

Construction of Women's Image in the Women's Magazines in Hong Kong (1988-1992)

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Introduction

In 1989, while I was still a lecturer teaching sociology in Hong Kong Polytechnic, I criticized women's magazines as an instrument of gender oppression against women. I argued that women's magazines are produced in a capitalist-patriarchal establishment by which women readers are constituted as consumers who play the patriarchal role as 'beauty'. In the middle of 'exhibiting' my feminist insights, I was interrupted by a woman student who said that she enjoyed reading women's magazines. Being familiar with Leftist and feminist thought, I discussed the theories of the unconscious, ideology, and the social construction of subjectivity, implying that her pleasure in reading women's magazines is merely an ideological artifact manipulated by patriarchal capitalism. Rather dissatisfied, she retorted,

'How do you know that it (my pleasure) is unconscious and ideological? It is "me" who reads the magazine and finds it pleasurable. How can you decide the meaning (of reading) for me? If my pleasure is ideological and unconscious, how can others tell the truth?'

I was stunned and speechless. I knew she was right. From then onwards, I took the notion of (female) pleasure and subjectivity very seriously. Gradually, I developed more reservations with the Leftist/Marxist and radical feminist perspectives, for they are too elitist and monolithic to allow room for most women's pleasure and resistance. In denying women's pleasure, radical feminism has denied women's subjectivity and positive identity. Women are portrayed as sheer victims, men essentially oppressive, and the only possible gender relation is 'men oppressing women'.

But that is only one part of the (feminist) story. I went deeper into the gender territory, incorporated the insights of psychoanalysis, post-structuralism and post-modernism. Women's pleasure (in consuming the popular culture) can no longer be reduced to patriarchal manipulation or the ideological unconscious. Women's subjectivity is neither denied (within patriarchy) nor assumed (essentially somewhere outside patriarchy), but politicized as a problematic that has to be explored, empowered and developed. As the above-mentioned student's response shows, women readers/consumers are not passive cultural dupes or helpless victims of the male world. Such a perspective is simply a denial of all the women's struggle, effort and subjectivity. While women work within constraints and boundaries, women are active agents employing strategies and resources to subvert patriarchal domination.

In 1991, a local feminist, in an open forum, shared her difficulties when she read Cosmopolitan. She said,

'I know that I am supposed to read In, the feminist-oriented magazine, but I can't help reading Cosmo, despite all its anti-feminist stuffs. It is the challenge for all feminism: how can we produce popular women's magazines that are feminist-positive and also highly pleasurable.'

Accidentally, I happened to come across **Janice Radway's** Reading The Romance and **Tania Modleski's** Loving with a Vengeance. I was fascinated by their endeavour to articulate

women's pleasure and resistance within a feminist perspective. Both of them engage positively with the notion of women's spectatorship in consuming popular culture. It is in this context of reclaiming (women) readers/consumers' subjectivity and gender identity that I locate this research on women's magazines. I began by reviewing local researches on the topic. Much to my surprise not even one single piece of academic work has been done on women's magazines in Hong Kong. All we have are merely short journalistic articles in local newspaper and magazines. I, with regrets, had to resort to white-western feminist theories to embark on this pioneer work on local women's magazines.

In this research, I select four glossy women's magazines to analyze their portrayal of women's images. My approach is hermeneutical and dialectical, that is, I argued that both women's images are constituted by the magazines, and the readings of these magazines by their women readers. While these magazines predominately produce heterosexist and patriarchal representations of gender relations and women's images, women readers do employ these magazines for their own self-empowerment.

Glossy women's magazines are selected, because given the consumerist and classist nature of Hong Kong society and women's power, these up-market magazines expresses most sharply features of gender politics in Hong Kong. In particular, Elle, Cosmopolitan, Elegance and In are selected, because:

- (a) their sales figures are the highest among glossy women's magazines. Cosmo claims to have a monthly sale of 47,000 copies, Elle 23,000, Elegance, 28,000 and In, 7000. ¹
- (b) each of the four magazines has its own unique style especially in terms of market positioning: Elle is the most prestigious local, fashion magazine, Cosmo is the most popular among middle class career women, Elegance represents the more mature and domestic-oriented readers, and In the only (glossy) feminist magazine in Hong Kong. Elle and Cosmo are franchised from the white-west, whereas Elegance and In are local magazines.

1. Outline of the thesis

Chapter One examines the historical background of women's magazines in Hong Kong. Particular attention is paid to the rise of career women as a new consumer category and its consumerist and classist implications for the women's magazines. While women's magazines in the 60's and 70's mainly targeted working class women readers with minimal advertising emphasis, women's magazines today primarily are aimed at advertisers who cater for women readers as up-market consumers. The main client of the magazine are not the readers but advertisers. The recent boom in the glossy women's magazines is indeed a market response to the rising economic power of middle-class career women.

Chapter Two elucidates the contemporary theoretical debate with regard to popular culture, consumers pleasure, women's magazines, postmodernism and feminist discourse. The chapter

¹. According to the local advertising norm, the sales figures claim of the magazines has to take a 20% discount. Magazines usually exaggerate their sales figures so as to attract more advertisements.

begins with a critique of the Frankfurt School (on the Left) and mass society theory (on the Right), arguing that their views on popular culture are reductionist, monolithic and elitist. In this context, I discussed David Morley's ethnographic study of TV which emphasizes the 'gendered' process of readership. In refuting the traditional notion of ideology as being monolithic, mechanical and totalizing. I take the category of 'negotiation' seriously (Gledhill, 1987; Hall, 1980 and Dyer, 1980) as it has the advantage of exploring the multiple contradictions, instabilities and possibilities in socio-political representations of femininity and constructions of identity. It is not a naive return to the notion of 'personal agency' as even the most powerful resistance and subversion exist within dominant discourse. All 'negotiations' happen not in a vacuum but under present institutional and structurally unequal power relations. Contemporary feminist cultural theorists interrogate both the possibilities and limitations of gender subversions in cultural representations. Janice Radway (1984) and Tania Modleski (1984, 1991) are taken as key feminist figures in exploring the strategies that women employ as consumers and readers to negotiate and subvert patriarchal domination in popular culture.

Chapter Three is a key chapter as it investigates local women readers' strategies in reading and manipulating women's magazines. Local career women acquire immense pleasure in reading various women's magazines. They do not take 'women' as a political category but tend to personalize their cultural taste/pleasure and individualize their class privileges/power. These career women are products of late capitalism and they enjoy immense (middle) class privileges generated from late-capitalism, thus they insist on using their class power as a matter of personal effort and style. These middle class career women are also highly critical of feminism which they see as a threat to their privileges status.

However, the reading of women's magazines, itself an exclusively women's genre which requires solitary attention, is appropriated by women readers to negotiate their personal space and resist the domestic 'obligation' as stipulated by patriarchy. Although all the interviewees are young career-women, the interviews reveal a traditional domestic gender division of labour according to which women are still in charge of housework. Reading women's magazines becomes a strategy to claim the domestic space and personal interests that are denied to traditional housewives.

Chapter Four is devoted to a content analysis. I argued in chapter two and three that women's magazines, as an exclusively women's genre, can be employed by women readers to reclaim their space and power, especially in the domestic context. But it does not imply that the content of the women's magazines is equally subversive. Indeed, in Hong Kong context, the content of glossy women's magazines is overdetermined by its advertising nature. These magazines, with the main revenue coming from advertisements rather than magazine sales, could be called 'women's advertising magazines'. The content is targeted primarily at up-market advertisers (rather than the readers), thus magazines produce the ideal reader as the middle class career women with immense consumption desire and power. Throughout the content shows a consistent emphasis and obsession with the liberal, middle class, consumerist, individualistic, pro-sex orientation. This can best be exemplified by the notion of sexual liberation which is actually collapses into sexual commodification and the (middle) classist attitude to casual sex. The glossy women's magazines, especially Cosmo, Elegance and Elle, do offer pleasure of the transgressive and the forbidden, from casual sex, extramarital relationship, polygamy to bisexuality, yet such transgressiveness is contained within the

dominant discourse of femininity, heterosexism and marriage.

Chapter Five concludes the discussion. Given the multiple and contradictory nature of women's magazines and gender identities, it is crucial to go beyond the either-or dichotomy which is predicated on a series of logocentric binarisms, like public vs private, masculine vs feminine, mind vs body, first world vs third world. The question is not an either-or issue for women's magazines: either patriarchal oppression or feminist liberation, but a 'both-and' strategy of exploring the patriarchal-heterosexist constructs and the space for subversion. Women's magazines are a complex site of ideological power struggle where gender relations are produced, reproduced and contested. They provide room for contestation, and do not necessarily involve any supposition of fixed identity or single image. They furnish resistances and subversions by means of postulating multiple and even contradictory images of women. As argued throughout the thesis, women's magazines do contain crucial spaces where the category of femininity is constantly produced and contested.

Women's magazines are never simply symptomatic of either patriarchal oppression or feminist liberation, they lie somewhere in between. The point is to enhance feminist intervention into the territory of women's magazines so as to empower women readers. It requires not just a critique of the explicit heterosexist categories in women's magazines, but also a positive exploration of the space and contradictions in women's magazines that empower their readers. It is hoped that this research may constitute a positive starting point for this crucial feminist field.

2. Research Methodology

Glossy women's magazines are those magazines that are published for women of the upper and middle classes. Many of them have an international circulation, like Elle, Cosmopolitan and Marie Claire. The scale of the audience, 'women', and the breadth of their subject matter, 'femininity', differentiates the glossy women's magazines from other kinds of periodicals in the media market. Women's magazines are simultaneously specialist and generalist: specialist in that they are for a single sex, women, and generalist to the extent that their content appeals to a wide spectrum of feminine concerns. There are not many comparable men's magazines. Men's magazines are aimed at particular groups of males and cater for specific aspects of a man's life ---his business, hobby or sports interests --- not the totality of his masculinity, nor his maleness as such.

Glossy women's magazines can be distinguished from the popular women's magazines in the following ways.

(a) Glossy women's magazines published in Hong Kong cost from about \$25-30 (around 2 to 2.5 pounds). They appear as monthly magazines. Popular women's magazines cost far less, around \$10 (around 85 pence) and most of them are published weekly.

