

Women's Magazines as Instruments of Neo-Colonial Domination

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Abstract

This paper examines how women's magazines in the Philippines, especially local editions of glossy American magazines such as *Cosmopolitan Philippines*, are instruments of neo-colonial domination. Published by Filipino media conglomerates like Summit Publications, these magazines are veritable clones of their international counterparts with very similar covers, advertisements, and editorial content. Because of their formulaic contents, women's magazines like *Cosmopolitan Philippines* wield a tremendous insidious influence on their readers as they promote high end American products, lifestyle, and values and tend to define femininity according to American standards. With their emphasis on Caucasian norms of beauty and behavior, women's magazines in the process, tend to make Asian women feel a pressure to conform to the patriarchal stereotypes of women propagated by the magazines and to even alienate them from their own indigenous culture.

Women's magazines are the most ubiquitous print media entertainment form for women in the Philippines. Go to any local bookstore, news or magazine stand, grocery, or public market, whether in urban or rural areas, and you can see them displayed. Whether glossy or in newsprint, they are in beauty parlors or spas, their colorful covers graced by models or showbiz celebrities, beckoning to be bought or picked up and read. These mass-produced publications—their prices range from PhP35 for

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those in newsprint to PhP100 - 120 for the glossies—are read by women of diverse ages from seven to 70, and from all income-classes and educational backgrounds.

Whether they cater to CEOs, housewives from “exclusive” villages, young professionals, high school or college students from urban or rural areas, or overseas workers, women's magazines have a lot to offer. As feminist scholar Marjorie Evasco aptly describes them, they are a veritable “weekly smorgasbord of feminine pleasures”—from their covers featuring the current beauty icons to their food and beverage advertisements, sections on fashionable wear, accessories, beauty and personal care products or household appliances and gadgets. They feature the latest cellphone models, iPods and Palm Pilots, household décor, paint, restaurants, hotels. They have articles on getaway trips to resorts, and feature stories on topics that presumably appeal to women. There are features on fashion and beauty trends; profiles of popular showbiz celebrities or sought after models; advice columns mostly on relationships and the problems encountered by women; feature stories on European royalty, Hollywood actors and actresses and their liaisons; dieting; the psychological problems of women, including their anxieties, feelings of inadequacy, hang-ups mostly having to do with their identities, or coping with demands on them by their families or by society; horoscopes and astrology guides; society pages reporting on the gilded lives of the elite and social climbers; how to invest and get the most out of your money, how to bag the most lucrative jobs, and how to transform oneself into the most desirable and alluring partner in bed.

Roles of Women's Magazines

Although they are primarily entertainment forms, meant to be lazily browsed or skimmed through rather than read seriously, women's magazines have assumed various roles for women. They are the arbiters of fashion, instant dispensers of practical advice, sources of reader-friendly information on a host of topics that women today must know in order to survive in a demanding, competitive, and complicated social milieu. They

define standards of beauty, taste, and behavior for women in a given era, and act as a very powerful although insidious instrument of social control as they lay down the norms of so called "femininity" in society. They substitute for friends to help one cope with loneliness. They provide escape from the otherwise repetitive, boring, confining world of household tasks, motherhood, wifely duties and their demands.

Because of their sheer ubiquity, formulaic nature, wide reach, and affordable cost, women's magazines constitute a very powerful instrument of the ruling ideology, specifically, of the Western capitalist ideology, which prevails in the social and economic system within which women's magazines are produced and distributed. Women's magazines in the Philippines, as in other Asian or Third World Countries which are often referred to as the "South," actually serve a very strategic role in the continuing domination of these countries by the Western powers, or the "North" that still need to colonize and spread their influence, through culture, in the post-colonial era.

Women's magazines in the Philippines started to proliferate after 1986, with the ouster of the Marcos dictatorship and the restoration of democracy. According to the 1986 Philippine Information Handbook, there were at that time twelve general interest magazines, one male-oriented magazine, two teen-age, three sports, sixteen showbiz magazines, and six women's magazines which included *Mod*, *Mega*, *Preview* and *Teen*.

