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Construction of Femininity and Consumer Culture in American Women's Magazines: A Qualitative Study about Good Housekeeping

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Abstract: *Good housekeeping is one of the mainstream American women's magazines. Targeting primarily the middle-class married women, it gives guidance and suggestions on beautifying appearance, latest fashions, housekeeping, cooking, and child-rearing. Using 24 issues of Good Housekeeping published in 2016-2017, this study explores what kind of femininity is constructed in this magazine. The study uses thematic analysis and interpretive textual analysis as the key methodologies. Furthermore, it explores the overlapping relationships between the magazine, femininity, and consumer culture. The article finds that femininity constructed in those two years of Good Housekeeping tends to be conservative, which is idealized and perfected in the magazine. The magazine has maintained its long-established and conservative style. It is established on a commercialized base and advocates that ideal femininity is to be gained through "purchasing." The conservative femininity constructed by the magazine is under the manipulation of modern patriarchy and consumerism.*

Key Words: American Culture, American Women's Magazines, Content Analysis, Femininity, Gender Studies, Good Housekeeping

Introduction

American women's magazines have a long history. Subscribing and reading them has been an important part of American women's lives (Walker, 2000). The contents of these magazines generally influence women in their personal, family, professional, social, and even sexual life (Moore et al., 1992; Walker, 2000; Kim & Ward, 2004). In doing so, they construct a special feminized world, in which it is cherished to be a girl or a woman. Therefore, women's magazines, as a dominantly female text and cultural form, construct femininity by shaping women's ideas, values, and behaviors.

Good housekeeping is a monthly women's magazine published in the United States of America. It has a history of over 100 years and is ranked among the top American women's magazines in circulation. As the magazine mainly addresses the married women of the boomer generation, giving guidance on

the issues of women's concern; it is worthy of a closer examination in terms of the construction of femininity in the context of current consumer culture. Keeping in mind the limitations of time and resources, the current research is limited to the issues published in 2016 and 2017.

Research Questions

This article argues that Good Housekeeping, as a mass-circulated American women's magazine, constructs femininity ideologically and commercially through advertising, editorials, and content. Centered on this statement, the article aims to answer the following questions by mainly employing thematic analysis and interpretive textual analysis as its key methods.

1. What kind of femininity is presented in Good Housekeeping in the years 2016-2017?

2. How was femininity constructed and embodied by Good Housekeeping during those years?

Literature Review

The literature review for this study is divided into two main parts: studies about womens magazines, and about Good Housekeeping.

Studies about Womens Magazines

A lot of research literature has been dedicated to women's magazines. These works are thematically and methodologically varied. They can be divided into four categories: historical studies of women's magazines, semiotic studies of women's magazines, studies of women readers and their relationships to magazines, and media studies of women's magazines. A brief description of those categories and relevant literature is presented in this part.

Historical Studies about Womens Magazines

Historical studies of women's magazines offer an overview of women's magazines during certain historical periods. Women's magazines can also have unique features and roles within the different historical time frames. Many historical studies have been carried out about women's magazines ([White, 1970](#); [Ballaster et al., 1991](#); [Walker, 1998](#); [Kitch, 2001](#); [Luddy, 2017](#)).

American womens magazines have been criticized for promoting unrealistic idealism and objectifying women ([Bhalla & Moscovitz, 2020](#)). [Friedan \(2013\)](#), in her landmark book, criticized them for pressurizing women to fulfill the role of homemakers and making unrealistic expectations.

Womens magazines became widespread and commercially important in the 19th century. But it has only been since Cynthia White's seminal work ([White, 1970](#)) that they started receiving serious critical analysis. The book examines women's magazines as an industry and discusses their relationships with advertising and technology. It also pointed out how womens magazines became more diverse and versatile. Furthermore, it compared older titles with new ones and those published on a monthly basis with the ones published on a weekly

basis. It highlighted the importance of different magazines having different flair and character.