(b) Glossy women's magazines excel in their layout, photography, graphic and art-design. They are normally in A4 format size. The superior paper quality is good enough to provide great clarity for professional photographic effects. Popular women's magazines are usually either A5 or A3 format size, as a kind of affiliation to the newspaper supplement format. The paper quality is poorer, mostly of newspaper grade.

(c) Popular women's magazines are parasitic upon other mass-media like film, Television, pop-songs, providing their readers with the news and information about the weeks happenings and entertainments in the media. Glossy women's magazines tend to be self-contained, maintaining a world-view and lifestyle of their own, with great emphasis on taste and refinement.

(d) As glossy women's magazines are published to cater for the interests and needs of the upper and middle class, the content, visual or verbal, as well as the advertisements, differ greatly from the popular women's magazines.

(e) Glossy women's magazines have a strong 'Westernized' sentiment and presentation, from cover models, fashion series, interviews, main features to other content features such as horoscopes. It is a kind of 'cultural colonialization' which is not atypical for 'neo-colonial' societies where 'westernization' equates 'globalization' and becomes the sign of 'taste' and 'high class'. In contrast, popular women's magazines are mainly targeted at lower classes, or more specifically, the common reader.

The present research will employ a qualitative approach to study glossy women's magazines in Hong Kong. This will involve not only the verbal content, but also a visual analysis because a very substantial part of glossy women's magazines are dedicated to visual photographic content. Qualitative analysis is concerned less with content per se, but more with the context of the social construction of femininity. Themes such as goals, values, beliefs and myths are not readily quantifiable, but require a more interpretative and qualitative approach. I will not count column inches devoted to, say, 'sexuality', 'housewife roles' or 'paid job', but will attempt to tease out the social meaning of these gender-loaded categories.

It is assumed that glossy women's magazines assert their reference to a 'reality', or they construct a reality for their readers. It is thus necessary to understand 'what' and 'how' the 'reality' is being constructed. Women's magazines are treated not as 'closed' texts, but are located in the specific social and cultural conditions of Hong Kong. In other words, women's magazines are treated as cultural and social texts, located in the context of society as a whole and the situation of women in particular. Specifically, the discourse of femininity will be located in three broader contexts:

a. gender politics of compulsory heterosexuality, male dominance, monogamous structure, beauty-industry, sexual politics, public-private split and the whole matrix of socio-political relations constituting and interacting with gender relations.

b. late capitalism in which consumerism, advertising, political economy and the social production of desire and taste will be examined with reference to the images of career-women in the magazines.

c. postmodern debates of subjectivity, pleasure and resistance where readers' reception and interpretation of the text (women's magazines) are given priority.

The success of glossy women's magazines is partly attributable to the professional packaging of the magazines. Visual analysis is particularly relevant because all too often, studies of women's magazines are confined merely to the verbal content to the neglect of the visual. The

analysis of photographs ranges from advertisements, fashion photography to series photography, focusing on the relations between different elements of photography, colour, framing, camera-angle, lighting, background, motifs, series, verbal-visual interaction, etc. This is, however, set in a social context, in which the elements are not just formalistically assessed, but rather are acknowledged to manifest concrete social relations, bearing social content and values.

In addition to verbal and visual qualitative analysis, interviews with the editors are also carried out to discern the nature of the editors' policy in the construction of women's images and how these message are transmitted from the sender to the receiver. Gaps, conflicts, negotiations within the editorial and between editors and readers will be studied. Questions are constructed under the following areas :

(a) editorial policy

- the aim of the magazine
- the age range, status and education of the target readers.

(b) marketing strategy: advertising, market trends and women's image

- how readers' perceptions of women's magazines are perceived and positioned
- the relationship with foreign editions as reflected in the content and ideology imported.

(c) role of the magazine in constructing the ideologies of femininity

- how the image of career-women are implied and constructed
- how social changes affect gender relations and women's image.

There is another dimension to the interviews --- the readers' readings.² Reading, here, is understood as the interpretation of certain codes and messages in a specific context. Social meaning is thus derived from a 'text' only with reference to the life-situation' of the concrete readers. Questions are constructed in the following areas:

(a) why the readers read women's magazines and what they read/omit

(b) what kind of 'pleasure' is acquired in the process of reading

(c) the gap between the readers' perception and that of the editors'

(d) how the perceived images of women interact with readers' lives

(e) what are the meanings and functions of women's magazines for the readers.

On top of a qualitative approach, quantitative analysis is also used to examine the verbal and visual proportion, the number of advertisements and differential distribution of content. It is important to compare and contrast quantitatively the contents of the magazines. Glossy women's magazines are foremostly a commodity, a profiteering media. Thus, the proportion of advertisement vs. content, the proportion of verbal vs. visual content is the basic information required. Such 'number crunching' is not an end in itself, but provides significant

²Interviews were conducted in the summer of 1992 when I went back to Hong Kong for the fieldwork. Twelve women readers were interviewed. This entailed at least one and a half hour discussion of their reception, understanding and interpretation of these women's magazines.

basis, clues, and references for the qualitative interpretation. The quantitative analysis consists of two sections:

- (a) the nature of advertising in terms of its types, nature, volumes and seasonal variations;
- (b) the relationship between verbal and visual content so as to detect the positioning and emphasis of different women's magazines.

In studying women's magazines in Hong Kong, it is hoped that contemporary 'western' feminist and social theories can be put in a critical hermeneutical circle in the Hong Kong context. Given the rapid rise of women's (economic) power and the recent boom of glossy women's magazines in Hong Kong, it is believed that the continual absence of rigorous study of the issue will only perpetuate the myth of career women and present gender inequalities. It is hoped that this research will be a meaningful beginning.

Chapter One: Theoretical Background, Empirical Context and Methodology

Introduction

There is no longer one image of women. Unlike in the past, where women were only to play the important role of caretaker at home, women nowadays are no longer restricted to the most menial nor the least-paid jobs: the job market has certainly opened up to a large extent. Women in Hong Kong today enjoy a very varied profile, ranging from traditional housewives, manual labourers, office support staff to high executives. That is not to say that sexual equality has been attained, but one can observe everywhere that the state of women is on the march towards socio-economic improvement. The phenomena of different mass media targeted at different social needs and demands for the conciliation of genders and social classes precisely captures the complexities of the society. Where formerly women were confined within 'family, church and kitchen', women nowadays have entered the world labour market, not just as manual labourers, but also as high executives and professionals. This is especially true for women educated in the late seventies up till now.³ They have enjoyed the benefits of the opening up of post-secondary education to both genders and all social classes. The end result can be observed in different aspects:

(a) Between 1961 and 1986, the proportion of women in the labour force (LFPR) increased from 36.8% (1961) to 42.8% (1971) and then to 51.2% (1986). The absolute increase in women working between 1961 and 1981 was from 324,000 to 843,000, an increase of 260%. The actual number of women workers broke the one million point by 1988 at 1,014,500, when the entire population at that time was only 5.4 million.⁴

(b) Women have become decision-makers beyond the buying of household goods and basic consumption goods. They have become independent decision-makers in all modes of consumption. Characteristic of this are the recent frequent appearances of car advertisements in women's magazines, promoting models of cars catering for women.⁵ When formerly men in the family were the ones who made such and other similar decisions, now women can decide for themselves.

(c) The rise in the purchasing power of women, especially single, young executive women who are more attractive to producers of quality and luxurious goods. A recent research shows an increase of 61% of purchasing power of career women aged 25-45 for the past ten years.⁶

³See **Appendix Two** for the rise of career-women and professional women both in actual numbers and percentage for the past twenty years in Hong Kong.

⁴Cho, 1987: 225.

⁵While 'car' advertisements have all along been identified as male and appeared only in 'male' magazines and newspapers, they have entered women's magazines for the past five years. Elle, Elegance, Cosmopolitan and In all possessed a considerable and steady amount of car advertisements. See **Appendix One: Quantitative analysis** for details.

⁶25, July, 1993. South China Morning Post.

(d) Compulsory and free education for all⁷, increased opportunities for women entering managerial class. Social acceptance for women's independent lives, birth control and late marriages all contribute to the relatively greater freedom and higher purchasing power of women.⁸ These new socio-economic changes help to cultivate the development of a modern middle class of professional women for whom 'independence' and 'autonomy' is the most significant feature.

It is the context of the rise of women's economic power (not feminist power) that generates and constitutes the unique nourishment of glossy women's magazines in contemporary Hong Kong. In the past five years, glossy women's magazines have been a novelty of great success, reflecting the rise of a new social class with specific social orientations, modes of consumption and constructs of perception. Women's magazines now form a separate industry controlled by powerful multi-million corporations, becoming one of the most crucial but least studied social institutions in Hong Kong.

The phenomenon of a magazine boom can be explained by the rise of a new middle class in Hong Kong.⁹ Since the 80's, the Hong Kong economy has been shifting from a production-oriented economy to an economy based on service and finance. The result is the swelling of the middle class in the service and financial industries. This new class demands a different lifestyle, and forms of entertainment and tastes that are suited to its status and image. However, unlike European countries in which there is a dominant middle class, the new middle class in Hong Kong is a new development associated with the dramatic growth of the Hong Kong economy. Lacking historical heritage and cultural predecessors, this new class has to look for a new image and identity for itself. The great influx of foreign quality magazines into Hong Kong after 1984 is indicative of this desire for a Western oriented form of new lifestyle and image.

The rise of career women, their economic independence, together with the general involvement of women in the labour market all conspire to turn these career-women into a

⁷In 1971, Hong Kong Government initiated the new policy of nine year free and compulsory education for all children, starting from age six irrespective of sex, race, class and ethnicity.

⁸A recent survey revealed that 98% of University women students in Hong Kong prefer to work after marriage, 91% accept permanently being single without shame and regret, and 75% prefer not to be mothers in the future. Although they are 'well-educated' university students, supposedly more liberal, open-minded and radical than the general public, such remarkable figures still highlight the sharp changes of attitude and orientation of women (university students) in contemporary Hong Kong. See 22, Oct, 1992. South China Morning Post.

⁹The average monthly salary of worker in Hong Kong has been on a rapid increase in the 80's, rising from \$2,350 (around 190 pounds) in 1980, to \$7,490 (around 650 pounds) in 1990, to 9,800 (around 890 pounds) in 1993. In particular, while in 1980, only 4.9% of the population attain a monthly salary over \$15,000, by 1990, the figure is increased eight-fold to 39.3%. The rise of this new middle-class, added with the low-tax policy of Hong Kong Government (maximum income tax is merely 15%) have lured them to become attractive targets for advertisers and commodity capitalism.

significant 'target' for advertisers and producers. In this sense, glossy women's magazines become the 'by-products' of the new middle-class career women.