Some Leading Examples

The 1989-90 4As Media Factbook list of women's magazines included *Mod Filipina*, *Women's Journal*, *Woman's Home Companion*, *Woman Today*, *Marie Claire* and *New Executive Woman*. Ten years later (1996), there was a boom in the magazine industry. The 1996-1997 4 As Media Factbook listed nine general interest magazines in English, thirteen female-oriented magazines, one teen magazine, four specialty magazines, three sports, three general interest magazines in Filipino and seventeen showbiz magazines. The boom gave rise to a very segmented magazine industry, with magazines catering to different age groups, like *Meg* for pre-teens; *Mega*, *Metro*,

and *Preview* for yuppies, college students and housewives; *Good Housekeeping* for married women, and *Working Mom* for working mothers.

A significant development starting in the late nineties, indicating how lucrative publishing women's magazines had become, was the appearance of local editions of such US women's magazines as *Cosmopolitan*, *Seventeen*, and *Good Housekeeping*. These local editions—*Seventeen Philippines*, *Cosmopolitan Philippines* and *Good Housekeeping*—are published by the Gokongwei-owned Summit Publishing with franchises from US publisher.

The appeal of the local editions which bear a strong resemblance to, and practically replicate the US editions, lies in their affordability, as they cost approximately only 1/3 the cost of the American editions. *Seventeen Philippines* costs PhP95, compared to the American edition of *Seventeen* which sells for PhP300. *Cosmopolitan Philippines* sells for PhP120 while the American edition sells for PhP375 and *Good Housekeeping* sells for only PhP95 compared to the American edition which sells for PhP300. Women are easily lured to buy the local editions on the assumption that for a much cheaper price, they can expect to enjoy the same type and amount of articles in the American editions.

Seventeen Philippines is the local edition of the biggest teen fashion and beauty magazine in the United States. Like its US parent, it claims to be a handbook for teens whose ages range from 17 to 21 and who are from the AB market segment. Fifty per cent of those who read *Seventeen Philippines* spend PhP4000 or more in a month. According to the Trends Newsstand Survey (TNS) in 2004, 70% of the buyers for this age bracket chose *Seventeen Philippines*, 28% *Chalk*, and 2%, *Young Star* (<http://www.summitmedia.com.ph/magazines/seventeen/phpl>, 9 June 2000). Being a teen magazine, it addresses concerns of readers in this particular bracket, like problems with fashion and beauty tips, pimples, dating, conflicts with parents, anxieties and identity.

Cosmopolitan Philippines is the 32nd international edition of its US parent. It was launched in the Philippines on April 23, 1997. Helen Gurley Brown, editor of the US edition, attended its launching. According to its website, it is "a service magazine that deals with women's issues—career,

relationships, health, self-esteem, sex, money, travel, fashion and beauty” and “is an empowering handbook on life.”

Cosmopolitan Philippines' target market are women aged 18 to 35, from the middle to the upper class, working or still in college, single or married, with or without children. It is intended to help women educate and improve themselves (<http://www.femalenetwork.com/aboutcosmo/#abtcosmo>).

Good Housekeeping, on the other hand, claims to be the top “family and home magazine which aims to help the modern homemaker who holds the purse strings to make the best choices.” The magazine’s articles are on the home, relationships, parenting, career and food. The emphasis on practicality is vouched for by the Good Housekeeping Institute which tests the products in the advertisements that appear in the magazine and kitchen tests the recipes before publishing them. Its target market comprises those between 25 and 44 years old, most of whom are married with children, employed and college graduates. According to the Trends Newsstand Survey for 2004, 52.2% of the buyers bought *Good Housekeeping*, 18.4%, *Food*, 12%, *Me*, and 11.4%, *Working Mom*.

In this era of globalization, these women’s magazines have become a huge marketing phenomenon, a powerful instrument for relentlessly and systematically propagating the capitalist ideology that produces them and that needs to be sustained. The publication of local editions of American women’s magazines in the Philippines exemplifies how women’s magazines are highly efficient vehicles for disseminating the capitalist ideology, especially to the countries of the South, or the Asian countries that constitute the vast market for capitalist-produced goods, services, ideas, and values. The constant bombardment by women’s magazines of the consciousness of those who read them is a strategic means of influencing their tastes, habits, practices, even their ways of viewing life, their relations and self-images. Such a process is necessary to keep the capitalist system going and to gain the women’s continued support of that kind of system, regardless of whether it also subjugates and exploits them.