[Ballaster et al. \(1991\)](#) give both theoretical and historical accounts in reviewing and decoding women's magazines in their book. It provides a historical development of women's magazines from the 18th century until 1988, illustrating the characteristics, progress, and development of women's magazines in different historical periods. It finds that despite changes in their content, readership, and editorials from the late 17th century to the present day, there have been remarkable continuities. These magazines continue to maintain the ideology of relocating women within domestic and private frameworks. It further suggests that they offer their readers a world to construct and explore the female self.

[Walker \(1998\)](#) brings together selections of articles from mass-circulated magazines for women that were published between 1940 and 1960. The study provides a resource for understanding how such magazines try to shape womens mindsets, attitudes and decision-making. Walker finds that magazines help to form standardized life trends and promote essential values of Middle America ([Walker, 1998](#)). However, due to its focus, this book functions as more of a sourcebook rather than deep analytical work. In 2000, she produced another work that suggests that these magazines play an important role in selling aspirations. At the same time, magazines reflect diversity in women's lives ([Walker, 2000](#)). Despite considerable contributions through qualitative work, she did not quantify the evidence ([Weiss, 2002](#)).

[Kitch \(2001\)](#) gives an iconological interpretation of the portrayals of women on magazine covers between 1895 and 1930. It argues that "media stereotypes of women first emerged not in the mass media from the 1970s to the 1990s but from the first three decades of the century" (p. 3). This work points out that the roots of women's stereotypes should be traced back to the girl images on magazine covers and tentatively suggests that a pattern can be found through these analyses.

Semiotic Studies about Womens Magazines

In semiotic studies, signs and symbolisms are analyzed. Semiotic studies primarily seek to explore

the symbolic meaning of magazine advertisements, but they tend to ignore the functions of other elements in the shaping of femininity. [Williamson \(1978\)](#), [Winship \(1987\)](#), and [McCracken \(1993\)](#) are some of the researchers whose works provide semiotic analysis of women's magazines in different aspects: from decoding the advertisements to exploring the underlying ideology.

[Williamson \(1978\)](#) provides a detailed and deeper understanding of magazine advertisements, using semiotic and Marxist theory to analyze and examine techniques used in advertisements for selling. She finds that advertisers simultaneously play upon and construct readers' desires in attempting to sell products. [McCracken \(1993\)](#) also argues that a large number of advertisements in these magazines make consumer culture pervasive, and they commodify the desire to buy. They also naturalize women's identity as consumers.

[Winship \(1987\)](#) asserts that publications create a woman's world precisely because it does not exist outside their pages (p. 7). She also comes to similar conclusions as does [Kitch \(2001\)](#). She suggests that while women's magazines appear to have incorporated some feminist thought in the 1970s, mostly they are in a pseudo-feminist way.

Studies about Readers and their Relationships to Women's Magazines

[Ferguson \(1983\)](#) and [Gough-Yates \(2002\)](#) are two of the most prominent researchers who worked in the area of readers and their relationships to women's magazines. Both of them consider women's magazines as a production industry that has a significant impact on the formation of femininity in women readers. [Ferguson \(1983\)](#) emphasizes that editors and staff can contribute to a shared female mindset and world. Following the footsteps of [Ferguson \(1983\)](#), [Gough-Yates \(2002\)](#) conducts her study from the production side of women's magazines. She finds that the magazine staff, writers, and editors are chosen to cater to the target readership in producing magazine content. [Nelson \(2012\)](#), who has been a prolific writer for most of the woman's magazines on the American newsstands, criticizes such magazines for creating airbrushed ideals and false expectations about what readers' life should look like. She seeks to unveil the truth of

women's magazines to enlighten readers to have a critical mind for distinguishing reality from fiction within the pages.

Studies about readers and their relationships with magazines provide some important linkages, but they do not depict the whole picture. They seem to be fragmented, presenting their arguments in isolation.

Media Studies about Women's Magazines

Studies about women's magazines are also found in the areas of media, gender, and culture. Studies in these areas are not limited to magazines only, but also TV, film, newspapers, advertisements, and music. This field explores media's meaning and influences in generating and shaping gendered messages and identities.

