

M0055735NC

THE NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

BUY ME - I'LL CHANGE YOUR LIFE

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO :

THE FACULTY OF HISTORY OF ART AND DESIGN & COMPLIMENTARY STUDIES

AND

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE

FACULTY OF FINE ART

DEPARTMENT OF PAINTING

BY

PAULA KEARNEY

MARCH 1989



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INTRODUCTION

Advertising is with us all the time, whenever we open a newspaper or a magazine, turn on the television or look at the hoardings along the road we are confronted with larger than life glamourised images of what we could or should be.

This thesis is concerned with the still and moving image, and with it's diverse contexts of production and consumption in society. It shall concentrate on commercial consumer advertising in the way in which it has managed to make up a discourse on what it means to be feminine. It shall focus on how women's magazines are managing to trivialise, degrade, use and reaffirm stereotyped and limited views of women's lives, and how the advertisements in these magazines are inviting women to buy advertised products by offering them sexually attractive images of themselves. Women are sold their images in the form of commodities.

This introduction will briefly examine advertising itself before introducing the first chapter which looks at how women are used to sell almost all types of products and how this use of women's bodies has reaffirmed their place in society as femme fatales, mothers and housewives. The second chapter will take a close look at the role of women's magazines and the cultural and commercial impact of these magazines as a social institution and as a sex-specific communications medium.

But why is there such a thing as advertising and why does it have to be persuasive? Why can't advertisers merely inform consumers of the availability and price of a commodity and seemingly leave them to decide for themselves whether to buy or not? The answer to both questions may be found in the make-up of our society.

In it's extreme form the consumerists position seems to rest on an incomplete understanding of the needs which people satisfy through the consumption of goods. We all need food and drink to keep us alive, clothes to keep us warm and dry. Most people need love, friendship and recognition from society. They need to belong to groups and to feel they belong. They need to be aware of themselves as individuals

in relation to surrounding social groups. If our material needs are not satisfied we die from hunger or exposure, and if most peoples social needs are not satisfied, they are liable, perhaps, to suffer psychological problems. Through the consumption of goods people satisfy both material and social needs. Various social groups identify themselves through shared attitudes, manners, accents and habits of consumption, for instance through the clothes they wear. In this way the objects that they use and consume cease to be mere objects of use, they infact become carriers of information about what kind of people they are or would like to be in order to belong. This makes it possible for advertisers to exploit most peoples needs for group membership and self-identification.

Advertising does not try to tell consumers that they need it's products as such, but rather that the products can help them obtain something else which they do feel that they need. For example, cosmetic manufacturers are not only selling their products, they are also selling hope :

"For younger looking skin try something specially created for the older women." (1)

We now have a society unique in human history, one wherein most individuals depend on a continuously growing array of marketed goods for the satisfaction of all their needs. The need for change, the sense that something different from the way things are becomes the need for a new purchase, a new hair style or a new face. Consuming products does give a thrill, a sense of being different, charging normality with the excitement of the unusual.

Advertising is a highly organised institution involving many artists writers and film directors and it comprises a high proportion of the output of the mass media. It also influences the policies and the appearance of the media and makes them of central importance to the economy. Advertisements advance and perpetuate the ideas and values which are indispensable to a particular economic system. Advertisers want us to buy things, use them, throw them away and buy replacements in a cycle of continuous and conspicuous consumption.

The primary function of advertisements are, we are told, to introduce a wide range of consumer goods to the public and thus to support the free market, but this is clearly not it's only role. Over the years it has become more and more involved in the manipulation of social values and attitudes, and less concerned with the communication of essential information about goods and services.

People who criticise advertising in it's current form, argue that advertisements create false needs and the production and consumption of things that are incompatible with the fulfilment of genuine and urgent human needs.

Advertisements usually suggest that private acquisition is the only avenue to social success and happiness, they define private acquisition and competitiveness as a primary goal in life. On the other hand, those who defend advertising, say that it is economically necessary and has brought many benefits to society. It contributes to society's well being and is an integral part of raising most people's standard of living by encouraging the sales of mass produced goods, thus stimulating production and creating employment and prosperity.

Vance Packard in his book *The Hidden Persuaders* (1970), looks at the use of 'Psychological Warfare' and it's effects on consumers. Motivational research was developed to probe peoples unconscious sales resistance, it's methods and applications were exposed by Packard. Depth interviews, projective tests and living laboratories were techniques developed to uncover a persons hidden anxieties and insecurities, guilt feelings or secret desires. Armed with such knowledge, the advertising agencies have transposed motivational research revelations into deceptively simple or outrageous advertisements.

Women have traditionally been targets for this kind of research since they are seen as the people who make most of the purchases in our society. Packard cites several examples of housewives who have been persuaded to buy such items as cake mixers which allow them a degree of creativity in order to give them a sense of achievement, of household gadgets which don't make them feel guilty for not working as hard as their grandmothers. According to Packard, advertisements which flatter consumers, which disguise the emptiness and drudgery of much household work and which glorify the role of the housewife, are guaranteed a certain amount of success. Eventually, however, we must always come back to the question of whether soft toilet paper will make a woman a better wife and mother, whether a new face cream will prevent her ageing, or an asprin will give her a new temperment.

In some respects the impact of advertising is all too obvious, children chant jingles instead of nursery rhymes at a very early age, and we can probably all remember occasions when we have bought something because we have been attracted by the advertisers claims. In other respects the effects of advertising on society over a long period of time are hard to assess. Many people would deny that they are influenced by advertisements, and they regard them at worst as lies and at best as idiot triviality. It is probably true to say that most people are consciously sceptical of advertising. However, although they might not believe the claims made for a product by an advertiser, such as :

" Persil washes whiter " (2)

they might find it more difficult to resist the more general social image or message presented along with the overall sales pitch, for example, that we can make friends by drinking the right kind of beer (Stag), get a boyfriend by using the right kind of perfume (Impulse) or become a supermum to an adoring family by buying the right packet of washing powder (Radion).

Some of this influence is not particularly sinister, or does not make society feel it is losing out, but it does mean that in many areas of modern life we can find the central values of a consumer society, conspicuous consumption, wealth, sexual attractiveness and sexual power, competitive one-up-manship and so on.

Advertisements are inescapable and are a powerful part of our environment. Some are banal, others attractive, entertaining and amusing. But it is important to remember that however attractive or amusing advertisements are, they perform both an economic and an ideological function in our society. Even if we don't actually believe what they say about this or that product, their influence is never the less strong. Advertisements provide pictures of "reality" and define the kinds of people we could be and the kinds of lives we could lead.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 *Johnson and Johnson, "New Empathy Special Care",
 Woman's Weekly, January 1989.*
 - 2 *Persil Automatic Advertisement, Television, 1989.*
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CHAPTER ONE

IMAGES OF FEMININITY

A new born child has a biological sex but no social gender. As it grows older society provides a string of prescriptions, templates, or models of behaviour appropriate to one sex or the other. Certain agencies of socialization notably the family, the peer group, the school and especially the media, make these expectations and models concrete, and provide the settings in which they are appropriated by the child. The child's sensuality is firmly directed into socially acceptable forms of expression, while at the same time, in a vast number of subtle ways, the child learns that it is a boy or a girl and what being a boy or a girl means. Take the Ribena advertisement on television for example, here we have two toddlers one a boy and one a girl, the caption goes:

"Soon he will be ready to take the world on and she will be all grown up before long" (1)

The young boy is shown as a little tough footballer while the young girl is shown as a soft passive lovable little ballerina.

