in 1939, after publishing her last book, she withdrew from the public sphere. This thesis examines the shifts that took place from 1920-1940 in ideas about the body and physical culture through Ullback's life and career.

Keywords: Sylvia Ullback, Physical Culture, United States, The Great Depression, Women

Introduction

Beauty and fashion were defining aspects of Hollywood stars in the 1930s and Sylvia Ullback, better known as Madame Sylvia of Hollywood, was the authority on beauty for the stars. She had built her reputation during the 1920s by helping the stars get into shape through diet, exercise and massage. By the 1930s, she had begun writing books and advice columns for Hollywood fan magazines. Her columns and books provided diet, fitness, and beauty advice for her readers. She used female Hollywood stars as standards and examples of the body types that readers should strive to achieve. Ullback's work illustrates an attitude toward physical culture that was unique to the 1930s. This attitude was a shift away from the discussion of reducing in fan magazines of the 1920s toward a common sense based form of reducing and was a reaction to the social and cultural environment of the 1930s. Ullback's discussion of beauty and health embodied an empowering sentiment for women living during the depression and echoed the New Deal values of hard work, confidence and determination specifically for women. However, this attitude only existed in Hollywood fan magazines for a short period of time, ranging between 1931 to 1936. In the late 1930s, the fan magazines moved away from discussions of physical culture as well as the type of woman that Ullback represented, and consequently she faded away. This thesis examines the content of Ullback's books and articles in relationship to ideas about women's bodies in the 1930s. It will add to the scholarship on the history of physical and beauty culture and differ from previous works by exploring the 1930s, an overlooked decade in this historical literature,

as well as by exploring the influence of Hollywood as a major factor in the changing standards for women's bodies.

In 1921, Ullback immigrated to the United States from Oslo, Norway with her husband Andrew and two sons. She was thirty-six years old when she arrived and had already worked as a nurse and masseuse for several years in Eastern Europe.[1] Bringing her techniques with her, she moved to Chicago with her family and began working as a masseuse. Her first wealthy client was Julius Rosenwald, a businessman and partner in the Sears and Roebuck department store company. The Rosenwald family introduced her to other wealthy clients, including film star Marie Dressler.[2] Sometime around 1925, Ullback made the move to Hollywood, California where she began working with movie stars out of her home. Her Eastern European treatments combining diet, exercise, and massage and her work with the stars soon made her a well-known figure. She was the frequent subject of newspaper columns across the country; the discourse that surrounded her focused both on her methods and her life. In 1929, Ullback got a job at Pathé studios, which made her even more famous.[3] However, she left in 1930 to open her own shop where she could service stars from all the studios.[4] Ullback became the most sought after beauty consultant in Hollywood, which would give her authority in her columns and books when she began writing in the 1930s.

In 1931, Ullback published her first book, *Hollywood Undressed: Observations of Sylvia as Noted by Her Secretary,* which discussed her experiences working with the stars. The book revealed intimate details of her famous Hollywood clients and ultimately angered many with what they viewed as unkind portrayals. For example, Constance

Bennett was described as "plainly a product of the metropolis, one of those high-bred, high-strung girls. As restless and jumpy as a flea, the new star seemed to have a horror of being alone."[5] *Hollywood Undressed* was written from the point of view of Sylvia's secretary and detailed her experiences with the stars throughout her career at Pathé. The book was ghost written by James Whittaker, actress Ina Claire's ex-husband, which may explain some of the harsh characterizations in the book. It was reported that Whittaker had "a big case of 'sour grapes' on the movies and movies people."[6] Regardless, the fallout from the book had severe consequences for Ullback. Not only did she experience a backlash from the Hollywood studios and the stars, but it is likely that she was also blacklisted from working directly within the industry as a result. However, after the book was released there was discussion over whether or not Sylvia, whose English was imperfect was to blame for the portrayal of the stars. As one columnist argued, it was "Not that Sylvia shouldn't have authorized the yarns in the first place, but the fact is that the masseuse is NOT completely cognizant of the meaning of many of the phrases, and innuendoes made by Whittaker."[7]

The fallout, however, did not keep Ullback away for long. It is possible that because many felt she was not completely to blame for the content of *Hollywood Undressed*, she was able to secure a job writing monthly editorials for *Photoplay* in 1932. She would eventually also write for *Modern Screen* and the fitness magazine *Physical Culture* magazine. She became a celebrity herself and was a well-known beauty expert for women in the depression era. Over the course of her career she published a total of four books, wrote columns for several magazines, had her own radio show, performed in

some vaudeville, produced cold crèmes, and lectured across the country. Using these columns and books this thesis reassembles a portrait of Ullback's career and uses her writing to offer analysis of women's physical and beauty culture in the 1930s. Her career develops alongside and exemplifies shift in ideas about the body and beauty from 1920 to 1939. Ullback continued to publish until 1939, when she withdrew from Hollywood and the public sphere.

Some may challenge the notion that Ullback's rhetoric was representative of her own views and that she wrote her own articles. She was quoted occasionally as speaking in heavily accented English. However, by the time she started writing, she had been in the United States for almost ten years. She may have retained her accent, but she spoke very good English. Like all writers she was edited, but the sentiments in all her writings are attributed to her ideas about the body and there is no evidence that she did not write her articles. It is more than likely she wrote much of her own material.

Previous scholars have argued that the focus on physical culture declined during the depression. However, this project will demonstrate that the discussion about physical culture was still very much present during the depression, but in a different form. Ullback's arrival in Hollywood and her growing popularity coincided with several historical developments which culminated with the "reducing craze." In 1925, the American Medical Association openly condemned the craze and over the next few years Ullback rose to fame within the context of this rejection and represented the new ideals of beauty and reducing which relied on diet and exercise instead of gimmicks. As the depression set in, ideas about women's physical culture shifted, from the radical methods

of the 1920s "reducing craze" to a health driven and regulated form of reducing which focused heavily on diet and exercise with the goal of achieving better overall health. Beginning in the late 1920s magazines began to move away from the reducing advertisements, which featured dangerous drugs and gimmicks. These advertisements had promised to help women lose weight and look beautiful overnight without any effort. As the discussion changed so did the mode of dissemination. By the 1930s the editorial became the primary venue for these new ideas about women's bodies in depression era fan magazines. Ullback's articles provide not only the ideas about physical and beauty standards but are also evidence of larger trends in women's history during the depression. By understanding the physical and beauty standards of this era we can better understand women's roles and their experiences. However, this "common sense" approach was only discussed in print for a short period and the discussion began to change again in the late 1930s. With the fear of another world war and the decline in popularity of the strong woman in the late depression years, the discussion of physical culture would begin to disappear from fan magazines all together and as a result, Ullback struggled to adapt and withdrew from Hollywood altogether in 1939.

Furthermore, Ullback's roots and training in Europe significantly affected her beliefs about the body. She was trained in a tradition of body building that linked the perfect body, the "body beautiful" to nationalism. This discussion of the body was prevalent throughout Europe and is typically associated with Fascism; however, some scholars have argued that it was not necessarily tied to fascism and that the link between the body and nationalism was present in other European countries in the early twentieth

century.[8] Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska argues in her article "Building a British Superman: Physical Culture in Interwar Britain" that the physical culture movement existed in interwar Britain. She states, "physical culturalists represented the cultivation of a fit male body as an obligation of citizenship and a patriotic response to the needs of the British Empire."[9] As the author points out, Britain experienced a renewed focus on physical culture after World War I as many began to push to increase the level of fitness in Britain. This line of thought varied slightly throughout Europe, but the idea that physical culture was linked to patriotism, social harmony, and economic success remained a fundamental tenet. Physical culture, in Europe, was a masculine concept and much of the focus was on a productive and healthy *male* body. Ullback trained in Europe as these ideas about physical culture were flourishing and as World War I was influencing thought about the body. Her writing reflects her European roots and training; however, she takes these concepts and applies them to the *female* body. Zweiniger-Bargielowska discusses the "endeavor to build a 'superman'" in Britain.[10] It could be said that Ullback used these concepts and applied them to American life in an endeavor to build an American "superwoman."

Ullback's publications, which functioned as guides to building the perfect woman were influenced by a variety of factors. First, her European roots and her training in the medical field impacted her writing. She brought with her a European approach to beauty and health, which was reflected in her methods and ideas. Her European techniques, in combination with her attitude toward beauty, made her writing unique. Secondly, her writing reflected the culture of the period. She consistently stressed that beauty, fitness,

and health could not be achieved without hard work, determination, and self-control, all of which were depression era values. Lastly, her articles speak to the history and the position of women in this period. She developed and advocated for an ideal of beauty, which made the pursuit of this standard visible, respectable, possible, and empowering for women. Women's status in the first three decades of the twentieth century changed rapidly. During this period the new culture of consumption gave women more authority in the home, suffrage gave them the opportunity to participate as citizens, and women began to have a career outside the home. Subsequently, the depression and the sectors in which job loss was the heaviest, often male dominated industries, caused a tension over the role of women. Consequently, gender roles were muddled and many women gained some more independence. The number of women with jobs rose steadily in the depression and the discussion over the body and beauty in Ullback's articles contained an undertone of empowerment for these women.[11] The beauty culture, which Ullback advocated, contributed to both the rituals and female institutions that were created through the changing ideas about beauty.

This thesis seeks to expand on previous historical studies in three ways. First, it will examine an overlooked period in the history of physical culture and "fat studies". Previous scholars have argued that physical culture declined and disappeared in the 1930s. However, these scholars overlook the shift that occurred and the change in the mode of dissemination of ideas about physical culture and the body. The discussion of these ideas moved from advertising sections of fan magazines to the beauty editorial. Secondly, it will offer a biography of Sylvia Ullback's life and career and revise previous

notions about her methods. Her career paralleled the change in ideas about the body and beauty from 1920-1940. This thesis will present a history of the shifts and changes in this period using Ullback as a case study. Lastly, it will add to the history of women's beauty culture and draw on the foundations laid by previous scholars to further understand the ways women employed of beauty culture in the 1930s as a way to navigate the changing social conditions of the period.

Historiography

This thesis will intersect with three different historiographies: the historiography of the history of the body and physical culture, the history of women, and the history of beauty culture.

The history of physical culture, or physical manipulation of the body, is surprisingly light and mostly concentrated on the pre-1927 era and the post-1945 era. The focus of most scholars has been on the development of a culture between 1880 and 1927 in which anti-fat sentiment and reducing became engrained.

In 1986, Hillel Schwartz published *Never Satisfied: A Cultural History of Diet Fantasies and Fat*, which sought to examine fat as a cultural condition.[12] Schwartz divides his work in to different sections, each of which explores "the cultural fit between shared fictions about the body and the reducing methods of the era."[13] Schwartz argues that the new industrial society that existed after World War I led to a new sense of aesthetic beauty, and in turn led to a society "confused by its own desires and therefore never satisfied."[14] Schwartz provides a valuable analysis of the history of fat; however his analysis often relies too heavily on the gimmicks and advertising methods of the

commercial diet industry to explain the proliferation of dieting and anti-fat sentiment. Furthermore, he gives too much credit to the influence of the new industrial society and overlooks other causes of the new culture of reducing. His analysis disregards the changing roles of women in the twentieth century, the influence of Hollywood, and the role of popular literature, on the changing ideas about physical culture.

In the late 1980s and 1990s the feminist historians of the period began to study fat. Roberta Pollack Seid's *Never Too Thin: Why Women are at War with Their Bodies* followed Schwartz's work in 1989.[15] Seid expands on Schwartz's analysis, seeing technological innovations, economic changes, and the new ideology of efficiency as all contributing to the new diet and fitness trends. She argues that from these new factors, a cultural construction of thinness was established which has become invisible in our modern society. Seid sees the diet obsession as having severe implications on the lives and bodies of women throughout the late twentieth century. Joan Jacobs Brumberg also explored the origins of the modern obsession with fat in her works *Fasting Girls: The History of Anorexia Nervosa* and *The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls.*[16] Brumberg argues that the rise of dieting and fitness was a result of the shift from an agrarian to an industrial society as well as from a religious to a secular world at the turn of the century. Both Seid and Brumberg sought to explore modern questions about the obsession with women's bodies and appearances through an examination of the historical origins of this trend. However, both tend to breeze quickly through the 1900-1927 period and overlook the 1930s in an attempt to get to the post World War II era.

In recent years a new interdisciplinary field known as "Fat Studies" has appeared. This field is "marked by an aggressive, consistent, rigorous critique of the negative assumptions, stereotypes, and stigma placed on fat and the fat body."[17] In the *Fat Studies Reader*, an introduction to the field, the authors explain that scholars can bring to study what they believe are the relevant categories and construction of fat in three ways. First by being suspicious and critical of any governmental, medical, or educational "non-neutral policy, attitude, or procedure where a line is drawn between fat and thin," secondly by being "aware and alert of seemingly neutral policies that have different effects on groups based on their weight" and lastly by "keeping the actual lives of fat people at the heart of analysis."[18] This activist approach, while valuable, is problematic when exploring an era when fat did have a stigma against it. Elena Levy-Navarro argues in her chapter "Fattening Queer History: Where does Fat History Go From Here?" that historical analyses of fat "constitute the beginnings of what must be a larger project to provide a genealogical history of oppressive concepts, especially biomedical ones like 'obesity.'"[19] She argues for the exploration of questions that help to give a history to "the oppressive constructs such as 'obesity' and the broader construct of 'health.'"[20] Her observations call for a lager interdisciplinary study of both the historical and sociological circumstances surrounding the construction of such biomedical concepts. These scholars make important points and call for a new field.

Peter N. Stearns sought to look at the history of the attack on "fat" using a comparative focus in *Fat History: Bodies and Beauty in the Modern West.*[21] Stearns argues that looking at the history of fat comparatively adds scope and significance that

other studies have lacked. Previous scholars, according to Stearns, have had a narrow view of the factors that allowed this obsession with fat to flourish, and as a result they have not fully grasped the range of the attacks on fat that began in 1900. The growing attack on fat in the first thirty years of the twentieth century was precipitated by immense social changes. Stearns argues that among the factors that led to this new obsession were changes in fashion, new commercial fat-control devices, industrialism, a new public discourse on fat, and the expansion of medical knowledge. Stearns brings new factors to the debate such as the impact of the medical industry on the growing obsession of fat. His comparative focus helps to show the differences in development between the United States and France, and helps explain the unique obsession with fat in America.

Heather Addison's work *Hollywood and the Rise of Physical Culture* adds to the existing literature by examining the reducing craze, that occurred in the 1920s by specifically through looking at Hollywood fan magazines.[22] She argues that previous scholars have not given credit to Hollywood and its influence on fitness and dieting. Expanding on the work of Stearns, Addison links the influence of Hollywood to the rise in anti-fat sentiment in America. Addison shows that by placing reducing advertisements in fan magazines they were inextricably linked to the southern California lifestyle and the Hollywood stars. Using the scholarship surrounding Hollywood and the film industry as well as the scholarship on fat and dieting, Addison provides a valuable analysis of the impact Hollywood had on the obsession with fat. Drawing on the work of the previous scholars, especially Stearns, she adds a significant and new aspect to the historiography of physical culture. However, Addison asserts that as the depression began to set in, the

reducing craze began to fade away. Addison shows that the number of advertisements for reducing products in fan magazines in the 1930s declined significantly from the mid 1920s.[23] Yet, Addison overlooks another shift that occurs. While advertisements did decline, the beauty editorial became more prevalent and popular, taking the place of the advertisement as the dominant venue of dissemination for these ideas. In addition, these editorialists were branded and marketed not only inside the magazines, but also outside through radio shows, books, and personal appearances.

This thesis will also intersect with the history of women's bodies and beauty. Lois Banner's 1983 work *American Beauty*, seeks to trace the history of women's beauty standards from the antebellum period to the 1920s.[24] Banner argues that the standards of beauty for women were influenced by women's positions and goals at the time. Social factors such as medical developments, social modernization, and class structure also played a role in defining these standards. The act of participating in beauty culture was a central facet of the woman's world. Women's history, Banner argues, has traditionally examined the women's world by looking at things such as childbirth and chores. However, this approach overlooks beauty as a fundamental aspect of the women's experience. She attempts to use beauty culture and the changing standards of physical appearance as indicators of the women's experience. Banner's work presents a solid analysis of the ways in which women's beauty has developed over time, the ways women experienced beauty, and the social factors that have influenced it.

In 1998, Kathy Peiss published her study *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture.*[25] Peiss studies the history of the cosmetic industry in the twentieth

century and the development of beauty culture in America. Peiss argues "for women experiencing these social changes, the act of beautifying often became a lightening rod for larger conflicts over female autonomy and social roles."[26] Beauty culture became not just a commercial industry, but also a system of meaning for women that helped them to "navigate the changing condition of the modern social experience."[27] *Hope in a Jar* presents a solid analysis of how women used beauty culture to create a shared ritual in the midst of immense social change.

This thesis uses the interpretations and foundations laid by Banner and Peiss to examine the meaning of Ullback's beliefs as well as the changes and developments in women's history that Ullback's writing reflected. While Ullback was never specifically concerned with cosmetics or fashion, she spoke often of beauty. For Ullback, beauty was the culminating result of diet, exercise, and massage. Additionally, Ullback believed that the attitude women embraced also had a profound effect on their success in achieving beauty and happiness in life. Ullback's articles can help us better understand the ways beauty culture allowed women to assert independence over their bodies in the 1930s. Therefore, this thesis will also have an impact on the historiography of women during the depression and beauty culture. The terms *physical culture* and *beauty culture* are both used to describe Ullback's message throughout this thesis. Physical Culture is used as Heather Addison defines it, as an umbrella term, which describes anything that physically modifies the body. Beauty Culture in contrast, is used to describe the overall appearance and the ritual that women interacted with. Furthermore, Beauty Culture describes women's experience and the ways they used beauty as a system of meaning.

This thesis is divided into four main chapters. Chapter One discusses the atmosphere and the culture of reducing Ullback encountered when arriving in America. She arrived during the climax of several historical trends which had developed prior to 1920 and led to the "reducing craze," a period of reducing and dieting through extraordinary measures and dangerous gimmicks. Ullback's career and rise to fame as "Sylvia of Hollywood" coincided with the height and the rejection of the "reducing craze," and signaled a change in ideas about the body and reducing. She stood in opposition to the techniques and ideas of the "Reducing craze" and represented, what was known as the "Reduceosanity" that developed. This chapter focuses on the period from 1920 to 1930.

Chapter Two discusses Ullback's departure from Pathé in 1930 and the publication of her articles for *Liberty Magazine* and her book *Hollywood Undressed* in 1931. These publications resulting in her blacklisting from the Hollywood community and contributed to her decision to leave Hollywood and pursue other opportunities in New York. However, they also contributed to her reputation and made her more widely known. Moreover, these publications reflected her distaste with the Hollywood lifestyle and help to associate her with the values of the average American during the depression.

Chapter Three covers 1930 to 1935 and examines Ullback's emergence as a editorialist for *Photoplay* magazine. Her articles, books, and radio show all represented the new ideas about physical culture that emerged after the reducing craze. Furthermore, for women living during the depression, her message offered an empowering sentiment, which sought to provide women with values and approaches to life. Through her use of

the stars as examples of beauty, Ullback discussed a type of beauty, which rested on egalitarian rather than aristocratic ideals. It covers the period from 1930-1935.

Chapter Four examines the period from 1936-1939 in which Ullback's career continually lost steam and she struggled to find a platform for her writing. As physical culture continued to decline in popularity, due to the association of physical culture with Nazi Germany, new discussions about beauty began to emerge. The tone of editorials changed to discuss topics such as fashion, personality, and makeup. Ullback struggled to match this new tone but in 1939 ultimately withdrew from the public sphere due to her inability to find a platform for her writing.

Introduction

[1] Sylvia Ullback, *No More Alibis* (*Photoplay* Publishing, 1934), 5–11; Sylvia Yahanne Elise Leiter formerly Ullback, "United States of America Petition for Citizenship, No. 202623" (Southern District of New York, NY, October 25, 1932).

[2] Elizabeth Yeaman, "Sylvia's Clever Hands Aid Stars to Keep Slender," *Hollywood Citizen News*, September 17, 1930; Sylvia Ullback, *Hollywood Undressed, Observations of Sylvia as Noted by Her Secretary.* (New York, Brentano's, 1931), 13–16.

[3] Ullback, *Hollywood Undressed, Observations of Sylvia as Noted by Her Secretary.*, 121–126; "Big Business," *Los Angeles Herald*, December 11, 1929; Yeaman, "Sylvia's Clever Hands Aid Stars to Keep Slender."

[4] "There Is Consternation Among the Feminine Stars of Hollywood...," *Hollywood Citizen*, January 15, 1931.

[5] Ullback, *Hollywood Undressed, Observations of Sylvia as Noted by Her Secretary.*, 137.

[6] *Hollywood Reporter*, July 28, 1931.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, "Building a British Superman: Physical Culture in Interwar Britain," *Journal of Contemporary History* 41, no. 4 (October 2006): 565–610.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid., 595.

[11] David M. Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945*, Kindle Edition (Oxford University Press, USA, 1999).

[12] Hillel Schwartz, *Never Satisfied: a Cultural History of Diets, Fantasies, and Fat* (New York : London: Free Press ; Collier Macmillan, 1986).

[13] Hillel Schwartz, *Never Satisfied: a Cultural History of Diets, Fantasies, and Fat* (New York: Free Press; Collier Macmillan, 1986), 5.

[14] Schwartz, 5.

[15] Roberta Pollack Seid, *Never Too Thin: Why Women Are at War with Their Bodies*, 1st ed (New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1989).

[16] Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls*, 1st ed. (Vintage, 2010).

[17] Esther Rothblum and Sondra Solovay, eds., *The Fat Studies Reader*, Kindle Edition (NYU Press, 2009), loc. 670.

[18] Ibid., loc. 695.

[19] Ibid., loc. 976.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Peter N. Stearns, *Fat History: Bodies and Beauty in the Modern West* (New York: New York University Press, 1997).

[22] Heather Addison, *Hollywood and the Rise of Physical Culture*, American Popular History and Culture (New York: Routledge, 2003).

[23] Heather Addison, *Hollywood and the Rise of Physical Culture*, American Popular History and Culture (New York: Routledge, 2003), 7.

[24] Lois W. Banner, *American Beauty* (New York: Knopf : Distributed by Random House, 1983).

[25] Kathy Lee Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture*, 1st ed (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998).

[26] Kathy Lee Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture*, 1st ed. (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998), 7.

[27] Peiss, 6.

Chapter 1: "Reduce-o-mania," 1920-1929

Sylvia Ullback immigrated to the United States in the early 1920s where she encountered a culture focused on eliminating fat by altering the body through radical gimmicks and techniques. She arrived during the culmination of several decades of changes that led to the "reducing craze," a period of dieting using radical techniques. The craze reached its height just as Ullback was just beginning her career as a masseuse. However, by 1925, the craze began to decline with the American Medical Association's condemnation of the drastic reducing techniques. In turn, the press, which had earlier promoted these radical techniques, began adopting a health-based approach that aligned more with Ullback's beliefs. This chapter will explore the nature of the reducing craze, the factors that led to its rise and decline, and Ullback's life and career as it paralleled these trends between the years 1920 and 1939.

Sylvia Ullback was born in Oslo, Norway in 1881. Her mother, Emilie Wilhelmsen, was a Norwegian opera singer and her father was a Danish artist. Ullback did not talk much about her parents, but she did mention that her family referred to her as the "ugly duckling." In an interview with Alma Whittaker she recalled, "I guess it was because they always told me I was an ugly duckling that I became so violently interested in beauty."[1] The ugly duckling became a common theme throughout her articles and she consistently urged readers to avoid becoming one. She often mentioned that the careers of her mother and father were their primary concern and as a result her grandparents raised her. The story of the ugly duckling affected Sylvia's self-perception and, in turn,

impacted her later ideas about health and the body. For Ullback the "ugly duckling" referred to a general appearance, which involved not just beauty but also an overall attitude that she believed was reflected through body language. In her writing, she sought to help women transform from an "ugly duckling" into a beautiful swan.

At some point after her mother died in 1891, Ullback decided to pursue nursing. In the introduction to her first book, *No More Alibis,* where she offers some sketchy details of her life story, she mentions that her father did not agree with her decision to become a nurse.[2] However, she resisted his control and moved to Copenhagen where she studied with a Dr. Ulrick as well as in various hospitals throughout Europe. It was then that she discovered the "magic of her hands."[3] She learned massage and claimed that she became "an ardent student of the science of manipulation by the hands in medical work."[4] *Photoplay* magazine claimed in a 1929 article that, "although a Scandinavian, Sylvia is no ordinary Swedish masseuse. She has taken degrees abroad and has worked with world famous doctors."[5] Whether or not she actually had medical training is unclear, but the publicity implied it and her clients later heralded her massage techniques.[6]

Ullback moved to Copenhagen where she trained and learned the fundamentals of massage in the 1890s. Her methods and ideas about the body and health clearly stemmed from her training in Europe and, specifically, in massage. The Western European idea of massage stimulating the body has its origins in the rise of calisthenics, or gentle gymnastics designed for women, first in England and then in the United States by 1850. Calisthenics aimed to reduce a particular area in the body by regaining control of the

muscles in that area.[7] However, the idea of using calisthenics to not only build up muscle but also reduce fat eluded experts of the era. It was asked how exercise could put on as well as take off weight.[8] As historian Hillel Schwartz shows, the "massage and movement cure" was imported to the United States from Northern Europe in the 1870s and was used to treat indigestion, irritability, and depression or to calm neurasthenia, a condition characterized by fatigue and headache, which was thought to be caused by emotional problems. Massage was thought to dissolve fat and emerged as a supplement to make exercise more effective. By 1900 massage as a way to break down fat so muscle could replace it began to take hold as a supplement to calisthenics and later exercise. *Ladies Home Journal* explained in 1901: "That which tears down fatty tissue when given vigorously will build up tissue when given lightly."[9]

In an 1884 edition of *A Practical Treatise on Massage: It's History, Mode of Application, and Effects*, Douglas Graham credits Peter Henrik Ling, a Swedish physiologist, as having instituted the Swedish Movement Cure, the origin of modern day massage. In 1813 Ling established the Royal Central Institution in Stockholm to practice and teach his system of gymnastics. Graham claims that since 1830, "with waning interest of the French physicians in the subject of massage, the Germans and Scandinavians have taken it up with renewed zeal."[10] He claims that physicians and surgeons in Europe held the method in high esteem. Copenhagen was a center of physical culture research, training, and thought in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.[11] Ullback became a student of this tradition once she began her training in the late 1890s. The

European ideas about massage strongly influenced the techniques she brought to America with her and the ideas she voiced about fat.