Scholars contributing to this area include Burton (2005) and [Gauntlett \(2008\)](#). [Burton \(2005\)](#) looks at women's magazines as gendered texts and as vehicles for representations. He pays attention to the narratives of these magazines in telling stories about being and becoming a woman. Burton finds that women's magazines construct pleasures, which produce the illusion of a valid and gendered social world. [Gauntlett \(2008\)](#) discusses women's magazines and female identities. She examines the messages conveyed by the magazines in 2006-7, and how the readers perceived them. It was found that women's magazines mostly suggested ways of thinking about self. Furthermore, the magazines for young women were clearly anti-tradition. Both of the researchers investigated the influence of women's magazines on female readers.

Although media studies of women's magazines can provide theoretical and methodological insights; in most of the cases, they are without any deep analysis of a specific magazine.

Good Housekeeping

Good housekeeping is an American magazine for women. It was launched in 1885. Currently, its publishers are Hearst Magazines. It usually publishes articles about different areas of women's interest like beautification, make-up, recipes, health, and literacy articles.

Although some academic studies have been carried out about Good Housekeeping, none of them look into the construction of femininity. [Liggett \(2006\)](#) examines the role of Good Housekeeping's Campbell Soup advertisement in shaping women's roles and images from the years 1905 to 1920. The major findings of that study are that Campbell Soup advertising promotes traditional roles for women and at the same time, shapes their attitudes towards the meanings and roles of a modern woman, mother, and wife in the early 20th century. [Banning \(2005\)](#) analyzes garment bags as promoted in Good Housekeeping. The focus of the study is on the design and fashion of the garment bags rather than femininity.

There is another dissertation on Good Housekeeping by [Finn \(2008\)](#). She claims that women are often confined to representations that fit patriarchal gender stereotypes. Through a content analysis of 2,525 advertisements from 1955 to 2005, she concludes that the portrayal of women in the advertisements of Good Housekeeping is not representative of their roles in reality. They have continuously depicted women as either domestic companions or decorative objects.

Major Conceptual and Theoretical Foundations of the Study

Basic Concepts of Femininity

It is hard to give a consistent and accurate definition of femininity because femininity is not a fixed and rigid term that has a stably defined meaning. Rather, it is fluid and changeable with the changing culture, norms, and values. Therefore, studies focusing on the nature of femininity tend to ignore it as a theory or concept ([Savigny & Warner, 2015](#)).

Femininity does not have agreed-upon definition or criteria, but its general features and perceptions about it are usually quite common. People often take femininity as being passive, impulsive, tender, illogical, hard to understand, caring, maternal, obedient, and heterosexual ([Vecchio, 2002](#)). These characteristics are generally considered inferior compared to stereotypical masculine characteristics e.g. assertive, calm, rational, and aggressive. Although their origin and rationale are not clear, Americans have formulated those gender-specific attributes and characteristics.

The terms male and female generally refer to the biologically rooted concepts which are used to describe an individual's sex. The concepts of masculinity and femininity, by contrast, refer to role behavior, identity, and personality characteristics that can be used to describe an individual's gender ([Conroy, 2015](#)). Therefore, the concepts of male and female are biologically innate while masculinity and femininity are socially and culturally constructed.

The traditional notion of femininity comprises the role of mother and caretaker. Motherhood and nurturing are key elements of the traditional female role, with warmth and expressiveness being the key elements of it ([Broverman et al., 1972](#)). Femininity is usually represented with a compassionate profile ([McDermott, 2016](#)), and its traits are expressive and communal in nature ([Bem, 1974](#)). [Spence and Helmreich \(1978\)](#) also listed feminine communal attributes including affection, sympathy, nurturing, and helpfulness. These traditional feminine roles and traits have formed the femininity stereotypes, which tend to dominate popular culture in the portrayals of women.

In the current practical trends, femininity has become increasingly difficult to pin-point. With the development and evolution of American history and society, traditional femininity has lost hold as a meaningful descriptor of modern womanhood. Because the notion of femininity is changing with time, the meaning of femininity has embraced more diversified aspects. However, such stereotypical concepts still prevail in America, and a significant part of American media still thinks that women are innately feminine due to their biology.

Women's Magazines and Femininity

Studies suggest that women's magazines produce a particular view of the world that is socially constructed through framing ([Hasinoff, 2009](#)). [Milkie \(2002\)](#) notes that print media creates idealized images and thwart alternative visions of femininity. [Ballaster et al. \(1991\)](#) further suggest that women's magazines purport to offer a recipe for femininity itself (p. 163).