Frilly party dresses and tiny bikini tops covering non-existent cleavages tell young girls that for them sexuality is to do with being passively looked at and admired. Boys meanwhile, are taught to regard their bodies as symbols of past or potential action and power. As John Berger writes :

"The social presence of a woman is different in kind from that of a man. A man's presence is dependent upon the promise of power which he embodies... The promised power may be moral, physical, temperamental, economic, social, sexual - but its object is always exterior to the man... By contrast, a woman's presence expresses her own attitude to herself and defines what can and cannot be done to her. Presence for a woman is so intrinsic to her person that men tend to think of it as an almost physical emanation, a kind of heat, or smell, or aura." (2)

By pre-adolescence the cultivation of this presence, and the signalling or disguising of the young women's sexual status as available or non-available, good or bad, has inevitably become a major female task. She is encouraged by advertisements, magazines and peer groups to paint her face, shave her legs and enclose her body in polyester lace, for these, not the natural features of her body, are the signs of her femininity. She must smile and speak softly, listen and flatter, dress with care and grace, because this will make her desirable. All of this will enhance rather than destroy her social status. Media images construct and reaffirm these stereotyped views of women's lives and capabilities. Along with television and women's magazines.

Mass media images represent the female body as the site on which feminine culture ideals can be literally manufactured. These images make-up a discourse on what it means to be feminine in this society.

Because of the immense power and spread of advertising and mass media communications through publications and television, society has taken for granted a set of signs, symbols, emblems and imagery. As hideous, vulgar, repulsive, and cheap as some of them may appear, these commercial artifacts constitute a new potent means of visual communication.

We are presented with a number of different images of what it means to be feminine. We have the beautiful young femme fatales, the sex kittens and the housewife. Almost all of these images represent passive and decorative role models which the viewers being women are encouraged to emulate. You are told you can become a better housewife and mother by buying the right soap powder or you can become every young man's desire by buying the right perfume.

1. Home Goodness

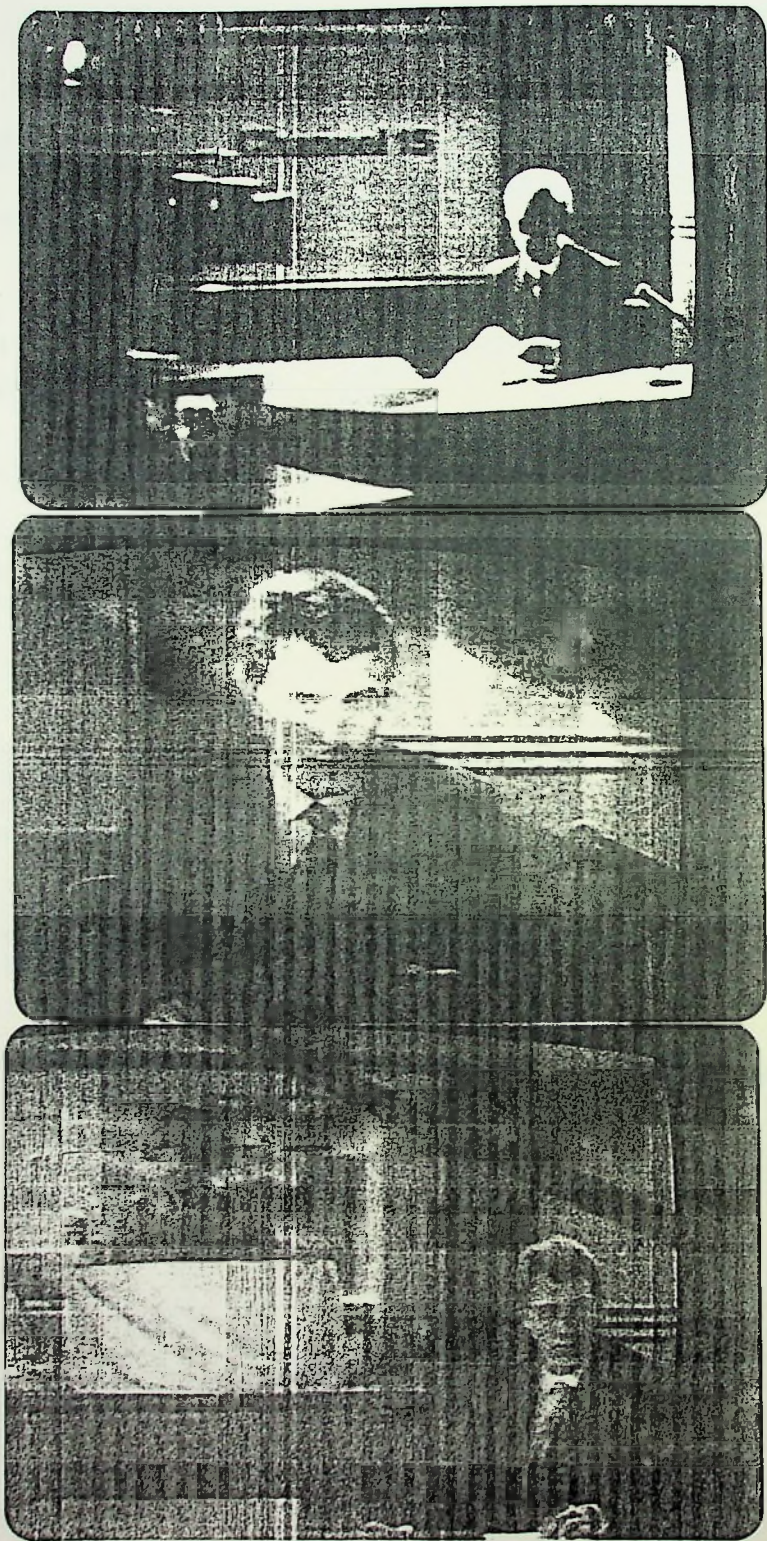
Advertisements are populated by nagging wives, talkative girlfriends, dreadful women drivers and dumb hopeless blondes, these are examples of 'humorous ads'.

Television situation comedies, newspaper cartoons and a lot of advertisements, routinely point out the mixed gender dynamic of the henpecked husband with the overbearing fat wife, the bewildered little guy entirely dependent on the woman running his life. The competent, assertive woman and the emotionally dependent man are considered a social joke.