The Major Role of Advertising

Advertising plays a primary role in making women's magazines financially viable. They also ensure a steady market for advertisers by promoting their products for the target markets of specific magazines in the highly segmented industry today. After all, the birth of contemporary American magazines like *Cosmopolitan*, *Seventeen*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Redbook* and *Vogue* in the postwar years when the United States which emerged virtually unscathed by World War II, was motivated by the desire of American manufacturers to have access to women who constituted a huge market as they were the ones who presumably decide on purchases for the family and their own needs. The importance of advertising as the lifeblood of women's magazines dramatically soared especially with the advent of globalization in the 1990s as it broke down borders among countries and benefited from the standardization and marketing of products through media that are tailor fit to directly reach their specific target audiences.

Because advertisements constitute the main source of income of women's magazines, advertisers wield a lot of influence on the magazine's orientation, editorial content, and space allocation. Advertisements, to begin with, occupy a lot of space in women's magazines, usually more than 50%. Advances in technology, especially digital technology, have made it possible for magazine advertisements to be more visually attractive. Instead of being confined to one page, as they were in the past, ads can be double spreads, occupy several pages and have parts of pages opened or have pullouts. Digital photos can make faces or complexion appear more radiant or flawless, and thereby add to the attractiveness of the ads.

They also influence the kind of articles that appear in the magazine. For example, articles on serious political issues like the move to change the system of government from a presidential to a parliamentary form, corruption in government, mail order brides, or human trafficking, or the toxic poisoning of children in Clark Air Base in Pampanga would probably not stand a chance of being featured in glossy women's magazines like *Seventeen* or *Cosmopolitan* as these would conflict with the overall effect of glamour, fantasy, and romance these magazines want to create.

Such a need to continuously maintain and expand the market for Western products is evident in the amount of space allocated to advertisements in women's magazines and to their role in promoting and selling such products. Whereas in the past, advertisements used to account for only 40% of space in women's magazines, today they account for more than 50% or even more, because some of the articles are actually advertorials, which identify where certain clothes, accessories like shoes and bags, make-up, jewelry, perfume and other paraphernalia can be bought. Geraldine Mortel, an undergraduate CMC student observes in her thesis "A Content Analysis of Teen Magazines" (Puno 2001: 12) that "these magazines ... more often referred to as women's magazines are consumerist and advertising-oriented." The emphasis on advertising has led cultural critic Ellen McCracken to call this genre "women's advertising magazines" (David Croteau and William Hoynes quoted in Puno, 2001) as they feature page after page of glossy ads selling products and services for women.

Propagating Western Standards of Beauty and Sexuality

Most of the products advertised in the local editions of the magazines, particularly the glossy ones, are Western products for women that cater to their every perceived need—from beauty products including cosmetics, whitening lotions, age-defying creams, oils, perfume, lipsticks, eyeliners, waxing creams, clothes, lingerie, handbags, shoes, jewelry, to sanitary napkins and deodorants, to high tech personal equipment like cellphones, IPODS, and Palm Pilots. They not only propagate the Western lifestyle, they also propagate Western concepts of femininity and sexuality.

Their standards of beauty are still predominantly Caucasian, although there are now alternative images of female beauty, suggesting a principle of accommodation to the dominant images of women in Western culture. The covers of the local *Seventeen* and *Good Housekeeping* feature American actresses like Cameron Diaz, Brittany Murphy, Sandra Bullock, Angelina Jolie, Kate Hudson, Katie Holmes, or Jennifer Lopez who are the "icons

of femininity” of the West. But to give the magazines a local touch and project other images of beauty, popular showbiz personalities like Sharon Cuneta, Angel Locsin, Joyce Jimenez, Francine Prieto, and popular models like Aubrey Miles who typify the *kayumanggi* beauty also grace their covers. These representations of female beauty repeatedly define female pulchritude and sexuality according to Western standards like being fair or *mestiza*, tall and slim.