Women's magazines influence women's lives and shape the construction of their cultural identities. [Wolf \(1991\)](#) argues that "women's magazines are the only products of popular culture (unlike romances) that change with women's reality, are mostly written

by women for women about women's issues, and take women's concerns seriously" (p. 71). As a result, they may suggest how women build their identities as per feminine norms preached by the magazines. Their spread and reach make it nearly impossible for any female to avoid their influence.

[Ferguson \(1983\)](#) explains femininity in women's magazines in these words,

"Women's magazines collectively comprise a social institution which fosters and maintains a cult of femininity. This cult is manifested both as a social group to which all those born female can belong; and as a set of practices and beliefs, rites and rituals, sacrifices and ceremonies, whose periodic performance reaffirms common femininity and shared group membership" (p. 184).

Women's magazines popularize themselves as a tool to understand and adopt femininity. They provide detailed guidance for their readers for multiple stages and aspects of womanhood ([Ferguson, 1983](#)). She further describes the rituals women undergo to perpetuate the ideology of femininity in these words,

"Individual members are socialized into their personal and collective identities through shared rites, rituals, parables, maxims, catechisms, badges, and totems, in the same way, that they are habituated into making the monthly or weekly dues they contribute towards the maintenance of the edifice itself. (p. 186).

Femininity thrives due to its millions of followers and tools for its propagation such as films, magazines, TV shows and social media. These tools further increase the connection between women and femininity by making femininity attractive to their viewers and reaches. [McCracken \(1993\)](#) explains their strategy in these words,

Readers are not force-fed a constellation of negative images that naturalize male dominance; rather, women's magazines exert a cultural leadership to shape consensus in which highly pleasurable codes work to naturalize social relations of power. This ostensibly common agreement about what constitutes the feminine is only achieved through a discursive struggle in which words, photos, and sometimes olfactory signs wage a semiotic battle

Against the everyday world which, by its mere presence, often fights back as an existential corrective to the magazine's ideal images. (p. 3).

In the magazines' fantasy world of femininity, home and appearance are the two pivotal factors. According to many of these magazines, most of the women's concern is with personal and emotional relationships: primarily with their family and friends. They present women as "homogenous group" and "naturally occurring group" ([Ballaster et al., 1991, p. 162](#)).

Assuming female readers as a coherent group, women's magazines are also ideological in constructing femininity for the assumed homogeneous female readers. Feminist theorists have their unique interpretation of the concept of ideology, and they have always seriously taken the concept. For feminist theorists, "Ideology are ideas, norms, values, representations of gender difference which exercise considerable influence, perhaps even more so than economic inequality, in maintaining women's subordination" ([Ballaster et al., 1991, p. 19](#)). Some theorists assume that such ideology is in men's interests to dominate and oppress women, and femininity works to legitimate male domination ([Delphy, 1984](#)). On the other hand, the naturalization of women's labor in the domestic sphere as mother and wife might be linked with class relations to serve the capitalist interests. They provide the explanation of women's magazines in compliance with the oppression of women or to resist this oppression.

Femininity is closely linked with women's appearance and character. Women's magazines are built on maintaining femininity as a cultural norm. They collectively comprise a social institution that fosters and maintains such femininity. The purpose of women's magazines is to sell the many commodities that are essential elements to create femininity, within which the flaunt of feminine norms is not acceptable. They build an empire to entice women to endlessly pursue femininity. As such, they reflect and create ideals of femininity.

Methodology

This study employs thematic analysis and interpretive textual analysis as its key methods. Thematic analysis is a common research method applied in qualitative research. It emphasizes

examining themes within data. This method has the advantage of conducting the research beyond the researcher's individual experiences. It is also flexible in applying multiple theories in interpreting the themes of the supporting data. Since the study is aimed to interpret the themes in the construction of femininity in *Good Housekeeping*, thematic analysis is well suited.