Most advertisements show women as being completely fulfilled by a caring, nurturing domestic role, but also continually in need of advice from various males about how to run their homes. Friendly males are recruited for 'taste tests', while white coated male scientists are necessary to explain how to deal with strains in bathrooms, kitchens and on clothes. Women are often made assurably ecstatic by very simple products as though a new brand of floor cleaner or deodorant really could make all the difference in their lives. Happy family advertisements all imply that if the female viewer's everyday life isn't as happy and harmonious as that in the advertisement, the short comings are in some way due to the woman's inadequacy in fulfilling the functions required of a good wife and mother. This idea is reinforced by the new Radion advertisement on television. (Fig 1). Here we are shown a male news caster dressed in a suit and tie, supposedly on a news channel. He is pointedly asking women if they are pleased with their detergents. He questions the viewers if their powders get rid of everyday stains in their wash. Through the advertisement he talks as if addressing one woman 'You' - the individual woman. He is portrayed as a stern, over confident man questioning housewives everywhere if their clothes are as clean as they should be, and if not, they are failing as wives and mothers. He asks the viewer if she really wants her families clothes to smell of sweat and odours:

"Is that what you really want from clean clothes, sweat, cooking, cigarette smoke ?" (3)

It is as if the woman in the advertisement was uncaring. The advertisement ends as all advertisements do with the introduction of the product, it is of course a new washing powder 'Radion'. So he was not just there to ridicule the woman, he had a purpose in mind, to sell his product to women everywhere. He hands it over to the joyful woman, then turns to the viewer and asks her to try it out for herself.



(Fig.1)

The problems of the family, frequently socially determined, are thus individualised, and incipient despair is converted into a consumption directed effort, which is allegedly capable of reinstating the agreement between the ideal image and experienced life.

Some advertisements remind housewives of their duties in quite plain worlds. A Radox Herbal Bath advertisement, (Woman's Own, Oct. 1978), pictures a worn-out woman surrounded by toys, promising that:

"We could make you a joy to come home to" (4)

In other words, it suggests that a housewife has an obligation to cheer her husband up when he gets back from a hard day at the office by making herself as appealing as possible.

Femininity is not necessarily constructed in the same way for all women, nor are they addressed equally by systems of representation. Visual discourse also works to privilege certain social values and meanings, while excluding others, thus, the construction of a feminine ideal which is white, heterosexual, young, slim, able-bodied and usually middle-class. It denies and renders invisible women of different race, sexual preference, age, size, physical ability and class position.

Images showing women's lives as less than idyllic are few and far between. But when they do occur they are almost always there to represent a social problem. Many of these images vividly illustrate the problems that women face from demanding children, never ending housework and depressing and inadequate housing.

In contrast to the glossy appeal of most other advertisements, these images are often black and white. These hidden areas of women's lives, medical and social welfare advertisements usually present these situations as static and inevitable.

The women are usually always shown as passive, childlike victims, completely crushed by the weight of circumstance and unable to understand what is happening. They themselves seem to be the problem, as though it is the woman's own inadequacy which makes her anxious and depressed, rather than the fault of the childcare and housing arrangements which force her to carry such heavy burdens.

The multi-million pound advertising industry wants us to believe that advertisements are completely benign. They say that posters give us something to look at while waiting in traffic, that hoardings cover up ugly building sites, that they provide people with news about products, that they educate them as to the different ways they can spend their money, and that without them magazines and newspapers would cost more. Like pornography, advertising is often defended as a necessary part of freedom and as essential to democracy.

2. The objectified figure

The majority of women who appear in advertisements are distinguished by their youth and beauty. There are the girlfriends who appear alongside their men, there are the sensuous models and femme fatales who act as status giving accessories to successful men. Other similarly sexual women are enticingly wrapped around stereo's or televisions. In trade and specialist magazines it sometimes seems that there is no piece of equipment too obscure to be shown next to a carefully positioned woman.

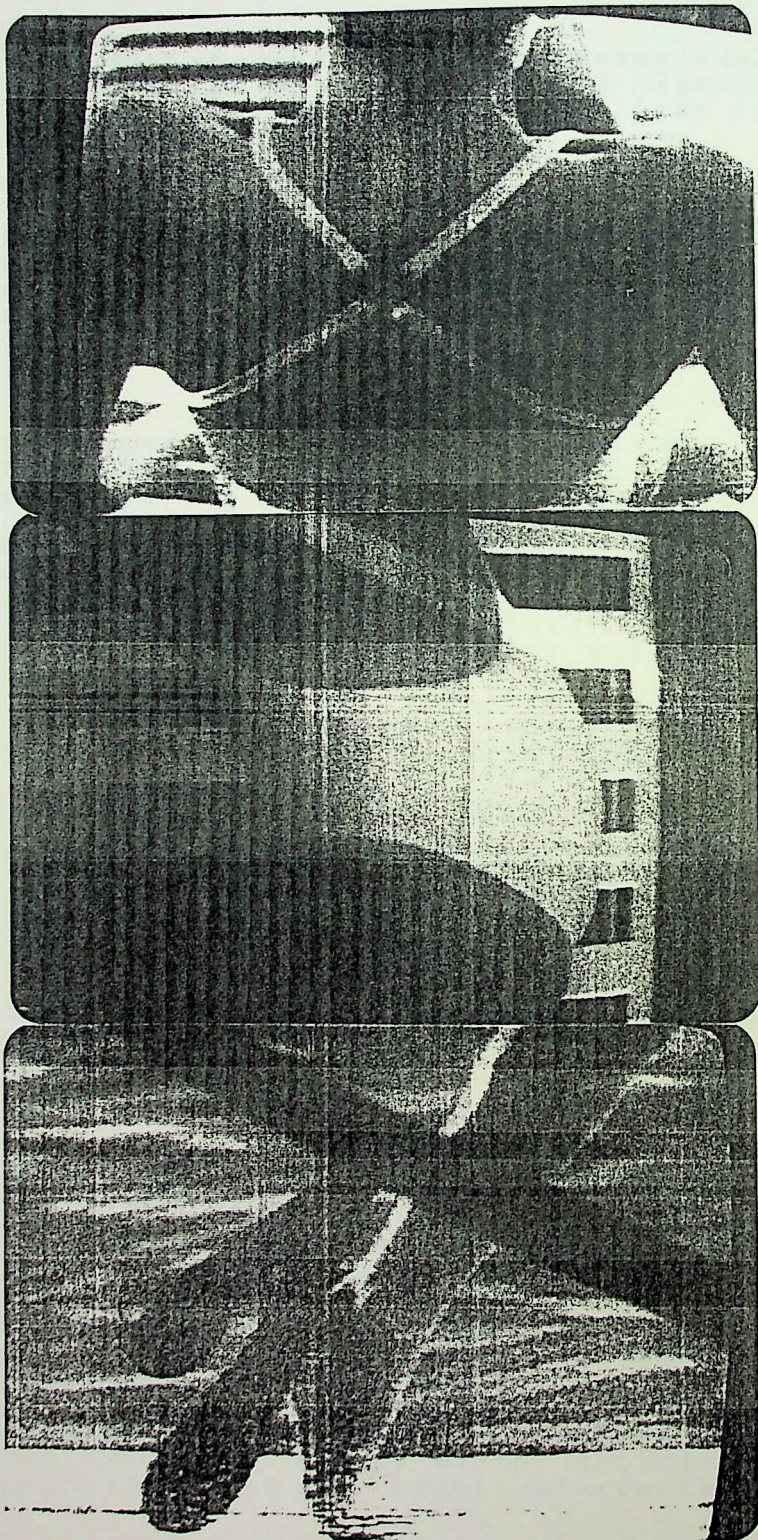
The portrayal of women in advertising, trivialises, degrades and dehumanises women. Media industries use women's bodies or parts of them for titillation and to sell products and publications. The way in which they do this is to present women constantly as glamorous, alluring and available. This results in women being viewed as objects, to be used for the pleasure and profit of the male viewer. Inevitably, society's attitudes towards women are influenced by this voyeuristic approach.