The covers are a crucial part of the text, as they hook the readers' attention and position them to uncritically accept the capitalist worldview and the patriarchal assumptions that pervade them. Subliminally, women are projected as sex objects, their seductive faces and bodies to be gazed at and implicitly, to exist for and satisfy the sexual needs of the male. Such subliminal suggestions are made by the provocative poses of the women—the plunging necklines, the exposed bellies, slim waists, and fingers tucked into jean pockets, or by raising skirts, focusing on the genitalia. The blurbs or titles on the cover page announce the kind of equally provocative content inside the magazines which are obviously intended to titillate or lure the readers to turn to those pages where the articles are to be found—like “Give Him The Best Sex of His Life” (July 2004), “Marriage and Sex, Is He the One? 80 Secrets of Happily Married Women” (June 2004), “Cosmo Sex-travaganza, Tips, Trends Techniques and the 2004 Pinay Sex Survey” (June 2004), “Thrill his Body, 6 Bedroom Surprises That'll Blow His Mind” (July 2004) “*Huli Ka!* What to Do When You've Cheated on Him” (July 2004), and “Sex Tricks to Treat Him this Season” (December 2004).

The advertisements of Cosmopolitan are usually of high end Western products that promise to make over their readers into veritable clones of the celebrities or models—like Clarin's, Estee Lauder, Christian Dior, Lancome, L'Oreal, Ponds, Clinique, Block and White. These are sometimes interspersed with Asian beauty lines like Shiseido, Veet, and Rexona. Clothes designed by Calvin Klein, Ralph Lauren, Gap, United Colors of Benetton; bags and shoes by Prada, Furla, and Gucci; and jewelry like TAG Heuer and Jewelmor, which are expensive brands, are endorsed to readers as “must have products.”

In his article "A source of casual enjoyment of impossible physical goals?" Tom S. Mullaney observes that women's magazines like *Seventeen*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Vogue* and *Glamour* operate on two levels: "one by design and the other by consequence." On the first level, they are "designed to be taken lightly, on a casual, superficial level." On the other second level, however, these magazines affect women readers in a "subtler, more serious way" as they perpetuate stereotypes women are forced to imitate.

Through the countless advertisements of women with flawless faces and figures, photos designed to maintain reader interest, and articles that are usually not meant to be taken seriously but just skimmed through from page to page, women's magazines repeatedly purvey "subconscious messages regarding thinness, beauty and gender roles." They create what Mullaney calls an "Us—they relationship," referring to the readers on the one hand and models whose bodies are being projected as the standard of beauty and femininity with whom the readers can easily identify because they are women, and whom the readers are being enticed to make themselves over into as "them" (http://jhu.edu/r_newslett/4/18/97/women's_magazines.htm 6 June 2005)—presumably by buying the same beauty products—cosmetics, skin clarifying solutions, whitening lotions, slimming products, stretch mark removers—thereby, adhering to Western standards of femininity and sexuality.

The South as "Other"

Repeatedly projecting Western standards of femininity, women's magazines virtually create a binary relationship between the North and the South, ironically with the South as "the other." Subliminally, Western standards and concepts of femininity and sexuality are upheld as those that should be emulated by women, regardless of their race, income, class, education, or cultural background.

Constant exposure to advertisements of the type repeatedly featured in women's magazines would lead Asian women to believe that being dark skinned, short, and not thin means they do not conform to prevailing standards. Thus, they feel compelled to follow beauty regi-

mens that prescribe "scientifically-based" diets, advocate liposuctions, breast augmentation, and facelifts, operations to remove eyebags, tuck in sagging cheeks, and to buy expensive products that will whiten their skin, hairdye that can transform their dark hair into more exotic looking burgundy, or give it blonde streaks to affect a Caucasian look.

Such concepts of femininity tend to homogenize the images of women and to eradicate or downplay those in the indigenous cultures of Asian readers, whose height, skin color, or weight may not adhere to Western norms of physical beauty. Cultural diversity tends to be eroded as feminine beauty is essentialized or defined in universal terms.

Feminist critic Janice Winship says that whether glossy or in newsprint, contemporary women's magazines' main selling point lies in the "range of fictions" they contain, which include, "the visual fictions of advertisements, or items on fashion, cookery or family and home" or actual fictions, such as those of the serialized romantic novels, the short uplifting or feel good stories, the stories of the 'rich and famous' or even the reports of events in the lives of 'ordinary' men and women. According to her, each of these tries to draw female readers into the world of the magazine, which is, ultimately, a world of consumption. But she adds that the pleasure does not always have to do with actually purchasing the products because even in looking at the products, women can "vicariously indulge in the good life through the image alone" (1997: 162-163).