Glossy women's magazines, being parasitic on advertising and consumerism, become the 'natural' market response to the rise of the new consumers. In fact, with Television ratings in the late 70's of three million viewers every night, magazines were considered to be sentenced to death. Even in the early 1980's, the more popular magazines in Hong Kong were either those of a journalistic nature, or those pertaining to mass entertainment; the few glossy women's magazines were neither popular nor marketable. In Hong Kong, there has been a crucial influx of glossy women's magazines since 1984. The rise of a new culture of glossy women's magazines began with the advent of a Hong Kong Chinese edition of Penthouse in 85 and 'Playboy in 86. Elle, a French licensed fashion magazine (Chinese edition) for women, was introduced to Hong Kong at the same time.

A more immediate impetus for initiating research on glossy women's magazines was the publishing of In, in July 1989 --- a feminist-oriented glossy magazine for women. This first 'feminist' magazine in Hong Kong indicates that the vast market of women's magazines can even absorb off-beat radical trends. Unfortunately, the In experiment ended after only two years. However, the market was so optimistic that by January 92 three new quality women magazines appeared: Women at Work (from the origin U. S. edition), Marie Claire (French fashion magazine with feminist orientations as a continuation of In), and Mary (a locally produced quality women's magazine).

The economically independent and professional woman, with her ability to make personal decisions regarding consumption, her eagerness for self-gratification, is an individual in a civil society that is no longer dominated by families, men and hierarchies. It is only a recent phenomenon that women in Hong Kong have attained this position. At the same time, all this may seem like a two-edged sword because women, like men, are involved in the whole social process of commercialization and rationalization. Although only a fraction of all women nowadays can attain a high level of acknowledged achievement or can attain social positions equal to men, and absolute equality is not yet in view, the transition is not to be undervalued. How this transition develops and how the change of values and belief systems are reflected can be seen also through the quality women's magazines. It is this social process and its political implications for career-women and feminism in Hong Kong that interests the researcher.

1. Rise of women's magazines

The selection of past defunct magazines was based on their availability in the Hong Kong Collection in the Hong Kong University Library, which is deemed a prime collector of back issues of magazines in Hong Kong. Apart from this collection, there was no central or public collection of the back issues of the women's magazines in the 50's, 60's and 70's. Even in the Hong Kong Collection, there was no central record of the gross sales or circulation figures of periodical and magazine publications. It is hard for us to know the actual numbers of readers in the 60's and 70's, nor can we know the actual perception of the readers. What I found in the Hong Kong Collection was only a partial and scattered portion of the magazines in this period. These ranged from the Lady Journal in 1959, Fair Maid Pictorial by Chinese Publishing Centre in 1965, The Young Pictorial in 1970, Femina by Centre Publication in

1973, 'Domina' by Domina Publications in 1977. Past editors were untraceable, so interviews had to be carried out with editors who have had long term experience in the field and preferably were still working in women's magazines.

Lady Journal is the first magazine that addresses women as its exclusive readers. While 'women's issues' were only addressed in the column of 'women's page' in the mainstream newspaper and some other journals, it was only with the birth of Lady Journal in 1959, that women readers were positioned as exclusive targets for a magazine. Lady Journal also marks another generic transformation: from the irregular leaflets and single-essay periodicals to a regular bi-weekly journal.

The 60's saw the flourishing of different types of magazine publishers. The Fair Maid magazine found in the 60's was the sole product of The Chinese Publishing Centre, owned by a Nationalist affiliated publisher and editor Chan Tai-Loi and a renowned photographer Chin. Under them were the manager and the editorial team. Because of the small number of staff, division of labour was almost absent. With the death of Fair Maid in 1972, new types of magazines arose, which were marked by more clearly defined and hierarchized organizational structures. There was a robust growth of specifically marketed magazines. The birth of Style (1968 by Thomson Press), Domina (1973 by Domina Publications) and Femina (1974 by Centre Publication Ltd) and Elegance (1977 by Zie Yonder himself) gave the women's magazines a clear cut definition. For example, the emergence of Women and Family in 1975 identified the needs of 'housewives' as a social class which formed a crucial readership population of women's magazines.

Elegance stood out as being owned by a male publisher who was the sole staff in the unnamed 'press'. Zie Yonder was the proprietor, publisher, editor, artist, photographer, manager all in one. His entire control over the magazine gave him a free hand to experiment with issues, from feminism to discussions of Marxism, ecology, homosexuality and the human rights movement. As he remarked:

'Before 1980's, women's magazines were largely managed in very simple forms of division of labour. Because of the small market and the lack of financial support, each magazine is usually produced only by 2-3 full time staff, including the chief-editor and another editor, both of them may also share the actual job of a reporter, artist, photographer or marketing manager. Though they may have several student volunteer helpers assisting the editors, this kind of "personal" scale of production is typical of the 60's and 70's.'¹⁰

2. Growing impact of advertising

In the 60's, advertisements were confined to the covers or the pages at the beginning and the end of the magazines. Advertisements inside the pages were regarded as a commercial trick that would distract readers' attention. As a reader remarked in the 'letters to the editor' in Feb 1966 on the attraction of Lady Journal, 'Lady Journal is very rich and substantial; does not

¹⁰Interview with Zie Yonder in 25, July 1992 in Hong Kong.

have advertisements in between the articles; I can concentrate on the content without being distracted.' In the 60's and 70's, magazines in general could still survive because of the sales of each issue. By 1978, Domina and Femina began to send free copies to 2,000 saloons and hairdressers in Hong Kong. The period saw a new parasitic relationship between magazines and beauty parlours and hair dressing saloons. There was a sudden increase in the advertisements, along with articles introducing the saloons, beauty parlours and hairdressers.

The emergence of Style in 1968 hallmarked the rise of glossy women's magazines: glossy front cover, fine paper quality, Western front cover model, trendy fashion series, beauty and cosmetics commodities, gossip column about the (local and Western) celebrity scene, together with elegantly packaged advertisements for 'high-brow' (mostly Western) commodities. It is the western outlook and representation of these magazines that constitutes glamour for their readers.

Coupled with the economic conditions in Hong Kong at the time, the 1980's proved to be the critical years for women's magazines. Maturing from industrial development in the 70's, the 80's witnessed the expansion of a service tertiary industry.¹¹ The Joint Stock Exchange, a merger of existing companies, started in 1985. The continually flourishing economy gave impetus to the development of advertising, which provided revenue for existing magazine companies. Expansion of these magazine companies resulted in further streamlining of organizational structure and a much clearer division of labour. The 1980's was thus a momentous period, both for Hong Kong's economy and for the women's magazine's market.

By 1980's, visual images were given top priority, reflecting a new mode of reading in the contemporary postmodern world.¹² Trendy visual icons and eye-catching slogans were associated with the growing importance of semiotics and textual analysis in analyzing visual representations. The emergence of advertising agencies was a new factor in advertising: the agency acts as a middle person, a medium between the product and the magazine. At the same time, global advertising, which developed by the early 80's, paved the way for the increase of the exposure to Western imagery in women's magazines. The advertising corporations extended their sales not just territory-wise, but regionally and internationally. The need to cater for not just one but many markets precipitated the 'international look' of these advertisements. The local cultural approach was sacrificed at the expense of a unifying and universal aesthetics. The abundance of advertising makes the magazines resemble buying guides.

There is a common trend among contemporary women's magazines to have their visuals increased over the years. The magazine in the 50's (Lady Journal) was set mainly in a verbal literary format, except for small photos of Chinese women. For example, the first issue of

¹¹The economy managed a remarkable growth for the past thirty years with the annual average GDP increase of 9.9% from 1961 to 1981. Even given the world economic recession since the late 80's, Hong Kong economy still attained 5% GDP annual growth from 1986 to 1991.

¹²See Baudrillard (1983) for a post-modernist postulation of the overwhelming simulation of media images, especially visual images, in the contemporary world.

Lady Journal did not have even a single full page of visual representation. There were only some photos accompanying the verbal content. Even the two last pages of advertisements were verbally presented.

The 60's witnessed a huge influx of photos of media celebrities. Having its debut in 1964, one of the remarkable features in the Fair Maid was the introduction of black and white photos, mainly about local fashion shows. Fashion shows at that time were just selling strategies of individual department stores which organized them. The early fashion was locally made clothing modelled on foreign designs. Another notable feature of the magazines in the 60's was the presence of 'do it yourself' sewing guides, with designs simpler and less fashionable than that with the fashion pages depicted. While it is the first sign of fashion shown in department stores, women were generally encouraged to make their own clothes, with sewing guides included in the magazines. Self made dresses were still very much encouraged, rather unlike the dominant inclinations for ready-made ones these days. There were also fashion photos provided by the department stores, but some were done by the magazines themselves. The image of models varied as a result, from professional figures to unqualified ones. Considering the number of starlets introduced in each issue, Fair Maid could be referred to as a 'pictorial'.

The 70's saw the rise of early advertisements in colour, with the presentation of the entire magazine becoming glossy. Photos of media celebrities employed a common filming technique: placing a strong light in the background, so that a halo of light surrounded the starlet. Nevertheless, the text and other small advertisements still dominate the magazines.

Artwork and photography improved over the years. In the 80's there was a growing percentage of visuals in the text, of about 50% in recent years.¹³ The emphasis on visuals and images rather than lengthy literary text indicates the growing importance of advertisements and visual representations brought about by television and film since the 70's. The franchised magazines were in a better position as they benefited from the supply of foreign fashion photos. Though the professional quality and standards of photography and artistic layout improved over the years, the quality was still generally substandard compared to overseas photography. This resulted in the growing and long term reliance on foreign photography especially in the 80's with the influx of franchised magazines which finally resulted in a change of the social cultural aesthetics of the local community. This new set of western aesthetics brought with them also the wider western values on femininity, beauty, and success.