Sylvia married her first husband, Andrew Ullback, sometime around 1900 and had two sons, Eyolf and Finn, who were both born in Copenhagen. Andrew Ullback served in World War I and lost his lumber business in the economic downturn after the war. Otherwise not much about him is known. Ullback rarely mentioned her early marriage and, when asked by journalists, she claimed she had been happily married. In actuality, her first marriage was troubled. In one interview, Ullback hinted that when her husband returned from World War I he had changed. "When [Andrew] came back," she insisted, "he found the same difficulties of post-war adjustment as many thousands of other soldiers."[12] It is likely that he had "shell shock" or what is now known as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Additionally, during and after the war, Ullback may have served as a nurse working with veterans and this experience, may have fostered a break with her husband, while furthering her interest in health and beauty.[13]

It is unclear why but the Ullbacks decided to leave Copenhagen. They arrived in the United States on July 7, 1921. When Sylvia arrived in the United States she encountered a society that was heavily focused on physical culture and reducing. Between 1900 and 1920 a new ideal of the female body was developing and evolving, as was a public discourse on the body and fat. These historical developments and the rise of the "reducing craze" set the stage for Ullback's rise to fame and her rejection of the 1920's reducing methods.

In a general sense the term "reducing" in the twenties meant the physical reduction of the body and the attempt to create a smaller self. In other words, it meant dieting and losing weight to become thin. The "reducing craze" and the need to "reduce one's shape" implied an attempt to create a standardized and thin figure that was in line with the fashion of the period.

Between 1900 and 1920 an obsession over fat and physical culture in the United States developed as a result of a number of historical factors. The development of this focus was paralleled by changes in the ideal standards of beauty for women, industrialism, the emergence of a consumer culture, and the rise of the Hollywood star system. Between 1880 and 1920 industrialization and the rise of the modern age brought revolutionary change to America. Innovations such as modern transportation in the car and streetcar, entertainment for the masses in film, new household innovations such as indoor plumbing, heaters, and the telephone, all revolutionized life for Americans.[14] The abundance and prosperity the country enjoyed as by-products of industrialization also caused concern because of the potential dangers of inefficiency and overproduction.[15] The body and the dangers of fat were discussed in relation to these dangers brought on by industrialism and mechanization. The body was seen as an entity that, in the words of historian Roberta Pollack, needed to be "as efficient, as effective, as economical, and as beautiful as the sleek new machines, as the rationalized workplace."[16]

The reducing craze marks the widespread acceptance and implementation of these new ideas in popular magazines, specifically the Hollywood fan magazine. These developments are fundamental to understanding the emergence in the 1920s of the

reducing craze and the distinct shift in the discussion of the body in fan magazines, which takes place in the late 1920s.[17] The ideas associated with the reducing craze permeated society from the early to mid-1920s but began to fall out of favor in the late 1920s. The shift away from the reducing craze is key to understanding the environment in which Ullback became popular. This evolution was marked by a change in the dissemination of ideas about physical culture and also by Ullback's writings and their popularity.

As Peter Stearns discusses in his work *Fat History*, the slender figure began to come into style around 1890 and the uncorsetted body became popular among women. The new fashion of the period, which stressed tighter clothing, encouraged a slender figure. As this style became popular, public discourse and comment on weight and the body became more common. The body, and fat specifically, was discussed widely in the media and many began to associate fat with poor health and poor morals. Obesity began to be seen as a health risk and Stearns argues that the growing number of physicians and faddists helped to create the "growing cult of hostility to fat."[18] Stearns asserts that doctors "echoed some of the disgust that the new popular perceptions of fat had involved, anchored by a revulsion against lack of self-control. They mirrored and doubtless encouraged, the emotional or ethical side of the revulsion against overweight."[19] Fat was associated with laziness and the absence of restraint, both symptoms of an alarming decline of traditional Victorian morals. A good body was "defined by self-restraint and was a vital sign of moral quality."[20] The anxiety about fat that existed in the early 1900s led to the creation of a powerful culture that was focused on fat in 1920s.

Reducing, in the 1920s sense of the term, implied an attempt to create a smaller, standardized, thin figure. The figure was meant to be pleasing the male gaze, regardless of the emotional impact these attempts had on women.[21] Reducing used methods that sought to medicalize and internalize the attempt to create a figure that fit the model of the ideal woman in this period. The quest to reduce was focused on achieving an external beauty through artificial means rather than achieving an overall healthy body through exercise and good diet.

This period was also marked by changes in the ideal type of beauty and body type for women. The "Gibson Girl," whose image was first drawn on the cover of *Life* magazine by Charles Dana Gibson in the late 1890s, first exemplified the "New Woman." Although she still wore the corset, the Gibson Girl began to represent a new ideal for the female body. The "Gibson Girl" became the archetype of the "New Woman" from 1890 to sometime around 1913. Carolyn Kitch asserts in her work *The Girl on the Magazine Cover*, that the "New Woman:"

> conveyed new social, political, and economic possibilities for womanhood. At many historical moments she seemed merely to "mirror" what was happening in society. Yet she also served as a model for that society and as a cultural commentator through whom certain ideals came to seem 'natural' in real life.[22]

The Gibson Girl was symbolic of the wholesome and healthy American woman. In appearance, she was said to be "tall and commanding, with thick dark hair swept upward in the prevailing pompadour style. Her figure was thinner than that of the voluptuous woman, but she remained large of bosom and hips."[23] She was very much the image of an elite woman. However, she reflected the values and aspirations that the feminist movement of the era sought for women. Scholars have argued that in the 1890s, the

Gibson Girl "was identified with physical emancipation through sports, exercise, and dress."[24] By 1900, however, she had become associated with a group of feminists who were "demanding more freedom in areas of personal behavior and sensual expression."[25] Developments in the push for women's emancipation and the realities of an evolving modern society were paralleled by changes in the New Woman. The Gibson Girl began to fall out of style around 1913 because the image no longer represented changing standards of behavior for young women. The period between 1913 and the early 1920s was a transition period between the Gibson Girl and the emerging "Flapper." In *American Beauty*, Lois Banner asserts that by 1913 "the appearance of the flapper marked the fruition of a sensual revolution among American women that had begun in the 1890s and that the Gibson girl image could only partly accommodate."[26] Elements of a proto-Flapper began to appear in 1913, but did not become popular or clearly defined until the 1920s.

The flapper, who is described by historian Lois Banner as "a small flirtatious, sometimes boyish, sometimes voluptuous model of beauty," became the dominant image of the New Woman in the 1920s and represented a younger generation of women with new and different expectations and definitions of women's emancipation.[27] Paula Fass has argued that young and modern women in the 1920s did not embrace feminism as older women had defined it, but instead "defined equality not as political rights or economic opportunities but as something more subtle and more threatening: freedom—the right to self-expression, self-determination, and personal satisfaction."[28] After women won the vote in 1920, organized political movements by feminists seemed to be

unnecessary and outdated. The new ideals of equality that were embraced by young women were not based in legal or political change. Their ideal of change and freedom, through "expression" and "personal satisfaction," dominated the culture of the 1920s and contributed to the outward appearance of a culture of excess. These values dominated the culture of the 1920s and were reflected in the image of the Flapper.[29]

When the New Woman's image shifted from the Gibson Girl to the Flapper, ideas about the body also shifted. The voluptuous woman faded and a new boyish figure came into style. The changes in the "New Woman" and the ideal body type as defined by the Flapper were paralleled by the development of a public discourse on fat. These two historical developments helped to create and define the culture of reducing and the "reducing craze" in the early 1920s. Ullback began her business as the reducing craze reached its height and her methods stood in direct opposition to those of the craze.

Shortly after arriving in New York in 1921, the Ullbacks moved to Chicago where they began looking for business opportunities.[30] Sylvia soon found work with the wealthy Rosenwald family.[31] Julius Rosenwald was a partner in the Sears, Roebuck & Company department store. The family hired her to help their grandmother get back on her feet after a fall in which she injured her kneecap. Ullback reportedly had her walking within a week and the Rosenwalds were so impressed that they hired her as a personal masseuse for $1.50 per day. The position likely provided the Ullback family with some stability and was a good job for a female immigrant during this period. At some point, while working for the Rosenwald family, Ullback came into contact with a well-known figure in the Hollywood community who helped her get her start. While newspaper

articles about Ullback do not identify this individual, Marie Dressler, Hedda Hopper, and Alice White were all credited with being so impressed by Ullback that they convinced her to move to Hollywood. Clearly, Marie Dressler was one of Ullback's earliest and best clients, as well as a friend, and it is likely that she was the celebrity that helped Ullback connect with Hollywood.[32]

Sylvia arrived in Los Angeles with her family and began working out of her home at the height of the "reducing craze." It involved new methods of reducing by artificial means, most of which were heavily advertised in popular magazines of the period. In 1925, a journalist reported, "Reducing has become a national pastime . . . a craze, a national fanaticism, a frenzy."[33] Hillel Schwartz claims that the "Roaring Twenties were also the calculating, calorie controlled, ounce-conscious Grim twenties."[34] The craze took place mainly among white, middle-class American women who were urged by advertisers to shed fat in order to be happier, more attractive to men, and more successful. Advertisements in magazines, particularly Hollywood fan magazines, were one of the main platforms through which ideas about women's bodies were disseminated.[35] While movies also played a role, advertisements directly guided women in their attempts to reduce. The advertisements and their attitude toward women and fat were very much reflective of the dominant cultural attitude of the 1920s. These advertisements were also what would lead to a change in the dominant reducing discussion.

The advertisements found in these magazines represented a transition. As Heather Addison shows, advertisements before the craze tended to be informational in nature and offered healthy eating or exercise tips rather than aiming to shame and

humiliate readers into reducing.[36] By 1920, advertisements used emotional appeal to convince readers that they needed to lose weight in order to live happier lives, as well as to achieve beauty. Reducing products that were advertised ranged from harmless special stockings to dangerous pills that contained thyroid hormones or other drugs. Fat was berated as a disgusting menace to a society focused on productivity in the new industrial age.[37]

Consumerism and modern advertising emerged together in the early twentieth century. The culture of consumption developed between 1880 and 1920 and created a new pressure to buy. The new focus on consumption can be seen in the advertisements found in popular magazines during this period. Consumerism in America was the result of both economic and noneconomic institutions working together to create what historian William Leach described as "the democratization of desire and the cult of the new."[38] By the 1920s advertising was used to create a dissatisfaction and self-consciousness that sought to convince readers to continually buy the products advertised in magazines. This proved exceptionally effective in the case of dieting and women's bodies.

The reducing craze played out mainly in the advertising sections of popular Hollywood fan magazines. The reducing advertisements and claims in these publications very rarely specifically mentioned the Hollywood stars. However, by placing them in fan magazines where the stars' lives and appearances were discussed, the association was implied. The Hollywood star system emerged around 1912-1913 and the "picture personality" became the dominant focus of motion pictures. Addison argues that stars of the period functioned in four key ways: as the "truth of films," as ideal figures, as living

proof that the fantasy lifestyles of on-screen characters could exist in the real world, and as examples of success for those who wanted to become stars themselves.[39] Fan magazines became the primary arena in which stars, their lives, and their careers were discussed. Addison asserts that "as article after article clearly documents, reducing was considered one of the professional duties of motion picture stars, thus making all stars de facto experts in the physical culture arena."[40] As the star system developed and big stars such as Clara Bow continued to appear both on screen and in fan magazines, stars began to have an influence on physical culture. Fans sought to model themselves after the stars and that model included the physical culture routines and diets of movie celebrities.[41] As Addison clearly points out, the stars of the 1920s and their attempts to "drug, diet, pound, and roll themselves into shape" must have encouraged at least some women who admired and looked up to the stars to do the same.[42] Fan magazines and the stars who were featured within them had, at the very least, some impact on the proliferation and the popularity of the reducing craze in the 1920s.

The advertisements in women's magazines invited women to look at, dream about, and decide on purchases based on fan magazine fantasies about slim starlets and their glamorous lifestyles.[43] Reducing products consisted of pills, crèmes, equipment, soaps, and pamphlets. The advertisements urged readers to remove fat and reduce through the effortless, but often dangerous, use of their products. These advertisements reveal the common themes and ideas about the body and reducing that the advertisers wanted women to believe in. Tablets and pills were one of the most common types of advertisements, but also some of the most dangerous. The pills supposedly contained

ingredients that helped to "neutralize fattening agents" in the body and advertisers often claimed they were endorsed and supported by doctors.[44] However, these pills often contained thyroid hormones and other dangerous substances. The companies sought to invoke a sense of authority and trust by claiming that the effectiveness of their products was based on scientific evidence and endorsed by doctors. These advertisements underscored the need for women to "seek their natural beauty, which becomes hidden when artificial influences cause the grace, slenderness and symmetry of the natural body to be lost."[45] In line with the new idea of the streamlined body, these advertisements emphasized the need for women to reduce in order to uncover their slender and beautiful figures. As a result, these advertisements inherently implied that anything other than a slender, graceful, and symmetrical body was unattractive and shameful.

Furthermore, in these advertisements mechanization is blamed for the increase of fat in society. An advertisement for Dr. R. Lincoln Graham's netroid pills that appeared in *Photoplay* asserts that, "the delicious foods of our modern civilization are so tempting that one eats too much. Machinery does so much of our work that we exercise too little. The result of this of course, is disfiguring fat…."[46] Blaming larger societal forces for the increase in weight removed personal responsibility from the fan magazine reader. The advertisements argued that the answer was simple. Reducing could be easy and effortless, if their product was used.

Reducing crèmes and soaps were another common type of product found in magazines. Advertisers of these products sought to appeal to those consumers who might have been hesitant about using pills to reduce. They often drew on the exoticism

of European techniques and stressed the effortless nature of reducing with such a product. An advertisement for a bath soap explained to readers:

> A European discovery makes it possible to reduce weight as nature herself reduces. Florazona actually washes away excess flesh through the pores. Don't risk your health with starvation diets, heart-straining exercises, internal drugs. Simply empty a package of fragrant Florazona in your bath.[47]

The focus on what were claimed to be European techniques and discoveries was featured prominently in many advertisements of the period. These advertisements sought to establish credibility by linking their product to Europe.

Another advertisement claimed "Reduce…No Diet; no drugs; no exercise. Dainty Form melts away your fat as if by magic just where you want to lose it."[48] The ease and effortlessness of reducing was a consistent and fundamental ingredient in these advertisements. Products promised not only to reduce fat without diet or exercise, but also claimed that radical results could be achieved overnight. Dainty Form reducing cream promised readers that it was possible to lose six pounds in one day.[49]

As early as 1925 the American Medical Association (AMA) began to investigate the companies who advertised reducing aids and began to push for reducing techniques and diets that relied on safer methods. The head of the AMA, Wendell C. Phillips, argued that women were negatively influenced by the fashion of the period and the body ideal of the Flapper. In 1926, the first "Adult Weight Conference" was held and medical professionals gathered to discuss the methods used to reduce. The *Chicago Daily Tribune* reported:

> A few weeks ago there was gathered in New York a body of scientists to discuss how woman can keep her boyish figure without endangering health. The conference was called by officials of the American Medical Association at the

> request of a popular woman's magazine deluged with requests on how to reduce weight.[50]

The conference exposed the methods through which women were reducing, including "diet, drugs, pills, and a rolling and steaming process" and the dangerous medical and mental implications of these methods such as "nervous breakdowns, lung infections and numerous other complaints."[51] The advertisements for the pills, creams and contraptions of the reducing craze were connected with scams and quacks that put women's health at risk. One article declared:

> Madame Stylish Stout, the jig is up. You and your Friend Husband, who have been under the fond delusion that you could wash, cat, or rub away those irritating extra pounds of avoirdupois, have been, in the phraseology of Dr. Arthur J. Cramp, director of the Bureau of Investigation of the American Medical Association, kidded by experts. You have been dancing while an army of quacks fiddled.[52]

The article continued by asserting that Dr. Cramp's investigation of unethical medical practice revealed that women were giving in to fashion and taking extraordinary measures to mold their bodies to fit the Flapper standard. The article explained:

> The string bean, hipless, boyish figure Dame Fashion has demanded of her devotees these latter season, be declared, has been a wonderful stimulus to this brand of quackery. And invariably it is the under-exercised and overfed heavyweight who thinks that somewhere there must be a panacea which, without effort on her part, will permit her to achieve such a figure.[53]

Discussion over these issues continued in the press and a new method of reducing through diet and exercise was stressed. Furthermore, doctors continually associated the development of these techniques with the image of the flapper and women's quest for beauty and style. A doctor at the Adult Weight conference was quoted as explaining that he did not completely blame women for they "were trying to realize an ideal; because

they have a laudable desire for beauty and because they show a willingness to curb their natural appetites for the fattening things."[54] However, all of the doctors at the conference agreed that the radical techniques had serious health consequences for women in both the short and long term. A doctor from Columbia University criticized women and claimed "by absurd reducing methods, women make themselves incapable of motherhood, or, of healthy offspring."[55] Reducing, according to this article undermined traditional gender roles in the sense that it threatened motherhood. This new discourse and the condemnation of the excessive reducing techniques that originated from the AMA continued to spread via the press. This discourse marked the beginning of the end for the reducing craze and created a climate in which Ullback's ideas would flourish.

Soon after the AMA began to publicly and proactively denounce these reducing scams, products, quacks, and techniques, popular periodicals began to get on board with the message. The AMA's Bureau of Investigation had begun conducting inquiries into companies that sold fake or dangerous products. They also began to look into the magazines that sold these companies advertisement space. At the threat of investigation many magazines began to cooperate with the AMA. In 1925 the Bureau of Investigation began looking at *Photoplay* and as a result of this pressure the magazine began to change its policy toward these advertisements.[56]

In July 1926, *Photoplay* published the first of a three-part series entitled "Wholesale Murder and Suicide." The editor, James R. Quirk, announced that *Photoplay* had launched a national investigation led by Catherine Brody, a popular New York journalist, into the "menaces of Reduceomania."[57] In the first article she asserted:

> In these days of the boyish figure, however, reducing has come to be more than an idea. It is even more than a fad, doctors say. It is a mania. The word, reduceomania has been coined by *Photoplay* to describe it. Reducing methods, by medicine and otherwise, do more than exist. They increase and multiply day to day and year to year.[58]

Brody explains to readers that following several deaths *Photoplay* commissioned her to conduct an investigation into how women were reducing and the dangers associated with the techniques. The death of one of the most popular silent era actresses is mentioned at the forefront. Barbara La Marr, the article claims, had taken a thyroid treatment to try to lose weight. Brody states that she became ill while taking the treatment and contracted tuberculosis, which caused her death. Whether or not La Marr's thyroid treatments contributed to her death was never proved. Yet the article vows to investigate and offer answers as to "how women were reducing, what dangers their methods held, especially when they used internal medicines, how they should reduce, if at all, and what healthy standards existed for them to follow."[59] The article represented a turning point in the discussion of the body in fan magazines. "Wholesale Murder and Suicide" was the first explicit condemnation of these techniques in *Photoplay* and the first to directly connect reducing to women's desires to achieve beauty like the film stars. The article warned women "the quick road to slimness is the quick road to neurasthenia, hypothyroidism, Bright's disease, hysteria, heart palpitations, tuberculosis, colitis, and possible death."[60] The article sought to make it clear that the ingredients in any internal reducing treatment were dangerous, even deadly, and could lead to a host of medical issues.

Brody consulted several doctors and reported their advice on what they regarded as "sane" reducing methods. When asked if there was a reasonable and safe way to

reduce, Dr. Sadler reported, "Work, exercise and sane diet are the best reducers, but in absolutely every case diet should be an individual thing, laid out for each patient, for everyone is a law unto himself."[61] Furthermore the article took a new stance on reducing by blaming the individual for excessive weight, arguing that being "fat" was due to a lack of effort and in most cases not something that could be fixed overnight. Another doctor was quoted as saying "it is the overfed, under-exercised individual who thinks that somewhere there must be a process that, without effort or self-denial, will transform stylish stouts into boyish form."[62] The "stylish" body, according to Brody, was the "boyish figure," clearly a reference to the Flapper. The article moved beyond just criticizing reducing techniques by condemning women's quest to achieve the lifestyle and look associated with the flapper. The article explained:

> Just how reduceomania has come to be is a hopeless question. Did the popularity of the straight up and down, one-piece frock in America make the boyish figure an ideal for women of all ages? Was it envy and the desire to emulate the corsetless, pliant, bob-haired flapper? Many people blame the movies for this and as for other sins . . . No matter what the cause, the big parade of women who want to be fashionably thin and do not stop to reason why or even how has been increasing.[63]

"Wholesale Murder and Suicide" was the start of a shift in ideas about reducing and a new focus on dieting through hard work and exercise.

Interestingly, "Wholesale Murder and Suicide" also proclaimed that massage was not a viable reducing technique. The article claimed "while massage has a reputation for reducing fat, careful observation over a long period of years has led us to believe that most of this reputation is without scientific foundation."[64] It would seem that this stood in opposition to Ullback's techniques; however, Ullback never advocated for a reducing

plan based solely on massage. Her three-pronged approach included massage along with healthy eating and exercise. Ultimately, massage, which caused no physical or internal harm, was not an issue that the AMA or *Photoplay* continued to oppose.

The second installment of "Wholesale Murder and Suicide" was published in August 1926. *Photoplay* asserted boldly on the first page, "To back up its fight to protect the health of the womanhood of the nation, *Photoplay* refuses to admit to its advertising columns any internal reducing preparations or questionable methods of removing fat."[65] This claim was made probably to satisfy the AMA and its investigators. *Photoplay* did ban all internal reducing products, but also continued to run ads for gimmicks and products such as reducing stockings, pamphlets that promised to send the reader the "secret" to weight loss, and contraptions that claimed to increase circulation. Nevertheless, advertisements for these sorts of products steadily decreased in the following years.[66]

Reducing advertisements and their health claims were not the focus of the second installment. Instead, the focus was a discussion of the ideal figure for women. Brody explained to readers, "the truth is there is no ideal figure. There are only stylish figures, the human body attempting every few years to follow new fashion. Thus the tragedy of reduceomania that is sweeping this country."[67] The article urges women to adopt "Reduceosanity" and the "honest methods by which the too fat women may cure obesity."[68] The article reassured readers that there was no ideal figure and they should strive to achieve a well-proportioned body instead of trying to be fashionable. *Photoplay's* assertion that there was no ideal figure was far from the dominant cultural

message of the period and it signaled an important change in the discussion of the female body.

The last article in the series was entitled "The Happy Ending of Wholesale Murder and Suicide." For the first time in *Photoplay*, women were given specific reducing exercises. Brody tells readers "As this is the final article in the series, I am going to give it a happy ending by showing you the correct way of reducing is infinitely pleasanter and more satisfactory than the dangerous 'get slim quick' methods."[69] The article aims to show how exercise along with a healthy diet can reduce in a safer and more effective manner. The focus of this article is, in essence, what Ullback was practicing at the time and what she would argue when she later started writing. From 1926 until 1932, fan magazines would slowly begin to shift away from the radical reducing methods.[70] However, *Photoplay* did not continue to consistently publish the kind of argument seen in Brody's articles. Columns featuring stars and their exercise routines and diets had occasionally appeared in the magazine, but it was not until Ullback began writing that the physical culture editorial began to appear regularly. Although Ullback never specifically mentioned these articles, they were significant in the sense that they signaled a shift in the popular perception of reducing techniques.

Between 1926 and 1931 the number of dieting advertisements dropped significantly. Heather Addison argues "the reducing craze was curtailed by two factors: reducing 'sanity' and the great depression."[71] Addison shows that in 1925 *Photoplay* published more than 135 advertisements for physical culture products. The number of advertisements fell significantly in the following year with only seventy-four

advertisements in 1926 and thirty-nine in 1927. In the 1930s the number of advertisements in magazines dropped to less than one hundred and ranged between forty and eighty per issue. Addison argues that physical culture did not completely disappear in the thirties, but it was no longer a fad.[72] She contends that some advertisements continued to appear, but often these were ads on how to gain weight rather than how to lose it.

As the fan magazines underwent this change in discussion surrounding the body, Ullback was becoming more popular and was emerging as a celebrity expert. By 1927, she had moved to Hollywood with her family and set up a business out of her home. She secured a clientele made up of Hollywood stars and routinely made house calls to provide them with massage, review their diets, and help them stay fit for their roles. In interviews with reporters and fan magazines she offered advice for reducing and relayed the strategies she used in helping the stars reduce. As she stepped into the spotlight her methods seemed to debunk and stand in opposition to those of the craze. Her techniques and attitude represented a change in the reducing discussion and she seemed to exemplify "reduceosanity" for the press.

In mid-1927 Ullback was offered a position on Mae Murray's vaudeville tour as her personal masseuse and dietitian.[73] Ullback accepted the position in September 1927 and was under contract to spend six months with Murray. However, things ended badly and according to newspaper accounts Ullback "performed the service for the actress until April 2, 1928 after which the defendant refused to pay her."[74] The dispute ended in court and Ullback "charged that she was engaged to keep Miss Murray's form beautiful, but that the screen actress terminated the contract prematurely."[75] Ullback won the case and

was awarded $2,000. The lawsuit provided national publicity for Ullback and she continued to rise to fame.