Women's function in advertising is to sell a product. Her humanness is irrelevant, only the look is important, her idealised form is used to hang things on or to drape over objects. She is herself objectified. She becomes part of the packaging of the product.

The advertisement for Renault cars reinforces this statement. The advertiser has set up a correspondence between the car and a woman. The woman is made appear the same as the car through her shiny dress, its colours and her shape as she lies on the floor. The silk-clad, slinky, fashionable model lies in a sensuous horizontal position in the first frame of the commercial. Her image dissolves slowly into the image of a car in the next few frames, the curves of her body forming the outline of the car. Subsequent frames show the fragmented parts of a woman, her hands, head and torso are juxtaposed with, dissolved into or made to stand instead of the car's instruments, headlights and reclining seats. Elongated fingers with painted nails sensuously touch and caress the control panel and the car's phallic looking locking mechanism. She is shaped and moulded by the car, she is displayed to be looked at by men. She is made into a decorative, passive object available and controllable like the car. She is moulded in the form that men desire, she is controlled by the gaze of the absent man and its represented by the imagined fetishes which men are supposed to respond to. She adorns and caresses the car and men are invited to caress this car/woman. The Renault advertisement is no longer on television but numerous advertisements like it take its place. (Fig. 2).

Take the Kelloggs Special K advertisement for example, here again the fashionable slim, silky model lies in a sensuous horizontal position. She is wearing a swim suit while lying beside a pool. She is advertising a cereal. The camera is focused close on her long sensuous body which turns and moves slowly, never do we see the woman's face, her body is all important. Passively she moves about, stretching her long legs and toes, her body always fragmented into allotted sexual parts. The commercial uses the same techniques as the Renault advertisement, the woman's foot and lower leg dissolve into the shape of the Special K - "K". The caption at the end of the advertisement tells us to:

"Get into shape and lose the fat" (5)



(Fig.2)

These kind of advertisements express women's sexuality in men's terms, it invites the signified voyeurism and sexual power and control through the forms of the signifiers.

Women are presented with examples of superwoman, an endless procession of successful, beautiful and inspirational role models to envy or emulate. Failure to achieve this idealised image results in feelings of inadequately and inferiority.

The images of women in advertisements show them as sexualised bodies, whose status in the world, and position in the advertisement, is dependent on how they look rather than what they do. Achievement is primarily visual achievement, and perfection is the attainment of physical beauty. But, at the same time, advertisements aimed at women, frequently offer the chance to create such effects by the purchase of a particular product. Through the advertisements the woman is encouraged to enjoy a fantasy of power.

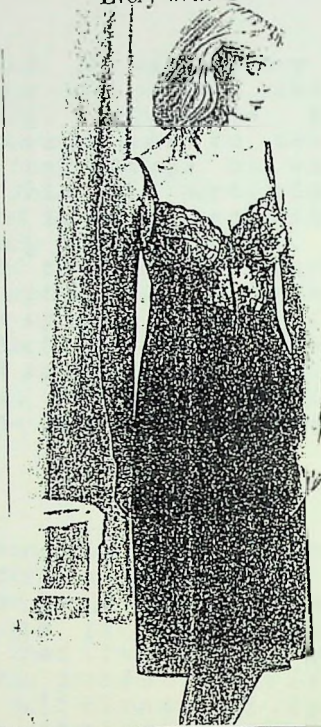
"Every woman should have her fantasy" (6)

But unlike advertisements directed at men, this is not power over people and things, but the power of becoming a perfect sight. For this advertisement was for matching bra and briefs. (Fig. 3).

"Light and lacy, comfortable and shapely, our matching bra and briefs flatter you in cup sizes B to DD, with a choice of colours too" (7)

"Social expectations create a looking glass into which we are invited to gaze while establishing a sexual identity. A woman standing before this mirror will find her image framed by the presumption: 'female is woman is feminine is heterosexual'. Against the warped surface of these expectations, our individual combinations of biological sex (female/male), social sex (woman/man), gender (femininity/masculinity) and sexuality (erotic preferences) cause reflections as seemingly deformed and laughable as the distortions of a fun house mirror. But rather than blame the mirror, most women will attempt painful contortions in an effort to create a more 'normal' reflected image" (8)

Every woman should have her Fantasie.



...illustrated,
...the slip, with
...and gentle
...dressing and
...
...elegant, style-
...available in D, G and
...in duck, white
...
...
...below, less to be 11",
...to 11 1/2 cup sizes, more
...range of exciting
...
...
...For the address of
...request, send no please
...Fantasie Foundation Ltd.
...19-20 Grosvenor Street,
...London W.1.



fantasie
BUY IT FOR THE STYLE.
WEAR IT FOR THE FIT.

Every woman
should have her
fantasie.



Light and lace, com-
fortable and looser,
our matching bra and
panty set is in
blue navy or black with
a choice of colours too.
Bra size 11
Available with 11 1/2
all 100% cotton and lace.
Also available in
Cotton Lycra
Bra size 11
8 to 10 cup sizes with
11 1/2 to 12
Most good retailers
have Fantasie bras and
briefs.
For the address of
your nearest branch,
write to Fantasie
Foundation Ltd.
19-20 Grosvenor Street,
London W.1.

(Fig.3)

The power which the advertising of beauty products offers women is always of a limited kind, located in terms of sexual display, appearance and attractiveness. Advertisements encourage women to see their bodies as a kind of project, a task perhaps, one which can be improved, or embellished. This is particularly clear in the advertisements found in women's magazines which only show a small part of the body and dwell on it. The message is that each small section of the body needs care and attention so that eventually it can become as perfect as the carefully lit and heavily made-up arm, lip, eyelid, thigh or foot in the photograph. Each body part becomes eroticised and sexual, to be looked at and marvelled in. It was the same case in the Kelloggs Special K advertisement. The whole outer surface of the body is transformed into an exquisite, passive, thing.

These advertising images remain long after the actual product and the specific claims made for it have been long forgotten. But for women, the barrage of beautiful and sexualised bodies and parts of bodies almost inevitable produces a feeling that there is much to be done before the body matches up to the standard shown in the advertisements. A sense of physical self-disgust and hopelessness can easily develop from all the exhortations to lose weight faster or take positive action with your skin, create a new face and make fabulous eyes. At the same time these advertisements help to endorse the powerful male attitude that women are passive bodies to be endlessly looked at, waiting to have their sexual attractiveness matched with active male sexual desire.