Interpretive textual analysis is a research method that seeks to explore the underlying meanings beneath the textual surface and examines the corresponding implicit social meanings. A magazine can be viewed as a particular text which can consciously or unconsciously link itself to the larger realities in society. The key to this method is to explore how the text creates identities for the audience. This study explores the construction of femininity in the woman's magazine, so it will naturally explore the meanings beneath the textual surface. As a result, an interpretive textual analysis will help to decode how femininity is constructed in the magazine's advertisements and stories.

This study has sampled *Good Housekeeping* magazines in the year 2016-2017. As it is a monthly magazine, 24 issues are sampled in total. The researchers examine each issue scrupulously to find out the common grounds and patterns in the magazine. The magazines during those two years mainly contained the following segments, namely "Your Look," "Real Life," "GH Institute Tried + Tested," "Your Body," "Your Kitchen," and "In Every Issue." The researchers found the common themes of the magazine and interpret the underlying implicit social meanings.

Findings and Discussion

The findings reveal that within the framework of femininity, there are three main constructions in *Good Housekeeping*: construction of ideal appearance, construction of feminine temperaments, and construction of domesticity. Further details are given below.

Construction of Ideal Appearance

The beautification of appearance has been a constant theme in women's magazines. It represents the external representation of the feminine. A flip through the *Good House-keeping* magazine presents

the readers with the bombardment of advertisements for beauty, aesthetics, home and fashion products such as shampoo, hair coloring spray, hair straightening, and curling tools, skincare products, cosmetics, fashionable seasonal clothes, home appliances, and food products.

The feminine appeal is maintained by the beautification of the outer look, which is closely linked with the material add-ups. Hair, skin, and clothes are key elements where shampoo, cosmetics, and trendy clothes have ground to play. It seems like a never-ending need for women to keep hydrated skin, shiny and glossy hair, and have a slim figure with fashionable clothes. All the visual and verbal information contributes to the defining of valued femininity.

Long hair is believed to be a central element of intrinsic femininity, while short hair is considered to be mannish. In *Good Housekeeping*, all the products for hair are aimed at promoting the care for strong, silky, and youthful-looking hair with varied styles. What is conveyed through such advertised products or hair care instructions is that women need to make constant efforts to maintain healthy and beautiful hair by applying such products.

Skin is also considered closely linked with femininity. With historical, cultural, and social changes, the criteria for women's skin beauty have also been changing. But one theme has been common and constant: young, smooth, soft, radiant, firm, supple, healthy, and bright-colored skin. In a culture that worships youthfulness, women are compelled to constantly pursue youthful looks. Targeting middle-aged women, *Good Housekeeping* contains advertisements for skin moisturizers, foundation, eyebrow pencils, eye shadow, mascara, eye creams, lipsticks, night creams, nail polish, etc. Like advertising on television, *Good Housekeeping* shares one of the common features of women's magazines, which is to tell women through the constant bombardment of advertisements that it is necessary to fight aging signs and skin issues. As cosmetics are symbols of femininity, *Good Housekeeping* spares no effort in guiding the targeted audience to maintain their femininity.

The standards for skin reveal a core theme: worshipping youthfulness. The magazine promotes

certain standards for women to view and examine their skin. Ageist ideology is rooted in the pages of the magazine on skincare. Making the skin and looks youthful is a defining feature of the ideal outer femininity. The linkage of such outer femininity standards is established between the magazine and its female readerships.

Clothing is another equally significant element contained in the notion of femininity. Good housekeeping entails the latest women's fashion illustrations in every issue. The magazine gives pieces of advice on how to dress for different seasons and occasions. What the magazine conveys is that proper appearance needs proper clothes and accessories. The underlying message is clear: looking good and fashionable is part of women's duty. They should give constant time and attention (and, of course, money) to it.

A common feature of stylish clothing in Good Housekeeping is the use of a large number of pictures, both about different pieces of clothing with brands and price tags and celebrity women with awesome outfits. These fashion advertisements tell what is feminine for appearance, which is tied up with a commodity base. Furthermore, the images of those celebrity women with fashionable products in the magazine appear to be camera conscious. [Burton \(2005\)](#) said that a camera in such a context is equivalent to the male gaze.