3. Readership of women's magazines in the 60's and 70's

The age and class group of targeted readers shifted throughout the years. In terms of marketing and readership, women's magazines in the 60's had very low levels of specialization. Readers were mainly lower class and working class women. The younger working class audience were targeted in the 60's, when they were the first batch to work in

¹³See **Appendix One: Quantitative analysis** to appropriate the actual verbal-visual relationship in recent years of women's magazines.

society, to earn a living for the whole family.¹⁴ Lady Journal ran a lot of coverage on working women. Indeed, a popular love story of a woman factory worker, featured in the regular story column in Lady Journal, had lasted for almost two years from Aug 1967 to May 1969. It is a typical love story between the woman factory worker and the young boss (the son of the boss) of the factory who disguises himself as an ordinary worker so as to experience the social reality of the working class people.

Despite its apparently 'conservative' sexual attitude and gender ideology, Lady Journal did recognize the reality of gender oppression. Indeed, it exposed and criticized on different occasions the patriarchal nature of our society, rendering support to women who try to resist and challenge the male-norm. For example, the editorial in 1966, while discussing women's role as housewives, argued that

'in our patriarchal society where women's personal choices are always limited, many bright and intelligent women who do not enjoy the 'male' right to be educated, can only express and develop their talent and potential in the household... and for those 'new women' who try to compete with the male in the society, they may be teased as 'too aggressive' and 'masculine'. This unfair social attitude should be altered. As a 'new woman' in the modern age, we need to reflect upon the predominant patriarchal social values and go beyond the social stereotypes and oppression against women.'

Indeed, the 1960's was the time when romantic and free love was firstly popularized in Hong Kong. With the rise of the factory system, and urbanization, which facilitated the greater freedom of women workers, and with the constant bombardment of 'Westernization' through popular music and movies (ranging from the Beatles, Peter, Paul and Mary to 'Rebel Without A Cause'), women in late 60's began to reflect critically on the traditional role and position of women in patriarchal society.

Although we cannot know the readers' responses at that time, the content added with the 'letters to the editors' apparently imply a considerable popularity of the magazine as a 'vanguard voice' for the women who were still living in a very traditional patriarchal world. The magazine functioned as surrogate 'family', providing an intimate and feminine space which the women readers desperately needed, especially in a social context where femininity was being privatized and trivialized. As a reader expresses the meaning of women's magazine to her in the 'problem page', 'Dear sister Chan, I am a faithful reader of your column... Your advice to other women is always of great help and relevance to me. I am living in a solitary world where you are my most important friend and listener.' (Jan, 1961) Another reader, Chi-ching, openly expressed her appreciation towards the 'feminist' element of the magazine, saying, 'my dear sister Chan... your positive encouragement towards modern women finding her way has deeply moved me. I think modern women should be brave enough to speak our voices.'

Yet, Lady Journal makes no attempt to establish an internally coherent and consistent ideology

¹⁴1960's is an unique post-war period of socio-economic development with large number of women (mostly migrated from China after 1949) involved in the work-force. Even as early as 1961, women workers occupy up to 36.8 % of the total labour force.

on the image of 'femininity'. In Feb 1967, while the editorial advised the readers to work hard in the factory and office to earn money for the family' (p.3), the 'love story' condemns the women who work outside the family at the expense of caring for the children (p.9). Another article in same issue 'Buying and Saving' (p.7), encouraged the new women to consume elegant and pretty dresses, as 'new women' should abandon the traditional, outdated concept of saving for the family at the expense of personal interest'. The magazine celebrated the housewife while it simultaneously provided positive identification with feminine beauty, both glorifying full-time mothering and positively depicting the image of career-women.

Published in the period of drastic social changes where the notion and nature of 'femininity' and 'womanhood' became controversial subjects, Lady Journal wavers between different ideological platforms and perspectives of gender issues. Yet, such multiple and even contradictory postulations of women's identities captured the deep anxieties and desires of women's struggle for independence in the 60's, thus accounting for the great popularity and commercial success of the magazine. Perhaps it is crucial to note that the ideology of 'domesticity' was neither monolithic nor static but deeply contradictory. There were indeed strong tensions, conflicts and inconsistencies between the ideal of the maternal woman whose beauty was inner and spiritual and, on the other hand, the definition of femininity as 'beauty' and attractive (to the heterosexual male). While home is produced as the site of women's primary sphere, women are also supposed to be sexual and beautiful, dressed in clothes that expressed their social status and personal taste.

Educating and popularizing practical information are additional crucial functions of the women magazines in the 60's. One popular feature is the medical column. The 'Medicine common-sense' was a popular regular feature in Lady Journal where Dr Chan (female) answered questions from the readers. In particular, medical issue relating to women, like menstruation, menopause, pregnancy and breast cancer were the most common issues. Given the high cost of medical services in the 60's, these women's magazines become crucial guides to the women who otherwise may have to consult specialists.¹⁵

Only in the late 60's did women's magazines specialize their style and content, by focusing on special groups of women. The 70's saw a flourishing and diversification of the women's magazine market, especially of the low brow magazines.¹⁶ They identified with the television and its personalities, and dealt predominantly with gossip columns. They were also explicit about sex, with lots of interviews and news media celebrities. The fashions depicted were the cheaper Japanese modes. The influx of these low brow women magazines, like Sister Picture pushed the glossy magazines into specializing their target audience further and 'upgrading' their image. More expensive cosmetics, perfumes, accessories were more visible in Domina

¹⁵Apart from Lady Journal, Fair Maid and Style also have columns about popular medical knowledge for the women readers, revealing the general inadequacies of medical services in the 1960's and 70's.

¹⁶The back issues section of Hong Kong Collection revealed that from 1971 to 77, there were at least six low-brow women's magazines that had entered the market, yet three of them, Women Today, Celebrity and 'Sister Sentiment' lasted for less than one year, whereas another three, 'Sister Picture', 'hong Kong Women' and 'City Glamour' lasted for no more than three years.

and Femina. There were the profiles of western designers and celebrities and about western movie stars. Such an emergence of international fashion, beauty and the consumerist lifestyle that appealed to housewives and young executives. Bi-lingualism, as practised by both Domina and Femina, gave the content a cultural look to appeal to the expatriate readers and those aspire loudly to western values.

In the 70's the age group shifted to more mature readers for Femina and Domina. This suggests that the magazine had actually progressed with the original readers in the 60's, as they became more well-off. The 80's witnessed the rise of the 'modern professional executive class' who were identified by their economic independence and well-educated background. While the content incorporated new elements such as investment, finance, office politics, office romance, the tone of language became more assertive and direct, articulating the new interests of these new career women. Yet it is not until the rise of franchised magazines in the mid 80's that 'Westernization' and 'commercialization' of women's magazines takes new shape.

4. Rise of franchised magazines: localization vs globalization

The mid-1980's saw the launching of the first franchised glossy women's magazines, Cosmopolitan, in Hong Kong. 1984 is singled out as a watershed year in local women's magazines as it earmarked the first arrival of franchised magazines. In the decades to come, several others have flocked in and even dominated the entire market of women's magazines, outbidding most local productions¹⁷. The contemporary magazine market consists of franchised magazines such as Cosmopolitan, Elle, Marie Clarie, Eve and Moda. Locally made magazines include In, Elegance and Style. The present franchised market consists of: Cosmo (by Hearst Corporation US, Television EI Corporation [Hong Kong]), Elle (by Hachette Group, France, Hachette Group [Hong Kong]), Marie Clarie (France, Yonder Publication [Hong Kong]), Moda (Italy, Communication Management Ltd,[Hong Kong]), Eve (Communications Management, Hong Kong), Harper's Bazaar (Conde Nast, US, Television EI Corporation [Hong Kong]), Trend (Japanese franchised magazine directly owning the local office). Elegance (Yonder Publication) and Style (Thomas Press) are the two remaining local magazines.

Lured by economies of scale and profit maximization, corporate media management has been a global phenomenon in capitalist economics. For the local party, the acquisition assured sales because of the renowned name of the foreign edition.¹⁸ The right to use fashion photos enriches the visual presentations of the local edition of the magazines. The advantages of media corporation on magazine publication would be economies of scale and specialization. The franchised magazine managed by such a corporation are added to the ability to have

¹⁷Date when the local (chinese) edition of the following foreign magazines first appear: Cosmopolitan (Dec 1984, US); Elle (dec 1987, UK); Marie Claire (Oct 1990, FR); Moda (June 1991, Italy).

¹⁸These giant international corporations like the Hearst Corporation which owns Cosmopolitan and Hachette Group which owns Elle have a well-organized (global) advertising network that ensures a certain amount of advertisements for any new franchised local magazine.

access to more of the visuals of foreign fashion series photography, and translated articles. For the parent corporation, the contract would mean an expansion of their market overseas, which might also boost sales of even the parent edition in the area.

Yet, the franchised relationship is a double-bind: the local magazines face varying controls from parent corporations. Besides the royalties to be paid, the local edition has to sustain the image of the parent. This also entails the problem of globalization over localization. Editors claim that they are encouraged to instil a local character in the edition, but are caught in the obligation to keep up the corporate image, or are drawn to include a high proportion of foreign material because of its superior technical quality. The editors have to search for the magazine's identity amidst control restrictions imposed by both the management and the parent. The common problem confronting franchised magazines is to balance localization and globalization.

The example of Elle could well demonstrate the problems that could result in the franchised co-operation between the parent corporation and the local one. Elle, a French fashion magazine was found by the Hachette press Group which is itself a gigantic multi-faceted media corporation launched here by the local Communication Management LTD. The company itself also published Hong Kong Tailor, Elle and later, Eve. The rift between them came in Jan 1989 when the parent was dissatisfied with the image and content as portrayed in the local edition, which distorted the original 'Elle look'.¹⁹

Despite the advantage of striking a sharp marketing identity, the phenomenon of launching foreign magazines spurred the question of an influx of foreign content not exactly designed for local readers. Localized content is featured mainly in producing local aspects of (Western) high culture, such as up-market fashion and 'profiles', of successful women managing both family and work, and their reasons for success. The underlying theme and constitutive categories of these local (Chinese) features reproduce 'Western' values and definition of 'success' and 'achievement', which primarily means 'public marketability' and 'paid work'. In the area of fashion, the domination of western model and designers labels elicit the significance of 'haute couture', while locally designed fashion is severely under-represented in these magazines. The front covers are overwhelmingly dominated by 'Western' models.²⁰ This is an ethnocentric judgement that has prioritized the Western conception and definition of beauty, look and lifestyle over the local Hong Kong-Chinese one.