Soon after the court case ended Ullback's services became a source of contention among the stars. By this time Ullback had a long list of clients that included Ina Claire, Norma Shearer, Constance Bennett and Norma Talmadge. In 1929, Gloria Swanson wanted to hire Sylvia to be her personal masseuse. Ullback declined the offer because she had just rebuilt her clientele after her problems with the exclusive contract with Mae Murray.[76] Nevertheless, according to Sylvia, Gloria Swanson was desperate and refused to allow her to decline the offer. Swanson took matters into her own hands and appealed to Joseph P. Kennedy, father of the future president who was at the time an executive at Pathé, and having an affair with the star. Kennedy, reportedly, was so impressed with Ullback's quick diagnosis of his own physical troubles he offered her a position right away. Kennedy's only stipulation was that Gloria Swanson was Ullback's first priority.[77]

The job made Ullback even more famous. Newspapers became fascinated with Sylvia, her salary, and her techniques. Various columns reported that Ullback made between one $150 and $400 dollars a week.[78] However, Pathé Studio financial records show that her salary was around $250 per week.[79] These records also reveal that contrary to press reports Ullback made $20,000 dollars a year, she probably only made around $12,000.[80] Still, this was a good sum of money for a woman at the time and it allowed Ullback to live in Southern California in Hollywood style. She became almost as big a star as the stars themselves. The position placed Ullback in the public spotlight even more. She appeared in the press over 150 times between 1929 and 1931.[81] Yet, Ullback

did not stay long at Pathé. She left in mid-1930 and pursued opening her own shop. She claimed that leaving was in her best interest so that she could accommodate more private clientele. Leaving allowed her to work with others who were not exclusive to Pathé.

Although she stayed at Pathé for only a short period, her techniques and approach to physical culture became a topic of discussion in the press. Ullback believed that beauty began with attitude and she often discussed confidence and determination as traits that were necessary to reducing. She was credited with solving the stars' problems both related to their bodies and their personal lives. A journalist in 1930 described Ullback's relationship with her clients by asserting:

> Some of her patients go [to Ullback] whether they need treatment or not. When she upbraids them for wanting to take her time, which she should reserve for others in need of her services, they admit that they come because they need the morale which she can give them. Sylvia is a fighter, and she instills backbone in others.[82]

Ullback was credited with doing much more than helping the stars stay fit. Her techniques, but more importantly her attitude toward her clients and beauty, instilled a sense of confidence in women. She was touted as a unique figure who performed miracles for the stars, in spite of their difficult and temperamental personalities and quirks. One of Ullback's clients told a reporter in 1931, "I know that Sylvia's treatment is not all physical. It's mental too. Much depends upon that, one's mental attitude. Sylvia does not permit her clients to keep scales in their homes, to spend their time running to them and climbing upon them to watch the ounces."[83] Ullback was portrayed as bucking the reducing craze with her attitude and techniques. While Ullback stressed the importance of physical beauty to her clients, she also instilled a mental attitude

toward appearance and more broadly toward life. This attitude was focused on positive thinking, determination and, subtly, independence for women. Ullback believed that approaching beauty in this manner would allow women to apply these principles to their everyday lives. The image in figure 1 was printed in *Screenland* magazine and the article discussed Ullback, the stars she worked with, and her techniques. Pictured in her studio at Pathé with her arm around Carole Lombard, the image suggested that Ullback had a close and friendly relationship with her clients.

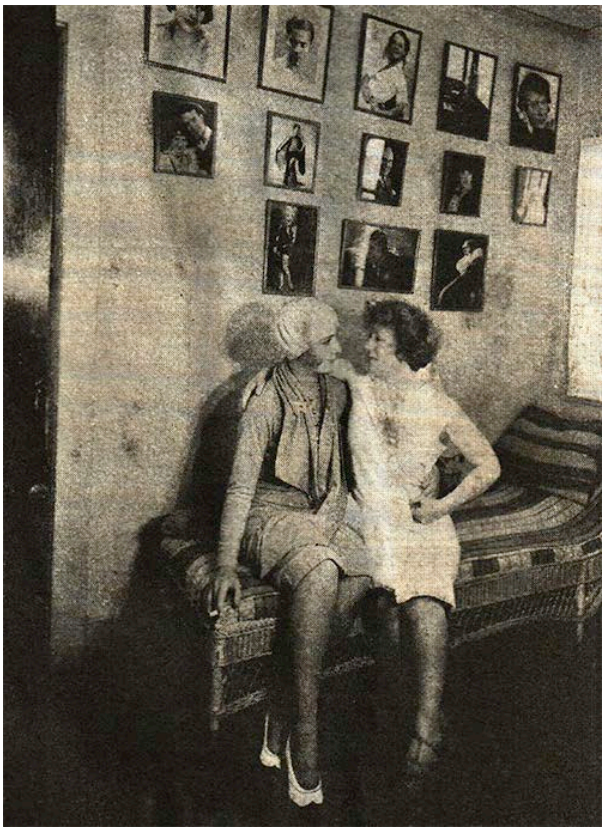

Figure 1 Sylvia in her studio at Pathé with Carole Lombard.
Source: Gary Strider, "Can Beauty Be Hand-made?," *Screenland,* January 1930, 24.

Beauty and health were closely related for Ullback. A client in 1931 stated that Sylvia "sets beauty as a goal. But not her highest goal. Her real goal is health, natural vibrant, the sort of health which radiates from skin and figure and posture and stride. The

sort of health which is lasting."[84] Ullback believed that beauty was the product of health. If women lived healthy lives, according to Ullback, beauty would reflect in their faces and in their appearances. She saw the body as an interconnected entity in which health, beauty, youth, and fitness were all tied together. Her training in Copenhagen and in massage clearly influenced her ideas and philosophies about health and the body.

Reportedly Ullback's attitude and approach to life drew people to her. Her words, when written, often came off as harsh and critical, and she was, but she was also described as full of laughter and spunk. Ullback was characterized as a small woman with a very large attitude and was portrayed as living a glamorous life along with the Hollywood stars.[85] Additionally, to add to the Ullback persona, she was in her mid-forties as she revealed, and her age fascinated journalists. Florabel Muir explained, "She's a living example of her own health slogan. She's 47 and looks 30. She has two grown sons and acts like a flapper."[86] Ullback was not exactly the model of a flapper and the description is a bit of an exaggeration used to glamourize her in association with the Hollywood scene, youthfulness, and with the era. The use of "Flapper" to describe Ullback firmly places her within the trends of the period and with the New Woman. Nonetheless, once she began writing she would explicitly and vocally condemn the culture of the twenties and the lifestyle of the flapper. A journalist described Ullback as a "slender, vibrant little creature [who] has lost none of her femininity. She is Sylvia, the mother of two fine sons, and Sylvia who has the strength of steel and the contours of a young girl."[87] She was seen as the authority on femininity and beauty and she exemplified what she preached.

Syndicated newspapers across the United States discussed Sylvia and credited her as a "miracle worker." Alma Whitaker reported that when she finished treating the stars Sylvia:

> has them as fit as fiddles. They always grouch for the first few days, and then begin to feel so good they are at peace with the world. By making them healthy and better-looking, she has improved their morale all 'round . . . They no longer fight with their wives, sauce their mothers, grouch at their work, or neglect their children.[88]

Ullback was known for having a tough attitude, being upfront, and being brutally honest with her clients. The discourse that existed in newspapers from 1925 to 1930 exemplifies the popularity of Ullback and the interest in her techniques. Newspapers described Ullback's tough attitude, but they also acknowledged that the stars needed and liked it. Her approach to health and beauty, as described in these articles, seemed to put the stars, and their lifestyles in the 1920s in check. While the articles about Ullback served to heighten her popularity they also portrayed the stars and their lifestyles in a positive light. In the early 1920s the film colony had been plagued with scandals such as the murder of Desmond Taylor and the Roscoe Arbuckle trial. These scandals led to a popular view of the Hollywood lifestyle as one plagued with self-indulgence. The discussion of Ullback's treatment of the stars and her no-nonsense attitude helped not only her image but also served to combat the image of the Hollywood community as frivolous and self-indulgent. These articles were positive publicity not only for Ullback but also for Hollywood and the stars. As the popularity of the reducing craze and the radical dieting techniques of the twenties began to fade, Ullback's philosophy of common sense and her no-excuses approach with the stars became more appealing.

The discussion that took place in newspapers during the late 1920s about Ullback and her techniques is evidence of two trends during this period. First it is representative of the new public discourse on fat that had fully taken hold by 1920.
Secondly, it is representative of the growing focus on star's bodies as well as the pressure put on them by the studios to maintain their figures. Many stars had clauses in their contracts that dictated how much weight they could gain or lose. Alice White, one of Ullback's clients at Pathé, had a contract with Warner Brothers, which stated "the artist represents that as of July 18th, 1929 she weighed 110 pounds and agrees to maintain this weight during her employment. In the event her weight should at any time vary more than 10 pounds above or 10 below 110 pounds, the company may terminate and cancel her employment."[89] This focus on the stars' bodies translated into the advertisements that were found in fan magazines of the period. While the ads were never specifically endorsed by or associated with the Hollywood stars, their placement in fan magazines next to articles about the stars and their lives implied an association. While Ullback may have become famous because of her involvement with the stars' appearances, her attitude toward women's bodies and beauty was unique for the period.

In 1929, the stock market crashed and the reducing craze was firmly replaced with "reduceosanity." Consequently, Ullback also continued to gain popularity and began her publishing career in 1931 with a series of articles in Bernarr Macfadden's *Liberty* magazine. The articles, and the book that followed had important consequences for Ullback. Although she ended her career with the studios' and the stars, Ullback

commenced a second career writing on the national stage where her methods and ideals gained traction and captivated women in depression era America.

Chapter 1

[1] Alma Whitaker, "They Are Clay in Her Hands," n.d.

[2] The details of Ullback's early life before she came to America come mostly from her book *No More Alibis* and from some interviews she gave to the press. Unfortunately, the details provided in *No More Alibis* are vague and, as a result, there are many holes in what is known about her life before 1921.

[3] Ullback, *No More Alibis*, 8–9.

[4] Ibid., 9.

[5] Katherine Albert, "They Must Suffer to Be Beautiful," *Photoplay*, October 1929, 33.

[6] It is clear from *No More Alibis* that many of the details of her early life are either exaggerated or glossed over. The account of her medical training may be exaggerated; it is known however that both of her sons were born in Copenhagen and not Oslo, so she probably did live there at some point. Ullback, *No More Alibis*; Albert, "They Must Suffer to Be Beautiful"; Yeaman, "Sylvia's Clever Hands Aid Stars to Keep Slender"; Sylvia Yahanne Elise Leiter formerly Ullback, "United States of America Petition for Citizenship, No. 202623."

[7] Jan Todd, *Physical Culture and the Body Beautiful: Purposive Exercise in the Lives of American Women, 1800-1870* (Macon, Ga: Mercer University Press, 1998), 197; Schwartz, *Never Satisfied*, 104.

[8] Schwartz, *Never Satisfied*, 105.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Douglas Graham, *A Practical Treatise on Massage: It's History, Mode of Application, and Effects* (New York: William Wood and Company, 1884), 28.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Yeaman, "Sylvia's Clever Hands Aid Stars to Keep Slender."

[13] In *No More Alibis*, Ullback claims that she and her family moved to New York at the beginning of World War I. However, her immigration papers show that the family did not arrive until July 7, 1921. Ullback, *No More Alibis*, 9; Sylvia Yahanne Elise Leiter formerly Ullback, "United States of America Petition for Citizenship, No. 202623."

[14] Roberta Pollack Seid, *Never Too Thin: Why Women Are at War with Their Bodies*, 1st ed. (New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1989), 82.

[15] Ibid., 82–3.

[16] Ibid., 83.

[17] For more information on the causes see: Addison, *Hollywood and the Rise of Physical Culture*; Seid, *Never Too Thin*; Stearns, *Fat History*; Schwartz, *Never Satisfied*.

[18] Stearns, *Fat History*, 47.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid., 53.

[21] Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Macmillan, 1989).

[22] Carolyn L. Kitch, *The Girl on the Magazine Cover: The Origins of Visual Stereotypes in American Mass Media*, Kindle Edition (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), Loc. 163.

[23] Banner, *American Beauty*, 238.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid, 239.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Paula S. Fass, *The Damned and the Beautiful: American Youth in the 1920's*, Kindle Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), Loc. 230, Kindle Edition.

[29] Ibid., Loc. 230; Banner, *American Beauty*.

[30] Yeaman, "Sylvia's Clever Hands Aid Stars to Keep Slender."

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ullback, *Hollywood Undressed, Observations of Sylvia as Noted by Her Secretary.*, 14–25.

[33] Schwartz, *Never Satisfied*, 183.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Addison, *Hollywood and the Rise of Physical Culture*, 7–8.

[36] Ibid., 10.

[37] Stearns, *Fat History*, 38.

[38] William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture*, Kindle Edition (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993), 9.

[39] Addison, *Hollywood and the Rise of Physical Culture*, 70.

[40] Ibid., 79.

[41] Addison, Hollywood and the Rise of Physical Culture; Richard DeCordova, Picture Personalities the Emergence of the Star System in America, (Urbana, Ill: University of Illinois Press, 2001).

[42] Addison, *Hollywood and the Rise of Physical Culture*, 112.

[43] Jennifer Scanlon, *Inarticulate Longings: The Ladies Home Journal, Gender, and the Promises of Consumer Culture* (New York: Routledge, n.d.), 16.

[44] "Fat the Enemy That Is Shortening Your Life Banished! By Neutroids--Dr. Graham's Famous Prescription," *Photoplay*, July 1925, 99.

[45] "This Lovely Figure Is Yours, This Beautiful Women Is Yours," advertisement, *Screenland*, October 1923, 99.

[46] Ibid.

[47] "*Reduce a Pound a Day Nature's Way,"* advertisement, *Photoplay Magazine*, July 1925, 109.

[48] *"Dainty Form Fat Reducing Cream,"* advertisement, Screenland, October 1923, 100.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Antoinette Donnelly, "When Reducing Becomes a Mania: Disaster Is Usually the Result, and Science Is Called Upon for a Remedy," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 11, 1926.

[51] Ibid., C8.

[52] "Warns You'll Be Fat Forever, If You Trust Cures: Diet Doctor Brands Them Quackery," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 14, 1925.

[53] Ibid., 5.

[54] Donnelly, "When Reducing Becomes a Mania: Disaster Is Usually the Result, and Science Is Called Upon for a Remedy."

[55] Ibid.

[56] American Medical Association, Dept. of Investigation, "Records. *Photoplay* Magazine-Phylacogen (inclusive), 1903-1939," n.d., American Medical Association, James S. Todd Memorial Library, http://beta.worldcat.org/archivegrid/record.php?id=23271730.

[57] Catherine Brody, "Wholesale Murder and Suicide: Do You Know the Menace of Reduceomania?," *Photoplay*, July 1926, 30.

[58] Ibid., 31.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Ibid., 32.

[61] Ibid., 31.

[62] Ibid., 32. "Fat the Enemy That Is Shortening Your Life Banished! By Neutroids--Dr. Graham's Famous Prescription," 99.

[63] Brody, "Wholesale Murder and Suicide: Do You Know the Menace of Reduceomania?," 31.

[64] Ibid., 33.

[65] Catherine Brody, "Wholesale Murder and Suicide: Reduceomania Seeks the Ideal Figure at the Expense of Health and Even Life Itself," *Photoplay*, August 1926, 36.

[66] Addison, *Hollywood and the Rise of Physical Culture*, 151.

[67] Brody, "Wholesale Murder and Suicide: Reduceomania Seeks the Ideal Figure at the Expense of Health and Even Life Itself," 36–7.

[68] Ibid., 37.

[69] Catherine Brody, "The Happy Ending of Wholesale Murder and Suicide," *Photoplay*, September 1926, 30.

[70] Addison, *Hollywood and the Rise of Physical Culture*, 10.

[71] Ibid., 151.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Ullback, *Hollywood Undressed, Observations of Sylvia as Noted by Her Secretary.*, 25–36.

[74] "Mae Murray Loses Suit," *Los Angeles Times*, March 23, 1929.

[75] "Mae Murray Sued," *The Border Cities Star*, April 23, 1928.

[76] Ullback, *Hollywood Undressed, Observations of Sylvia as Noted by Her Secretary.*, 114–116.

[77] Ibid., 121–127.

[78] "Norwegian Woman the Nemesis of Double Chins," *Denver Post*, December 7, 1931; "Many Important Posts Now Held by Fair Sex," *New York Daily*, January 25, 1931; "No Title," *St. Petersburg Independent*, April 3, 1930; Karl K Kitchen, "Up and Down Broadway," *New York World*, October 1929; "Big Business."

[79] Pathé Exchange records, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

[80] According to Dollartimes.com $12,000.00 in 1925 had the same buying power as $156,535.49 in 2012. Annual inflation over this period was 3.00%.

[81] This is a conservative estimate based on the acquired articles during research. Most of the columns that mentioned her were syndicated so the number of times she was mentioned in the press is probably significantly more.

[82] Yeaman, "Sylvia's Clever Hands Aid Stars to Keep Slender."

[83] Faith Baldwin, "Hollywood's Beauty Czarina," *Modern Screen*, September 1931.

[84] Ibid.

[85] Florabel Muir, "Sylvia Rubs Those Rolls of Fat Away," *New York Daily News*, n.d.

[86] Ibid.

[87] Yeaman, "Sylvia's Clever Hands Aid Stars to Keep Slender."

[88] Alma Whitaker, "Reformative Beauty," *Los Angeles Times*, March 9, 1930.

[89] "Excerpt of Alice White Contract," August 20, 1929, Warner Bros Archives, School of Cinematic Arts, University of Southern California, Los Angeles.

Chapter 2: The Rouge Masseuse, 1930-1931

By 1930, Ullback's career had reached a new high and she became even more famous because of her position with Pathé. She left the studio that same year, and pursued a new agenda, which put her at odds with many within Hollywood. Her articles for *Liberty* magazine, her book *Hollywood Undressed,* and her departure from Los Angeles were all major developments in her professional life; and ultimately led to a publishing career that would land her on the national stage. Through these publications and the press coverage that ensued, Ullback's beliefs and approaches became more accessible and more widely read. Her rejection of the Hollywood lifestyle in 1930 and 1931 allowed her to appeal to women around the country by associating herself with the common woman of the depression era, and helped her to establish a career writing.

In mid-1930, after a year of working for Pathé, Ullback left the studio. She claimed in the press that her contract limited which stars she could work with and that she had left the studio with plans to open her own shop where she could service more stars from other studios. Specifically, the Pathé contract restricted Ullback during the workweek and only allowed her to moonlight in the off hours. The Pathé stars as well as the studio executives had priority over her services.[1] A newspaper explained that:

> She decided to sever her studio affiliation in order to have time to take stars from other studios. As a result almost every prominent star in filmdom has sought "streamlines" at the hands of Sylvia. Now several of the major studios are anxious to obtain the exclusive services of this beloved masseuse, and they are making their offers so attractive that it is feared she will not be able to resist signing a contract.[2]

Ullback never signed again with another studio, perhaps because she was hesitant to have her clients restricted. Publically Ullback insisted that she left because she wanted more independence, however with the departure Joseph Kennedy, she likely had no choice but to leave. Ullback may have been collateral damage in the split between Kennedy and Swanson. Without an executive to advocate for Ullback's value and despite her glossy public reputation, she was probably cut by the struggling studio for budget reasons.

Her experience at Pathé left her bitter toward Hollywood, the studios, and the lifestyle of the community. Although the press announced her plans to open her own shop, this never came to fruition. Perhaps she had trouble building a client base back up again, adding to her feeling of betrayal. Sometime after leaving Pathé, Ullback decided to publish a book based on her experiences with the stars. She began working with James Whittaker, a Chicago newspaperman and Ina Claire's ex-husband, to write the book.[3] Reports about the book, ghostwritten by Whittaker, began to appear as early as October 1930 even though the material wouldn't be published until July 1931.[4]

A series of articles that would later become her book *Hollywood Undressed* was first published in the form of several articles for *Liberty* magazine. The series was titled "A Masseuse Looks at the Stars: An Inside Peek at How the Darlings of the Screen are Whacked into Shape," and it was Ullback's first taste of the publishing industry. The magazine listed the author as Sylvia of Hollywood, but claimed the stories were "As Revealed by an Indiscreet Secretary." By this time it was public knowledge that the "Indiscreet Secretary" was really James Whittaker. The weekly eight-part series began

on July 4, 1931 and each installment featured a story about and a diet based on a star Ullback had worked with.[5]

Shortly before the articles were published in *Liberty,* the magazine underwent a change in ownership and was sold to Macfadden Publications.[6] The representative for Macfadden Publications informed the press that the company did not plan to make significant changes to the publication. Ullback's association with the magazine and with Macfadden Publications is not surprising given the beliefs of the company's outspoken owner. Macfadden Publications was owned and run by Bernarr Macfadden, who was also known as the "Father of Physical Culture." Macfadden owned several magazines and throughout the 1930s he continued to acquire publications. Macfadden and Ullback had similar beliefs and while this may have been their first interaction, it was not be their last. Ullback and Macfadden would also cross paths again just a few years later.[7]

Macfadden began his physical culture career in the early 1900s after having a severe illness in which he lost a large amount of weight. He became familiar with ideas about bodybuilding and health in the 1890s as physical culture was developing. By 1910 he had began a publishing *Physical Culture,* which discussed issues of the body and gave advice on building the perfect physique. By 1920, Macfadden's *Physical Culture* was a huge success and had more than tripled its annual revenues.[8] How much direct influence, if any, Macfadden had on Ullback's philosophies is questionable. While they aligned on some issues, they did not on others. Macfadden and Ullback likely met during her career in Hollywood and *Liberty* was her first publication.[9]

Macfadden's view of physical culture stressed that it was necessary to ensure that the populace followed healthy living standards. He criticized the United States for its failure to promote "efforts to build a race necessary to maintain the vigor and vitality so badly needed to defend our democracy." He also believed that disease was a result of impurity of the blood. One reached this state by "the overconsumption of impure or unnatural food and drink or ingestion of other synthetic poisons. White flour, processed foods, alcohol and coffee fell into that category as did any and all medicines." This sentiment fell in line with progressive era health reform ideals. Macfadden, like other progressive era reformers, thought unnatural substances corrupted and poisoned the body.[10] While some of his ideas did align with Ullback's, hers was based more on European ideals of health and were in many ways more moderate. In Macfadden's most popular work, *Vitality Supreme*, he described the purpose of the book:

> To help the reader solve the problems associated with the attainment of vitality and health at its best. By following the suggestions which you will find in this volume, by stimulating the life-forces in connection with the thyroid gland, by straightening and strengthening the spine, by toning up the alimentary canal, and by adopting other suggestions set forth in these pages, you should be insured the attainment of vital vigor really beyond price. Do not be satisfied with an existence. If life is worth anything, it is worth living in every sense of the word. The building up of one's physical assets should be recognized as an imperative duty.[11]

While Ullback and Macfadden agreed on things such as the glands being the regulatory function of the body, both a progressive and a European ideal, his notions were significantly more involved.[12]

His connections and power within the publishing industry likely helped Ullback as she began her publishing career. The publication of "A Masseuse Looks at the Stars"

and the news that it was to be expanded into a book caused an uproar in the Hollywood community. The book, which was finally published in October 1931, was made up of the *Liberty* articles broken into chapters and expanded. The first half discussed Ullback's experiences with the stars while the second half offered diets, advice on healthy cooking, and provided a set of calisthenic exercises that were to be completed with a partner. Even before *Hollywood Undressed* was published, both Ullback and the book were the subject of controversy in Hollywood. Ullback was publically attacked and criticized, regardless of attempts to redeem her, and eventually news that she planned to move to New York began to surface.[13]

Hollywood Undressed recounted Ullback's experiences treating the stars, and dedicated chapters to most of the major stars she worked with including Marie Dressler, Gloria Swanson, Ina Claire, and Mae Murray. She revealed intimate details from events that took place in their private lives. The introduction sought to explain the reasoning for the book and accused the stars of over-indulgence and being self-involved. Ullback's secretary, the supposed author, claimed she wrote the book after becoming disenchanted with Hollywood and the stars. The book explained, "When you see sixteen motion-picture stars a day troop in and strip down to sixteen different kinds of physical results of overeating and other forms of self-indulgence, you get sour on the whole lot of them. You wonder how they get that way."[14] The "secretary" continues by stating, "As I figure it, most of [the stars] never ate regular until they landed their first Hollywood contracts and now a menu just goes to their heads—their heads and their elsewhere. Eat, drink,

and be stuffed, for tomorrow we may be fired."[15] Throughout the book the greed and pettiness of the Hollywood stars is showcased through Ullback's experiences.

One of the harshest stories in the book is that of Mae Murray and her husband Prince M'Divani.[16] Ullback recounted her time on tour with Murray and the court case that ensued afterward. Murray was painted as a childish and self-centered star. Murray's relations with her husband, their rather violent disagreements, as well as his dislike of Ullback. The book never explicitly accused M'Divani of physical abuse but hinted at it. According to *Hollywood Undressed* M'Divani was "a tall, broad dragoon of a man who took a dislike to Sylvia. As near as Sylvia could make out, it was considered improper for a princess like Mae to get so intimate with the peasantry."[17] Other stories ranged from serious accusations, such as accusing actor Neil Hamilton of violating prohibition, to embarrassing stories such as a star of fashioning a corset out of bath towels and safety pins to avoid Sylvia's scrutiny.[18] Ina Claire also portrayed in an unkind light. Claire was described as:

> A voluptuous creature, very different from the slim Broadway star of yesterday, was taking her ease in a bed heaped up, a la French boudoir, with about a dozen small comfort pillows. Swimming in linen and lace, the star was probably supposed to be a study of beauty at rest. She was all of that. In a word, she was visibly overweight. Grouped about the massive royal bedstead were the various ministrants to the lady's luxurious ease—maids, more maids, a secretary. The idea seemed to be to spare Miss Claire the exertion of lifting an arm.[19]

The description of the scene when Ullback visited Claire, served to critique the lavish lifestyle she lived. Regardless of the vendetta the ghostwriter may have had against his ex-wife, the tone and message of the book was clearly also a rejection of the self-indulgent lifestyle that many of the stars lived.

Even the cover of the book was suggestive of the scandalous treatment of the stars in the book. A review of the book stated,

> The book lives up to its cover. Jacketed in cellophane, and showing a lady in a bright yellow dress pulling on a stocking in the best setting-up manner, one is startled upon removing the shiny jacket, to discover that the yellow dress has been printed on the transparent tissue and that on the regular paper jacket the lady is revealed as nature made her.[20]

The imagery on the front cover reflects the claims made within. The book made the stars appear frivolous and petty at a time when the depression was continually deepening. In 1930, the downward spiral that had been initiated by the stock market crash in 1929 continued to intensify. Business failures continued to rise and reached a record high in 1930 while the Gross National Product fell 12.6%.[21] The lax and excessive culture associated with the twenties and the values of the flapper were no longer fashionable with the public. The cover insinuates that underneath the stars were just like everyone else.