By presenting the fashion section with visual pictures, Good Housekeeping conveys two messages. One is that women can never become too feminine. They should always strive for more. Clothes and accessories are essential products for this purpose. The other is that women are ostensibly addressed by the magazine as consumers. The overwhelming commercial information both about fashion and other elements (which are irrelevant to fashion, but are shown on fashion pages) seeks to grab women's attention and lead them to consume.

Maintaining a slim and smart figure is one of the more common themes of women's magazines ([de Freitas et al., 2018](#)). Good housekeeping also encourages women to lose weight through a healthy diet, special supplements, and exercises to attain a slender body. The editorial contents suggest that exercise plus proper eating can boost women's confidence and energy. Suggestions and detailed

illustrations of body moves do appear in abundance. However, like the magazine's fashion and beauty sections, body-shaping is mostly directed at the selling of certain products.

The Construction of Feminine Temperaments

The magazine not only constructs the ideal external appearance of women but also establishes feminine temperaments on a deeper level. Women are presented as being emotionally expressive, courteous, and compassionate. The editorial content of Good Housekeeping plays an important role in depicting such feminine personalities, mainly through the "Real Life" column.

Being emotional is also an element considered vital to femininity. Women are portrayed as more emotionally-changeable and expressive than men. It is considered a submissive feminine trait. However, [Moi \(1995\)](#) says that such labeling is a patriarchal trait as it stresses painting women as emotional and instinctive; men, on the other hand, are presented as rational and logical.

Real Life stories in Good Housekeeping often depict women as emotionally expressive, changeable, and vulnerable. Such emotional attributes also conform to American female stereotypes, which are in exact contrast to the masculine stereotypes i.e. calm, rational, and unwilling to show emotions. The magazine's construction of women's emotional nature perpetuates the idea that women are usually victims of being too emotional. What's worse, it consequently puts women in a relatively weak status.

Politeness and social etiquette are also believed to be closely linked with femininity. Good Housekeeping magazine still devotes space to reflect women's concerns and confusion about how to behave in appropriate and decent ways under certain circumstances. In a small segment of the magazine "Etiquette Advice", it frequently appears to be the case.

Women's magazines have their traditions in framing the perfect womanhood by instructing how to behave in gracious and respectful ways. This tradition can date back to women's magazines in the mid-19th century, which published advice on how to be a perfect Victorian lady. Such gendered social norms used to be constraints for women. Apparently, Good Housekeeping has inherited the tradition. The

construction of such a feminine temperament is rather conservative, which conforms to a traditional gendered stereotype.

Another defining characteristic of femininity that is quite common in Good House-keeping is compassion, something that (McDermott, 2016) also found. It basically means having sensitivity to others' feelings, pain, and suffering. Helpfulness, warmth, kindness, care, and patience are the concrete qualities of compassion. American culture generally associates femininity with compassion in the social world while linking masculinity with toughness and competitiveness (McDermott, 2016). Being compassionate is also one of the gendered stereotypes assigned to women (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993). The compassion temperament is encoded as a part of femininity by Good Housekeeping; this point is also frequently manifested through the editorials in the "Real Life" column of the magazine, telling and sharing women's stories and experiences in everyday life. Many of these stories contain either acts of compassion, sympathy and care; or arise sympathy for them.

Good housekeeping constructs women as having a natural tendency to be compassionate. The catchphrases such as "desire to do good," "comes naturally," "wanted to help," and "feeds my soul" depict women as compassionate and sympathetic. Kindness, warmth, and gentleness are conveyed through such stories. Compassion is an aspect of feminine temperament that is enhanced within the text. These findings are in line with the previous studies which found that Good Housekeeping promotes stereotypical roles and attitudes toward women (Liggett, 2006; Finn, 2008).

The Construction of Domesticity

Domesticity is one of the traditional elements which are central to the definition of femininity. The study found that domestic ideology was also central to Good Housekeeping as a large proportion of the magazine's pages were occupied by editorials on family, maternity, and domesticity. The same was noticed by Liggett (2006). The magazine speaks to readers as mothers, wives, and homemakers. In the domestic sphere, women are charged with the responsibility of homemaking and cooking. Once again, underneath the practical advice and guidance

for homemaking and cooking is the deep-seated consumerism that directs women to consume utensils, furnishings, home appliances, and groceries to perfect the ostensible world perceived as women's sphere.