The underlying message of these ads is obvious: if only women would buy the same products or consumer goods or services as those endorsed by the models or celebrities, they too would be transformed into ravishing and desirable *femmes fatales*; efficient but still glamorous homemakers; wild and exciting lovers who have mastered all the techniques to please their partners; dutiful mothers and wives; and successful career women who are physically alluring, competent at their jobs, aggressive and articulate, and able to make astute decisions because of their confidence.

Offering Sheer Fantasy

Purchasing certain specific cosmetics or suffering by endless dieting, liposuction, breast augmentation, etc. would make women more alluring and successful in snagging the male they have set their eyes on or ensure fidelity in their husbands. What these magazines offer is sheer fantasy, for it is practically impossible for most women to ever become as glamorous as the icons whose faces and figures are repeatedly displayed within their pages. Yet, the desire to become like them is constantly whetted by the ubiquitous ads, thereby making women more eager consumers. As Angela McRobbie observes, "the magazine embodies the stereotype of objectified femininity, unachievable and unreal" (Curran, Morley & Walkerdine 1996: 173).

Significantly, a survey of the advertisements in *Cosmopolitan* Philippines from January to June 2005 shows that most of the advertisements were of beauty products. Twenty eight per cent of the total number of ads were of beauty products, like cosmetics, skin whiteners, lipsticks, blushers, eyeliners, and mascara and perfume, followed by Personal Care products, or products like soap and shampoo, which ranked second and accounted for 20% of the ads, followed by 13% for food and beverages, fashion, 14%. Only 2% of the ads were on health care.

These figures clearly indicate the high priority given by women's magazines to marketing US or European women's beauty products like L'Oreal, Clinique, Lancome, Estee Lauder, Christian Dior, Maybelline, Nivea and Ponds and conditioning Asian women readers to believe that patronizing these expensive foreign made products is a must and more beneficial for them rather than utilizing beauty aids like locally made papaya soap or facial cleansers or scents like jasmine oils or shampoo or using *gugo* for their hair.

Beauty and femininity are also, ultimately, equated with external appearances, because of the emphasis on skin color, maintaining one's physical figure by following the fad diets (from Atkins to South Beach), enrolling in physical fitness programs, or signing up for expensive life-

time programs in slimming clinics like Slimmer's World or Marie France. Being healthy is not the implied reason for starving. Slimming clinics dictate what regimen has to be followed, and ads of doctors who can perform liposuctions or facelifts are standard fare in women's magazines. Female suffering is justified as a "guarantee" that can transform women readers into ravishing beauties who would be more attractive to men.

The power of women's magazines to pressure women into conforming with the unrealistic standards of beauty projected repeatedly in their advertisements and articles is illustrated by a survey commissioned by Unilever, cited in "Why Filipinas don't find themselves beautiful" (*PDI* 25 Sept. 2005), which showed that only five percent of Filipino women find themselves beautiful while the remaining 95% consider themselves average, below average or even ugly.

The explanation for this finding, which Nonong Pedero, the columnist, found disconcerting because of the reputation of Filipino women for being beautiful as a number of them have won international beauty contests, was attributed to the beauty standards used to judge their beauty—standards which are propagated via the ubiquitous media like the billboards, TV commercials, movies, newspapers and women's magazines.

According to him,

[T]he whole thingamajig really depends on your beauty standards; the criteria by which you judge beauty. The truth is, we have been indoctrinated by the mass media—newspapers, magazines, movies, TV, commercials, and billboards—into seeking beauty features which are often unrealistic and, may I coin 'un-Filipino.' (Pedero 2005: F-3)

He noted that the Western standards of beauty that these propagate such as having aquiline noses, fair skin, model thin figures and height are unrealistic as the typical Filipino women have flat noses, are dusky brown or *kayumanggi* and have petite figures (Pedero 2005).

The constant bombardment by the mass media of these standards of beauty pressure women to conform with those standards by purchasing all sorts of beauty products, undergoing costly operations to repair sagging cheeks, eye bags, flat noses, and to make their lips acquire a “bee stung” or pouting look; breast augmentation or their derriere rearranged to look exactly like those of J. Lo. Those who cannot afford to have these costly operations are made to believe that they are not attractive or beautiful and this gives rise to creating feelings of inadequacy in them. The Unilever study concluded that if Filipinas “do not meet the beauty standards brought forth by magazines and television, they are simply not beautiful” (Pederro 2005: F3).