Hollywood Undressed also provided diet, cooking, and exercise advice for women seeking to reduce. Just as the *Liberty* articles had, the book provided a diet in the back of the book for each star that was discussed. The book explained to readers that "the boss handles diet problems from a dual point of view: the elements of the diet, and their preparation. Of the two, the latter is *much more important.* A pork chop, properly cooked, would be a much better diet dish than a chicken wing fried in fat and ignorance."[22] The ideas about diet, in both the book and the articles, stressed that women must make smart choices when cooking. Massage and exercise were necessary but they did no good if a sensible diet was not followed. The book provided diets for different situations based on the stars discussed, but more importantly stressed that the concepts

provided were fundamental and timeless techniques for cooking healthy food. The book explained "Diet fads come, diet fads go, but one thing never changes: the art of diet cooking."[23] The techniques provided within *Hollywood Undressed* were suggestions on how to cook different types of food such as meat, fish, and vegetables and recommended that things such as butter should be avoided. The advice embodied what Ullback would later deem as "common sense."

The book also addressed the glands and endocrine disorders by citing not Ullback but an anonymous doctor. The book explained that:

> Sylvia wasn't to be lured into shooting off her mouth about the new science of the endocrine glands, with which the doctors propose eventually to handle the great number of cases of obesity and underdevelopment due to a deep-seated cause which no amount of massage, exercise, or even diet, can reach.[24]

A footnote in the chapter explains that the American Medical Association advised against the use of this doctor's name with any publication but that he could be addressed by writing to the publishers. Clearly an attempt to avoid any statement that might anger the AMA, the book shied away from claiming any authority on medical issues.[25] The book goes on to offer a table of "relative measurements" for women's figures and a series of exercises to address specific areas. The exercises, which are referred to as calisthenics, are presented as exercises that should be completed with a friend.[26]

Not surprisingly, most stars were furious over their portrayal in both the articles and the book. Ullback declared that her approach to dealing with "these cinema children who have been accustomed to having people lay down on their bellies and worship them, is to spit in their eye."[27] Hedda Hopper urged stars to boycott Ullback and told Audrey Rivers of *Movie Classic* magazine that, "Nobody—*nobody* will ever go to her again!"[28]

Another star told Rivers "She can't live forever on what they paid her for her articles. After she has spent it, what then? She's *through* in Hollywood absolutely!"[29] However, this controversy did not seem to faze Ullback as she continued to brush off the allegations and insisted she did nothing wrong. In response to the allegations Ullback told Rivers, "You tell everybody Sylvia is right here in Hollywood to stay. And doing business as usual, thank God!"[30] Hedda Hopper accused Ullback of letting all the press and fame go to her head. She claimed:

> You suffered because she could pound you into shape quickly—but that was before she saw her name in print. That went to her head completely. It acted just like a drug. She would rub anyone at any hour of the day and night if they would print pieces about her in papers and magazines. Sylvia, Sylvia—that name must become more important and famous that the stars. She was like the person who engaged a press agent at a fabulous salary and then read and believed every work she paid to have them write about her.[31]

Whether or not Ullback intentionally traded massage and reducing for publicity, the accusation by Hopper probably had some weight among the stars. It reflected the rage that ensued within the community about her book and articles. Hopper ended the rant by asserting, "The autographed photographs she so kindly showed you were obtained, as she coyly puts it, as loving mementos to keep her company in her old age. She will be able to add memories of friends betrayed, spied on, lied about—and may that heritage bring its reward, and may God have mercy on her soul."[32] While Hedda Hopper was known for her harsh revelations about others her comments reflect the anger and betrayal felt by those who Ullback had treated.

Ullback's attitude toward the controversy was to remain vigilant and not give into the claims that she had betrayed the stars. Her responses to the criticism were consistent with her attitude towards beauty and toward life in general. She told one reporter:

> You tell everybody for me: Sylvia doesn't run away from anything! I am of a race that doesn't run. If anybody has anything to say to me, I'm here. If they want to give me a sock in the jaw, they can find right where I've always been and busy too, thank God! I've never been busier.[33]

Ullback denied for several months that she was leaving but by October of 1931, just before the book's publication, she departed from tinsel town. *Hollywood Undressed* led to Ullback being ostracized and she never worked for the studios or the stars again. However, she may have anticipated the reaction to her book, after the controversy surrounding the *Liberty* articles, and made the decision to leave Hollywood prior to the books publication. If the book reflected her feelings toward the industry, she certainly had come to resent the attitude and lifestyle of the community and may have decided that she was through. The second part of the book explained:

> bit by bit, one by one, the respectable and representative percentage of Hollywood film people who are listed on the boss's books have been made over and educated to the point where they are the caretakers of their own waistlines and do not need professional supervision at thirty dollars an hour.[34]

It seemed that the book was justifying her departure by claiming that her clientele no longer needed her. It stands to reason that Ullback may have been fed up with the industry and the community and wished to use her knowledge and training for another purpose.

Additionally, Ullback was put in the middle of an ugly and public battle between Gloria Swanson and Constance Bennett during her time at Pathé. The spat began because

of Bennett's affair with Swanson's husband but escalated and involved Sylvia when the two competed over her services. Swansons third husband, Henri Marquis de la Falaise de la Coudraye, a film director, had secured a position representing Pathe in Paris. Joseph Kennedy had given him the position to investigate "Swanson's interest there" and, most importantly, to keep him away while Kennedy and Swanson continued their affair in Hollywood.[35] While in Paris, Marquis had an affair with Bennett and signed her to Pathé. Trouble mounted when Constance Bennett arrived at Pathé and challenged "Gloria's standing as the undisputed star of the lot," beginning a fierce rivalry between the two.[36] Bennett constantly tried to lure Ullback into leaving Swanson and coming to work exclusively for her creating an awkward situation for Ullback. Swanson was furious, and a battle over Sylvia's services erupted.[37] In *Hollywood Undressed* Bennett's almost desperate attempts to convince Ullback to work for her were described in detail. The book explains that as Sylvia was about to leave Bennett's home after a treatment she turned:

> And there was Bennett, sitting up in bed, with her hand stretched out so that it was under the spotlight from the bed-table lamp. She had on a sapphire ring on one finger that Sylvia had once admired, and she was making the sapphire flash in the light looking at Sylvia with a coy expression. Suddenly she stuck her head to one side and pulled the ring off her finger. "Do you like my ring?" she cooed. "It's yours if you'll come."[38]

The book continued and explained that Ullback did not accept her offer because of her loyalty and friendship with Swanson. Ullback became a pawn in the spat between the two stars and while she remained loyal to Swanson it clearly had an effect on her feelings toward the Hollywood community. The tensions between the two stars continued to mount until Kennedy left Hollywood permanently and Swanson secured a divorce from

Henri in 1930. Soon after the divorce Bennett was engaged to and later married Henri.[39] Ullback's negativity toward Bennett in *Hollywood Undressed* and in later articles was likely due to her friendship with Swanson.

Sylvia's treatment and experiences at Pathé were clearly a large influence on the book, and while she remained friends with Gloria Swanson, being cut at the studio after Kennedy's departure clearly impacted her attitude towards the community. However, her position at Pathé made her even more famous and *Hollywood Undressed* may have served as a way for her to launch herself into a publishing career and escape Hollywood.

Amid the discussion over *Hollywood Undressed* in the fall of 1931, rumors began to surface that Ullback might have been unfamiliar with some of the negative connotations in the book due to her unfamiliarity with the English language.[40] James Whittaker was rumored to be not fond of Hollywood or the stars after his divorce from Ina Claire. Some began to claim that Sylvia shouldn't bear all the blame because she may not have been familiar with some of the language and phrases used to describe the stars. One columnist declared:

> All ye femmes who are tres furious with Sylvia for the goings-on in Liberty hak to the Lowdown. [sic] The real offender is James Whittaker, who is ghosting stories. Not that Sylvia shouldn't have authorized the yarns in the first place, but the fact is that the masseuse is NOT completely cognizant of the meaning of many of the phrases, and innuendoes made by Whittaker--she is not by any means familiar enough with the nuances of English (as used by Mr. W.) to understand the ire some of the articles have aroused. Maybe she wouldn't care. But the fact is that Whittaker has long had a great big case of "sour grapes" on the movies and movies people, and the consensus of opinion is that his conduct in this matter is "unethical and LOUSY."[41]

Several articles appeared that argued Ullback wasn't completely to blame. Some even claimed that the big stars found it amusing. A journalist explained in September 1931:

> Some of the stars have become angry, but the really important folks mentioned have taken Sylvia's revelations like good sports and expressed themselves as amused by the expose . . . Some of the people mentioned here were not exactly handled with kid gloves by the impetuous little Scandinavian, but to the credit of Hollywood everybody laughed and took it big except a few minor souls with hurt egos.[42]

The stars mentioned in this particular article were all good friends of Ullback who she had treated lightly in the book. Marie Dressler, Gloria Swanson, Norma Shearer, and Mary Duncan, all escaped without significant criticism or embarrassment.[43] Regardless, they were the exceptions as many others mentioned in the book were upset.

The book was controversial because of its treatment and discussion of the Hollywood stars. A newspaper reported:

> Now Sylvia has written a book, consisting of reminiscences which I am sure are going to make your idols and mine feel kind of silly…Sylvia is going to pull them stars off their pedestals and, as she tells you, make them 'look like a bunch of saps ruined by too much money'.[44]

Although Ullback was continually blamed for the book, she downplayed the controversy and the consequences of her book, claiming that the stars "must have her treatments to retain their valued shapes."[45]

Reportedly, Ullback upset at the way she had been treated in light of *Hollywood Undressed*, decided to leave the picture colony in October 1931.[46] She later acknowledged that she had rebelled against the industry and she continued to express her feelings about the way the stars acted when she explained "I did the greatest sin to the movies…I made them appear ridiculous. In Hollywood everyone must take them solemnly and bow low."[47] By the time Ullback left Hollywood she was thoroughly disenchanted with the attitudes of the film stars and their approach to beauty and health.

Ullback left Hollywood to pursue other opportunities just before *Hollywood Undressed* was released. She left behind her husband and two sons and moved to New York.[48] Her marriage, by this point, was troubled and the relocation was for both professional and personal reasons. It allowed her to escape the anticipated criticism in Hollywood once the book version of her *Liberty* articles was published, but it also allowed her to assert her independence and leave her husband. While she left Andrew Ullback, she did not divorce him. Her sons, by this time, were grown and both had careers of their own in Hollywood. Ullback, with the help of Norma Shearer, had been able to secure Finn a job working at Metro Goldwyn Mayer cutting film and her other son reportedly worked at Pathé.[49] Andrew Ullback and her sons remained at their home on South Gennesse Avenue in Los Angeles.[50] Sylvia's move also served her professional career by distancing her from the elite lifestyle of Hollywood while her book helped to associate her with the common American at a time when the depression was continually to deepening.

While in New York she pursued a variety of opportunities before finally securing a position at *Photoplay*. She told a reporter that while in New York she would "just direct. Have somebody work for me. I will tell them what to do. I advise, I lecture, I will sell my cold crèmes, but no more back pounding. I tell you, baby, it's this way—I am sensitive. People have said things. Just a masseuse. And so, I think it is time to quit."[51] The press followed Ullback's plans for her next move in New York closely. In addition to lecturing at department stores in New York and marketing her line of beauty products, which were later known as "Sylvaglo," she also had a short career in

vaudeville.[52] *Variety* reported that she performed before showings of *Viva Villa* in 1931 and she had a part in a recording of the play *Strictly Dishonorable* (1931) with Sidney Fox.[53] Additionally it was rumored she had drafted a play with Edith Ellis and was shopping it around to Broadway producers. The play was rumored to deal with her experiences prior to coming to the United States and "present as characters prototypes of the famous picture stars on whom she has worked."[54] The three-act play was supposed to be "a biting satire" in which everybody "gets slapped one way or another."[55] Ullback told a reporter that when the play was released "Hollywood will close up and Mae West will look as hot as ice on a sidewalk."[56] Whether or not the play made it to the stage or if there was even a script is unknown. However, a farcical comedy in three acts entitled "They Who Get Slapped" was copyrighted by Edith Ellis Furness on October 13, 1931 and renewed again in 1959.[57]

The focus and speculation on Ullback's career shows her popularity and the extent to which she and her methods resonated with women at the time. Reducing and the techniques of the twenties continued to wind down and Ullback's methods represented the new attitude toward the body and reducing. Ullback had only lived in the United States for ten years, yet she had come a long way and, by 1932, was a celebrity on the national stage. Although she was estranged from her husband, she used her status as a celebrity to build a publishing career and secure a platform through which she could advise women all over the country. She sought to use her writing to provide women with advice about beauty, attitude, and reducing during the depression.

Notes Chapter 2

[1] Ullback, *Hollywood Undressed, Observations of Sylvia as Noted by Her Secretary.*, 123–125.

[2] "There Is Consternation Among the Feminine Stars of Hollywood..."

[3] "Famous Lovers of Screen to Wed," *The Pittsburg Press*, May 9, 1929; "Slaps of Ten," *Baltimore News*, October 13, 1930; Mayme Ober Peak, "Stars Tremble Over Sylvia's Articles," *Portland Telegram*, September 6, 1931; "The Low Down," *Hollywood Report*, July 28, 1931.

[4] "There's a Hardy, Muscled and Husky Masseuse in Hollywood," *Portland Oreganian*, November 30, 1930; "Undressed," *Detroit Free Press*, November 19, 1930; "Slaps of Ten."

[5] Sylvia of Hollywood, "A Masseuse Looks at the Stars Part One," *Liberty Magazine*, July 4, 1931; Sylvia of Hollywood, "A Masseuse Looks at the Stars Part Two," *Liberty Magazine*, July 11, 1931; Sylvia of Hollywood, "A Masseuse Looks at the Stars Part Three," *Liberty Magazine*, July 18, 1931; Sylvia of Hollywood, "A Masseuse Looks at the Stars Part Four," *Liberty Magazine*, July 25, 1931; Sylvia of Hollywood, "A Masseuse Looks at the Stars Part Five," *Liberty Magazine*, August 1, 1931; Sylvia of Hollywood, "A Masseuse Looks at the Stars Part Six," *Liberty Magazine*, August 8, 1931; Sylvia of Hollywood, "A Masseuse Looks at the Stars Part Seven," *Liberty Magazine*, August 15, 1931.

[6] "'Liberty' Sold To Macfadden," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, April 2, 1931.

[7] Information about Macfadden's philosophies can be found in his works about the body. *Viatlity Supereme,* his most well known work, showcases the similarities between Macfadden and Ullback's beliefs. Macfadden bought *Photoplay* sometime in 1934. The first issue listed under Macfadden Publications was January 1935. Bernarr Macfadden, *Vitality Supreme* (New York City: Physical Culture Publishing Co., 1915); Mark Adams, *Mr. America: How Muscular Millionaire Bernarr Macfadden Transformed the Nation Through Sex, Salad, and the Ultimate Starvation Diet*, Kindle Edition (HarperCollins e-books, 2010).

[8] Adams, *Mr. America*, Loc 1610.

[9] Anthony Slide, *Inside the Hollywood Fan Magazine: A History of Star Makers, Fabricators, and Gossip Mongers*, Kindle Edition (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010).

[10] James C. Whorton, *Crusaders for Fitness: The History of American Health Reformers* (Princeton University Press, 1984).

[11] Macfadden, *Vitality Supreme*, 6–7.

[12] Macfadden, *Vitality Supreme*; Adams, *Mr. America*; Whorton, *Crusaders for Fitness.*

[13] Audrey Rivers, "Famous Masseuse Denies She Has Offended Stars: Sylvia Ulbeck Told on Players Whose Weight She Has reduced--'All in Fun,' Her Version," *Movie Classic*, October 1931; Rosalind Shaffer, "Sylvia's Diary Stirs Filmdom," *Buffalo Courier,* September 6, 1931; Mollie Merrick, "Timely Closeups from Hollywood," *New London Daily*, October 10, 1931.

[14] Ullback, *Hollywood Undressed, Observations of Sylvia as Noted by Her Secretary.*, 12.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid., chap. 2–3.

[17] Ibid., 29.

[18] Ibid., 70–73.

[19] Ibid., 90.

[20] George Currie, "The Eagle's Book of the Week: Stardom's Gorgeous Kitty-Cats," October 25, 1931.

[21] Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945*, 59.

[22] Ullback, *Hollywood Undressed, Observations of Sylvia as Noted by Her Secretary.*, 176–177.

[23] Ibid., 9.

[24] Ibid., 205.

[25] Ibid., 206.

[26] Ullback, *Hollywood Undressed, Observations of Sylvia as Noted by Her Secretary.*

[27] Peak, "Stars Tremble Over Sylvia's Articles."

[28] Rivers, "Famous Masseuse Denies She Has Offended Stars: Sylvia Ulbeck Told on Players Whose Weight She Has reduced--'All in Fun,' Her Version."

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Mayme Ober Peak, "Social Butterfly of Screen a Different Person at Home," *The Hartford Courant*, January 10, 1932.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Rivers, "Famous Masseuse Denies She Has Offended Stars: Sylvia Ulbeck Told on Players Whose Weight She Has reduced--'All in Fun,' Her Version."

[34] Ullback, *Hollywood Undressed, Observations of Sylvia as Noted by Her Secretary.*, 174.

[35] Cari Beauchamp, *Joseph P. Kennedy Presents: His Hollywood Years*, Kindle Edition (Knopf, 2009), 4814.

[36] Ibid., Loc. 4814.

[37] Ullback, *Hollywood Undressed, Observations of Sylvia as Noted by Her Secretary.*, 147–152.

[38] Ibid., 150.

[39] Beauchamp, *Joseph P. Kennedy Presents: His Hollywood Years*, Loc. 5813.

[40] "The Low Down."

[41] Ibid.

[42] Shaffer, "Sylvia's Diary Stirs Filmdom."

[43] Ullback, *Hollywood Undressed, Observations of Sylvia as Noted by Her Secretary.*, 13–25, 114–126, 116–120, 50–64.

[44] Hubbard Keavry, "Masseuse Tells on Hollywood Stars," *Tulsa World*, July 26, 1931.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Evelyn Seely, "Hollywood Stars Writhe Under Sylvia's Pen Pricks. She Makes Them 'Work Like Hell' but They Like It," *New York World*, December 22, 1931.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Yeaman, "Sylvia's Clever Hands Aid Stars to Keep Slender."

[50] *Los Angeles City Directory, 1932*, vol. 1932 (Los Angeles, Cal.: Los Angeles Directory Co., 1932), http://rescarta.lapl.org/ResCarta-Web/jsp/RcWebImageViewer.jsp;jsessionid=CEBE0C111CAE0FC48B273AFF05F5703C?doc_id=Los Angeles City Directories%2FLPU00000%2FLL000007%2F00000001.

[51] Mona Cannady, "Sylvia Quits Massage to Write, Act," *New York News*, October 9, 1931.

[52] Ibid.; Ullback, *No More Alibis*; Sylvia Ullback, *Pull Yourself Together Baby* (New York: Macfadden, 1936), 65.

[53] "Think It Will Rain?," *Jamaica Screen Book*, November 1931; "Sylvia of Hollywood, 'Viva Villa,' $16,000; B'klyn Uninspiring," *Variety*, June 5, 1934.

[54] Jack Casey, *Chicago News*, October 13, 1931, sec. Jest About Hollywood.

[55] Cannady, "Sylvia Quits Massage to Write, Act."

[56] Casey.

[57] Library of Congress. Copyright Office and United States. Dept. of the Treasury, "They Who Get Slapped, a Farcical Comedy in Three Acts by Edith Ellis,no. 6281, October 13 1931," in *Catalog of Copyright Entries* (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1931), 335, http://books.google.com/books?id=Yc5DAAAAIAAJ.

Chapter 3: "Any Woman Can Be Beautiful," 1932-1935

Ullback was not out of work for long and her departure from Hollywood allowed her to seek new venues for her skills and beliefs about the body. *Hollywood Undressed* helped her to enter the publishing industry and she was able to pursue new opportunities in New York. In 1932 she secured a job writing for the Hollywood fan magazine, *Photoplay,* as their beauty editorialist. Her articles ran from 1932 to 1935 and expressed an empowering message for women of the period. Her articles stressed the values by which Ullback claimed to live her life, and urged women to employ these principles in their own lives in order to achieve beauty, health, and ultimately overall happiness. Furthermore, her writing reflected the values stressed by Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal, and reflected the culture of the depression. Her discussion of health and the body represented a distinct shift from the methods of reducing characterized by the "reducing craze." Reducing, as discussed in her articles, was focused on health and reflective of the culture and conditions of the depression.

Ullback's definition and use of the term "reducing" described a health and exercise driven approach in contrast to an approach that relied on the supposed ease and effortlessness of creams, pills and soaps popular during the reducing craze. For Ullback, reducing was an attempt to reshape the body with the goal of pleasing one's self. The goal was personal and emotional happiness with the body reflected in the mirror rather than attempting to create an image to please a man. In this sense the gaze shifts, from the

man to one's self.[1] While Ullback stressed a fit and thin body, she argued that there is no one standard of perfection, and that perfection was personally defined.

Figure 2 Portrait of Sylvia Ullback from her first *Photoplay* article.
Source: Sylvia Ullback, "Any Woman Can Be Beautiful," *Photoplay*, February 1932, 31.

In her first article for *Photoplay*, entitled "Any Woman Can Be Beautiful," Ullback explained to women:

> I say any woman can be beautiful and I mean it. You can't all have lovely features, but you can be beautiful. Whoever said beauty is only skin deep was a fool. Beauty begins behind your forehead and the beauty of some of the loveliest women I know can never be registered by a motion picture camera. Now here's the amazing part of it. You can make yourself beautiful. You can—if you have the nerve and the courage—do it all yourself.[2]

As Ullback explains, beauty, in her view, was something that began by using common sense and employing the values of confidence, determination, and courage in life. She

had a democratic view of beauty in which every woman was entitled to beauty and could achieve it if they were willing to work for it. She explicitly explained to women that she did not accept excuses and demanded women follow her advice and reduce through effort with confidence and common sense. Her first article included a portrait of Ullback pointing at the reader in an engaging fashion similar to the Uncle Sam "I Want You" posters (Figure 2). The caption underneath read "You can do it yourself! You can if you will! But you've got to stir up your lazy bones and your lazy mind."[3] The image reinforced her message that readers must use courage and effort to change their bodies. Her articles in *Photoplay* all gave the same advice, but varied in approach and focus. She wrote four "series" of articles for *Photoplay* between 1932 and 1935; each took a different approach to discussing her method and beliefs about reducing.

The first series ran between January 1932 and January 1933. They aimed to establish Ullback and her reputation with the readers of *Photoplay*. In these articles Ullback discussed and advocated for a reducing culture that focused on diet, exercise, and common sense; they encouraged women to forget their excuses and alibis for not reducing. Ullback had always been portrayed as a woman with a fiery attitude who did not accept excuses or nonsense from her clients. Likely her portrayal as such a woman was, in part, because of her frankness and her heavy European accent, which may have come across to Americans as brassy. She expected results and did not tolerate excuses. As an immigrant who had come to America and had been successful, she believed that with hard work and confidence came results. This was portrayed in her attitude towards reducing. She brought these beliefs with her to *Photoplay* and she told her readers:

> Either get some brains or stop reading my stories. I'm sick and tired of the silly questions a lot of you ask. Now, mind you, I'm delighted to hear from you and it gives me a thrill to know that those old pounds are melting off like butter you mustn't eat, but I do get out of patience when you keep asking me things your common sense should tell you.[4]

Ullback believed that women, both fat and thin, needed to use her articles as a general guide and use their common sense to alter her advice for their personal circumstances.

Ullback's articles often included diet recommendations along with reducing exercises. Her diets often consisted of specific menus for breakfast, lunch, and dinner and focused on meat, fruits and vegetables—all in moderation. Tomato juice, coffee or tea without cream and sugar, fruit salads, salad with vinaigrette dressing, and lean meats were all beneficial dietary items. Her diets were not extreme and she never suggested skipping meals. However, she did suggest one liquid based meal, such as broth based soup, each day. She believed that her diets were designed to provide the appropriate nutrients and provide strength to the body. Ullback did not concentrate solely on reducing, but also focused on building up the physical body. In addition to her "General Reducing Diet," she occasionally provided a "General Building Up Diet." She explained to women that the diet provided was "not harmful. It gives you plenty of food and it gives the bones the nourishment they need…."[5] Her diets were designed to provide the body with certain minerals and vitamins that were necessary to stay strong and healthy.