With the influx of franchised magazines, similar contents, both verbal and visual, are found

¹⁹As May Lee, the former editor of Elle, told us, 'the parent Elle in France was very dissatisfied with the quality of visual representation, especially in the fashion photo series which were mainly produced in Hong Kong. The verbal-visual ratio of the magazine was also complained to be too unbalanced at the expense of the visual. Thus since 1989 with the take-over of the parent corporation, Elle became a women 'fashion' magazine that emphasizes mainly the visual representations of fashion.

²⁰In the case of Cosmo for example, all the front cover models between 1988 and 1991, except three issues, are all foreign models. The only three examples cover models (in June, 1989, April 1991 and June 1991) were local celebrities who were indeed highly westernized.

in these magazines. These include translated articles, foreign fashion shows, Western models, together with local articles like celebrities profiles, cultural scenes, entertainment information and local writers' columns. For example, the locally made Elegance was previously more distinct with their profiles of Chinese, Taiwan and Hong Kong women. But the recent years saw a change to a more 'international' outlook. As the magazines became 'glossier' and developed a prescriptive approach to 'femininity', this 'glossiness' elicited by the glamour of media celebrities was supplanted by the imagery fostered by the Western label and culture in the form of music, art and fashion design labels. The influx of franchised magazines changed women's magazines concept into a new fantasy and aspiration for women readers: a commodity culture that was essentially 'Western'.

Since the early eighties, English terminologies, brand names, designers, artist, celebrities were dominant in the captions and the texts of women's magazines. Though the idea of translating the whole article was scrapped, they retained the policy of inserting an English title in the text, which contributed less to understanding the article than to the trendy, Western and marketable 'look' of the magazine. The idea was really to instil a sense of 'chic' Westernness. Maria Chan, the editor of Elle justified this by saying that 'the readers objected to the absence of English of the magazines, as it would make the magazine look outmoded. On and off we received letters from the readers expressing their preferences towards the 'modern' outlook, which primarily means Western images.'²¹ Hence bi-lingualism or precisely English language was a sign of 'advancement and high class, education and taste' in terms of culture, class and self identity. Though these western oriented articles may bring alien values to the local context, the names and places are awkward in direct translation from the English and other European languages.

The franchised women's magazines carried values like independence, liberalism and openness which were all labelled as 'Western'. These cultural stereotypes help not only to formulate the 'West' as different, but actually hierarchizes it as a superior 'Otherness'. Westernization, associated with 'modernity' and 'progress', has actually expressed the 'West' as the centre of trade, culture, communication, fashion and entertainment, thus entailing the universal acceptance of the (Western) globalized and standardized content offered in the magazines. Indeed, the imposition of Western values is symptomatic of the predominating cultural trend, namely the homogenisation of culture precipitated by global market capitalism. Imperialism takes on a new catchword: globalisation.

5. Portrayal of femininity

There was a common rule throughout the years: women were supposed to be healthy and beauty conscious --- 'health' and 'beauty' issues were feminized. All these magazines share the fascination of defining the proper meaning and boundaries of 'femininity'. Femininity has always been taken as the common ground for the definition of the readership of women's magazines, although the substantial content of 'femininity' varies from one age to another.

As the concept of fashion grew, women came to be portrayed as slender and tall. Hair styles, like fashions, were modelled after famous Western stars such as Audrey Hepburn or even

²¹Interview with Maria Chan in the 3, Aug 1992 in Hong Kong.

Greta Garbo and Marlene Dietrich. Local starlets began to copy the styles of western models and celebrities.

The arrival of Style in 1968 signified a new phase. Besides health and beauty consciousness, expensive and high quality products were promoted. Femininity was given a new definition, no longer as the caretaker of the family and the good housewife, but as the beauty (plump face, thinly slit eyes, slim body), with extensive knowledge of make-up, cosmetics and a westernized lifestyle. The rise of new executive young women and the rise of the feminist movement promoted the image of strong independent career women, with assertive characters. A new wave of the new ideology entered along with the franchised magazines --that of self-improvement, independence, autonomy and open-mindedness. What was hidden was the desire to consume in order to be a western woman, identifying with the celebrities. Westernization becomes the answer to this self-improvement under the banner of modern women. Womanhood is then expressed through the consumption of western cultural and material commodities.

These new glossy women's magazines, like Domina, Femina and Style had little to say on housekeeping, child care or gardening. Fashion-plates and detailed accounts of the latest style in dress took priority, defining womanhood in terms of leisure and taste rather than their domestic skills. There was a stress on women's appearance, dress and fashion rather than their social personality. Unlike the domestic magazines, they featured femininity as the object of the gaze. It carried a contradiction where the role of reader/woman was defined both as the object of gaze and the subject of pleasure. Despite its liberating role in formulating the notion of 'career-women', bourgeois women were condemned to the triviality and mundanity of domestic household lives entirely alienated and segregated from the public male world.

Style pioneered a new style of non-domestic magazines, hailing the image of 'new woman' as its propaganda slogan. It began to include advertisements inside the main text, in between different articles and columns, instead of merely in front and at the end of the magazine. More importantly, advertisements are linked, through the visual pleasure of semiological representations, more explicitly with the portrayal of femininity. Style also hallmarked a sharp private-public split in the history of women's magazines, where femininity is primarily represented as the personal and the private while the masculine is defined as the public, work and the political. Thus, the female selfhood is confined to the domestic. Real and authentic femininity is supposed to be articulated through personal and intimate language, the language of the domestic. Even if a woman has paid work outside the domestic, it is the domestic, romance and marriage, that defines her selfhood. Yet, domesticity is closely linked with consumption, through the new advertising language on home-making, body-beauty and domestic appliances and home commodities. 'Femininity' is not only constituted by beauty and the domestic, it is something that is meant to be improved, developed and accomplished through consumption. The fact that 'femininity' is both natural but also socially consumed has generated and constructed 'femininity' as a source of anxiety and pleasure.' Women's magazines definitely manipulate the contradictory nature of contemporary femininity and offer themselves as the answers.

In this chapter, I examined the history of local women's magazines since the 1950's. Given the rapid growth of economic and social development, coupled with the rise of advertising and a mass group of young career women with immense consumption power, the mid-80's

witnessed the birth of glossy Westernized women's magazines targeted at middle-class women consumers. How do these magazines portray the images of modern women? How should we read these glossy women's magazines? Are they reproducing patriarchal structure of male dominance, or are they sites of resistances for women's space? In next chapter, I will examine contemporary debates on popular culture, women's pleasure and resistances.

Chapter Two : Popular Pleasure, Women's Magazines and Resistance

For a long time, popular feminine narratives were either dismissed or criticized, especially by feminists, as being patriarchal. As Ann Karpf remarks in 1985, 'Certainly, until recently many socialist and/or feminist women have been closet women's magazines readers, slipping their copy of Cosmopolitan beneath their Guardian and Practical Computing, convinced that they are ideologically incorrect escapism...they merchandise capitalism, and make black women and lesbian invisible.'²² Regarding her feeling towards reading women's magazines, Williamson simply confesses, 'I knew I was being "exploited", but it was a fact that I was attracted'.²³ The attraction is exactly the pleasure and fantasy element of such magazines. If we accuse women's magazines of being trivial and cliché, 'we risk seeing them through male eyes, and ignoring their contradictions'.²⁴ Instead of criticizing them for not being feminist enough, we should ask how do these magazines enrich feminist politics and engage with women's lives directly. This is the strategy of my thesis.

To many feminists, women's magazines epitomize women as a fetishized object of male gaze, as an object for consumption. They depict women as male playthings in layouts that are often interpreted as pornographic.²⁵ Popular culture and specifically women's magazines are thought by many to be worthless. Mainstream feminist media criticism had condemned commercial forms of leisure as 'an expression and instrument of patriarchal ideology'.²⁶

The stereotypical response to women's popular culture is that women use fantasies to eke out their own drab existences. It is an offensive view that denies the pleasure and positive meaning to these women experience in reading. Women's magazines are criticized as blurring the distinction between fantasy and reality. In my sample, women did frequently cross the boundaries between reality and fiction, but it is precisely the shifting positioning and contradictory nature of these magazines that generates the ground of resistance and a reading of reality which differs from the rigid daily lives they lead in the patriarchal world.

Women are not 'just passive products of socialization'.²⁷ Annette Kuhn asks a very important question (and gives an appropriate answer) in the 'Introduction' of The Power of the Image on the representation of women:

'But why spend time and effort analyzing images of a kind often considered questionable, by feminists? Why not try instead to create alternatives to culturally dominant representations?...Politics and knowledge are interdependent: the women's movement is not...faced here with a choice between two mutually exclusive alternatives'.²⁸

²²Karpf, Ann, 1985: 12.

²³Williamson, Judith, 1985: 9.

²⁴Karpf, Ann, 1985: 19.

²⁵See, for example Chinyelu Onwurah, 'Sexist, Racist and Above all Capitalist: How Women's Magazines Create Media Apartheid' in Kath Davies, Julienne Dicky and Teresa Stratford eds., (1987) *Out of Focus: Writings on Women and the Media*. London: Women's Press.

²⁶Wimbush, Erica and Margaret Talbot, 1988: xx.

²⁷Smith, Dorothy, 1988: 39.

²⁸Kuhn, Annette, 1985: 7-8.

1. Postmodern critique of modernist discourses of popular culture

Mass/popular culture has always been interpreted by social theorists as either vulgar kitsch or as ideology imposed by the ruling class on the oppressed group. The most influential theory of mass culture was that of the Frankfurt School, for whom mass culture was condemned because it is an ideological product of the culture industry, lacking progressive political value. Popular culture, governed by the logic of exchange value, is presented as a mass-produced commodity culture targeted at the lowest common denominator.