"Mommy, why do you have a moustache ?" (9)

Asks the child in the Remoatron hair removal advertisement.

"Because sometimes even nature makes mistakes... unwanted facial hair can be embarrassing... put an end to those embarrassing questions... you'll be glad you did" (10)

Consider the difference between the public display of the masculine straight razor and shaving soap and the carefully concealed tweezer or razor hidden in a woman's cosmetics case. For the removal of body hair, there is no female counterpart to the reassuring image of father, face lathered with razor in hand, daily reminding his family and himself of his manhood in the morning ritual of shaving.



FLAWLESS FINISH SPONGE-ON CREAM MAKEUP

It lets you control
the coverage.

Light, moist, fresh-looking
makeup that goes on
sheer... or covers every little
imperfection.

You control the coverage
as you damp-sponge it on.
Flawlessly.

Elizabeth Arden

79

(Fig.6)

Cosmetic Surgery

☐ Breast Enlargement

The breast enlargement, or augmentation, operation may be desirable for a number of reasons. Most often, breast enlargement helps those women who consider that their breasts are too small for their individual frame. Sometimes, of course, the breasts may shrink quite naturally following childbirth and breast feeding. Cosmetic surgery enlargement improves or restores the fullness and firmness that are required. In all situations the eventual size of the breasts is discussed between the patient and surgeon during consultation. Breast feeding is not affected by the enlargement procedure.

The general principle of modern breast augmentation is simple, involving the insertion of a self-contained silicone implant (prosthesis) through a small incision which is hidden in the skin crease beneath the breast where it meets the chest. The implant then lies over the muscle wall and beneath the actual tissue of the breast so that only the breast itself may be felt. The breast is enlarged and kept in a natural position without any interference whatsoever to its normal feelings and functions.

For many persons the enlargement procedure may vary slightly — each case is highly individual.

For those the implant will be inserted beneath the chest wall muscle. This also creates a natural shape. The frame of the patient and existing breast shape and tissue will determine the relevant type of procedure. For each procedure the implant is compatible with normal breast tissue, sharing similar texture and general characteristics.

☐ Other Procedures

NOSE IMPROVEMENT AND REFINEMENT

FACELIFTS · WRINKLE IMPROVEMENT

EYEBAG AND EYELID IMPROVEMENT

BREAST ENLARGEMENTS, UPLIFTS AND REDUCTIONS

INVERTED NIPPLE IMPROVEMENT

SPOT FAT REDUCTION · 'TUMMY TUCKS'

'BAT EAR' CORRECTION · RECEDING CHIN CORRECTION

OVERCOMING MALE BALDNESS

Registered by
The Hounslow
& Spelthorne
Health Authority



Member of the
Registered
Nursing Home
Association

The Pountney Clinic

Please telephone

01-570 9658

THE POUNTNEY CLINIC

41 Bath Road, Hounslow
West London TW3 3BN

I am interested in the following important procedure:

WEEKLY CANTALS

Name

Address

WWD/2

(Fig.5)

Wax Strips Legs Longer

Take away your body hair with Louis Marcel Strip Wax and you won't have to bother again for up to six weeks.

You get the smoothest hair-free skin — the same kind of effect you'd achieve by having your legs hot waxed at a salon... but without the hassle.

Just smooth on each strip in the direction the hair grows. Then, when it's immediately, in one slick flick, you've got rid of the whole hair root instantly. When hair eventually grows, it won't feel so rough but looks finer and less obvious.

Is it an endurance test? No — you feel only the quickest sting if you take your skin first and pull the strip straight back on itself, not outwards. It's worth it to save time-consuming hassle. Especially if you're going on holiday.

Louis Marcel Strip Wax comes in elegant wallets and four sizes: large, for your body and special petite strips for your face.

For a leaflet, or answers to specific questions, write to Samantha Booth, WGL, 26 King Street, Covent Garden, London WC2E 8JD.

LOUIS MARCEL FOR SMOOTH OPERATORS

(Fig.4)

Advertisements make almost heroic the act of a manly 'he' shaving away thick stubble while an admiring 'she' looks lustfully on. Imagine a similar cultural celebration of a woman plucking her eyebrows, shaving her arm-pits or waxing her upper lip. All advertisements for products to de-hair the female, show only the aftereffects, before scenes apparently would be too shocking. (Figs. 4 & 5).

Even more public acts of femininity, like applying make up, tend to rely on an underlying message of female inadequacy. There is a problem to be corrected, a basic improvement to be made. (Fig. 6).

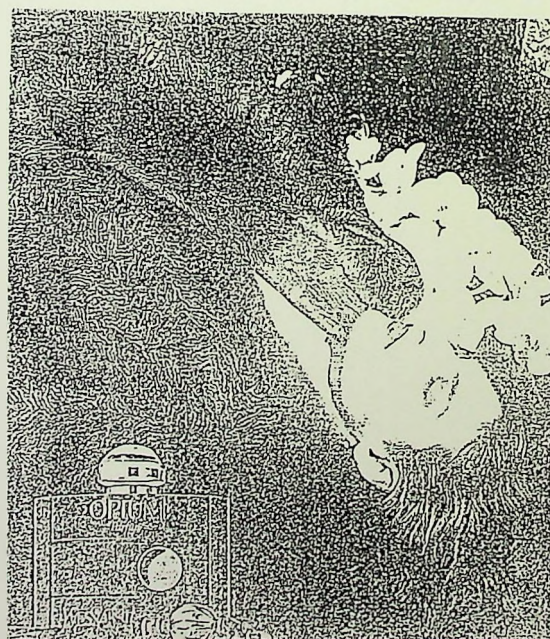
Appearance talks, making statements about gender, sexuality, ethnicity and class. In a sexually, racially and economically divided society all those visual statements add up to an evaluation of power.

Cosmetics, soap and drug industries spend proportionately more on advertising than any other major industry group. In general, it is estimated that from six percent to twenty percent of company sales must go to offset advertising expenses.

Why do women buy costly beauty products that demonstrably have little purpose other than participation in a fantasy? The purchase of a new cosmetic, the decision to change the colour or style of one's hair, will perhaps make the life of the person who buys the product transform.

Despite daily experience to the contrary, we continue to hope that maybe this time, maybe this product, will make a difference to our lives. And if it doesn't it is still a relatively in-expensive way to visit the mysterious world of Max Factor, the elite circle of Chanel, and the smouldering, sensuous world of Opium. Everything that is so difficult to attain in real life is promised for the price of a new perfume or make-up. (Fig. 7)

With clear gel, silicone and promises we can possibly appear like the cultural image of woman. Woman is no longer 'woman', but a symbol, an object.