Women's magazines tend to propagate the notion that female beauty is skin deep, having more to do with physical appearance rather than with intelligence, skills, personality traits or other attributes.

Feminist critic Marjorie Evasco's observations on the importance of ads in women's magazines in the 1990s, based on a survey of four local women's magazines she surveyed in 1991, could also apply to *Seventeen Philippines*, *Cosmopolitan Philippines* and *Good Housekeeping Philippine* edition. According to her, “women's magazines provide an interesting locus within which to explore the image of woman's otherness ... inside, the articles, pictures and advertisements converge on the main area of life which seems to be ‘outside history’—for personal relationships, life and sex” (Williamson 1987: 101).

The overall effects that these ads create, according to her, are that of a

... contained world where the woman is kept happy because she knows the latest cosmetics in the market; the fashionable trends in doing her hair, face, legs, body and feet “for a whole new you,” exercise tips to keep the ugly bulges and cellulite away. The most efficient brands of rice cookers, electric mixers, and home furnishings; the different ways of cooking with canned pineapple, the right milk, sandwich spread or home remedies for the family, plus a dream dictionary and the horoscope to guide her actions through the week's variations of problems in love and relationship. The ultimate prod-

uct, is therefore, the quintessential image of otherness: the woman she can become or dream of becoming according to the dominant beliefs and values of a culture. (Evasco 1991: 162)

The contents of women's magazines have the same elements of fantasy and escapism. In fact, some of the articles in the local editions are reprints or adaptations of articles in their American counterparts, which are usually already in the market as early as the first week of the month or even two or three weeks before the local editions appear in the market. Slight changes in the articles to give them local color or to adapt them to the local culture are made by the magazine's staff.

The articles in *Seventeen Philippines*, as to be expected, deal with topics and problems of concern to teen-agers: fashion, dating, proms, decorating one's room, getting along with parents, as well as coping with teen-age problems like pimples and personal insecurities. But to its credit, the local edition of *Seventeen Philippines* contains articles on gays and lesbians, and topics like abortion and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

Capitalizing on its slogan "the fun and fearless Filipina," *Cosmopolitan Philippines* contains articles that would "liberate" the Filipina by encouraging her to deviate from the conservative norms of behavior, especially those that have to do with sexuality. The January to June 2005 survey shows that the most space went to personal advice articles, which include columns that dish out advice on fashion and good grooming; problems regarding relationships, dealing with in-laws; anxieties or concerns about sex and acquiring STDs like HIV-AIDS; articles on sanitation, social etiquette, financial advice and nervousness or anxieties. This was followed by testimonials and confessions, which accounted for 18% of the space, celebrities and stars, fashion, and body and health care which all accounted for 12% each, relationships, 10%, beauty care which accounted for 8% of the articles, others, 4%, food and travel, 2% each.

“Liberative” Potential Still Patriarchal

Although the majority of the personalities or celebrities featured in *Cosmopolitan* conform to the stereotyped feminine icon, there are also attempts to introduce progressive elements into the magazines by featuring successful women like Solita Monsod, a University of the Philippines professor, newspaper columnist, former head of the National Economic Development Authority and TV host (*Cosmopolitan* Apr. 1999); Love Añover, a TV reporter with a reputation for being funny (*Cosmopolitan* Sept. 2003) and Captain Brooke Castillo and First Officer Mayra Florencio, female pilots for Cebu Pacific Airline (*Cosmopolitan* 2004). These offer representations of femininity that deviate from the traditional image of the woman as someone who adheres to the Western feminist icons. These women who are known to be active in public service, are articulate and independent-minded, are held up as role models for Pinays to emulate.

There are also articles on how to manage one's finances, abortion and STD (*Cosmopolitan*, May 2001), legal advice columns and advice columns on sex and female sexuality like “Life, Love, Lust” by Margie Holmes, which tackle women's problems that have to do with dating; the financial problems of married couples; difficulties of getting along with in-laws; concerns and anxieties about lovemaking and satisfying one's partner in bed by experimenting with all sorts of techniques; gay and lesbian relationships. But some of the letters seeking advice sent to this column are so fantastic that they give rise to the suspicion that they are not actual letters sent by real people, but are concocted by the writer or members of the magazine staff.