Attention to the body's glands also constituted one tenet of her reducing regime. She believed that the body's glands were crucial to health. She explained:

> Both fat and thin girls must stimulate the thymus glands. Did you know that most of your health and happiness centers right around your neck? You *must* keep your neck loose in order to have sparkling eyes. We all do strenuous, nerve-racking

> work. We must loosen up the neck and shoulder muscles. We must work on those glands. And no little tappings either . . .[6]

Ullback believed that the glands were the key in the appearance of the body. Emotion and physical ailment were both related to proper function of the glands according to Ullback. In her mind, the glands represented the bodies regulatory system. The results of massage and stimulating the glands were as Ullback described, "You're full of pep. You're stimulated. You're alive. You look happy. Your eyes sparkle. Isn't it wonderful? And so easy too. But don't forget to dig in and dig in *hard*."[7] Her discussion of the glands and her directions on how to manipulate them was complimented by several images showing her method of massage (Figure 3). The discussion about glands and a regulated body was something Ullback learned during her training in Northern Europe. Massage, which was invented and widely studied in Sweden and Denmark, was thought to help regulate the thyroid and other glands by allowing blood to circulate properly throughout the body.[8]

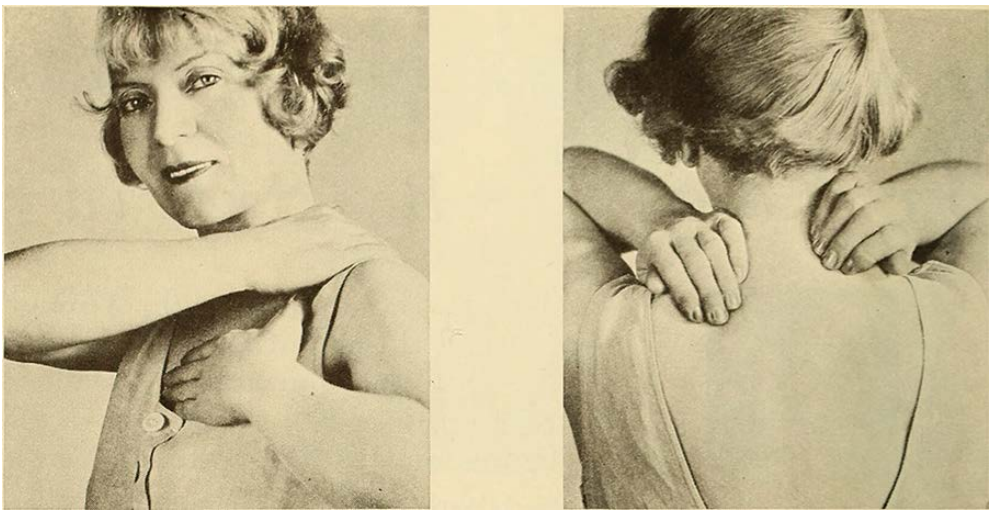

Figure 3 Sylvia's massage technique for the neck
Source: Sylvia Ullback, "Now! Girls! Here's Pep for You!," Photoplay, April 1932, 70.

Sprinkled throughout the 1932 issues of *Photoplay* were mentions of Ullback, her popularity, and readers' reactions to the new contributor. In May 1932, *Photoplay* published an article entitled "Here's What Folks Think About Sylvia" and included letters from readers across the United States and throughout the world. *Photoplay* explained at the top of the page:

> It isn't often that *Photoplay* pats itself on the back, but when we get a scoop like the series of Sylvia articles we think we can take a few bows. And when thousands and thousands of letters come from women all over the world, telling Sylvia and us just what miracles have been accomplished, we feel we are justified in passing the good word on to you.[9]

The article was promotional in nature and clearly sought to encourage readers to continue to buy the magazine. They were run in *Photoplay* as hype for Ullback's articles. However regardless of the motives behind the article, it speaks to Ullback's popularity and her resonance with women. In response to Ullback's very first article in *Photoplay,* entitled "Any Woman Can Be Beautiful," which included a full page photo of Ullback pointing her finger at the readers in an engaging and challenging fashion, one reader from Menton, France exclaimed: "Sylvia's articles are the answer to our prayers. Her photo with the accusing finger has place of honor among our film star collection. We had great results from the first month. Instead of spending time at tea parties, we now do exercises."[10] These reader letters demonstrate Ullback's impact and her reception with women not only in the United States, but also abroad. Another woman wrote in about her accomplishments since reading Ullback's article:

> If heaven ever sent a good angel this way, it's Sylvia. Blessings on her. I only weighed 130 pounds but I'm now down to my normal weight—118. And I do

> feel elated! I am sure we appreciate her as much as the wealthy stars did, perhaps more. I shan't miss a copy of *Photoplay* as long as her articles are in it.[11]

These *Photoplay* letters indicate that Ullback's beauty advice was well received. Furthermore, her articles provided them with guidance to help navigate a difficult and sometimes desperate period for Americans. A woman from Canada wrote, "Surely there is no other profession to rival Sylvia's in bringing happiness. For to feel oneself gradually become graceful and attractive brings more pleasure than any other thing."[12] Ullback often spoke about the happiness women could achieve by following her advice. However, happiness came not only from the process of remodeling one's body, but also from employing attitudes of positivity and hard work in life. The approaches stressed by Ullback gave women a way to approach life.

About half way through her first series of articles at *Photoplay,* Ullback's personal life took a sharp turn. By June 1932, she had been living in New York and away from her family for more than six months. The long distance took a toll on her marriage of more than thirty years. Sylvia and Andrew's relationship may have been strained for sometime. He likely suffered from shell shock well into the 1930s adding to her marital issues. In several articles prior to June 1932 the Ullbacks were depicted as a happy couple. A journalist in 1931 wrote that Sylvia was married to:

> a kindly, Great Dane of a human man she calls 'Papa', to whom she says she has been happily married for 28 years. Fifty times a day, she yells out to 'Papa, darling,' to bring her creams from the storeroom, or this or that! Hand and foot, he waits on the little woman over whom he towers like a giant.[13]

The description of the couple sought to stress their European roots and characteristics, but also made clear the dynamic of power in the relationship. It is clear, from this article and

other descriptions of the couple, that Sylvia held the power in this relationship in several ways. She probably provided the bulk of the family's income and clearly had control over her business which may have added to the tension in the couples' marriage. However, while this may have been a factor in the Ullbacks' struggles, it was likely not the only one.

In June 1932, Sylvia reportedly asked for a divorce. Andrew Ullback told a reporter "We were like turtle doves when she left here, never fussed any more than man and wife do sometimes. Three months ago her letters began to sound strained. Before that we wrote two and three times a week; she telegraphed and telephoned."[14] Reportedly Sylvia had met a young actor and, according to Andrew, "he took her out dancing in New York; that is where she met him. He introduced her to fashionable people, I suppose. She forgot everything here."[15] Her new beau, Edward Leiter, was a graduate of the University of Southern California, was much younger than her, and was pursuing a vaudeville career in New York when the two met.[16] Ullback secured what one article deemed "a Mexican-quickie divorce after 31 years of wedded life" and married Leiter just a few days later on July 1, 1932 in Ergemont, Massachusetts.[17]

Figure 4 Sylvia Ullback and Edward Leiter
Source: "Sylvia, Hollywood's 'Figure' Expert, Wed," *Leader Post*, July 11, 1932.

According to the press the divorce devastated Andrew Ullback. He told a reporter, "There'll never be another woman for me. I'm heartbroken. All I have to hope is that some day she will come back to me and the boys."[18] Another article about the divorce reported that Andrew Ullback was "crushed, stunned, and dazed. The force of her blow has knocked him out, broken his heart. 'Pop's' spirit was broken some years ago, I suspect, when he lost his business in the World War and had to depend largely upon 'the little woman' and her dynamo of ambition."[19] Ullback, for the most part, had supported the family since their arrival in America. Regardless of whether or not this dichotomy strained their relationship, Sylvia cited cruelty as the reason for the divorce on her naturalization forms October 25, 1932. Leaving for New York may have offered her

an escape from more than just the criticism over *Hollywood Undressed*. Her new relationship was happy, yet also rebellious. She and Edward Leiter were married for forty-three years and she often bragged of her "bravery" in marrying a man almost 20 years younger than herself.[20] Her escape to New York and her boastful comments about marrying such a younger man reveal a willingness to pursue personal happiness and independence just as she encouraged her readers to do.

In February 1933, Ullback began a new series of articles for *Photoplay*. This series focused on the body types of various stars and aimed to help women achieve beauty as exemplified by the stars. *Photoplay* explained:

> Sylvia herewith begins a new series. She will tell you how various types of stars achieved their present physical beauty, and you can follow her instructions and attain the same results. Her dynamic personality—which shines through these columns—will encourage and inspire you to the completion of your task.[21]

Each article used a star Sylvia had worked with and attempted to give women a formula through which to achieve a body like that of the star. This type of article allowed *Photoplay* to promote the stars and their films as well as discuss beauty. Another article explained:

> You know that for years Sylvia, America's most famous physical culturalist and masseuse, has been Hollywood's court of last resort for problems of beauty and figure. This month she gives another revelation in her fascinating series about how she helped noted stars through crises that threatened their careers.[22]

Ullback would share some of her experiences working with a picture personality and then offer advice as to how to achieve that stars' "type" of body and beauty. While she often praised the stars' appearances, she stressed that they did not achieve their figures overnight. Their physiques were achieved through effort. While she did not out rightly

condemn the techniques characterized by the "reducing craze," she clearly established that diet and exercise were the only healthy way to reduce.

In her first article, "Sylvia Tells All About Connie Bennett," she explained how women could achieve the attractiveness, grace, and poise of this famous actress. She explained, "Listen—you girls and women—if Connie is your ideal; if you are, basically, the Connie Bennett type—listen while I tell you exactly how I treated her and what system I used to help make her the lovely woman she is today. And you can do for yourselves what I did for her."[23] Included in the article were the diets and treatments prescribed by Ullback for the star and stories about her personality and treatment. This type of article served not only to promote the star and their films. Her tone in these articles, however, was much kinder than in *Hollywood Undressed,* probably because the Hollywood fan magazine served to promote the stars, their studios, and their latest pictures.

Ullback's articles offered advice on how to adopt the style of a particular "type" of star. This type of article, the style adaptation editorial, offered variations of different types of beauty, which were available to women. [24] The historian Sarah Berry argues that star emulation "rather than being discussed as a matter of psychological identification with particular stars, is often presented as a conscious move to adopt a particular set of fashion and behavioral codes."[25] The beauty and physique of the star is attainable unlike the "mythical aristocratic qualities" of the elite class.[26] Furthermore, Ullback's platform at a popular magazine allowed her to communicate her beliefs about beauty to the common woman rather than to the elite members of Hollywood.

While these articles told women they could achieve "star-like" beauty, they often recalled Sylvia's mantra of effort and confidence in ones' appearance, and more broadly, in life. She often detailed both the stars' strengths and their weaknesses in terms of reducing, but also showed that they worked to overcome these faults. For instance in an article about Carol Lombard, Ullback included a section about the actresses' attitude and confidence. She explained that at one point the studio released Lombard from her contract. However, Lombard did not let it get to her and that she always believed that in the end it would turn out to be a positive experience. Lombard insisted she knew she would "do much better somewhere else."[27] Ullback wrote:

> I knew that she was just putting up a brave front. But her prophecy came true. She did much better somewhere else. So just take Carole's attitude for your own. In Hollywood—or anywhere else—you can't let people see you down. Keep a stiff upper lip. Believe me, that attitude will do more to give your face character and even real beauty than anything I know. As for your figure—well, you've got to work on that![28]

The stories about stars within these articles echoed Ullback's beliefs and served as examples of her approach to life. These stories offered women not only reducing and beauty tips, but also an approach to "navigating" the milieu of the depression.[29]

Hollywood, during the depression, tried to back away from any association with elitism. During this period, it sought to "make the New Deal into a veritable leading man" by producing films that focused on individual opportunities for success and the fluidity of the classes.[30] Ullback's message for women reflected the popular New Deal ideals and philosophies by rejecting elitist values and stressing the availability of beauty to every woman.

During Franklin Delano Roosevelt's presidential campaign in 1932 he offered a "New Deal" to the American people. The New Deal sought to pull America out of economic despair and stressed the values of courage, faith, and hard work. The policies of the twenties, Roosevelt argued, had profited the elite but ignored the average person.[31] He promised to travel the country and "study at first hand, from the lips of men and women of all parties and all occupations, of the actual conditions and needs of every part of an interdependent country."[32] A fundamental tenet of his campaign was the assertion that government had created an environment that focused on big business and forgot the average American. In his acceptance of the Democratic nomination for President, he stated:

> I pledge you, I pledge myself, to a New Deal for the American people. Let us all here assembled constitute ourselves prophets of a new order of competence and of courage. This is more than a political campaign; it is a call to arms. Give me your help, not to win votes alone, but to win in this crusade to restore America to its own people.[33]

The Roosevelt administration's image of the "forgotten man" resonated with Americans during this time. The public identified with Roosevelt's beliefs, policies and personality at a time when many felt the common American and his needs had been forgotten in the midst of the depression. Ullback emerged as an editorialist when Roosevelt was campaigning and her writing embodied these ideals.

The values that Ullback preached were reminiscent of the values stressed by Roosevelt's New Deal. In March 1933, President Roosevelt aired his first fireside chat over the radio and addressed the Banking crisis. He stressed to Americans, "confidence and courage are the essentials of success in carrying out our plan."[34] There was also a

sense of persistence and perseverance that was instilled by the New Deal. Roosevelt asked Americans to approach the economic situation as if America was at war. He urged Americans to come together, work hard, and have confidence that conditions would improve. Ullback's articles were grounded in the culture produced by the New Deal and the appeal to the common American. Her articles were reflective of this culture and applied the same values to beauty and health.

Ullback's advice did not always have to do with diet and exercise. She also occasionally discussed the effects of depression on the face and skin. In a 1933 article about Helen Twelvetrees, "Hollywood's Most Melancholy Girl," Sylvia discussed a method for facials that stimulated the glands of the face. She insisted that feeling sorrowful and crying caused nothing but problems for the skin and face. The articled recounted the story of Helen Twelvetrees's woes and insisted that a positive attitude and confidence was the way to approach life. In concluding her article, she explained:

> All during the time when she was feeling so low here's what I used to tell her: 'Adopt this motto—God's gift to humanity is a sense of humor. I can grin anything off. So can you. There's a funny side to everything that happens. Look at that side.' That's what I used to tell Helen—or rather I used to scream it at her, for I've got a voice that can be heard—and that what I'm telling all your girls who get blue and sad and depressed. Give yourself a grand facial, put on a nice makeup, get out your best clothes and walk along the street with your shoulders held up and your head high. Crying never gets you anything—except wrinkles![35]

This reflects Ullback's approach to life and the values she sought to impress upon women. In several ways the 1930s was a period of tension. Furthermore, it was a period when women and feminism lacked a clear direction or specific goal, leaving the society confused about historically accepted gender roles. Ullback's articles contained an undertone of empowerment for women. They encouraged women to break with

traditional gender expectations and be emotionally, as well as physically, strong. Scholars, such as Kathy Peiss, have argued that beauty culture "should be understood as not only a type of commerce but as a system of meaning that helped women navigate the changing conditions of modern social experience."[36] Overtly, the articles were about beauty and fitness. However, subtly, Ullback's articles sought to instill women with the values of hard work, confidence, and determination in dieting, but also in life. Together, these values composed a formula for women to use and, as a result, beat the depression.

In this second series of articles, Ullback also began answering letters from women, something she had previously refused to do. She wrote "Well, girls, I see there's no way out! I've fought and fought against answering letters. I've told you to spend the time that you would take in writing me doing your exercises—but you insist on writing and I guess there's nothing I can do but answer those letters."[37] Women wrote in with questions about how to cure thick ankles, a sagging chins, or illnesses. In turn, Ullback answered these questions, but exhibited no patience for those who had not used their common sense. Her answers were generally concise and to the point. In a 1933 letter to Sylvia, a woman explained that her husband liked fried meat and pastries causing a dilemma for her because Ullback's diets forbade fattening fried food. The reader asked Ullback for advice on how to reduce the upper part of her arms and stated the difficulty of cooking things that her husband liked but she could not eat herself. Ullback responded:

> Certainly, it's hard to see foods you like and not be able to eat them but that's what I have been trying to tell you. You've got to have courage and grit to be beautiful. And you've got to stop whining. I suppose you think it wasn't difficult for Connie Bennett to leave a party at which she was having a good time to get

> home at nine o'clock! But she did it—and even a professional pastry cook can keep on a diet if she really wants to. Snap out of it and stop complaining.[38]

This response captured the tone of many of Ullback's responses to readers. While her response first provided exercises for the arms, she focused on the will power that reducing required.

Ullback's career also expanded beyond her editorials for *Photoplay*. In 1932, General Electric sponsored "The Madame Sylvia Show" for broadcast on the radio. According to *Variety,* the show, as run under General Electric, conveyed "the Sylvia message entirely from her own thoughts."[39] General Electric soon dropped Sylvia but Ralston picked her up and using dramatization was apparently more successful. Ralston's version of the show, however, had much more success. *Variety* reported that each episode for Ralston was, like her articles, built around a celebrity who had "subjected her contours to the Sylvia mitts."[40] Ullback read her lines herself and *Variety* describes her voice as "a dialect that raises havoc with the Anglo-Saxon vowels but nevertheless easily understandable."[41] The show continued until 1935 and ran in a similar fashion each week, yet was profitable and effective for Ralston's RyKrisp. *Variety* described a general plot for the show as:

> The rushes in the projection room revealed a plumpness that flabbergasted the femme star and threatened her film future. Along came Mme. Sylvia to the rescue, and after a regimen of epidermis pounding, dieting and exercises the once distraught filmite was back to her pristine parallelity. For a boxtop of the Rye Krisp wafer the femme worrier on the loudspeaker and can get a copy of the same diet and exercise chart used by the Mme's Hollywood customers.[42]

The show was, for the most part, a skit based on Ullback's experiences with the stars. The parts were acted over the air much like a radio soap opera.

A show from December 4, 1934 featured a skit about a woman waiting in Ullback's shop and her nervousness over seeing Madame Sylvia. The announcer explained to listeners before the skit began that:

> when you follow her method of eating and her method of exercising you practically guarantee yourself a perfect figure. No starvation methods, no strenuous exercises but rather sensible eating, and scientific easy exercises designed to pound off fat that mars your natural loveliness.[43]

The episode then turned to a woman nervously waiting for her appointment with Sylvia. Once inside, Ullback and the woman discuss her nervousness and Ullback explains why she looks the way she does:

> 'Ullback': No wonder you're nervous and no wonder your skin is flabby…you're one of those that loves to lay in a hot bathtub for hours at a time.
>
> 'Nervous Woman': Well that's because I haven't been able to relax, I am so worried about my figure and not being able to wear nice clothes and now with the holidays coming on I…
>
> 'Sylvia': (interrupts) Mmhmm…Now listen to me baby, bathing is a very essential thing to beauty but I mean bathing I don't mean steaming yourself for hours in a bathtub.[44]

Ullback continued and gave the woman an explicit prescription for diet and exercise followed by a pretend massage over the air. While Ullback was only on the show for a few minutes each week, the show was centered on her and her methods. It condemned the radical measures of the 1920s, used her reputation to draw listeners in, and underscored the need for rational reducing methods. *Variety* deemed it a "smartly devised" radio show and advertising scheme.[45] The show probably heightened Sylvia's popularity and her reach, making her message even more widely available to women.

In 1934, Ullback published a book entitled *No More Alibis.* It was the first book she had ever authored alone, and it became a *New York Times* bestseller list in 1935 and 1936.[46] The book's success speaks to Ullback's widespread popularity with women. It was originally published in 1934 by *Photoplay's* publishing company and was reprinted by Macfadden Publications in 1936. The introduction to the book, written by Carolyn Van Wyck, the beauty editor for *Photoplay,* explained:

> This tiny woman is a living example of her sincerity. She has turned down offers of a hundred dollars for one treatment because she feels that in confining herself to treatments she reaches only a few people. It is the wider scope that Sylvia seeks. It is the millions she wants to serve, not just a few. And so she had written this book, to tell you in her own words the secrets of a perfect body and a lovely face.[47]

The introduction served to introduce Ullback and provide a history of her life and her experiences with the Hollywood stars prior to her work at *Photoplay*. She was often credited with having given up treating the stars, at a profitable rate, to speak to and help all women. The assertion that Ullback gave up her career to help all women was reflective of her attempts to disaffiliate herself from the elite and the focus on the "forgotten man" in the depression era. Ullback had given up her career working with the stars to help the "forgotten woman."

No More Alibis was published during the New Deal and the book embodied the principles stressed by the program. In 1934 Roosevelt explained, "Disorder is not an American habit. Self-help and self-control are the essence of the American tradition—not of necessity the form of that tradition, but its spirit. The [New Deal] itself comes from the American people."[48] The ideas stressed by FDR were reflected in Ullback's book. She

encouraged individualism and self-help, arguing that any woman could be beautiful through hard work and determination.

The first chapter of the book sums up Ullback's attitude. Entitled "The World is Yours," she explained to readers that they can have the figure they desire if they put in the effort. She told women, "Don't be soft with yourself. You've got to go after that figure with bull-dog determination! Nobody can give you a lovely figure but yourself. I'm telling you *how* to do it, *but you must do it.* Don't let anybody hand you that stuff that it's easy!"[49] Her book drew on the material from her articles and expanded on it. She urged women to confront their habits and take responsibility for their appearance. She told readers:

> You know why you are fat—and this goes for men as well as women. You eat entirely too much, and in most cases improperly. You don't exercise to use up the fat that stores in your body. You carry around excess pounds that simply ruin your beauty, health and disposition.[50]

Although pieces of *No More Alibis* were drawn from previous articles, the book was expanded and offered a detailed diet plan as well as exercises for reducing specific areas of the body.

Although many claim that her techniques were radical and extravagant they only appear so.[51] By the standards of the period, her techniques were moderate and centered around ideas about a healthy body. The claims that her techniques were radical likely stem from her attitude and fiery tone. She offered a ten-day "conditioning diet" designed to prep and train the body to follow certain habits. Ullback claimed that by following the "conditioning" diet the "body will be limber and elastic, ready for the harder work that is to come. Your mind will be alert because of that sensible diet. You will already have

trained yourself to the right amount of sleep, early rising and correct bathing all of which are important."[52]

Ullback also had a chapter in *No More Alibis* devoted to nervousness, which she occasionally addressed in her articles. Hinting at the anxiety that accompanied living during the depression, Ullback explained:

> Nervousness is caused by a terrific demand on your energy. Most of us live strenuous, nerve-racking lives. It shows in strained face, jittery nerves. The effort to make a decent living today, to keep pace with your social or home life means sapping of every ounce of your strength and keeping you keyed-up. To be ambitious is fine but there is such a thing as being eaten up with ambition.[53]

The struggle to "make a decent living" was a concern for many during the depression and Ullback's suggestions sought to comment on and offer a remedy for the physical effects of living during the depression. To remedy this "nervousness" she recommended stimulating the nerves in the neck and shoulders with massage, which become stiff and cause nervousness. Ullback explained, "tightness at the back of the neck is the direct result of nerves. The right manipulation on this part of your body will bring new spirit and vitality."[54] Ullback often discussed the use of massage to manipulate the nerves; which was something she learned during her training in Scandinavia.

When *No More Alibis* was published, Ullback was still writing monthly articles for *Photoplay*. Her third series of articles ran for a shorter period, only lasting from February 1934 to November 1934. These editorials were structured as letters *to* the Hollywood stars and offered advice about their bodies. Instead of addressing her readers in the articles and using the stars as examples, she addressed the stars themselves. In the first article of the series, Ullback wrote to Clara Bow and explained, "right now, Clara,

your face is too fat. And you've got to do something about it. That's why I'm writing to you. I know exactly *how* you can take off the excess plumpness on your face and make your eyes a million times more lovely."[55] The character of these articles was decidedly different than her other articles in the sense that she no longer addressed, or even mentioned, her readers except for in her fan mail section. However, she still maintained the same attitude towards reducing. In an article addressed to Patricia Ellis, an up and coming star of the period, Sylvia remarked on what she believed had happened to the actress' body between films:

> Let me answer my own question and tell you what has happened. You've put on weight—several pounds of unnecessary fat. And, darling, we're going to have a little heart to heart talk right now, only I'm going to do the talking. I'm going to tell you how to get rid of the excess weight and get back that lovely figure you had a few months ago. And this time you're going to keep it![56]

Both Clara Bow and Patricia Ellis were minor figures in Hollywood at this time and were mentioned to promote the release of their films.[57] Ullback's advice to the stars served to show readers that even the stars had to work to maintain, or earn, their status and their figures.

There may have been several reasons for the shift in the style of the articles. First, the magazine might have wanted to change the format of the articles so as not to bore readers. Secondly, these articles may have only lasted a short time because *Photoplay* underwent a change in ownership late in 1934 when Bernarr Macfadden purchased *Photoplay*. The change in ownership as well as changes in the magazine's editorial staff, starting in 1935, may account for one reason the articles took on a new format.

There were only eight installments in the series before it shifted form again. However, while the format of her articles changed, once again, women continued to write in. Ullback continued to answer letters and readers sent in questions about every aspect of reducing as well as letters testifying to their successes. Ullback continued to stress her beliefs that health, through exercise and diet, would reflect on the exterior through glowing skin, personality, and a woman's overall presence. In response to a reader that asked about overcoming self-consciousness she wrote:

> If you stay on my health diets, if you make your figure so lovely that you'll know you're the best looking girl in your set, and if you'll learn to walk with your shoulders back, your stomach in and your head high you can't be self conscious because you'll be sure of yourself. You'll *know* you're attractive! And that's the only way to overcome timidity—to know you're okay![58]

Ullback continued to have no patience for those who did not apply these values to their lives and were looking for easy ways out. In response to a woman who inquired about an alternative way to reduce because she thought Ullback's exercises took too much time Ullback responded:

> I wish I could get my hands on you. I would give you a good shaking. You can find the time if you want to find the time…If the stars, who literally work from ten to sixteen hours a day when they're making a picture, can find time to take my exercise, I'd like to know why you can't. Girls who do the most strenuous work are my best patients. Gosh! You make me so mad! No—and a thousand times no—there isn't any way to reduce in spots except by exercise and squeezing off the flesh. Make the time. There are no short-cuts to beauty. Snap out of your indolent ways and get busy right now![59]

The articles in this series focused on the difficulties and challenges that the stars faced in reducing and the effort they took to overcome them. Her ideal of health was tethered on the values of hard work, confidence, and determination in reducing and these ideals resonated with women in the depression era. Consistent with her outspoken personality,

Ullback wasted no time berating anyone who complained or sought the easy way out. Overcoming one's challenges was a theme that ran throughout her articles and books and was seemingly important to her. The focus on this theme may stem from her personal life and the challenges she had faced throughout her life. Ullback had overcome being the "ugly duckling" and by her own account had been an ambitious person all her adult life. Her success in moving from Northern Europe to America and achieving a career that placed her in the national spotlight likely influenced her belief in overcoming challenges to achieve an individual best. While the story often centered around the idea of beauty, the story echoed larger issues for women such as acquiring a career despite the naysay of others.