The Frankfurt School's discourse on mass culture is neither fixed nor monolithic. Habermas, for example, proposed a sophisticated theory of cultural critique of capitalist culture in his two volumes on communicative rationality.²⁹ Marcuse, another crucial member of the Frankfurt School, argues that the liberal consumer societies control the public by indoctrinating them with false needs. 'People recognize themselves in their commodities; they find their soul in their automobile, hi-fi set, split-level home...social control is anchored in the new needs which (the consumer society) has produced'.³⁰ Horkheimer and Adorno argue that the same commodity logic and instrumental rationality manifest in the sphere of production are also noticeable in the sphere of consumption.³¹ For Adorno, the increasing domination of exchange value not only obliterates the original use-value of commodities, it leaves the commodity free to take on a secondary use-value.³² The centrality of the commercial manipulation of images through advertising and mass media indicates a constant re-working of desire through these images. Thus consumer society confronts people with dream-images which speak to desires and an aestheticised reality.³³ Through illusive advertising and mass media in general, capitalists are able to exploit images of romance, desire, beauty, fulfilment and the false happiness promised in car, drink and washing machine advertisements. Cultural commodification in television, radio, magazines and cinema is severely denounced for repetitiveness, uniformity, falseness, vileness and barbaric meaninglessness. It is in such a context that Adorno and Horkheimer proposed a truly transformative art that transcends market relations opposed to commodified bourgeois reality. Ironically, such a dogmatic defence of 'high art' and an elitist contempt for mass culture from the Left coincides with the reactionary glorification of high art from the Right.

It is crucial to contextualize the specific historical situation the Frankfurt School criticizes: Although Adorno and Horkheimer wrote in the 40's during their exile to the United States with specific reference to American culture, the roots can be traced to the 20's and 30's with the failure of proletarian revolution, the totalitarian nature of Stalinism, the rise of Fascism, and more generally, the passivity and malleability of the mass society. These critical theorists are deeply pessimistic about proletarian revolution and the possibility of subverting capitalism.

The Frankfurt School perhaps can be subsumed under the wider platform of 'modernist discourse', which argues that there are crucial difference between the high art of the nineteenth century and the mass-produced art consumed by the mass public today. For

²⁹Jurgen Habermas, 1984.

³⁰Herbert Marcuse, 1964: 120.

³¹See Horkheimer and Adorno, 1972.

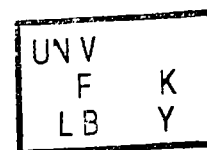
³²Such a secondary use-value has been developed by Baudrillard and referred to as 'sign-value'.

³³ Consult Haug (1987) for a detailed elaboration of Adorno and the leftist view of the nature of secondary use-value.

Horkheimer and Adorno, there are only two kinds of art: mass art, which is manipulated by the (capitalist) producers to manipulate the people and to colonize their leisure time and thus keep them contented with the status quo, and high art, which is the last preserve of the autonomous, critical spirit. Since mass art is entirely dominated by the cultural industry and only high art can resist such domination, socially concerned critics must focus their attention upon the differences between mass and high art. This argument, first advanced by the Marxist theorists and best articulated by Frankfurt School, is especially pernicious because it perpetuates contempt for mass art as a politically progressive attitude.

As suggested by Bob Shields in Lifestyle Shopping, we need to treat consumption as 'an active, committed production of self and of society'.³⁴ Such a view is counter-hegemonic, and as de Certeau suggest, we

'are confronted by an entirely different kind of production, called "consumption"...characterized by its ruses, its fragmentation...its poaching, its clandestine nature, its tireless but quiet activity, in short by its quasi-invisibility, since it shows itself not in its own products, but in an art of using those imposed on it.'³⁵



Indeed, (radical) feminists in the same period share a similar set of assumptions about men and women, whom they perceive as victims of the conspiratorially constructed capitalist power of manipulation. Friedan, one of the first to focus on the significance of consumerism in perpetuating women's oppression, quotes an executive of the hidden-persuasion business in The Feminine Mystique: 'American housewives can be given the sense of identity, purpose, creativity, the self-realization, even the sexual joy they lack --- by the buying of things'.³⁶ In her influential feminist manifesto, 'The Female Eunuch', Germaine Greer expands on Adorno and Horkheimer's identification of degradation of 'love' into 'romance' in mass culture, criticising 'romance' as an extension of women's oppression.³⁷ As argued by Williamson,

'The whole drive of our society is toward displacing as much difference as possible within it while eliminating where at all possible what is different from it: the supreme trick of bourgeois ideology is to produce its opposite out of its own hat...the ideology of difference is not, in fact, different from the ideologies that imprison us all.'³⁸

Both critical theory and radical feminism are based on a distinction between 'true' and 'false' needs, that the desire and choices of the masses are regarded as less authentic and real if they are gratified by material object and escapist television, rather than say political, creative activities in the consciousness raising (women) group.

³⁴Bob Shields, 1992:2.

³⁵de Certeau, 1984: 31.

³⁶Friedan, 1965: 181.

³⁷Greer, Germaine, 1971.

³⁸1986: 100, 106.

The Frankfurt School and mass culture theory have seriously been criticised, along the following lines:

(a) Solipsist: the social analysts, intellectuals or feminist theorists alone are said to see through the genuine social reality of oppression. But from which position can the theorist assert that he/she is free from power, distortion and ideology? From what ground outside the prison of ideology can the intellectual's interpretation be validated? How can anybody measure people's acceptance or rejection of the 'false ideology' and how can 'false ideology' be defined and articulated if it is covered up? Given the pervasiveness of mass media and capitalist ideology, how can one postulate art as 'unpolluted' and 'unmediated' by the language, ideology and media of capitalism?

(b) Mechanical and causative: the postulation of the mass as the passive receiver of pre-set values necessarily presupposes a mechanistic and linear process of socialization and media construction, as if there are no discrepancies between readers and producers, as if there are no re-interpretations and resistances among the readers, as if the readers are just helpless and hopeless victims of total brainwashing, as if the capitalists have no problems in imposing their 'ideology' on the mind of the public. The danger is to treat culture as an objective givenness without asking how signs and images are read, perceived and consumed in the everyday practices of the common-sense world, and who is engaged in the production of these meanings.

(c) Elitist: the Frankfurt School's tendency to treat the culture industries as producing a homogenous mass culture which threatens individuality and creativity has been criticized for its elitism and inability to examine the complex differentiated audience response and reading in the process of consumption.³⁹ In its attempt to defend the working class interest against the exploitation of the ruling class, the Frankfurt School produces the ironical outcome of denying the experiences and interest of the working class, defining it all as 'false ideology'. While denying the pleasure acquired by the consumers in the process of reading/consumption, the Frankfurt School and mass society theory are being pushed to the ridiculous position of arguing that the more the oppressed suffer the better, as only suffering, not pleasure, will provoke radical revolutions. Mass society theory and the Frankfurt School have studied consumerism merely as an agent for oppression and subordination of women. Relatively less attention has been paid to the contradictory way in which the relative status and power of women has paradoxically been enhanced by consumer society.

(d) Monolithic: the notion of a unitary and cohesive ruling class ideology is the presupposed but unclarified foundation of the Frankfurt School and mass culture theory. The mass media is assumed to be monopolized and controlled by this ruling class, transmitting the ruling class ideology downward. Such theory has assumed a unitary, monolithic 'dominant ideology', which serves directly and merely the interest of the 'ruling class', and such dominant ideology can be transmitted freely and smoothly through the mass media. It has postulated an essentialist and naive conception of power where power is understood as some concrete entity imposed from the top to the bottom by a centralized ruling agent.

³⁹Swingwood, 1977; Bennett et al., 1977; Gellner, 1979; Stauth and Turner, 1988.

It is in this light of these deficiencies of the Frankfurt School and mass society theory that the 1980's has witnessed a radical shift of intellectual approach and orientation in the studies of popular culture. The contradictory, multiple and subversive dimensions of consumption and readership are emphasized, becoming the focus of study. Among the forerunners was Ellen Willis who in 1970 wrote a competent defence of consumerism, stressing the rationality and pleasure involved, and criticising authors such as Marcuse and Adorno for their elitism and sexism⁴⁰. At the same time Enzensberger criticized Marcuse's notion of 'false needs' as unverifiable, unfalsifiable, speculative and elitist, prioritizing the theorist's own class and cultural bias at the expense of the public's pleasure.⁴¹

Since the late 70's, it has become a crucial, if not dominant trend to re-valorize and re-articulate popular culture not in terms of omnipotent manipulation of the innocent public. Instead, the contradictory, double-bind and subversive pleasures of youth style, popular television/cinema, romantic fiction, advertising, shopping and women magazines are explored. The pleasures derived in consuming these popular cultural commodities are explored by this new approach in popular cultural studies --- women's desire for consumption in Steedman's study, wearing nylon stockings as a form of protest in Carter's research, young people watching television advertisement in Nava's study, and Mort and McRobbie's emphasis of the active creation of street style in youth culture.⁴² For Fiske, Madonna offers her readers a sexual-physical pleasure that has nothing to do with men, a feminine sexuality not defined by patriarchy. By sexualizing the nun and the Virgin Mother, Madonna is effectively challenging the binary opposition of 'virgin vs whore' that has controlled and oppressed women historically. What these texts share in common is the legitimation of the active role of consumers in producing meanings relevant to their life-world.⁴³

Popular culture is no longer treated as ideology imposed from above by the ruling class, but as the complex site of a political struggle generated from below by the people, although in no way free from unequal power relations. Dave Morley's study marks an engagement with the complex ways in which television operates within the family, and with the way it plays a subtle role in managing the internal relations of the household.⁴⁴ His approach reveals the contemporary trend to bring back the reader/viewer into media studies, from the centrality of the text to the recognition that the text does not simply impose its meanings onto its readers.

While historically, media researches did focus on the readers/viewers response, the audiences are usually assumed merely as the aggregates of individuals, with the blatant ignoring of their wider socio-political context through which different readings are produced in the first place.⁴⁵ As argued by Elliott, the intra-individual process of this 'uses and gratification approach' 'can be generalized to aggregates of individuals, but they cannot be converted in any meaningful way into social structure and process'⁴⁶

⁴⁰Willis, Ellen, 1970.

⁴¹Enzensberger, 1970.

⁴²Examples include Hall, 1980, 1981; Hebdige, 1979, 1988; Morley, 1980; McRobbie, 1989; Wilson, 1985; Steedman, 1986; Mort, 1988; Mercer, 1987; Carter, 1984; Radway, 1987; Winship, 1987; Fiske, 1989a, 1989b; Nava, 1992.

⁴³Fiske, 1989.

⁴⁴D. Morley : Family Television : Cultural Power and Domestic Leisure, Comedia, 1986, London.

⁴⁵See, for example, Lundberg and Hulten, 1968; McQuail, Blumer and Brown, 1972; Rosengren and Windahl, 1972; Katz, Gurevitch and Haas, 1973.

