

MESSAGES OF FRUGALITY AND CONSUMPTION IN THE
LADIES' HOME JOURNAL: 1920S-1940S

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ABSTRACT

Since its inception more than 125 years ago, the *Ladies' Home Journal* has provided readers with cost-saving, pragmatic advice on domestic matters, while at the same time promoting consumerism by exposing readers to all the material trappings of an aspirational lifestyle, including the “perfect” kitchen and an array of clothing and accessories. This study seeks to examine the messages the *Journal* sent to its readers regarding saving and spending during periods of economic prosperity, depression, and recovery to uncover what these messages may have said about women’s roles in society during those times.

A content analysis of 60 issues of the *Journal* from 1920 to 1949 examines messages of frugality and messages of consumption present in service journalism articles. The findings of the content analysis reveal a greater number of frugality-oriented messages in the 1920s, as opposed to the 1930s—which contained the fewest frugality-oriented messages overall—and the 1940s. Using mass communication theories of social constructionism and cultural Marxism, a discourse analysis reveals conflicting roles for women with regard to saving and spending, as defined by the messages of frugality and consumption put forth in the *Journal*.