Ullback's fourth series of articles for *Photoplay* put a new spin on using the stars as the standard of beauty. The articles written by Ullback from December 1934 to July 1935, "set the standard" for the development of particular areas of the body based on the stars' bodies. The article explained: "Now here is something for you girls who want the form divine! The flawless features of the most beautiful figures in Hollywood are assembled by Madame Sylvia, into a hypothetical woman who must stand as the paragon of liveliness. To match her should be your goal!"[60] She explained that her career was built on criticism and she justifies the importance of criticism for both the stars and her readers:

> Maybe you think I've been rough on the stars—pointing out their defects as I've done. Maybe they think I've been rough. I've had to be. If I didn't tell the stars of Hollywood, and you, what is wrong with them, I wouldn't be true to myself, and—what's more important—I wouldn't be true to the or you. Their livelihood depends on their looks. Nothing breaks a Hollywood contract so quickly as *fat*,

> and the stars are so used to their own figures and are so flattered so much that they don't see those pounds creeping up on them.[61]

She instructed women to follow her lead and inspect their body for imperfections. She urged readers to "make up your mind that you're going to be beautiful—and then get to work."[62] The series was in line with her previous rhetoric and sought to put a new spin on Ullback's articles about reducing. These articles continued to urge readers to approach reshaping their bodies as an individual initiative, even more than the previous series.

Another theme in her fourth set of articles was overcoming ones defects, or "handicaps," to have a figure that was perfect for each individual body. Perfection in these articles may have been measured against the standards set by stars, but Ullback consistently challenged the notion that one must attempt to have a body exactly like that of the star. At first glance, the articles seem to be furthering perfection, as the stars defined it, but subtly Ullback encouraged women to remodel their body, overcome their challenges, and sculpt their body, until they were satisfied with their body. Perfection, for Ullback, was defined on an individual basis. There was no single standard of perfection; it differed depending on body type. She talked of making oneself better than it already was, self-improvement, with the goal of reaching perfection suitable to ones body type. She told women:

> Your waistline may be too high or too low. Your eyes may be small. Your mouth may be too wide. You may be able to walk down the street without having a dozen sculptors chasing you like marathon runners, begging you to pose for them. But no matter what your defects, no matter if you have as many as Garbo has eyelashes you can—and you *must*—be attractive.[63]

Her article continued to explain that the issue of most importance was health. She told women "I want you to look at some of the Hollywood girls who are really attractive—girls who have had handicaps and defects to overcome but who, in spite of them, give the illusion of loveliness."[64] The issue of overcoming handicaps was a theme that ran through all Ullback's articles and was something she consistently stressed to her readers. It may have stemmed in part from her childhood and the story she told about the ugly duckling. Much of the discussion about perfection, and to some extent her rejection of that ideal, may have stemmed from her own experience of overcoming the appearance of "the ugly duckling."[65] Ullback overcame her handicaps both physically, in her appearance, and in her life. By this time she was happily married to Edward Leiter, and had an extremely successful career for a woman of the period. She pushed women to follow the example of those she wrote about, and, less obviously, the example she set.

Furthermore, her discussion of overcoming "handicaps" is reflective of the equalitarian tone in her articles. Unlike previous decades, when beauty was associated with the elite, Ullback stressed the availability of beauty for all women, including the "forgotten woman" of the depression. The stars she wrote about all overcame challenges, and represented a type of beauty that was attainable for all.

In June 1935, Sylvia published her final article in *Photoplay*. This article was unique in the sense that it was not a part of any series and it directly dealt with the depression. Entitled "How to Get Rid of the Depression Blues," Ullback discussed the need for women to pull themselves together and stop "crying" over the depression:

> So you've been through the depression and you tell me that the worry and the mental stress of the last few years have left their mark upon you. Your letters say

> that you're nervous, run down, pepless, melancholic. And I'll add something to that. Your circulation is probably terrible too. And you blame it all on the depression. When the only person to blame is yourself![66]

In line with Ullback's disdain for excuses and complaints, she scolded women for worrying about the depression rather than focusing on their health. This article was the first time she explicitly mentioned the social circumstances of the period and also marked a shift in her writing, toward a more vocal and openly opinionated tone in regards to societal and cultural issues. She continued by telling readers that the depression was actually "good" for them:

> Listen to me! The depression was darn good for you. Before the crash when money was rolling in your were soft—physically and mentally. You were filled to the eyebrows with self-importance and had nothing to back it up but the dollar. You ate rich foods. And that made you heavy in body and soul. And my advice during and after the depression is the same. It's this: Keep lean, babies, keep lean! And that doesn't cost a cent. All you need is your head and your hands. It doesn't matter how much or how little money you have—you *can* keep lean.[67]

Continuing with her discussion of common sense, she urged women to use their head when reducing regardless of the economic circumstances. She told women "best of all, if you'll only keep lean, your mental outlook will be so much better you'll have health and happiness to do your work well, which in turn means success."[68] Much of this discussion is reminiscent of Ullback's experience as an immigrant. Coming to the United States she was able to secure a good job and make an excellent living for herself. While she never described her experience as the stereotypical "American Dream," her life did fit that model and she believed that success could be achieved if women would employ common sense and dedicate themselves to their goals.

Ullback disagreed with attitudes of pity and hopelessness in wake of the depression. She exclaimed:

> I get so many letters filled with self-pity. I wish you'd spend that time you devote feeling sorry for yourself on getting rid of your blues. Many of you say that you're sure the picture stars haven't a worry in the world. Well, let me tell you—you're wrong. I worked on the stars' figures. I worked on their souls as well…Buck up, girls! Crying doesn't get you anything—except wrinkles. Start today to take the health and happiness that is yours.[69]

On the surface, Ullback's articles claimed that health and beauty would solve women's problems even in the wake of a depression, a much larger societal force which was not within the ordinary person's control. However underneath this discussion about beauty was a set of values and standards for women to employ in their everyday lives.

"How to Get Rid of the Depression Blues" was the last article Ullback wrote for *Photoplay* until her return in mid-1936. Why she left is unknown, *Photoplay* never acknowledged her departure and she did not mention it in the article. However, she started immediately the next month at *Photoplay's* biggest competitor, *Modern Screen.* The articles in this magazine were quite different from the articles she wrote for *Photoplay* and she began to address larger societal issues. This shift in the content and tone of her writing marks the beginning of Ullback's decline. As her message and the values of society began to shift again in the second half of the 1930s, she struggled to find a platform for her ideas.

From 1932 to mid-1935 Ullback's career moved quickly. She became increasingly popular and was widely recognized as the beauty expert for women. Her philosophies and values stemmed from her European training and her personal experiences, and was reflective of the culture of the period and the position of women at

the time. Her writing provides insight into the ideas about women's bodies during the depression. Moreover, her message represents a distinct and definite transition from the reducing culture of the twenties to an approach centered around diet and exercise in the 1930s.

Notes Chapter 3

[1] Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures.*

[2] Sylvia Ullback, "Any Woman Can Be Beautiful," *Photoplay*, February 1932, 31.

[3] Ibid., 30.

[4] Sylvia Ullback, "Please! Please! Use Your Common Sense," *Photoplay*, June 1932, 68.

[5] Sylvia Ullback, "Quit Those Cocktails If You Want a Figure," *Photoplay*, May 1932, 69.

[6] Sylvia Ullback, "Now! Girls! Here's Pep for You!," *Photoplay*, April 1932, 70.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Schwartz, *Never Satisfied*, 106; Graham, *A Practical Treatise on Massage: It's History, Mode of Application, and Effects*, 28.

[9] "Here's What Folks Think About Sylvia," *Photoplay*, May 1932, 108.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Mayme Ober Peak, "Socks the Film Stars and They Like It," *The Boston Sunday*, May 31, 1931.

[14] Mayme Peak, "Miss Peak Tells Inside of Mme Sylvia's Divorce: Famed Masseuse Takes a New Love After 31 years--Husband Crushed," *Daily Boston Globe*, July 9, 1932.

[15] Ibid., 2.

[16] "Mme. Waaler a Bride: Radio Broadcaster Wed in Bershires to Edward Leiter, Actor," *New York Times*, July 6, 1932; "Beauty Monitor at Hollywood Weds an Actor," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 6, 1932; "Mme. Sylvia Weds Actor," *Los Angeles Times*, July 11, 1932; "Sylvia, Stars' Masseuse, Weds Joe Leiter's Nephew," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, July 4, 1932.

[17] Sylvia divorced Andrew Ullback on June 24, 1932. "Mme. Waaler a Bride: Radio Broadcaster Wed in Bershires to Edward Leiter, Actor"; Peak, "Miss Peak Tells Inside of

Mme Sylvia's Divorce: Famed Masseuse Takes a New Love After 31 years--Husband Crushed."

[18] Peak, "Miss Peak Tells Inside of Mme Sylvia's Divorce: Famed Masseuse Takes a New Love After 31 years--Husband Crushed."

[19] Ibid.

[20] "The Nellie Revell Show," *Interview with Madame Sylvia of Hollywood*, n.d.

[21] Sylvia Ullback, "Sylvia Tells All About Connie Bennett," *Photoplay*, February 1933, 70.

[22] Sylvia Ullback, "How Sylvia Changed 'Carol of the Curves' to Svelte Carole Lombard," *Photoplay*, April 1933, 50.

[23] Ullback, "Sylvia Tells All About Connie Bennett," 70.

[24] Sarah Berry, *Screen Style: Fashion and Femininity in 1930s Hollywood*, Commerce and Mass Culture Series v. 2 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 22.

[25] Ibid., 29.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ullback, "How Sylvia Changed 'Carol of the Curves' to Svelte Carole Lombard," 127.

[28] Ibid., 107.

[29] Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 6.

[30] Andrew Bergman, *We're in the Money: Depression America and Its Films* (Ivan R. Dee, 1992), xvi.

[31] Franklin Delano Roosevelt, "Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago," July 2, 1932, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=75174.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Franklin D. Roosevelt: "Fireside Chat on Banking," March 12, 1933. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=14540

[35] Sylvia Ullback, "How Sylvia Cured 'Hollywood's Most Melancholy Girl'," *Photoplay*, June 1933, 84.

[36] Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 6.

[37] Ullback, "Sylvia Tells All About Connie Bennett," 70.

[38] Sylvia Ullback, "How I Gave Constance Cummings a New Figure," *Photoplay*, March 1933.

[39] "Radio Reports: Mme.Sylvia, Talk, Music Commerical," *Variety*, November 7, 1933, 40.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid.

[43] "The Madame Sylvia Show," Radio, December 4, 1934.

[44] Ibid.

[45] "Radio Reports: Mme.Sylvia, Talk, Music Commerical," 40.

[46] "Monthly List of Best-Selling Books," *New York Times*, October 6, 1935; "The Best-Selling Books," *New York Times*, May 3, 1936.

[47] Carolyn Van Wyck, "Introduction," in *No More Alibis* (Chicago: *Photoplay* Publishing Company, 1934), 10.

[48] Franklin D. Roosevelt: "Annual Message to Congress.," January 3, 1934. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=14683.

[49] Ullback, *No More Alibis*, 13.

[50] Ibid., 22.

[51] Louise Foxcroft, *Calories and Corsets: A History of Dieting over Two Thousand Years*, Kindle Edition (Profile Books, 2013), 65; David Desser, ed., *Hollywood Goes Shopping*, Commerce and Mass Culture Series (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 22.

[52] Ullback, *No More Alibis*, 31.

[53] Ibid., 113.

[54] Ibid., 117.

[55] Sylvia Ullback, "Sylvia Gives Clara Bow Some Timely Advice," *Photoplay*, February 1934, 72.

[56] Sylvia Ullback, "Look Out, Patricia! Says Sylvia," *Photoplay*, March 1934, 72.

[57] The article about Patricia Ellis coincided with several films released in the first half of 1934 including Easy to Love (1934), Harold Teen (1934), and Let's Be Ritzy (1934). William Keighley, *Easy to Love*, Comedy, 1934; Murray Roth, *Harold Teen*, Comedy, Musical, Romance, 1934; Edward Ludwig, *Let's Be Ritzy*, Comedy, 1934; Ullback, "Look Out, Patricia! Says Sylvia"; Ullback, "Sylvia Gives Clara Bow Some Timely Advice."

[58] Ullback, "Look Out, Patricia! Says Sylvia," 88.

[59] Sylvia Ullback, "Keep That Perfect Figure," *Photoplay*, August 1934, 84.

[60] Sylvia Ullback, "The Perfect Model For Your Figure," *Photoplay*, December 1934, 72.

[61] Ibid., 73.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Sylvia Ullback, "Happiness for Every Type of Girl," *Photoplay*, July 1935, 44.

[64] Ibid.

[65] Ullback often told reporters that her mother referred to her as a "ugly duckling" and that it was something she had to overcome as a young woman. Alma Whitaker, "They Are Clay in Her Hands."

[66] Sylvia Ullback, "How to Get Rid of the Depression Blues," *Photoplay*, June 1935, 41.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Ibid., 81.

Chapter 4: "A Call to Arms," 1935-1939

In August 1935, one month after she left *Photoplay,* Ullback began writing for *Modern Screen* magazine, a major *Photoplay* competitor. The next few years were busy for her. She bounced between *Modern Screen,* Bernarr Macfadden's publication *Physical Culture,* and *Photoplay* (as the Beauty Editor). She also published two more books. Within this period, the content of the Hollywood fan magazines began to change, and as a result Ullback struggled to adapt. She attempted to expand her writing by focusing more on societal issues, personality, marriage, and children. However, her writing, while shifting, still remained loyal to her tenets of diet, exercise and massage. The change in the focus and the content of her publications in this period were reflective of larger societal and cultural shifts. Physical culture and a focus on exercise and health specifically, increasingly became associated with Nazi Germany and consequently declined in popularity. This period was one of tension for Americans. In addition to confronting the continuing depression, America was trying to remain isolated from the European conflict. International and domestic anxieties became reflected in the publications of the period. Additionally, in Hollywood, the "strong woman" character in film, began to decline and studios started to advocate for safer and more traditional female characters. Not only were the actresses who were known for their portrayal of strong female characters often the subject of Ullback's columns, Ullback also had a reputation for being a strong and independent woman. The convergence of this backlash on the strong female character as well as the decline in the popularity of physical culture

led to an environment where Ullback struggled to keep her career afloat. By 1938, these issues had severely impacted Ullback's career and she withdrew from the public sphere after losing her platform with the fan magazines.

In October 1935, Ullback began a one-year run at *Modern Screen.* The magazine announced the beginning of Ullback's new series:

> Her name is as well known as that of President Roosevelt, Mickey Mouse, and Garbo. Sylvia of Hollywood has brought more beauty to a beauty-starved world than all the jars of cold cream on the cosmetic counters. She is going to write a series of articles for *Modern Screen.* The first one will appear in the September issue—so don't complain that you weren't told.[1]

Ullback's branding as "Sylvia of Hollywood" served to remind readers of her association with the Hollywood stars giving her legitimacy with her readers. The series of articles for *Modern Screen* discussed a variety of issues related to beauty and reducing that were outside of the previous style of Ullback's articles. However, while her articles discussed new topics such as marriage and children, she always related them to beauty and reducing. Ullback argued these new topics were tethered to her fundamentals of diet, exercise, and massage.

When *Modern Screen* announced that Ullback would begin writing for the magazine, they also announced that she wanted to be of "real assistance" to readers and promised Ullback would help readers achieve the "type" of beauty embodied by their favorite star. As in her *Photoplay* articles, Ullback's *Modern Screen articles* would "take one general type of face and figure, point out its defects its need for improvement and tell you just exactly how that improvement can be achieved."[2] The article explained:

> For example: How many of you are—in a general way—the Jean Harlow type? Does the mirror or do your friends tell you that you 'look sort of like Harlow'?

> Blonde, curved, voluptuous. Would you like more perfectly to achieve the svelte and lovely Harlow lines and fight off the plumpness which that old meanie, Nature, delights in wishing upon this particular type? Sylvia will tell you how to do it.[3]

Ullback's article on achieving the "Jean Harlow type" allowed women to achieve a model and standard of beauty, represented by the stars, that was egalitarian and attainable for women. Ullback complimented her discussion of type by discussing the need for individuality. She explained to readers in the same article that, "You are basically the Harlow type, yes--but that doesn't mean that you should try to make yourself a carbon copy of her. Carbons are never so clear as the original!"[4] She instructed women that while they may be the same "type" as Harlow, women still needed to be an individual. She explained, "Use your own basic type as an author uses a basic plot. Dress up the Type. And don't forget the O.Henry twist at the ending. That's individuality girls."[5]

The emphasis on what film historian Sarah Berry deems "techniques of self" was a common discourse in the 1930s. She asserts that the emphasis on self-improvement, which was extremely common during the depression, contradicted older notions of social status.[6] The Hollywood stars were presented as representations of self-improvement and Sylvia's stories sought to encourage women to follow their model. Ullback always explained that the stars did not achieve their beauty without examining their defects and working to improve them through determination, confidence, and effort. By framing the stars as an elite group who any woman could replicate, regardless of class status, she challenged the traditional hierarchy of social relations.[7] At the same time, framing the stars in this way affirmed her belief that success was based in individual drive to attain a goal. The American dream, she thought, made it possible for anyone to succeed if they

try hard enough. In previous decades the fashion and lifestyles of the elite were, for the most part, assumed to be unattainable. However, the stories of stars' rise to fame, often from ordinary backgrounds, began to change this dynamic. The elite, represented by the Hollywood stars, became an attainable standard as the star system developed in the 1920s and 1930s. Women, regardless of class, could model themselves after a particular star and replicate the image of upward mobility that she represented. The depiction of upward mobility for women was a common theme in films of the era in part because it was so limited at the time. It placed this status within the grasp of ordinary women. Ullback's discussion of the stars' and her emphasis on the emulation of the stars appearances, but also the image of self-improvement and their work ethic that they represented, underscores this change. Through continually discussing these values Ullback presented beauty to women in an egalitarian fashion.

Within these articles for *Modern Screen,* Ullback explicitly condemned the radical techniques of the 1920s for the first time. In previous articles, she had occasionally hinted at her disgust with these techniques, but she never directly criticized "reduceomania". By September 1936 she explained:

> Have I ever told you to take pills and potions? No! Have I ever told you to buy rolling pins or sweat the devil out of yourselves with steam cabinets, electric blankets, or similar contraptions? No! I'm only telling you common sense things, healthy things. Eat properly. Live properly. Exercise regularly (and properly, I might add). Use your noodle and stay away from quackery and hocus-pocus.[8]

Her description of these techniques as "quackery and hocus-pocus" echoed the sentiments stressed years before by organizations such as the American Medical Association and the medical community. The reason for Ullback's sudden criticism is

unknown but, she continued to stress to women that the only way to reduce safely and effectively was through hard work and diet. She told women "I know you can work miracles on your body. And when I say 'work' I mean work. You can't do it by wishing, or quack methods or hocus-pocus. But faith in yourself plus the necessary work has turned many a miracle before this."[9] Therefore, while these articles represented a change, in the sense that she began discussing the 1920s techniques openly, they still stressed the same values that had been present in her writing all along.

Ullback also began offering advice on children and parenting. She explained her motives for addressing children in her article entitled, "I'm Doing this for the Kiddies: Expert Advice for Anyone's Child":

> Now what, you may be asking, has inspired me to turn my critical eye toward the younger generation? I'll tell you in one seven-letter word: letters. Pathetic letters from unhappy adolescents. Letters from anxious mothers who are at their wits end over little Patsy's refusal to eat anything but banana splits and chocolate cake, Over Josephine's complexion or Annabelle's figure, not to mention Mary Louise's inability to enter a room without tripping over a rug, stumbling against the Chippendale, and busting the best tea set to smithereens.[10]

She advised women to provide their children with sunshine, fresh air, good sleep, and proper exercise. She told readers that she decided to tackle the children's problems because "I don't want any mother to sit by and take her children's problems for granted. Take it from me, the tragedy that can shroud a sensitive child's life, because her problems are treated with indifference, is horrible."[11] Ullback hinted at the neglect she felt from her mother who referred to her as the "ugly duckling" and revealed that she was absent for most of Ullback's childhood.[12] The influence for this article also may have stemmed from the recent success of child stars of the era, such as Shirley Temple. The article

insisted on the need to instill the values of diet and exercise in children at a young age. She told women "Well darlings, believe me, it isn't the hand embroidered French dresses and the expensive toys and all the other money bought delights that make Shirley, Jane, Sybil, and Cora Sue the fine young women they are. Its sunshine, fresh air, good food, sleep and proper exercise."[13] Although this was a new subject, it held true to her original ideals.

Sylvia also began discussing marriage and love more frequently. Her articles and advice on how to keep a husband echoed the popular notion that one must keep her figure to keep her husband. She explained to women:

> Men are creatures of habit. They'll accept what they've got until—well, I hope the "until" never enters your life. But you don't mean love, baby. He's not particularly thrilled by you, though he may be fond of you. He doesn't ache to show you off. You may be a swell housekeeper and an agreeable companion but what a pity that all the romance and excitement is out of your lives. Wouldn't you like to inject a little and live again the thrills of ten years ago? You would? Well, that means you have to regain that healthy, strong and alluring body you once had.[14]

She furthered the notion that love was dependent on an attractive appearance. Her articles did not include many exercises or diets, but they sought to offer more philosophical advice on reducing and the consequences of both a good and bad figure. In another article she wrote:

> And now let me give you some tips. For goodness sake, don't harp on dieting and reducing. Husbands have a holy horror of those two words, mostly because they have seen too many women ruin their health and dispositions by stupid starvation diets and fantastic get slim quick ideas. A jittery cranky woman can drive a man to more things than drink. Remember this, my system gives you health and strength—two essentials to beauty in any form.[15]

Perhaps this cynical tone was reflective of her own marriage with Andrew Ullback, which ended in divorce in June 1932. Ullback often used herself as an example and told readers that she was more than twenty years older than her husband. Using this example Ullback stressed the importance of keeping fit, healthy and attractive to maintain a good marriage.

Throughout her time at *Modern Screen*, Ullback continued to discuss hard work, common sense, and confidence. In an article entitled "Do You Believe in Miracles," from 1936, she discussed the ability of women to "work miracles" on their bodies. She explained:

> People who have some unhappy physical handicap are inclined to put on a great show of indifference and make believe they care little for the acclaim which the world pays to beauty. But they can't fool mama. You've heard them . . . the sad little birds, at dances, who spend most of the evening out in the powder room, playing like they're waiting for someone. A pathetic game it is, too. The girls who say, with a sweet-sour smile, "I really don't care much for boys." The women whom life passes by. Such people make me want to do two things: first I want to sit down and have a good cry with them. Then I want to give them a good, hearty smack between the should blades and say, "What the devil's the matter with you anyway? Snap out of it! It's your own fault that you are as you are. Get busy and stop sulking."[16]

Her articles continued to discuss "handicaps" and criticized women's lack of effort. She impressed on readers the necessity of individual effort and hard work in reducing routines. Despite the slowly recovering economy, she remained true to her beliefs.

While Ullback was busy writing for *Modern Screen*, the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, Germany inspired an international discussion about physical culture. The German focus on physical culture and "Aryan superiority" was a topic of debate, which started the year before the games. In Germany, Adolf Hitler introduced a focus on sport and physical

fitness in 1933 and recreation became a cornerstone of proper schooling and training for Germany's youth. Sport, it was thought, provided "a sense of self-sacrifice, of courage, while displaying the elitism of a natural order" based on physical traits of the Aryan race.[17] Germany's belief that the Aryan race was superior led to a controversy over race and discrimination during the Olympics. In late 1935, Jewish and Catholic organizations in the United States began to protest the German discrimination against Jewish athletes. A newspaper reported:

> An international move to 'boycott' the 1936 Olympic games in Berlin because of unfair treatment of Catholic and Jewish athletes loomed as an immediate possibility tonight after American athletic authorities moved to consider banning United States participation in the games if Nazi religious persecution continues.[18]

The president of the American Amateur Athletic Union asserted, "That the present German government has injected race, religion and politics into sports in general and into the Olympics in particular, and has destroyed their free and independent character."[19] The blatant discrimination of Jewish athletes by Germany was openly condemned as a product of an oppressive government and it infuriated Americans. Germany responded to pressure by offering two athletes who were supposedly "half-Jewish," Helene Mayer and Rudi Ball, spots on the German Olympic team. The invitation allowed Germany to avoid an American boycott, however, no other Jews were allowed on the German team.[20]

The Berlin games were the first games to be broadcast live over the radio making Hitler's display of his "superior Aryan athletes" an internationally viewed event.[21] Hitler used the games, in 1936 and after, as a tribute and a testament to the superior nation he had built. The German team came in first place overall, and as historian Barbara J. Keys has argued, "the German team had been propelled to new heights by rigorous and

systematic training and the psychological boost of competing before the Fuhrer and enormous home crowds rooting for German victory."[22] However, the discussion over the games and Germany's success perpetuated a growing distaste for government mandated physical culture.

The racial dynamic between Germany's "superior" Aryan athletes and the African American athletes on the United State's track team was the subject of harsh discussion and is representative of the association between Hitler's vision and physical culture. By the end of the games, the eighteen African Americans on the United States team accounted for eighty-three of the team's 167 points and won six gold medals.[23] In the press, the success of the African American athletes was presented as a victory over the repressive regime and flawed racial policies of Nazi Germany. It was seen as a blow to the German ideal of Aryan supremacy and physical superiority. One newspaper reported:

> The German crowd has taken his victory in good part, but when the tumult has died and the foreigners have gone home, National Socialist racial experts will have to do some explaining away. From their point of view, a negro is only slightly less damaging as a record breaker than a Jew. The Aryan race has lost face. They may maintain, of course, that [African American track star] Owen's superiority lies in his legs and not in his breed. But that would be a lame explanation in a country that sets as much store on physical efficiency as the Third Reich does.[24]

Hitler had no use for African Americans and thought the athletes were "little more than animals but had to be welcomed as guests."[25] The victory of the track team, and in particular the coverage of Jessie Owens, was seen as evidence that Germany's policies were repressive and deeply flawed. Marty Glickman, a Jewish member of the American track team, explained in an interview, "I feel athletics are above racial prejudice and discrimination of all sorts . . . I want to show Nazi Germany that the Aryan myth of

supremacy isn't true."[26] The games were discussed in America in this light, and the track team's victory served as evidence that Hitler's Aryan Supremacy was a myth. The popularity of the European notions of physical culture as propagated by Ullback declined. While in men's sports weightlifting and fitness not only continued but grew in popularity, the term physical culture, deeply associated with Europe, went into decline.[27] The focus in the United States became increasingly on male bodies and the need for fitness to counter the Nazi vision of the superior male physique. For women, the rhetoric not only shifted but the importance of physical culture declined altogether.