YVES SAINT LAURENT

(Fig.7)

In some respects advertisements have recognised women's changing roles over the last decade, although this has been prompted more by commercial interests in developing new and potentially profitable markets than by any feminist concerns. Thus, for example, if one glances, through a current women's magazine, one may find advertisements which show women actively involved in sport, using technology or opening building society accounts.

The problem is that although these images do show women in more varied activities than before, they rarely break with traditional definitions of femininity, nor do they alter fundamental inequalities in gender construction. Women may take on 'masculine' roles but they still have to be shown as attractive and desirable.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 *Ribena Advertisement, Television, 1989.*
 - 2 *John Berger, Pictures of Women, p. 21.*
 - 3 *Radion Automatic advertisement, Television, 1989.*
 - 4 *Radox Herbal Bath advertisement, Woman's Own, October 1978.*
 - 5 *Kelloggs Special K advertisement, Television, 1989.*
 - 6 *Fantasie advertisement, Woman's Journal, November 1987.*
 - 7 *Fantasie advertisement, Woman's World, February 1989.*
 - 8 *Judy Chapkis, Beauty Secrets, p. 119.*
 - 9 *Remoatron Hair Removal advertisement, Judy Chapkis, Beauty Secrets, p. 5.*
 - 10 *Remoatron Hair Removal advertisement, Judy Chapkis, Beauty Secrets, p. 5.*
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CHAPTER TWO

THE SURROGATE SISTER

1. The Role of Women's Magazines in Society

Women's magazines are one significant yet least studied social institutions of our time. These periodicals contribute to the wider cultural processes which define the position of women in a given society at a given point in time. These magazines, help to shape both a woman's view of herself, and society's view of her. Women's magazines are about more than women and 'womanly' things. They are about femininity itself, as a state, a condition, a craft, and an art form which comprises a set of practices and beliefs.

Specialist periodicals for women have existed for almost three hundred years. 1693 saw the launch in Britain of The Ladie's Mercury, the first ever women's magazine. The audience catered for by these first publications were that of the upper-class or upper middle class women.

The editors of these specialised publications were intent on improving the minds of their readers, of educating as well as entertaining them. They put into their journals philosophical reflections and snippets of news from home and abroad. They were concerned with social and political ideas as well as with home management, fashion and fiction. Their tone was one of mental and moral uplift well suited to literate, leisured ladies.

But this upper-class tradition only continued until the mid-nineteenth century when changes took place in cultural definitions of womanhood, and in the class selected as the target audience. These shifts reflected the economic prosperity and other attributes of middle class victorian society, and it's restricted feminine ideal, woman as a modest, pure and family bound being, more interested in personal appearance and domestic affairs than in politics and the news of the world..

As time went by women began emerging from cloistered domesticity to pursue a social life or do good-works, publishers sought to broaden the appeal of their journals to reflect these wider interests. These new interests attracted advertisers. During the last two decades of the nineteenth century, advertisement revenue emerged as the critical factor in the profitability of the women's magazines. Some forty eight journals were launched between 1880 and 1900.

By the twentieth century the majority not the minority was what the editors now wanted. No trumpets were sounded for the liberation of Edwardian womanhood from the fashion following and meal planning magazines. Beauty and motherhood was the aspirational norm.

Several women's magazines from this period are still on book stall stands today. Woman's Weekly (1911), Vogue (1916), Ideal Home (1920), Good Housekeeping (1922), Woman's Journal (1927), Woman and Home (1926). All of these magazines were launched for middle-class women, preoccupied with the concerns of self, family and home. The first issue of Woman's Weekly in 1911 illustrated this class bias and domestic focus.

"The woman of mayfair and the lady who lives in the castle are not catered for in this paper. But.... the woman who... rules the destinies of the home is going to be helped in her life, her work and her recreation by this journal" (1)

During the second world war women's magazines in Britain took on a new social significance and political direction. Collectively and individually, women's magazines were the voice of women during the war. These journals were both medium for, and mediators of, British wartime social policy, transmitting messages of sacrifice and hope to women busy keeping both factory wheels turning and home fires burning. Handmaidens of government and handholders of the female population, this was the dual role of women's magazines during the war.

After the war women's magazines then played their part in the opposite direction, putting across post-war social policies which firmly re-located women back to the home and kitchens. Women's magazines today still define women's role in society and have changed little over the years.

2. The Cult of Femininity

Women are raised to want to fill the social roles in which society demands them. They are trained to model themselves after the accepted image and to meet as individuals the expectations that are held for woman as a group.

A woman is valued for her body. She can make babies, she can be wife and mistress and she can 'be made'. But in order to maintain herself as this desirable sex object or mother, it is necessary for her to buy lotions, perfumes deodorants, padding, diet pills and make-up. For no woman is born fitting the perfect image, so it is necessary for her to strive to become closer to it.

This is where women's magazines step in for it is supposed that the female sex which is at best unconfident, and at worst incompetent, needs or wants to be instructed, rehearsed or brought up to date on the arts and skills of femininity.

Instruction, encouragement and entertainment to do with the business of being a woman is directed at specific groups of women. Adolescent girls, young women, brides, new mothers, housewives and slimmers are all offered help. Such courses of instruction does not stop at any age for femininity as a career is a life long commitment. It requires frequent refresher courses and occasional updating. Their messages are more than you can do it, but you can do it better with a little help from us. (Fig. 1)

"You don't have to spend a fortune on make-up to look your best. The colours you choose and the way you apply them are more important than the price-tag on the product, as beauty editor Frances Quinn helped these four readers of Woman's Weekly to discover" (2)

The problem pages are the area of women's magazine discourse which consistently strive to strike the most intimate tone of voice and help. They present an ideal, typical example of the multiple purposes that women's magazine journalists believe themselves and their products serve. They entertain their audience at the same time as they provide a form of psychological and social support. The problem page is full of warmth, understanding, practical information and advice about sex, family anxieties and worries.

In offering support, encouragement and help with readers problems these magazines have projected themselves as the surrogate sister. They project empathy with and sharing of those same problems.

We are not only presented with problem pages, but also with beauty hints, beauty help and quiz games on how to improve your life by asking questions about yourself and your lover/husband. (Fig. 2)

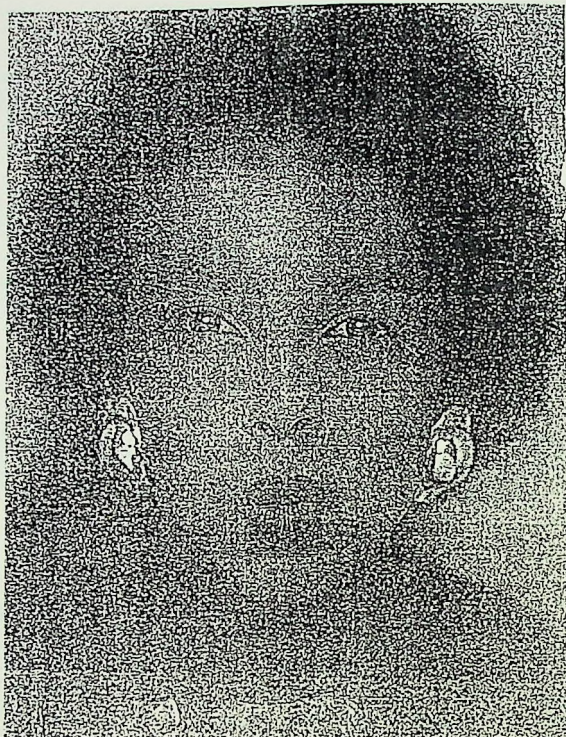
From personal appearance to personal relationships, from job success to marriage success, from the mundane to the magnificent in the kitchen, bathroom, boardroom or bedroom, women are urged to do more and to do it better. Readers of these magazines are presented with examples of perfect women, an endless stream of successful, beautiful and inspirational role models to envy or to emulate. (Fig. 3)