Good Housekeeping functions as a guidebook for homemaking and cooking. More specifically, it provides guidance about home decoration, home remodeling, home cleaning, cooking recipes and instructions, and new utensils or home appliances to facilitate domestic chores. The magazine's content on fashion and beauty, housekeeping, and cooking are depicted as crafts of art that must appear pleasant to the eye. Bright-colored and appealing pictures of home and enticing dishes construct an unattainable utopia world. Similar to beauty and fashion editorials and contents of the magazine, Good Housekeeping also suggests that one should never be satisfied with her home decoration and cooking because there is always room for improvement.

Good housekeeping reinforces the search for housekeeping perfection and relocates women in the domestic sphere. It depicts women as in need of help to become competent housekeepers. The advertisements and editorial content are encoded as an expert solving a woman's problem with a particular product, presenting themselves as reliable and convincing. What's more, the home and kitchen are idealized as women's spaces full of pleasures and fantasies to disguise the repetitiveness and boring nature of house tasks. In addition, motherhood is endowed with moral values. Domestic responsibilities are ideologically constructed as enjoyable and easy. Therefore, the magazine reinforces women's role as mothers and homemakers.

Conclusion

Good housekeeping has an obvious thematic focus on the construction of femininity. The femininity constructed by the magazine during 2016-17 has shown conservative norms. The magazine constructs femininity mainly in three aspects: idealizing femininity in outer appearance (looks, fashion, appearance, etc.); feminine temperaments (kind, compassionate, emotionally expressive, etc.); and domesticity (women-centric roles in the house and family). Such feminine traits are generally assessed as

weak and vulnerable. Therefore, the constructed femininity as in being a woman is external beauty-centered with stereotypically feminine traits, which conform to patriarchal standards.

Good housekeeping constructs femininity mostly in a commercial way. The magazine addresses its female readers primarily as consumers. The constructed ideal feminine appearance and ideal images of women fulfilling traditional roles are all based on women as consumers. The magazine is permeated with advertising for beauty and domestic space, and the messages from the advertisements are gendered. These messages convey a theme that women's perfection needs to be backed up with commodities. Feminine personality traits such as nurturing and caring are also exploited by the market which encourages women to purchase not only for themselves but also for the family. Femininity is not innocently constructed but encodes a consumerism ideology within.

Evidently, contents in *Good Housekeeping* are dominated by what it defines as beautiful, emotional, and personal issues. It also propagates that these areas are women's priorities and primary concerns. It cannot be denied that the advice and guidance are helpful and wholesome, but at the same time, it put femininity maintenance into a trivial and mundane world.

The femininity constructed by *Good Housekeeping* magazine is conservative and hesitant to change because the core themes and ideology tend to be stagnant despite its long history. Loads of advertisements targeting female readers play an important role in contributing to the magazine's

construction of such femininity. The magazine has been creating problems for readers by over-emphasizing aging signs, the need for fashionable products in every season, and physical appearance. The magazine has been presenting and even creating insecurities that readers should face and feel, and then the magazine- the intimate friend and adviser- provides the commodity-based recipes for maintaining femininity.

It may be concluded that the magazine is not that free to decide its editorial content. It is, as a matter of fact, subject to the manipulation and domination of the capitalist market. That is to say, underneath the conservative construction of femininity is the need of advertisers of the big consumer culture. The consumer market and society are hesitant and unwilling to change because maintaining such status is profitable for their own interests. *Good Housekeeping*, as one of the many women's magazines, simply presents itself with a seemingly modern and wholesome mask to hide its traditional ideology of maintaining women's subordination. Framing women in the domestic sphere is exactly the impediment to their social participation and achieving gender equality.

Women's magazines cannot take all the blame for maintaining women's domestic roles and subordinating status. They are only one of the many forces and elements in the society that construct contemporary femininity. Like most (if not all) of the other forces and players in the current world, it is also governed by new liberalism. The underlying forces for the constructed femininity are modern capitalism and modern patriarchy.

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