Newspapers continued to discuss the German focus on physical culture even after the games had ended. Hitler continued to use the success of Germany at the Olympic games as a testament to the greatness of his regime and Germany. A newspaper in September 1937 printed the text of Hitler's speech, which took place in Berlin's Olympic stadium. Hitler explained:

> It is the demonstration of our peoples. The deep meaning of this demonstration of peoples is a sincere desire to guarantee for our country that peace which is not the wages of renunciation and cowardice but the result of will to guarantee the full awareness of our responsibility for national moral and physical values and for everything that makes up the substance of our culture.[28]

The continual coverage of Germany's focus on "physical values" as a necessary element to the success of a pure Aryan race led to a new negative association of physical culture or any discussion of the body as a necessary tool for a successful nation. The use of the term "Physical Culture" begins to sharply decline in 1935 illustrating the growing uneasiness American's had with the term.[29] The term began declining in popularity around the same time that news about the German faith in Aryan superiority and physical

culture continued to surface. The association of physical culture with Nazi Germany created an environment in which Ullback's beliefs would become less popular and as a result editors would move away any association with these ideas. Additionally, Ullback's distinct European roots and heavy accent probably contributed to her troubles. The impact of the German belief in physical culture wasn't immediate however as the situation in Europe continued to grow more severe in the late 1930s, Ullback struggled to adapt her writing to fit this new environment.

In October 1936, several things occurred that impacted Ullback and her career simultaneously. In the same month, she returned to *Photoplay,* began writing for Bernarr Macfadden's *Physical Culture* magazine, and published her second book, *Pull Yourself Together, Baby.* She left *Modern Screen* without explanation after a little over a year. In February of 1936, *Modern Screen* promoted her to the "Beauty Critic of Motion Pictures," signaling the success of her articles, and it is possible that Macfadden Publications lured her back by making her *Photoplay's* Beauty Editor. *Photoplay* and *Physical Culture* each had different messages and took a different approach to discussing beauty, health and reducing. Macfadden may have seen Ullback as a safe way to continue to promote Physical Culture since it wasn't associated with a political stance. Instead, in Ullback's case, it was rooted in Hollywood glamour. Since she was writing for both magazines at the same time, she needed to expand her topics even further to come up with different articles, that fit with the tone of the specific publication.

Physical Culture had been Bernarr Macfadden's first publication and focused largely on issues of health and body. While it had previously spent a great deal of time

discussing masculinity and bodybuilding, by the 1930s it was geared toward a female audience. The "Physical Culture Creed" was published in each issue and explained the magazines fundamental beliefs. It stated:

> That our bodies are our most glorious possessions; that health-wealth is our greatest asset; that every influence which interferes with the attainment of superb, buoyant health should be recognized as a menace. We maintain that weakness is truly a crime; that sickness is the penalty of violated health laws; that every man can be a vigorous vital specimen of masculinity; that every woman can be a splendid strong well-poised specimen of femininity, if the laws of health are rigidly observed.[30]

The creed continued to state the "requirements to the building of glorious health" including pure air and sunlight, a wholesome diet, regular use of the muscular system, cleanliness, internal cleanliness, proper sleep, and the right mental attitude.[31] This creed sums up the beliefs of the magazine and the types of editorials found within it. Ullback's articles, therefore, were likely required to embody some of these ideals. At the bottom of one article appeared with the phrase "There is no beauty without strength, physical fitness is your first obligation."[32] Her articles did not take a significant amount of adjusting for the magazine as her methods were for the most part in line with the magazine's beliefs. In contrast, *Photoplay* continued to be a fan magazine, which relied on stories about the Hollywood stars and community. The articles in *Physical Culture* focused on health and the body as a vital entity for citizenship while the *Photoplay* articles continued to discuss the stars and their bodies. The articles for *Physical Culture* were not centered on Hollywood, however she was listed in the article as "Sylvia of Hollywood" and the connection was clear. The differences and the similarities in Sylvia's articles for these two publications exemplify her attempts to adapt her writing.

Her reentry article for *Photoplay* was entitled "Sylvia Returns to Restore Your Beauty." After giving readers a scolding in true Sylvia fashion, she asked "How's that for an old-fashioned Sylvia lambasting? Does it sound natural? Well, it's just my sentimental way of saying its great to be back as Beauty Editor of *Photoplay.*"[33] She expressed her gratification to her readers and wrote,

> I'd like to make you understand how much I appreciate that loyalty. It is darn gratifying to know that you depend upon me. Hundreds of thousands of letters have told me what I've helped you do for yourselves. I've seen many of you personally, when I've been lecturing all over the United States…Even when I raise the devil with you and make you work, you come back for more. That thrills me more than a starring role would thrill an extra.[34]

She picked up where she left off and gave women several exercises and an extensive diet in her returning article. However, her articles did have a bit of a different tone and are reflective of her attempts to adjust to the changing conditions of the mid-1930s.

In November, she returned to critiquing the stars. Her articles, for the most part, went back to discussing the picture personalities and helping women achieve the "type" of beauty embodied by their favorite star. While her *Modern Screen* articles started off looking at "types" of beauty, she moved away from this several months in to discuss broader topics such as children and marriage. Due to *Photoplay's* focus on personalities and perhaps because of the editorial staff, she did not get as much leeway to discuss more philosophical issues. Yet, she did begin to talk more about personality. In "Stop Having the Blues" Ullback advised women on how to avoid depression and melancholia. The article discussed the personality, attitude, and values necessary to overcome depression and melancholia. Ullback told women, "unravel those blues like you'd rip up an old sweater and pick up the stitches that are causing holes in your life. Stop being wishy

washy and a softie with yourself. Stop straddling the fence mentally. Make up your mind. *Be Definite*."[35] In her book published about the same time, *Pull Yourself Together, Baby*, which discussed personality, she also took the same approach. Her discussion of personality was reflective of the recent focus on individuality in the book market. Several books had been published on personality and Ullback likely tried to follow this trend.

Ullback's articles at *Physical Culture* linked her to Bernarr Macfadden. It is not a surprise that Ullback wrote for Macfadden in light of his views on women. Macfadden's early career and the content of his magazine *Physical Culture* has been linked to feminist ideals by some scholars. Termed "Health Feminism" by Kathleen Endres, Macfadden's publications from 1899 to 1920 began by advocating for health feminism and, by 1920, had extended to "embrace political, economic, and legal equality for women."[36] Endres divides Macfadden's feminism into two phases. The first, from 1899 to 1909, drew on Macfadden's principals of physical culture. He offered exercises to improve women's health and their womanly duties, advocated strongly against the corset, and began advocating for women's right to medical information including birth control. The magazine offered the image of "an active, physically fit woman who was ready to face the challenges of the 20th century."[37] The second phase, described by Endres, introduced a "more radical form of feminism, one committed to social, economic and political equality to women, one that pushed aggressively for birth control and suffrage."[38] The image of the "New Woman" as presented in *Physical Culture* was "strong, healthy and intelligent, quite capable of facing the challenges of the new century

and taking advantage of the opportunities of the times. She was a true partner in a marriage of equals. She was as comfortable in the home as outside it."[39]

While Endres's analysis of this feminism ends in 1920, Macfadden did not waver from his ideals in the following decades. His magazine continued to embrace these ideals, and they were reflected in the tone of the publication. Ullback's freedom to be more explicit in her articles stems from the content and tone of *Physical Culture* and underscores the empowering tone she took with women in her articles.

Macfadden was also known for his strong views about the need for government regulated and mandated physical culture. He did not shy away from his belief that a nation was more successful with a physically fit, healthy, and vital citizenship. He had the utmost admiration for the physical culture regiment in post-World War I Europe and specifically in Germany. He was intrigued by the "extraordinary military power" which he thought came from the "physical resources of [the German] people."[40] Macfadden often criticized the United States for not having a physically fit populace and its failure to promote efforts to "build a race necessary to maintain the vigor and vitality so badly needed to defend our democracy."[41] He refrained from praising Germany in the mid-1930s, however he still discussed the need for physical culture as a defense for America. Ullback did not echo Macfadden's views on Germany and physical culture; however his views on war and physical culture speak to the content of the magazine and the nature of Ullback's articles for *Physical Culture.* As the 1930s progressed, the images of German vitality and health slowly disappeared from Macfadden's publications; yet as Ullback's

rhetoric illustrates it was still discussed in relation to those European countries that were not axis powers.

Her *Physical Culture* series jumped right in, without an explanation from the editor as to who Ullback was or what her articles would entail. The first article in October 1936 was entitled "Would You Like a New Body? Madame Sylvia Tells You How You Can Have One." Sylvia's reputation as Madame Sylvia of Hollywood helped to associate the magazine and Macfadden with Hollywood while distancing them from the Germans. In comparison to her articles running in *Photoplay* at the same time, these articles discussed reducing and health with a focus on the benefits for society. This series started out distinctly by immediately mentioning and discussing children and physical culture. She argues that good physical health and beauty starts as a child:

> Whenever I see a group of children running and romping in the open air, their sturdy bodies and fresh little faces glowing with health, it seems impossible to believe that some day many of them will be tragic figures of overindulgence, dissipation and improper living. But I know that's just what will happen to them unless they are taken in hand early in life and given proper instruction and training to preserve those health, vital bodies.[42]

The article goes on to explore the problems of the education system, arguing that it was a tragedy that young women graduated from schools in America with "a sloppy walk, weak muscles, a bad case of the jitters and no flair. She may have majored in Latin and mathematics but she's certainly been a flop as far as her physical culture is concerned."[43] The tone of these articles stemmed from the overall influence the publication had on Ullback's articles. *Physical Culture* often discussed the need for physical education within the schools and promoted the notion that physical health was a vital aspect of good citizenship.

Furthermore, Sylvia's articles discussed building strength and the importance of "scientific exercise". Ullback's discussion of "scientific exercise" was not a new concept in her articles, but it was a new branding of her concept. The term "scientific exercise" was too complicated of a term for *Photoplay* or her books, which had a more prominent focus on Hollywood, but the term fit *Physical Culture.* "Scientific Exercise" referred to an exercise that was designed to strengthen and work a particular area of the body. Again separating these methods from Germany, Ullback equated "scientific exercise" with the methods of the Scandinavian countries and discusses their model of physical culture which citizens were taught at an early age in schools. She explained:

> We could learn a lot from the Scandinavian countries. Scientific gymnastic exercises are compulsory in the schools and are performed in the open air. The photos on these pages were taken in Sweden and are typical of the work being done for the young women of that country in their schools.[44]

The article then proceeded to give examples of exercise and discuss the proper form and habits for "scientific gymnastic exercise" and "intelligent eating." While she may have used new language to refer to her methods, the techniques themselves remained the same. *Physical Culture* focused on far more advanced notions of health and fitness than the fan magazines she had written for in the past.

Physical Culture provided Ullback with a platform for her articles and ideals that allowed her more freedom in the discussion of the body and women. Consequently, she was able to be more direct, and her articles assumed even more of an empowering tone toward women. In an article about shaping and exercising the back Ullback exclaimed:

> Women are the backbone of the nation! Oh yes we are. And no squawks from you males either. But don't forget, girls, it's the condition of our individual back-bones that determines the kind of nation we have or will have in the future. I

> mean that in more ways than one. Not only must you have sturdy, strong spines to produce healthy race, but you must have plenty of "backbone." In another sense of the word. You can't be a weakling if you expect to keep pace with the fast-stepping life that's going on around you and life can land some awful blows if you don't learn how to duck. That's a big job. But take it from me, darlings, if you'll keep you back straight and healthy, it'll be much easier to develop the other kind of "back-bone."[45]

Several things stand out from Ullback's discussion of the backbone. First, the discussion of "the nation" is evidence of the magazines focus on physical culture as a patriotic duty and their attempt to Americanize this message. The magazine, and Macfadden specifically, believed that the promise of a nation laid in the physical fitness of their citizens. It is also reflective of the international discussion over physical culture during this time, which was closely tied to the Berlin Olympics controversy and Hitler's notion of Aryan superiority. Ullback's discussion of the "backbone" stressed individuality and the necessity of courage and hard work to build a healthy and successful populace. Furthermore, Ullback applied this international discussion of physical culture to women by asserting that they had a crucial role in the nation. Ullback likely agreed with this as well and often hinted at the idea that fitness should be priority number one for women. Her discussion of women as "the backbone of the nation" in this article is her most outspoken mention of women and their responsibilities. While she never explicitly explains what she means other than in relation to physical culture, the notion itself is representative of Ullback's empowering tone for women. Disguised underneath an editorial about the back, her article offered a sentiment that stressed the necessity of strong and independent women to the country.

As she wrote more about physical culture in one venue, in another she tackled personality. Ullback's book on personality, *Pull Yourself Together, Baby,* was published in October 1936. It stepped outside her typical discussion of the body by focusing on personality. She argued that personality was a product of physical health. She explained, "This book is about personality. That magic touch which makes an ugly person charming—a pretty woman fascinating—a beautiful girl simply irresistible."[46] This book was a distinct shift in her writing. Ullback explained:

> Personality is a combination of brains, character, charm, physical attractiveness, manner and manners. It's the answer to the question "How can I be popular?" It gets jobs, it wins friends, it draws beaux like a magnet, it keeps the husbands in love with you. And let me tell you right now, you don't have to be born with it. You develop it. It can be acquired. You were born with the brains, use them. Exert the character. Work for what you want.[47]

With her same message of hard work, she took her beliefs and applied them to personality, giving readers a sequel to *No More Alibis,* which offered the next step in achieving beauty after having a fit physique. She told women "Now you have another job ahead of you. You can take off fifteen pounds of fat with comparative ease. Can you get rid of fifteen pounds of oversensitiveness? Can you build up charm as you'd build up a thin body?" [48] The book took Ullback's methods to the next level and offered a "How To" book about personality based largely on her attitude toward life.

For Ullback, a good personality began with a good diet and exercise. In line with her beliefs, the book argued that good internal health would reflect outwardly through a gleaming personality. The first chapter entitled "The Personality Diet" sought to help women achieve a radiant personality, which was reflected on the skin and in the eyes. She told women "for if you will eat properly and do all you can for your bodies, to keep

them healthy and attractive, half the battle for a distinctive, radiant personality is won."[49] Personality was in part reflected through proper internal health as discussed in her chapter "Glamour is Glandular." She wrote:

> What do I mean, you ask—glamour is glandular? I mean that sex appeal is glandular. Uh huh, this is going to be about sex appeal. We all want it, and need it…When I refer to glamour, I mean in the flesh. In every day life. Something that you, and you, and you, as human beings can possess, if you'll check and double check your glandular system and keep it functioning as normally as possible.[50]

Ullback continued to stress her belief that the glands were the regulatory center of the body and if functioning properly they would reflect outwardly on the body through beauty and also personality. She offered women some basic diets and exercises designed to help maintain their figure and then advised them to buy *No More Alibis* if they sought more. *Pull Yourself Together, Baby* was designed to be a supplement to her previous books and articles. Together Sylvia's two books were advertised as the complete guide to becoming "as beautiful as the stars of Hollywood."[51]

Aside from her chapters on diet and exercise, the bulk of the book focused on attitude. It sought to provide women with model character traits and values that she believed would lead to a happy and successful life. She urged women to stop worrying about what others think and to live life for themselves. She wrote,

> You'll never be poised, assured, stimulating, vital nor vivid if you fear that a pair of eyes are constantly upon you, checking up on you, making comparisons and finding fault; if you fear that a pair of ears are listening, cattily and critically, for every word you say . . .[52]

She claimed that fear about what others were thinking reflected on not only health, but also through body language. She explained to women:

> A woman with poise, assurance and self-respect is a woman who doesn't care a whoop about other people's sneering remarks concerning herself. She does not carry this attitude to a point of arrogance or conceit, however, if she's a real person. She's not arrogant or conceited. And don't you be. She's an individual. That's what you must be. Do your level best—your durn-tootingest for your face, figure, hair, the clothes you put on your back…for your whole personality . . . Remember this: Self-assurance, the self-respecting kind—is a first and ever-present necessity of personality development.[53]

Ullback used her discussion of personality to communicate the same beliefs in hard work and dedication but discussed new issues such as respect, which she had never mentioned before.

In comparison to *No More Alibis*, a bestseller, *Pull Yourself Together, Baby* was not as popular although it did get good reviews. One explained, "although the book is entirely jocular in vein, it has lots of good advice in it and gives recipes as to how to get and how to get plump, with 'personality' as a keynote."[54] Another noted that it "should be read, marked and inwardly digested. Such study should pay rewards. At any rate you'll be entertained in the reading, and probably sufficiently worried to do something more about it."[55] Yet, reviews of the book indicated that Ullback's book had stiff competition in other popular personality books released the same year such as Dale Carnegie's *How Win Friends and Influence People* and Margorie Hillis' *Live Alone and Like It*. Sylvia's book failed to make the best seller list unlike her competitors books and sales were sluggish for *Pull Yourself Together, Baby*.

Ullback departed from *Physical Culture* in August 1937 and *Photoplay* the next month. In October 1937, after her departure, *Photoplay* was redesigned and the magazine explained, "In every way the new *Photoplay* will be richer and finer, than ever before—truly a luxury magazine that will delight the heart of every person who really appreciates

a motion picture publication."[56] The magazine would also change in its style and content. An advertisement for the new *Photoplay* stated, "In addition to bringing you each month all of the feature that have endeared *Photoplay* to you in the past, *Photoplay* for October will contain many new art and editorial features of an exciting and surprising nature."[57] The new content of the magazine focused largely on fashion and, starting in 1939, the covers of the magazine were titled "*Photoplay*: Hollywood's Fashion Authority." As a result, *Photoplay* generally did away with the physical culture editorial. The magazine now focused on beauty and fashion discussing things such as makeup and clothing in the beauty editorials. This was a distinct shift from the beauty editorial as Ullback had written it. Until 1935 when she moved to *Modern Screen* her articles were almost exclusively about the figure. During the period from 1936 to 1937, movie magazines had continued to evolve and move away from discussions of physical culture. Ullback's attempts to retool her message and discuss new subjects had failed and no longer resonated with the content of editorials.

In the October 1937 issue of *Photoplay*, the issue following Ullback's second departure, the replacement beauty editor Carolyn Van Wyck took a new approach to beauty. She told women,

> Readers, this is a brand-new department an I might as well admit to you frankly that it's an experiment. You have been hearing about Hollywood influence until you are probably as bored with it as I am because so much exaggeration comes into it all the time. But just the same, I'm going to add one more word and that is there is no possible exaggeration of the Hollywood influence on personality and beauty.[58]

The article promised to provide women with the newest beauty tricks used by the stars. The images strewn across the editorials first two pages were captioned with comments

about how the article would help women achieve, lovelier skin, glossy hair, and lose-suntans.[59] While the article does mention the figure, it is more focused on other aspects of beauty such as skin, hair, makeup and the culmination of all these aspects in an overall appearance.[60] A lovely figure began to be discussed as not so much a product of diet and exercise but one defined by personality, fashion, skin, hair, and makeup.

Between October 1937 and the middle of 1939 Ullback was unable to place her work and she fell off the press's radar. She was likely struggling to find a platform. During Ullback's absence, the strong female character in Hollywood films began to decline. Several of Hollywood's biggest female stars were deemed "box office poison" by the *Hollywood Reporter* in Spring 1938 and blamed for the 1937-1938 economic slump.[61] Many of the stars on the list were famous for their depictions of strong women on screen and were also featured in Ullback's articles at one time or another. Stars such as Mae West, Dietrich, Greta Garbo, Katherine Hepburn, and Joan Crawford made the list and it severely hurt their careers.[62] As historian Jill Watts argues the portrayal of women shifted toward a safer and traditional representation on screen.[63] As a result, these forces may have also hurt Ullback. The stars deemed "box office poison" were often discussed in her editorials and the fan magazines so closely aligned with the studios provided less coverage of these women as their careers faltered. Additionally, Ullback was also a strong female personality and was known for encouraging readers to adopt many of the traits embodied by these stars. Exactly how much this hurt Ullback is unknown, but along with the decline in physical culture it probably made her reemergence that much more difficult.

In 1939 Ullback reappeared with her fourth and final book *Streamline Your Figure*. The book was Ullback's first publication in a little over a year after her departure from *Photoplay* and *Physical Culture* in the fall of 1937. During her absence she was not mentioned in the press and details about her life during this period are unknown. She was not publishing articles and was not being discussed in newspapers. The only mention of her was the advertisements for her previous two books run in both *Photoplay* and *Physical Culture.* She probably struggled to find a venue for her writing as the conflict in Europe continued to intensify and as discussions of physical culture were removed from publications. *Streamline Your Figure* may have been her last attempt to get back into the limelight, although by this point, after being gone for more than a year, she was likely irrelevant. Drawing from her articles for *Physical Culture*, the book returned to her discussion of the body.

The foreword, which introduced and established her credentials with the reader, claimed, "But Sylvia is democratic above all things. Her ideas are not for a select few but for the many. Her accomplishments have been stamped with the aristocratic stamp of Hollywood's approval, it is true. But her message, as it comes to you in these pages, is addressed to Everywoman, Everywhere."[64] Two themes arise from this description of Ullback. First, the use of democratic to describe her and her ideals represents the egalitarian nature of her writing, which characterized all of her writing. This reoccurring theme, in her articles, discussed the stars and offered standards and examples of perfection, but they offered an ideal of beauty, which could be attained by anyone regardless of social class. In previous decades, the image of beauty had been one

associated with elite values. As the new woman developed, this began to change. In the 1930s and in the fan magazines, the Hollywood stars exemplified the ideal women. However their stories and the discussion surrounding them stressed that these values were attainable to all. Ullback's approach to beauty and to health was unique in not only her ideals and her methods, but in her attitude toward it.

Secondly, the use of democratic to describe Ullback attempts to link Ullback and her methods with the values of America. While the conflict was quickly escalating in Europe, the book may have sought to associate Ullback with the values of America rather than with her roots in Europe. Furthermore, physical culture was increasingly becoming unpopular, and the use of the word democratic stressed her wish for beauty and health to be democratic and against totalitarianism.

The book retreated from personality and went back to discussing the body and achieving the ideal figure. Some of the chapters were pulled from her articles for *Physical Culture* and were expanded for the book. However she also had some new chapters, such as one entitled "The Call to Arms." The title of the chapter is interesting considering the tensions in isolationist America at the time but was reflective of calls for preparedness. Discussing the last exercise in the chapter Ullback wrote:

> That last is a good old army exercise. It helps keep our soldiers fit and their muscles toned. And in this respect, particularly for you gals with skinny underdeveloped arms—what's sauce for the gander is sauce for the goose. Remember that *you're* in the army too—Sylvia's army. So come on, babies, all of you, get busy. Defend and guard the welfare of your bodies and answer the call to arms![65]

The discussion of soldiers and the description of the exercise as an "army exercise" is a radically new approach for Ullback's article. Most of her writing was predicated on her

reputation, as "Sylvia of Hollywood" and she had never addressed exercise by relating it to the military. However, her continued discussion of the body as democratic and a necessity to a beneficial and productive citizenship was likely her downfall. While it may have, in part, developed from her connections to Macfadden, it was becoming increasingly unpopular.

Streamline Your Figure continued to be advertised until 1940; although Ullback disappeared after the publication of the book. She never gave a reason for her departure from the public eye however; it stands to reason that she had trouble-acquiring publishers. The change in her discussion of the body exemplifies the changes in society and the time and the changes in ideas about women's physical culture. As the decade progressed and the powers in Europe continued to clash, physical culture for women continued to decline in popularity and in discussion. Ullback attempted to redirect her message by discussing personality, however her ideals no longer resonated and publishers moved away from discussions of physical culture. Instead, beauty was discussed through cosmetics, hairstyles, fashion, and outward appearances rather than the regulated and health based approach Ullback defined. Ullback disappeared and would be quickly forgotten with the onset of World War II. Nevertheless, she represented a small window in the 1930s when reducing and ideas about the body were based on unique attitude of common sense and effort.

Notes Chapter 4

[1] Sylvia Ullback, "We Wish to Make an Announcement: Madame Sylvia Makes a Thrilling Offer," *Modern Screen*, August 1935, 34.

[2] Ibid., 34.

[3] Ibid., 34.

[4] Sylvia Ullback, "If You Would Have A Figure Like Harlow," *Modern Screen*, November 1935, 44.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Berry, *Screen Style*, xx.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Sylvia Ullback, "Your Ten Pet Alibis: Debunking All The I Can't Reduce Excuses," *Modern Screen*, September 1936, 52.

[9] Sylvia Ullback, "Do You Believe In Miracles?," *Modern Screen*, June 1936, 60.

[10] Sylvia Ullback, "I'm Doing This For The Kiddies: Expert Advice For Anybody's Child," *Modern Screen*, August 1936, 52.

[11] Ibid., 53.

[12] Alma Whitaker, "They Are Clay in Her Hands."

[13] Ullback, "I'm Doing This For The Kiddies: Expert Advice For Anybody's Child," 53.

[14] Ullback, "Your Ten Pet Alibis: Debunking All The I Can't Reduce Excuses," 53.

[15] Sylvia Ullback, "How to Hold Your Husband," *Modern Screen*, January 1936, 83.

[16] Ullback, "Do You Believe In Miracles?," 61.

[17] Arnd Kruger, "Germany: The Propaganda Machine," in *The Nazi Olympics*, ed. Arnd Kruger and William Murray (Urbana, Ill: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 23.

[18] "International Boycott of Berlin Games," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, July 26, 1935.

[19] "Mahoney Asks Resignation of Lewald," *Rochester Journal*, October 21, 1935.

[20] Barbara J. Keys, *Globalizing Sport: National Rivalry and International Community in the 1930s* (Harvard University Press, 2006), 141.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid., 153.

[23] Ibid.

[24] "An Editorial Diary: A Non-Aryan Victor," *The Glasgow Herald*, August 6, 1936.

[25] Kruger, "Germany: The Propaganda Machine," 24.