" Forget the hearts and flowers, valentines day is for kissing. So get your mouth in gear and discover the perfect pout. Julia Rowe kisses and tells." (3)

Women's magazines are not just concerned with the technology of knitting, contraception and cooking, but they also tell women what to think and do about themselves, their lovers, husbands, parents, children, colleagues, neighbours and employers. Add to this the power of the advertisements which are directed at the women through the pages of the magazines and the conclusion follows, for here is a very potent formula indeed for steering female attitudes, behaviour and buying along a particular path of femininity, and a particular female world view of the desirable, the possible and the purchasable. The picture of the world presented by women's magazines is that the individual woman is a member not so much of society as a whole but of her society, the world of women. It is to this separate community that these weekly magazines address themselves.

By means of these magazine titles, cover photographs, subject matter and advertisements women's magazines define themselves as a distinctive form of specialist periodicals. Their primary distinction is a biological one, based upon female sex. As a social institution, women's magazines play in shaping the characteristics of femininity, because they themselves are part of and contribute to the nature of society as a whole.

These magazines are specialised periodicals yet they concern themselves with a general audience, everyone born female is a candidate for their services. This points to a hidden message behind their presence on book stalls. The fact that they exist at all makes a statement about the



LIP SERVICE

Forget the hearts and flowers, Valentine's Day is for kissing. So get your mouth in gear and discover the perfect pout. Julia Rowe kisses and tells.

*Forget the hearts and flowers,
Valentine's Day is for kissing
So get your mouth in gear and
discover the perfect pout.
Julia Rowe kisses and tells*

the case where by accident or by design there must be and are found no more similarities than any other pair of the two because they are not the same organism. It is to keep them naturally mixed. The future will be kept there with enough and of genetic benefits, some come from the outside.

To keep life looking good right through the winter, make sure your trees, a little like you, are in good shape when they return to full life in spring. It will always be handy to have a good supply of fertilizer on hand, because you can't overfertilize. In fact, you can't overfertilize a good tree. On the other hand, you can't fertilize a tree which is seriously diseased. The best time to fertilize is in the fall, after the leaves have fallen. Then the fertilizer is taken into the soil and helps the tree get ready for winter. It also helps it get ready for spring. In fact, it can apply your normal winter cream over the top, but instead of the typical Night Time which contains an effective insecticide with the washing out, leading to problems, use the new *Tree-Tonic*.

[illegible][illegible]

One struggle we're being quite tired of. Some people believe that you can't achieve the perfect bikini without giving your mouth a full exercise - and no, they don't just mean as a good chin wag.

possible, then again usually wide and shallow in around the edge of teeth so they are quite faint. Hold for about ten seconds then release slowly relaxing and breathe out for ten. It might be a while to get this line going properly, good or bad. A. I want to if you're having trouble with it.

LIP READING

When C. P. Allen's steps died, and those of Vincent, John and Gene, the three who made stream history. Today there are lots of seals, famous trout boats, but can you find good wild ones? Going to the Sun is a very tame and the old guides and their families, but it is a wilderness.

1. $\frac{1}{2} \log \frac{1}{2}$
 2. $\frac{1}{2} \log \frac{1}{2}$
 3. $\frac{1}{2} \log \frac{1}{2}$
 4. $\frac{1}{2} \log \frac{1}{2}$



(Fig. 3)

position of women in society as one which requires separate consideration and distinctive treatment.

Women's magazines use their front covers as their advertisements for themselves. Their titles and photographs proclaim these magazines are for women only, as titles such as these communicate, Hers, She, Woman's Weekly, Woman's own, Woman's Realm, Woman's World, Woman and Home and Woman.

The scale of their audience, women, and the breadth of their specialism, femininity, sets these magazines apart, and serves to differentiate them from the majority of the mass media.

These magazines operate quite differently from magazines for men. There is no men's periodical press in the same generic sense that there is for women. Men's magazines are aimed at particular groups of males and cater for parts of a man's life, his business, hobby or sporting interests, not for the totality of his masculinity. But in 1986 the publishers of The Face produced the first self conscious, non-pornographic magazine for men, Arena. It aimed to grab a corner of the fashion market. For a number of years Cosmopolitan had been producing Cosmo Man, which unlike Arena, held a general rather than a specifically fashion interest. The women's magazines Options and Elle have followed the trend with their own separate magazine or section for men.

The magazine Arena, lives up to it's name by being a gladiatorial stadium where two contending meanings of male heterosexuality battle it out. On one side are the images reflecting the new, less rigid sensibilities. Pictures of young male models are portrayed in passive 'feminised' poses, exposed to the camera. The heterosexual male reader is confronted with a challenge, the new object of his gaze is another man. They are invited to take pleasure from these male bodies and the clothes they wear. There is a sensuality about the images which until now has been completely absent from publications for heterosexual men. Yet on the otherside contesting these images, is the text of the magazines. The articles confirm a traditional male view of the world. The mirror is thrown away for the old objective authority, the interviews with wealthy fashionable men, articles on money and sex. These are seen through the new consumer ethic, but are traditionally all the same.

While women's magazines regularly feature women's interrogation of masculinity, magazines aimed at men studiously ignore taking up such concerns.

On any magazine stand each women's magazine attempts to differentiate itself from others, as well as vying for attention. Each does so by a variety of means, the title and it's print type, size and texture of paper, design and layout of image and sell lines and the style of model image. Cover images and sell lines also reveal a wealth of knowledge about the cultural place of women's magazines. The woman's face which is their hallmark is usually white, young, smoothly attractive and immaculately groomed, and usually smiling or looking seductive. It is no profundity to say that as the sign of woman these qualities in the cover image imply that white skin, youth, beauty, charm and sexuality are valuable attributes of femininity.

The various magazines reflect the image to convey their respective styles, domestic or girl-about-town, cheeky, or confident, up-market or down-market, by subtle changes of hair-style, neckline and facial pose.

They waver from these images occasionally rather than regularly with royals and male celebrity's, mothers-and-babies and couples.

There is one other important and defining characteristic of this cover image, the woman's gaze. It intimately holds the attention of the reader and viewer. Such an image and gaze also has a wide currency in advertisements directed both at men and women, it also has a daily venue on page three of the Sun and Star, and appears on the cover of 'girlie' magazines. The woman's image in the latter is obviously caught up in a provocatively sexual significance. Her partially revealing body speaks the sexuality about which the facial expression in the former often imply.