⁴⁶Elliott, 1974: 252.

Thus David Morley argues for 'the specificity of communication and signifying practices, not as a wholly autonomous field, but in its complex articulations with questions of class, ideology and power,' thus focusing on the 'structural conditions which generate different cultural and ideological competencies.'⁴⁷ The purpose is to understand how a preferred or dominant reading was established within the encoding process. The context of television watching was identified by David Morley as a lacuna of the Nationwide study as the groups has viewed Nationwide in a 'contrived' setting, their workplace, but not in their domestic viewing context. Morley's Family Television examines the way in which people live their culture and seeks to locate subjects in the socio-historical context.

The present study follows an ethnographic approach of semi-structured, open-ended, tape-recorded interviews lasting for around two hours. As other feminist researchers have stressed, this open approach to interviewing allows the respondents to raise issues and topics that they feel important and relevant to them.⁴⁸ Women readers are encouraged to recount their experiences in a holistic way, thus avoiding the problem encountered by traditional survey methods, i.e., the fragmentation of women's accounts of their experiences.⁴⁹

This research emphasises the importance of attending to the social dimension of reading women's magazines and to the ways in which the dynamics of domestic life informs the practises of reading. The context of reading is not unified but diverse, constituted by different household members and relevant texts. Reading must be contextualized in the specific ways that readers occupy different subject positions in their social relations. Individual readers cannot be regarded merely as bearers of deep structures. Instead, they must be seen as active subjects crossed by a number of different and often contradictory discourses that allow us to 'see the person actively producing meanings from the restricted range of cultural discourse which his or her structural position has allowed them to access to.'⁵⁰

Deploying the concept of ideology as the site of political struggle, Angela McRobbie studied the British magazine for teenage girls Jackie, and concludes that teenage magazines do not merely give 'the girls what they want' but rather 'try to win and shape the consent of readers to a set of particular values'. Even so, Angela McRobbie's textual study of Jackie has been criticized by Martin Barker for assuming the ignorance of readers and their inability to read anything different than that 'imposed' and 'interpreted' by the theorist.⁵¹ This monolithic approach to textual studies repressed the internal tensions and contradictions which disrupt the magazines. The contents of the magazines were 'reproduced' inside the heads of the girls readers, oblivious to the different readings by the readers, the disparities among themselves and between readers and the theorist.

The Frankfurt School and mass-culture theories have seriously been criticized particularly by theorists actively and positively engaged with postmodernism and post-structuralism. Fredric Jameson's essay, 'Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture,' makes a two-pronged attack on

⁴⁷Morley, David, 1979: 20.

⁴⁸See Finch, 1984; Graham, 1984 and Dorthoy, 1992.

⁴⁹For a feminist critique of traditional research methods, see, Stanley and Wise, 1983; Bell and Roberts, 1984.

⁵⁰Morley, David, 1986: 43.

⁵¹M. Barker et al., 'Method for Cultural Studies Students', in Introduction to D. Punter (ed) Contemporary Cultural Studies, London, Longman, 1986.

the Frankfurt School's theory of mass culture. Jameson first argued that high art is not free or immune from capitalistic commodification. Indeed, the modernist effort to avoid the repetitive and standardized nature of mass art has sentenced modernist art to the obsessive pursuit of 'innovation and novelty', and thus act in accordance 'with the ever swifter historicity of consumer society, with its yearly or quarterly style and fashion changes'.⁵² Secondly, mass art does possess negative critical functions that high art is supposed to possess. Even if mass culture is false consciousness, the fact that it is so gratifying to the public indicates that it exposes the dissatisfaction and problems of the reality of people's lives. Mass art, for Jameson, often contains specific criticisms of everyday life, performing 'a transformational work on [real] social and political anxieties and fantasies which must then have some effective presence in the mass cultural text in order subsequently to be 'managed' or 'repressed'.⁵³

Frederick Jameson and Roland Barthes have argued for a relaxing of strict boundaries between the study of high and mass culture, paralleling the new changes and categories in the postmodern age. Barthes' semiotic method expands the notion of text from purely literature to all visual-verbal communication systems, including women's magazines. Building on Saussure's formulation that linguistics was only one part of the science of signs, Roland Barthes treats semiology as part of linguistics because signifieds cannot exist apart from language, as even non-verbal signs have to be expressed through language. The entire sign of ordinary language (signification between signifier and signified) in Saussure becomes merely the signifier in what Barthes termed a second-order sign system. Thus the sign 'red', for example, not only consists of a signifier (sound/image) and signified (the mental concept this signifier produces) as postulated by Saussure, but in Barthes' view, 'red' is merely the signifier in other semiotic chains, producing new signifieds such as passion, love, danger or menstrual blood.

We cannot confine ourselves to the analysis of 'denotation message' (the style or artistic characteristics) but have to extend to the 'connotation message' (the image's analogous relation to the real), to borrow Roland Barthes' famous distinction in semiological studies. In the context of semiology, mass media, advertising and women's magazines not only sell products but create structures of meaning which become our common-sense chain of 'natural' association. When 'sportswear' means youth and energy and when 'Coke' signifies cross-cultural/class/age pleasure, the chain of signification becomes reversed, taking the sign for what it signifies, the thing for the feelings, the commodity for its underlying message. Advertising naturalizes and normalizes the ideological process of signification by linking people's internal feeling/needs to an external object through which it is seen as a logical connection: the unattainable (lost youth and energy) is associated with what can be attained through consumption (of the sportswear).

Zygmunt Bauman has developed an insightful and challenging understanding of changes of the roles of consumption in late-capitalist societies. What ties individuals to society is their consumption activity. While all consumers are free to consume, we are also systematically seduced to consume. Not everyone has the ticket to the club of consumerism. For Bauman,

⁵²Jameson, 'Reification and Utopian in Mass Culture'. *Social Text* 1 (1979) :130-48.

⁵³Ibid.

there exists a world of two groups, 'of the seduced and the repressed, of those free to follow their needs and those forced to comply with the norm'.⁵⁴ Towards the end of Legislators and Interpreters, he developed the crucial distinction between seduced and repressed. The seduced are thoroughly incorporated into consumer culture and their lives are in significant part devoted to the acquisition and display of commodities. The repressed are those who are excluded from the market, lacking adequate social resources to play the social game of consumerist self-identity. Bauman argues that this is the major division in contemporary society. In other words, 'individual needs of personal autonomy, self-definition, authentic life or personal perfection are all translated into the need to possess, and consume, market-offered goods'.⁵⁵

Bauman was not proposing a monolithic monster of consumerism. Despite the capitalist market absorption and de-politicization of individual needs and desire, the consumer can manipulate the market to usurp authority from the state and the market. This is the difference between traditional and the modern forms of domination: For the modern consumer market, 'There is no site from which authoritative pronouncements could be made, and no power resources concentrated and exclusive enough to serve as the levers of a massive proselytising campaign'.⁵⁶ Indeed, it is here that Bauman refuted the traditional notion of ideology, as being monolithic, mechanical and totalizing. The traditional notion of ideology is too closely tied to the reproduction of relations of production, allowing no spaces for pleasure and resistance.

It does not imply that the notion of ideology is redundant, nor do I argue that women's magazines are not ideological. Actually, Marxists' idea of 'ideology' helps us to address the relations between different kinds of power --- discursive, economic and social. However, the notion of 'dominant ideology' --- that ideology is unitary, the ruling class is cohesive and united, the media is monopolized by the ruling class, readers merely passive agents, and that truth and ideology can be clearly detected by theorists --- must be rejected. Ideology has always been adopted within the orthodox Marxist tradition as part of the super-structure that stabilizes and legitimates the economic base. It is distinguished from scientific representation of economic relations, and serves to disguise and to mystify social inequality. It is within such modernist discourse of a hierarchized binarism (ideology vs science, false vs truth, authentic subject vs alienation/oppression) that the 'dominant ideology', well illustrated by the Frankfurt School, is articulated as an all-enveloping and determining force that shapes people's beliefs, values and action, and reproducing the interest of the ruling class.

Discourse is neither seamless nor monolithic: textual and cultural analysis of women's magazine reveals multiple contradictions in the representations of femininity offered within one single issue. Following the neo-Gramscian model which understands ideology not as monolithic culture imposed by the ruling class, but as a site of struggle for discursive power in which different preferred meanings and reading compete for dominant positioning, Stuart Hall argues that what the dominant forces may articulate in a certain pattern is often 'disarticulated' in what he terms 'negotiated' or 'oppositional' readings of texts.⁵⁷ Ideology

⁵⁴Zygmunt Bauman, 1987:169.

⁵⁵Zygmunt Bauman, 1987:189.

⁵⁶Zygmunt Bauman, 1987:167.

⁵⁷See Hall, Stuart: 1980 and 1981.

is a site of struggle for competing definitions of reality. For Hall, the preferred definition of reality by the dominant can never completely anchor the desired signification.

Christine Gledhill suggests that 'negotiation' is a useful tool for feminist textual analysis as it notes the instability of identity of those readings, while acknowledging the political need to attain a minimal extent of consistency and identity.⁵⁸ The notion of 'negotiation' has been employed by recent cultural scholars.⁵⁹ especially in the reconstruction of the relation between media products, ideologies and audiences. It helps to avoid a deterministic view of cultural production, whether economic (the media product reflects and reproduces dominate economic interest) or psychoanalytic (the text constructs spectators through the psycholinguistic mechanisms of the patriarchal unconscious). 'Negotiation' conceives cultural exchange as the intersection of the processes of production and reception, thus actively engaging and bridging the gap between the textual and the social subject. Meaning is neither imposed nor passively imbibed, but arises out of the struggle between competing frames of reference. A range of positions and interpretations may co-exist within any single text, or single social group. Audiences may shift positions as they interact with the text.

The value of 'negotiation' is to allow spaces to the subjectivities, contradictions, identities and pleasures of audiences without losing one's political identity. To adopt a political position is to assume for the moment a consistent and answerable identity. Since identity and subjectivity are always in the continual process of construction and reconstruction, cultural critics should be reminded not to look for any final and achieved model of representation and identity. If meaning is produced in a process of negotiation, it is crucial to detect and explore the flux, discontinuities, digressions rather than any fixed position of reading of the text. It is crucial to explore and open up definitions, identities and alternatives present in the texts.