[26] "U.S. Olympic Fund Deficit Is Dwindling," *The Montreal Gazette*, July 13, 1936.

[27] The Google Books N-Gram viewer allows the occurrences of a specific phrase in books over a select period of time to be graphed. The graph illustrates the decline in the use of the phrase "Physical Culture" starting in 1935.*Google Books Ngram Viewer, "Physical Culture."*, http://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=physical+culture&year_start=1880&year_end=1980&corpus=15&smoothing=3&share=.

[28] "Text of Speeches By Hitler and Mussolini," *The Windsor Daily Star*, September 29, 1937, 18.

[29] The Google Books N-Gram viewer allows the occurrences of a specific phrase in books over a select period of time to be graphed. The graph illustrates the decline in the use of the phrase "Physical Culture" starting in 1935.*Google Books Ngram Viewer, "Physical Culture."*, http://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=physical+culture&year_start=1880&year_end=1980&corpus=15&smoothing=3&share=.

[30] "The Physical Culture Creed," *Physical Culture*, August 1937, 83.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Sylvia Ullback, "Would You Like a New Body? Madame Sylvia Tells How You Can Have One," *Physical Culture*, October 1936, 44–5.

[33] Sylvia Ullback, "Sylvia Returns--to Restore You to Beauty," *Photoplay*, October 1936, 63.

[34] Ibid., 64.

[35] Sylvia Ullback, "Stop Having the Blues," *Photoplay*, February 1937, 54.

[36] Kathleen L. Endres, "The Feminism of Bernarr Macfadden: Physical Culture Magazine and the Empowerment of Women," *Media History Monographs* 13, no. 2 (2011): 6.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid., 9.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Adams, *Mr. America*, loc. 2994 .

[41] Bernarr Macfadden, "War Is an Ugly Word!," *Physical Culture*, February 1935, 4.

[42] Ullback, "Would You Like a New Body? Madame Sylvia Tells How You Can Have One," 44.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid., 45.

[45] Sylvia Ullback, "Madame Sylvia Give You A Beautiful Back," *Physical Culture*, December 1936, 44.

[46] Ullback, *Pull Yourself Together Baby*, ix.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Ibid., x.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid., 35.

[51] "You Will Profit Tremendously by Reading Sylvia of Hollywood's Two Outstanding Books," *Photoplay*, June 1937, 127; "Now I'll Give You a Magnetic Personality Says Sylvia of Hollywood in Her New Book," *Photoplay*, January 1937; Sylvia Ullback, "Sylvia of Hollywood Says: Change Your Looks!," *Physical Culture*, October 1937.

[52] Ullback, *Pull Yourself Together Baby*, 27.

[53] Ibid., 27–8.

[54] "Books and Readers," *Lawrence Journal-World*, November 7, 1936.

[55] "The Book Nook," *The Palm Beach Post*, November 1, 1936.

[56] "Next Month..! *Photoplay* Steps Out," *Photoplay*, September 1937, 125.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Carolyn Van Wyck, "*Photoplay*'s Own Beauty Shop," *Photoplay*, October 1937, 28–29.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Ibid., 28–9.

[61] Jill Watts, *Mae West: An Icon in Black and White* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2003), 232–3.

[62] Ibid., 233.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Sylvia Ullback, *Streamline Your Figure* (New York: Macfadden Book Co., 1939), 2.

[65] Ibid., 58.

Conclusion

Ullback's withdrawal from the public sphere in 1939 signaled the culmination of a change in ideas about physical and beauty culture in women's magazines. From 1921 to 1939 Ullback's career paralleled developments in thinking about appearance and health, reflected the culture of the period, and offered women an empowering sentiment for navigating the social milieu of the period. Her career and her rhetoric offer several conclusions about women's bodies in the depression and the changing nature of the period.

First, it is representative of the changing nature of ideas about women's bodies in the decades from 1920 to 1940. Both the radical methods of the 1920s and the common sense and health-based approach of the 1930s, mirrored the culture of the period. The excessive consumer driven culture of the 1920s was reflected in the reducing advertisements that dominated physical culture during this period. The notion that fat would disappear overnight was driven by the new culture of consumption and was part of the excessive nature of 1920s culture. Furthermore, it was reflective of the changing standards of appearances for women. The changes in reducing and ideas about fat were followed by the change in the "New Woman." Between 1920 and 1940, the New Woman was represented by the flapper and also Hollywood film stars. In 1929, with the crash of the stock market and the beginning of the United States depression a new health based, "common sense" approach to physical culture, as defined by Ullback, flourished. The regulated system of reducing through effort and determination mirrored the individualist attitude of the depression era.

Secondly, Ullback's unique attitude toward beauty adds to our understanding of beauty culture and women in the depression. Ullback's techniques and especially her attitude toward beauty provided women with an empowering sentiment. Her tenets of diet, exercise, and massage were complimented with a stringent belief that ones' attitude toward reducing and life made all the difference. She stressed that approaching reducing and beauty through hard work, confidence in oneself, and determination in their goals would lead to beauty. She offered women a set of values that reflected the culture of the depression. As women attempted to adapt to the social changes that a modern society had brought with it, discussions of beauty and beauty culture acted, as historian Kathy Peiss has described, "a lightening rod for larger conflicts over female autonomy and social roles."[1]

Third, her discussion of the stars and beauty culture within her articles and books took an egalitarian approach to beauty. By using the stars as examples Ullback provided advice on how women could achieve a particular set of traits and looks exemplified by the star. These examples were based on the ideal figure and beauty, but also, perhaps most importantly, they were based on behavioral codes and values that publicity about the stars exemplified. Ullback's articles often recounted stories about the stars and their approaches to the setbacks they encountered. These stories always urged women to adopt the qualities of these stars. The women featured in these magazines epitomized beauty and Ullback stressed that beauty was tied to success and happiness through diet, exercise

[1] Kathy Lee Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture*, 1st ed (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998), 7.

and massage. The values communicated through these magazines both imposed ideas on readers and also reflected the values of the period.

Additionally, Ullback's discussion of the body instilled a sense of independence for women and also control over their bodies. Reducing in the twenties was creating a "smaller self" that was pleasing to men, regardless of emotional means. The techniques used at the time sought to manipulate the body through external and often dangerous substances rather than through diet and exercise. However, reducing, as Ullback discussed it, meant reshaping ones body to suit your own happiness. Physical perfection was a subjective ideal based on ones own personal happiness and satisfaction. This allowed women to take control of their bodies and allowed a sense of independence in their lives. The return to external ways of creating beauty toward the end of the 1930s once again removed women's control over their bodies.

The ways women approached beauty during the depression allows for a wider and more complex understanding of the history of women in the 1930s. Furthermore, it allows for an understanding of how women's bodies functioned as a site where the expectations and standards of society were instilled, but also how women used the meanings instilled on their bodies to navigate the tensions of the depression.

These values came at a time when the depression was at its height and women encountered tension over their roles. Women lost their jobs less often then men due to the nature of women's work in the 1930s. Bringing in income to their family was often left to them. While one in four women worked in 1930, the role of women was often ambiguous and a tension over women's proper role existed. Feminism seemed to lack a

purpose in the 1930s and there was no defined movement or goal for women after achieving suffrage in 1920. This left a precarious situation for women and Ullback's articles sought to offer a set of values and approaches to navigating the milieu of the period.

Lastly, Ullback's writings offer a glimpse at unique period when beauty culture was something different than before or since. After World War II the crusade against fat in America took off, being propelled to extreme heights by the media. Women in the early 21st century are surrounded by images of the ideal body, often an unattainable standard, in the media. Ullback's rhetoric, specifically her editorials and books from 1932-1939, represented a unique period when radical reducing measures were condemned and common sense was urged.

Ullback disappeared after 1939 and what happened to her is unknown. She was 58 years old by this time and had a successful career in Hollywood and in publishing. She may have decided to retire and in the 1940 census she was listed as a housewife. Nevertheless, she remained married to Edward Leiter until her death in 1975 at age 94. She lived a long life and embodied the health ideals she preached. Sylvia and Edward died within a month of each other in Santa Monica, California. At the time of her death, she was still listed as a housewife. Her career was forgotten soon after her withdrawal from the public eye. Her impact and importance to historical studies of women and the body is clear. Her writings and her articles are evidence of a unique period of "Reduceosanity" in the depression era and while she may have faded away in 1939, her

articles and books remain a reminder of her values, ideals, and of a period when “dieting” meant more for women than just losing weight.

Bibliography

Newspapers

Buffalo Courier, 1931
Baltimore News, 1930
The Border Cities Star, 1928
The Boston Sunday, 1931
Chicago Daily Tribune, 1925, 1926, 1932
Chicago News, 1931
Daily Boston Globe, 1932
Detroit Free Press, 1930
Denver Post, 1931
The Glasgow Herald, 1936
The Hartford Courant, 1932
Hollywood Citizen, 1930, 1931
Hollywood Report, 1931
Hollywood Reporter, 1931
Los Angeles Herald, 1929
Los Angeles Times. 1929, 1930, 1932
Lawrence Journal-World, 1936
Milwaukee Sentinel, 1932
The Montreal Gazette, 1936
New London Daily, 1931
New York Daily, 1931
New York News, 1931
New York Times, 1932, 1935, 1936
New York World, 1929, 1931
The Palm Beach Post, 1936
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, 1935
The Pittsburg Press, 1929
Portland Oreganian, 1930
Portland Telegram, 1931
Rochester Journal, 1935
St. Petersburg Independent, 1930
Tulsa World, 1931
The Windsor Daily Star, 1937

Articles and Documents

"Advertisement 'This Lovely Figure Is Yours, This Beautiful Women Is Yours'."

Screenland, October 1923.

Albert, Katherine. "They Must Suffer to Be Beautiful." *Photoplay*, October 1929.

Alma Whitaker. "They Are Clay in Her Hands," Personal collection.

American Medical Association, Dept. of Investigation. "Records. Photoplay Magazine-Phylacogen (inclusive), 1903-1939," n.d. American Medical Association, James S. Todd Memorial Library. http://beta.worldcat.org/archivegrid/record.php?id=23271730

Baldwin, Faith. "Hollywood's Beauty Czarina." *Modern Screen*, September 1931.

Brody, Catherine. "The Happy Ending of Wholesale Murder and Suicide." *Photoplay*, September 1926.

———. "Wholesale Murder and Suicide: Do You Know the Menace of Reduceomania?" *Photoplay*, July 1926.

———. "Wholesale Murder and Suicide: Reduceomania Seeks the Ideal Figure at the Expense of Health and Even Life Itself." *Photoplay*, August 1926.

Currie, George. "The Eagle's Book of the Week: Stardom's Gorgeous Kitty-Cats," *Brooklyn Eagle Magazine*, October 25, 1931.

"Excerpt of Alice White Contract," August 20, 1929. Warner Bros Archives, School of Cinematic Arts, University of Southern California, Los Angeles.

"Fat the Enemy That Is Shortening Your Life Banished! By Neutroids--Dr. Graham's Famous Prescription." *Photoplay*, July 1925.

Google Books Ngram Viewer, "Physical Culture". Google, n.d. http://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=physical+culture&year_start=1880&year_end=1980&corpus=15&smoothing=3&share=.

Graham, Douglas. *A Practical Treatise on Massage: It's History, Mode of Application, and Effects.* New York: William Wood and Company, 1884.

"Here's What Folks Think About Sylvia." *Photoplay*, May 1932.

Keighley, William. *Easy to Love*. Comedy, 1934.

"'Liberty' Sold To Macfadden." *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, April 2, 1931.

Library of Congress. Copyright Office, and United States. Dept. of the Treasury. "They Who Get Slapped, a Farcical Comedy in Three Acts by Edith Ellis,no. 6281,

October 13 1931." In *Catalog of Copyright Entries*, 335. U.S. Government Printing Office, 1931. http://books.google.com/books?id=Yc5DAAAAIAAJ.

Los Angeles City Directory, 1932. Vol. 1932. Los Angeles, Cal.: Los Angeles Directory Co., 1932. http://rescarta.lapl.org/ResCarta-Web/jsp/RcWebImageViewer.jsp;jsessionid=CEBE0C111CAE0FC48B273AFF05F5703C?doc_id=Los Angeles City Directories%2FLPU00000%2FLL000007%2F00000001.

Ludwig, Edward. *Let's Be Ritzy*. Comedy, 1934.

Macfadden, Bernarr. *Vitality Supreme*. New York City: Physical Culture Publishing Co., 1915.

———. "War Is an Ugly Word!" *Physical Culture*, February 1935.

"Next Month..! Photoplay Steps Out." *Photoplay*, September 1937.

"Now I'll Give You a Magnetic Personality Says Sylvia of Hollywood in Her New Book." *Photoplay*, January 1937.

"Radio Reports: Mme.Sylvia, Talk, Music Commerical." *Variety*, November 7, 1933.

Rivers, Audrey. "Famous Masseuse Denies She Has Offended Stars: Sylvia Ulbeck Told on Players Whose Weight She Has reduced--'All in Fun,' Her Version." *Movie Classic*, October 1931.

Roosevelt, Franklin Delano. "Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago." July 2, 1932. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=75174.

Roth, Murray. *Harold Teen*. Comedy, Musical, Romance, 1934.

Sylvia of Hollywood. "A Masseuse Looks at the Stars Part One." *Liberty Magazine*, July 4, 1931.

———. "A Masseuse Looks at the Stars Part Two." *Liberty Magazine*, July 11, 1931.

———. "A Masseuse Looks at the Stars Part Three." *Liberty Magazine*, July 18, 1931.

———. "A Masseuse Looks at the Stars Part Four." *Liberty Magazine*, July 25, 1931.

———. "A Masseuse Looks at the Stars Part Five." *Liberty Magazine*, August 1, 1931.

———. "A Masseuse Looks at the Stars Part Six." *Liberty Magazine*, August 8, 1931.

———. “A Masseuse Looks at the Stars Part Seven.” *Liberty Magazine*, August 15, 1931.

“Sylvia of Hollywood, ‘Viva Villa,’ $16,000; B’klyn Uninspiring.” *Variety*, June 5, 1934.

Sylvia Yahanne Elise Leiter formerly Ullback. “United States of America Petition for Citizenship, No. 202623.” Southern District of New York, NY, October 25, 1932.

“The Madame Sylvia Show.” Radio, December 4, 1934.

“The Nellie Revell Show.” *Interview with Madame Sylvia of Hollywood*, n.d.

“The Physical Culture Creed.” *Physical Culture*, August 1937.

“Think It Will Rain?” *Jamaica Screen Book*, November 1931.

Ullback, Sylvia. “3 Days--and Sylvia Had Brightened Sidney Fox’s Whole Life.” *Photoplay*, August 1933.

———. “Any Woman Can Be Beautiful.” *Photoplay*, February 1932.

———. “Are You Guilty of These Sins? Round Shouldered? Conscious Of Height? Ungraceful Walk? Here Are Some Star Remedies.” *Modern Screen*, May 1936.

———. “Beauty and Personality Are Inseparable.” *Photoplay*, November 1934.

———. “Beauty Is Made Not Born Says Sylvia.” *Photoplay*, January 1933.

———. “Beauty Miracles Are Handmade.” *Photoplay*, April 1937.

———. “‘Beware the Danger Line, Glenda!’ Warns Sylvia.” *Photoplay*, May 1934.

———. “Charm Is Self Made.” *Photoplay*, July 1937.

———. “Come on, You Fat Girls! Hey, You Skinny Girls!” *Photoplay*, March 1932.

———. “Common Sense + Sensible Exercise = Beauty.” *Modern Screen*, October 1935.

———. “Cutting a Figure for Yourself.” *Photoplay*, March 1937.

———. “Diet for Glamour.” *Photoplay*, January 1937.

———. “Do You Believe In Miracles?” *Modern Screen*, June 1936.

———. “Fat? Thin? You Can Be Just Right! Losing Or Gaining Is A Cinch, Sylvia Claims, If You Follow The Rules-The Same Tips She Gives The Hollywood

Stars." *Modern Screen*, April 1936.

———. "Garbo's Glamour... Mystery or Misery?" *Photoplay*, December 1936.

———. "Happiness for Every Type of Girl." *Photoplay*, July 1935.

———. "Have You That 'Desk Chair Spread'?" *Photoplay*, August 1932.

———. "Help Yourself to a Summer Figure." *Photoplay*, June 1937.

———. "Here's More Perfection for You." *Photoplay*, January 1935.

———. "Here's the Standard for Beautiful Legs and Feet." *Photoplay*, February 1935.

———. "Hips, Hips, Away!" *Physical Culture*, January 1937.

———. *Hollywood Undressed, Observations of Sylvia as Noted by Her Secretary.* New York, Brentano's, 1931.

———. "How About Your Hands and Feet?" *Photoplay*, October 1932.

———. "How I Gave Constance Cummings a New Figure." *Photoplay*, March 1933.

———. "How Skinny Women Can Gain Weight." *Physical Culture*, June 1937.

———. "How Sylvia Changed 'Carol of the Curves' to Svelte Carole Lombard." *Photoplay*, April 1933.

———. "How Sylvia Changed Ruth Chatteron's Nose and Figure." *Photoplay*, January 1934.

———. "How Sylvia Cured 'Hollywood's Most Melancholy Girl'." *Photoplay*, June 1933.

———. "How Sylvia Insured Jean Harlow's Success." *Photoplay*, September 1933.

———. "How Sylvia Made Joan Bennett Straighten Up." *Photoplay*, July 1933.

———. "How Sylvia Put Grace into Ann Harding's Walk." *Photoplay*, November 1933.

———. "How Sylvia Tamed Jumpy Nerves for Gloria Swanson." *Photoplay*, October 1933.

———. "How to Fix Your 'Spare Tire'." *Physical Culture*, March 1937.

———. "How to Get Rid of the Depression Blues." *Photoplay*, June 1935.

———. “How to Hold Your Husband.” *Modern Screen*, January 1936.

———. “How Young Do You Want to Be?” *Photoplay*, August 1937.

———. “I’m Doing This For The Kiddies: Expert Advice For Anybody’s Child.” *Modern Screen*, August 1936.

———. “If You Have a Good Figure--Keep It!” *Photoplay*, September 1932.

———. “If You Would Have A Figure Like Colbert---What To Do According To Mme. Sylvia.” *Modern Screen*, February 1936.

———. “If You Would Have a Figure Like Crawford.” *Modern Screen*, December 1935.

———. “If You Would Have A Figure Like Harlow.” *Modern Screen*, November 1935.

———. “In the Bad Old Summertime: Figures and Faces Can Suffer but Mustn’t!” *Modern Screen*, July 1936.

———. “Is Mae West Skidding on the Curves?” *Photoplay*, November 1936.

———. “Keep That Perfect Figure.” *Photoplay*, August 1934.

———. “Let the Eyes Have ‘It’ Advises Sylvia to Jean Muir.” *Photoplay*, July 1934.

———. “Look Out, Patricia! Says Sylvia.” *Photoplay*, March 1934.

———. “Madame Sylvia Give You A Beautiful Back.” *Physical Culture*, December 1936.

———. “Make Your Figure Perfect by Diet, Exercise, Massage.” *Photoplay*, November 1932.

———. *No More Alibis!* New York, Macfadden Book Company, Inc., 1934.

———. “Now! Girls! Here’s Pep for You!” *Photoplay*, April 1932.

———. “Please! Please! Use Your Common Sense.” *Photoplay*, June 1932.

———. “Poise and Grace Mean Feminine Beauty.” *Physical Culture*, May 1937.

———. *Pull Yourself Together Baby*. New York: Macfadden, 1936.

———. “Putting Curves on a Thin Girl.” *Photoplay*, September 1937.

———. “Quit Those Cocktails If You Want a Figure.” *Photoplay*, May 1932.

———. “Reduce Those Hips, Legs, and Arms.” *Photoplay*, September 1934.

———. “She’s Not a Glamorous Beauty, Yet Dozens of Men Whisper ‘I Adore You’ Into Her Attentive Ear.” *Physical Culture*, February 1937.

———. “Stop Having the Blues.” *Photoplay*, February 1937.

———. “Streamline Your Face.” *Physical Culture*, July 1937.

———. “Streamline Your Figure.” *Physical Culture*, 1938.

———. *Streamline Your Figure*. New York: Macfadden Book Co., 1939.

———. “Sylvia Gave Zasu Pitts Renewed Beauty.” *Photoplay*, December 1933.

———. “Sylvia Gives Clara Bow Some Timely Advice.” *Photoplay*, February 1934.

———. “Sylvia of Hollywood Says: Change Your Looks!” *Physical Culture*, October 1937.

———. “Sylvia Returns--to Restore You to Beauty.” *Photoplay*, October 1936.

———. “Sylvia Sets the Standard for Facial Beauty.” *Photoplay*, April 1935.

———. “Sylvia Tells All About Connie Bennett.” *Photoplay*, February 1933.

———. “Sylvia Tells Loretta Young How to Put on Weight.” *Photoplay*, June 1934.

———. “Sylvia Tells Mae Clark How to Gain Energy.” *Photoplay*, April 1934.

———. “Sylvia Tells What Saved Norma Shearer’s Figure.” *Photoplay*, May 1933.

———. “Sylvia’s Advice to the ‘New Girls’.” *Modern Screen*, March 1936.

———. “Sylvia’s Ideals for Lovely Back, Hands, Arms.” *Photoplay*, March 1935.

———. “Sylvia’s Ideals for MOUTH CHIN and FACE.” *Photoplay*, May 1935.

———. “The Perfect Model For Your Figure.” *Photoplay*, December 1934.

———. “Thin Girls Need Sleep, Food, Exercise.” *Photoplay*, December 1932.

———. “Too Pretty to Be Plump.” *Photoplay*, October 1934.

———. “Tricks and Trimming of Allure.” *Photoplay*, May 1937.

———. “Up to Your Knees in Beauty.” *Physical Culture*, February 1937.

———. “We Wish to Make an Announcement: Madame Sylvia Makes a Thrilling Offer.” *Modern Screen*, August 1935.

———. “Work With Me for Beauty and Health: Beginning a Grand New Series.” *Modern Screen*, September 1935.

———. “Would You Like a New Body? Madame Sylvia Tells How You Can Have One.” *Physical Culture*, October 1936.

———. “You Will Profit Tremendously by Reading Sylvia of Hollywood’s Two Outstanding Books.” *Physical Culture*, May 1937.

———. “Your Ten Pet Alibis: Debunking All The I Can’t Reduce Excuses.” *Modern Screen*, September 1936.

Secondary Sources

Adams, Mark. *Mr. America: How Muscular Millionaire Bernarr Macfadden Transformed the Nation Through Sex, Salad, and the Ultimate Starvation Diet.* Kindle Edition. HarperCollins e-books, 2010.

Addison, Heather. *Hollywood and the Rise of Physical Culture*. American Popular History and Culture. New York: Routledge, 2003.

Banner, Lois W. *American Beauty*. New York: Knopf : Distributed by Random House, 1983.

Beauchamp, Cari. *Joseph P. Kennedy Presents: His Hollywood Years*. Kindle Edition. Knopf, 2009.

Bergman, Andrew. *We’re in the Money: Depression America and Its Films*. Ivan R. Dee, 1992.

Berry, Sarah. *Screen Style: Fashion and Femininity in 1930s Hollywood*. Commerce and Mass Culture Series v. 2. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.

Brumberg, Joan Jacobs. *The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls*. 1st ed. Vintage, 2010.

DeCordova, Richard. *Picture Personalities the Emergence of the Star System in America*. 1st paperback ed. Urbana, Ill: University of Illinois Press, 2001.

Desser, David, ed. *Hollywood Goes Shopping*. Commerce and Mass Culture Series. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.

Endres, Kathleen L. “The Feminism of Bernarr Macfadden: Physical Culture Magazine

and the Empowerment of Women." *Media History Monographs* 13, no. 2 (2011).

Fass, Paula S. *The Damned and the Beautiful: American Youth in the 1920's*. Kindle Edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.

Foxcroft, Louise. *Calories and Corsets: A History of Dieting over Two Thousand Years*. Kindle Edition. Profile Books, 2013.

Kennedy, David M. *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945*. Kindle Edition. Oxford University Press, USA, 1999.

Keys, Barbara J. *Globalizing Sport: National Rivalry and International Community in the 1930s*. Harvard University Press, 2006.

Kitch, Carolyn L. *The Girl on the Magazine Cover: The Origins of Visual Stereotypes in American Mass Media*. Kindle Edition. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001.

Kruger, Arnd. "Germany: The Propaganda Machine." In *The Nazi Olympics*, edited by Arnd Kruger and William Murray. Urbana, Ill: University of Illinois Press, 2003.

Leach, William. *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture*. Kindle Edition. New York: Pantheon Books, 1993.

Mulvey, Laura. *Visual and Other Pleasures*. Macmillan, 1989.

Peiss, Kathy Lee. *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture*. 1st ed. New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998.

Rothblum, Esther, and Sondra Solovay, eds. *The Fat Studies Reader*. Kindle Edition. NYU Press, 2009.

Scanlon, Jennifer. *Inarticulate Longings: The Ladies Home Journal, Gender, and the Promises of Consumer Culture*. New York: Routledge, n.d.

Schwartz, Hillel. *Never Satisfied: a Cultural History of Diets, Fantasies, and Fat*. New York : London: Free Press ; Collier Macmillan, 1986.

Seid, Roberta Pollack. *Never Too Thin: Why Women Are at War with Their Bodies*. 1st ed. New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1989.

Slide, Anthony. *Inside the Hollywood Fan Magazine: A History of Star Makers, Fabricators, and Gossip Mongers*. Kindle Edition. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010.

Stearns, Peter N. *Fat History: Bodies and Beauty in the Modern West*. New York: New

York University Press, 1997.

Todd, Jan. *Physical Culture and the Body Beautiful: Purposive Exercise in the Lives of American Women, 1800-1870*. Macon, Ga: Mercer University Press, 1998.

Watts, Jill. *Mae West: An Icon in Black and White*. Oxford University Press, USA, 2003.

Whorton, James C. *Crusaders for Fitness: The History of American Health Reformers*. Princeton University Press, 1984.

Zweiniger-Bargielowska, Ina. "Building a British Superman: Physical Culture in Interwar Britain." *Journal of Contemporary History* 41, no. 4 (October 2006): 565–610.