What I would argue is that the gaze between cover model and female readers marks the complicity between women that we see ourselves in the image which a masculine culture has defined.

In fact few women readers will make an immediate identification with these images, for they are too polished and perfect, so unlike real people. Paradoxically, though, women do respond to them. For they are selling women an image to aspire to, they persuade them that they, like the model, can succeed, for the model is only the hanger, as we see in this Royal Mail advertisement. (Fig. 4)

"Photography by - Bradford Branson and Frhz Kok. Make-up by - Paul Starr, Hair by Nick Zeigler, styling by Kim Bowen, shawl by Gallery of Antique Costume and Textiles £30, fountain pen by Mont Blanc £120, suit by Jean Paul Gaultier junior at Harvey Nichols £280, and letter by Royal Mail 19p". (4)

In society, as in the journals of women's magazines, the subject of female beauty is significant, and this significance reflects the extent to which a woman's worth is defined in terms of her appearance. These magazines imply that women have a duty to be beautiful. But physical beauty is more than a goal in it's own right, it also symbolises a separate power structure within female society. Among women, the difference lies between those who hold the scarce resource of beauty and those who do not. Within the world of women's magazines, however, all followers of the cult of femininity are potentially beautiful, sharing both the rights and obligations of that state.

There is a further and less metaphysical reason which makes beauty a significant category. In the economics of publishing women's magazines, advertisement revenue from cosmetics, hair care, clothes and slimming products account for a high percentage of the magazine income.

This setting of performance standards, of the practices that define women as 'women', emerged in this study as one of the most visible and constant purposes served by women's magazines. It shows how women are directed towards an ever more perfect production and presentation of self. From child-care to hair-care, from cooking to conversation. The parameters of female excellence portrayed as normative, in terms of their desirability and achievability are universally high. This conclusion contrasts to the feminist view that women are presented with low-level reference groups by comparing themselves with other women rather than men.



Photography by
 Bradford Brown & Eric K.
 Make up by Paul Starr
 Hair by Nick Ziegler
 Styling by Kim Brown
 Shawl by Gallery of
 Antique Costume & Textile
 Fountain Pen by
 Mont Blanc £120
 Suit by
 Jean Paul Gaultier Junior
 at Henry Nibbeli £250
 Letter by Royal Mail Pop
 By Art By Local, by Hana



(Fig.4)

Multiple forms of excellence are laid down, be a better mother, be a better lover, be a better cook, be better dressed and be better looking. The urge to achieve is ever evident in women's magazines problem-solving and fact-giving pages.

A woman who has never questioned herself on her sex, or questioned herself as regards her appearance does not exist. Women's magazines have and are playing an important ideological role in the maintenance of patriarchal concepts of women's role in society.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Marjorie Ferguson, Forever Feminine, p. 17
 - 2 Frances Quinn, "Beauty on a Budget", Woman's Weekly January 1989, p. 46 - 47.
 - 3 Julia Rowa, "Lip Service", 19 magazine , February 1989, p. 58 - 59.
 - 4 Royal Mail advertisement, Woman's World, February 1989.
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CONCLUSION

Current ideals reinforce a view that to be feminine is to possess certain bodily attributes, which makes it difficult to visualise femininity outside prevailing attitudes to and representations of the female body.

In contemporary representation, then, definitions of femininity are elided with the way the body is depicted as a sexual entity. Feminist theorists have challenged the idea that gender and sexuality can be collapsed together in this way, arguing that socially prescribed ideals of femininity bear little relationship to the actual capabilities of the female sex. But, if femininity is not reducable to female sexuality, neither can it be separated entirely from it. The construction of feminine stereotypes and the construction of female sexuality are inter-connected. This is not to say that femininity is determined by biological sex, but rather the reverse, that sexual identities are formed within prevailing codes of femininity. Definitions of femininity and female sexuality as we understand them are reproduced in cultural forms which help to define what are seen to be desirable roles and relationships for women in current society.

Popular media and women's magazines help to disseminate and reinforce mythical views of woman as either 'supermum' or 'sex-kitten', assumptions that a women's place is really in the kitchen or in the bedroom.

"A woman must continually watch herself... from earliest childhood she has been taught and persuaded to survey herself continually. And so she comes to consider the surveyed and the surveyor within her, as the two constituent yet always distinct elements, of her identity as a woman" (1)

To finalise this conclusion I want to examine briefly the position of women as spectators and to account for women's pleasure in images of women. In most analyses, the position offered is a profoundly contradictory one for women. On the one hand, women as spectator is offered the dubious satisfaction of identification with the heterosexual, masculine gaze - voyeuristic, penetrating and powerful. This may offer the pleasure of power and control, but at the expense of denying women's own experience and identity. The problem with this is that it cannot offer any positive explanation of female pleasure as different from that of male pleasure. On the other hand, it is argued,

women's pleasure is bound up with a narcissistic identification with the image of the female body, which is usually shown to be desirable but passive. This second explanation seeks to account for the frequency with which the female image appears, often semi-nude, in women's magazines and in advertisements which are addressed specifically to a female audience.

The first explanation suggests that images of women are attractive because, as women, we are subject to socialization. We inhabit a patriarchal culture in which we, no less than men, are socialized into the acceptance of women's bodies as desirable and accessible. We are bombarded with images of style, glamour and seduction through magazines, advertisements, film, television, art and literature. No wonder these images have become objects of fantasy and desire for women too. No wonder they seep into our consciousness as models of what we really want to be.

The other kind of explanation of women's pleasure draws upon the concept of narcissism. If the male look is characterized by voyeurism, observing and taking pleasure at a distance, the female look, it is claimed, is narcissistic, finding pleasure in closeness, in reflection and in identification with an image.

It follows then that women will anxiously scrutinize images held up as ideals of femininity for signs that they can appropriate to themselves.

But since there is usually a mismatch between ourselves and the images held up to us, the response cannot be one simply of pleasurable narcissism.

Women's social and sexual relations have been located within patriarchal culture, and their identities have been moulded in accordance with the roles and images which that ideology has sanctioned.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 John Berger, Looking On, p. 247.
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 2. Rowa, Julia. "Lip Service", 19 magazine, February 1989 p. 58 - 59.
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A video tape containing selected advertisements accompanies this thesis.

VIDEO TAPE CONTENTS

HOME GOODNESS

1. Radion Automatic.
2. Radion Automatic.
3. Ariel Rapide.

WOMAN AS OBJECT VIEWED

4. Cadbury's Flake.
5. Kelloggs Special K.
6. Kelloggs Special K.
7. Nivea Shampoo.
8. New Oil of Ulay.
9. Vidal Sassoon.
10. Sure.
11. Impulse.
12. VO5 Shampoo.
13. Chambourcy Chocolate Mousse.

MEN AS OBJECT VIEWED

14. Lynx.
 15. Levis 501.
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