Aside from the profiles of film celebrities and pop stars, confessional or personal experience stories are also a favorite type in *Cosmopolitan*, with their generous doses of fantasy and fun, as they recall gaffes during Christmas parties, embarrassing incidents involving romantic encounters with one's crushes, past boyfriends, bosses and the like. There are some articles that exhibit daring, such as the confession of a young girl making out with her boyfriend while her mother was seated on a couch just behind the one she and her boyfriend were

occupying. There are accounts of quickies in some airport bathroom between a young girl with a former boyfriend. Some of these firsthand accounts are so incredible and verge on fantasy, suggesting that these are manifestations of desires, aspirations, hopes, and dreams which are usually not openly articulated in a sexually-repressive society like the Philippines.

Articles like "Oh Yes Baby! The Moans, Groans and Other Noises Pinays Make in Bed" (*Cosmopolitan* Feb. 2001), "Can a Lesbian Be Straight Again?" (Apr. 2000), "Sex for Virgins, a Beginner's Manual" (Jul. 2000), "Who Says Nice Guys Can't Be Wild in Bed?" (May 2001) and "Hunks Unzipped! What Your Guy's Undies Reveal about Him" (Jun. 2002) tackle topics that are risqué or not considered appropriate topics for conversation among conservative Filipinos. They illustrate how *Cosmopolitan* offers to liberate Pinays by encouraging them to confront and accept their own sexuality.

While these articles do infuse a measure of "liberative" potential in the magazine, the overall qualities of *Cosmopolitan* still make it patriarchal because women in the magazine are predominantly represented as sex objects, whose sense of personal worth is dependent on male standards. They are perceived primarily in external or physical terms and shown as fragmented rather than whole persons with feelings and intellectual capacities. Women are also made to appear to collude in their own exploitation or subjugation by the male or by male-dominated society as representations of them seem to imply their uncritical acceptance of the assumptions of the patriarchal society which defines the world of the magazine.

Conclusion

Far from being innocuous or harmless publications, women's magazines are very powerful entertainment forms, which wield a lot of influence on the individual and collective consciousness of hundreds of thousands of readers. In the postcolonial era, they have become very efficient instruments for propagating and spreading the dominant capitalist ideology which reigns in the West to the developing Asian countries or the

South—or “the other” that has to continue to be colonized or dominated as it is a vast market for Western made goods, products, services and values. With their characteristic glitz and glamour, they are able to attract and condition hundreds of thousands of women to believe that the capitalist system is desirable and beneficial even though it actually subjugates and exploits women.

The covers of the magazines, which are designed to attract and lure the readers to buy these publications, feature Western icons of femininity although occasionally, local showbiz personalities and models also appear on them. Such icons uphold Western standards of physical beauty and norms of behavior as well as values.

Advertisements which are necessary for the viability of women's magazines promote the Western lifestyle as well as products and services produced by the capitalist system. Dominant among these ads are beauty products and personal care products which uphold Caucasian standards of physical beauty, such as, for example, the desirability of being fair, slim, and tall—qualities which the average Asian women do not possess. Usually, these products use women themselves to sell the products, thus commodifying women and making them wittingly or unwittingly collude in their own exploitation or commodification. Women's bodies and faces are used to display the products, thus presenting them as fragmented rather than whole persons with capacities for thinking and feeling.

Because of their emphasis on Western standards, what these advertisements peddle are unattainable and unrealistic for typical Asian women. They merely create frustrations or feelings of inadequacy in them and even alienate them from their indigenous standards of beauty or modes of behavior for women in their culture.

The articles in women's magazines like *Seventeen Philippines*, *Cosmopolitan Philippines* and *Good Housekeeping* are also characterized by their emphasis on female fantasies, especially those that have to do with attaining physical beauty, relationships, self gratification, advice columns, horoscopes and astrological guides, serialized romantic novels, personal testi-

monies and confessions which entertain and at the same time, feed women readers' hope.

These women's magazines have to be critically analyzed so that their positive or deleterious effects on women readers can be understood and their potential as mass media for raising women's consciousness realized.

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