However, we must not de-politicize the notion of 'negotiation' but stress the unequal power relations and structural constrains. People do not negotiate in a vacuum, nor do they negotiate on an equal basis. An individual woman may have privileged social power, but women as a whole, are still systematically and structurally oppressed, lacking adequate social power to 'negotiate' their spaces and subjectivity. As will be demonstrated in chapter three, while women readers negotiate and reclaim their feminine spaces in reading women's magazines, such negotiation is inscribed within the wider socio-political framework of unequal gender power relations, and that significantly limits women's social capacity to negotiate.

2. Popular Culture, Consumption and popular pleasures

Culture is the constant process of producing meanings from which social identity is generated. As a constant succession of social practices, culture is inherently political, not only in the constitution of hegemonic discourses, but in the distribution of various forms of social power. What is distributed are not finished commodities but the resources of everyday life that have to be completed by consumers in the process of reading/consumption.

Popular texts are not closed or fixed entities but require active constitution by the readers. We

⁵⁸Gledhill, Christine, 1987.

⁵⁹Hall, 1980, Morley, 1980 and Dyer, 1980

can attribute no inherent meanings to fashions and other cultural texts. The meanings of these cultural texts can never be exhausted in the text, as texts are activated and made meaningful and completed only in the process of reading embedded in inter-textual and extra-textual socio-political practises. The audience is both consumers of the commodity and the producers of meanings and pleasures.

Popular culture is contradictory to its core: where its commodities are produced and distributed by the capitalist network of consumption for its own economic interest, its perpetuation is produced only by the active and voluntary participation of the people for their own interest. To be made into popular culture, a commodity cannot merely be produced by the capitalist, it must bear the interest of the people. It is such process of generating and circulating meaning and pleasure in consuming popular culture that is denied and neglected by traditional cultural theorists, especially the Frankfurt School on the left and the mass society theory on the right. As argued by Carter,

'The market is not an institution with rigidly defined (if consistently subverted) hierarchies, structure, orders and conventions...The machine is never intrinsically monstrous; it is both manipulated, controlled and controlling.'⁶⁰

Mass art not only contains contradictions, it also functions in a highly contradictory manner: while appearing to be merely escapist, mass art simultaneously challenges and reaffirms traditional values. There are always utopian moments and elements even within the most commercial commodity. Every form of mass culture has a dimension 'which remains implicitly, and no matter how faintly, negative and critical of the social order from which, as a product and a commodity, it springs'.⁶¹ As Richard Dyer points out in 'Entertainment and Utopia', mass art appears to be escapist because it 'offers the image of 'something better' to escape into, or something we want deeply that our day-to-day lives don't provide'.⁶²

In the context of women's magazines, it cannot merely be a escapist entertainment, nor can it present purely negative images of women, because no women readers would buy them. Women's magazines cannot simply define women negatively as 'non men'. If women are treated as commodities and consuming agents, then it is insufficient to define them negatively. Femininity has to be given specific content so as to induce them to consume. To attract readers, women's magazines must articulate women's image and identity positively. Indeed, the success of women's magazines depends on its capacity to balance the contradictions and promises of reality that invite women readers to enjoy the constructed 'myth', yet constantly bearing in mind that even a 'myth', is located in reality outside textual experiences.

If the cultural commodities do not contain resources from which people have autonomy to make sense of their social realities, then these cultural texts will be rejected. If the cultural text fails to articulate the living experiences and desires of the public, these cultural texts cannot be popular. Popular texts can ensure their popularity only by inviting and generating contradictory desires and pleasures of the consumers. If the readers are not 'cultural dopes'

⁶⁰Carter, 1984: 188-189.

⁶¹Jameson, 1979: 144.

⁶²Dyer : Entertainment and Utopia in Genre: the Musical : A Reader. Edited by Rick Altman. London: RKP, 1981.

but are actively consuming and reading women's magazines, then there must be space in women's magazines that escapes ideological control and allows readers to construct meanings out of their social experiences.

In other words, popular culture is a double movement of containment and proliferation, control and subversion, domination and resistance.⁶³ The cultural commodities that are incorporated into popular culture contain both forces of domination and contradictory resistances. Being a punk is a tactic of resistance, the co-option of this into the cultural industry is a strategy of containment; Madonna subverted the patriarchal myth of monogamy and marriage, but her position as a sign and catalyst for the cultural industry also confirms capitalist domination.

Indeed, the contemporary debate on popular culture, pleasure and resistance has re-orientated and focused on the potential subversiveness of 'consumption'. The deep structure of patriarchal capitalism construes 'earning /production' as typically masculine, 'spending/consumption' as typically feminine. Thus society always addresses women as consumers and men as producers. However, contemporary theorists on consumption have argued that consumption has become a crucial terrain that subverts the rigid public-private, masculine-feminine distinction. Indeed, women's consumption becomes a process of self-empowerment. Bowlby finds evidence that spending a man's money can be a resisting act within the politics of marriage. Women find resources of empowerment both in the limited space and the values prescribed by patriarchy and in their ability to go beyond these limits.⁶⁴

Reading women's magazine is a process of consumption. One buys the magazine and then consume the images and messages of the magazine. The magazine lures the readers into further consumption. Indeed, the survival and profit of women's magazines are predicated upon the capacity to attract further consumption. Women's magazines not only socialize consumption, but also legitimate and reinforce 'shopping' as a focus of women's identity.

In our society where most people do not have control over the condition of production, consumption does offer some means of coping with such frustrations.⁶⁵ As Stedman-Jones revealed in his study of the culture of the London working class, 'evidence about patterns of spending among London poor suggests that a concern to demonstrate self-respect was infinitely more importantly than any forms of saving based upon calculations of utility. When money was available which did not have to be spent on necessities, it was used to purchase articles for display rather than articles of use.'⁶⁶ This display involves the purchase of specific class-taste commodities that these consumers aspire to. It is pleasurable in so far as it generates a sense of pride in a specific cultural identity and helps to control one's social relations and situation. Consumption can never change or subvert the system of a capitalist-patriarchal economy. Yet subversiveness can be articulated in consumption where the needs

⁶³Such double movement of containment and proliferation, control and subversion is stressed by Fiske in his study of popular culture. See Fiske, 1989, 1990.

⁶⁴Bowlby, Rachel, 1985.

⁶⁵ This point of the control of meaning over consumption has been stressed by Judith Williamson (1986) especially in reference with the sense of impotence, frustrations and powerlessness over the conditions of productions in capitalist societies.

⁶⁶Stedman-Jones, 1982: 101.

of the consumers are both sharpened and denied by the economic system that makes them.⁶⁷

3. Male Gaze and Female Pleasure

Recent theories about the representation of women have drawn heavily on Lacan's psychoanalysis which postulates that, given the phallogentricity of psychic/linguistic structures, women can only occupy the object/other position in social discourse. The power of male dominance, as Luce Irigaray argues, comes from a Western culture that is dominated by the 'visual'.⁶⁸ Of all senses, vision provides the most powerful separation between subject and object. 'Looking' is always the domain of domination and mastery: the looker is left uncontaminated by its object. The look/gaze, like the phallus, is organized and structured as a hierarchized controlled and singularized centre of visual viewpoint. Laura Mulvey argues, in her classic article, Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema, that the visual pleasures of Hollywood cinema are based on fetishistic forms of looking.⁶⁹

For Mulvey, there are two types of visual pleasure offered in Hollywood films. Mulvey argues that the visual in narrative film is built around two contradictory processes: first, objectification of the image which depends upon direct scopophilic contact with the female form displayed for the spectator's enjoyment. This form of pleasure requires the separation of the erotic identity of the subject from the object on the screen, a voyeuristic pleasure. The second form of pleasure is identification with the image developed through narcissism and the constitution of the ego. It offers the spectator pleasurable identification with the male protagonist and through him the power to possess the female character displayed as sexual object. Both processes are exercised by the spectator's identification with the male hero and the objectification of the female. Women as erotic spectacle brings both pleasure and pain. The anxiety induced by seeing the image of woman, supposedly reminds the male spectator of the threat of castration and is therefore displaced by the fetishisation of the image. But the possibility of the male as erotic object doesn't really exist, as she makes no differentiation between identification, and object choice, in which sexual aims may be directed towards the male figure. Thus feminists like Laura Mulvey argue that conventional representational structures make it impossible for the female spectator not to position herself as the object (rather than subject) of desire. She either places herself as passive recipient of male desire, or as watching a woman who is a passive recipient of male desire.

Fetishism, Freud first pointed out, involves displacing the sight of woman's imaginary castration onto a variety of objects --- shoes, belts, knickers and so on --- which serve as signs for the lost penis but have no 'direct' connection with it. For the fetishist, the sign itself becomes the source of fantasy, and in every case the sign is the signifier of the phallus. It is man's narcissistic fear of losing his own phallus, his most precious possession, which causes shock at the sight of the female genitals and the subsequent fetishistic attempt to disguise or divert attention from them. Women may seem to be the subjects of an endless parade of pornographic fantasies, but fundamentally most male fantasy is a close-up narcissistic

⁶⁷ Williamson, 1986.

⁶⁸ Whitford, Margaret, 1991.

⁶⁹ Mulvey, Laura, 1989: 14-29.

dialogue.⁷⁰ Women are turned into objects of display, to be looked at and gazed at by men. In such sense, women do not exist at all.⁷¹ The scenario has nothing to do with woman, but man. The true exhibit is always the phallus. Women are simply the screen onto which men project their narcissistic fantasies. The play on sexual difference is ultimately co-opted by the ideology of sexism which eroticized genital differences in the first place. Despite the homoerotic imagery of these cultural representations, it is still predicated on a heterosexist discourse where homo-erotic desire is expressed and repressed, produced and destroyed.

As suggested by John Berger, women and men have an unequal power in looking.⁷² He characterized men as having a privileged gaze, able to look actively and critically without their look being returned with equal scrutiny by women. "Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only the relations of men to women, but the relation of women to themselves."⁷³ Looking, in western culture is understood as a form of power: the scientist is masculine, the nature he observes, feminine. The visual organizing principle in oil painting, magazine advertising and motion pictures resides in the male gaze. Woman is object, man is subject. Objectification is inescapable for women. Psychoanalysts employ the concepts of voyeurism and fetishism to account for the gendered construction of subjectivity through the 'gaze', in which the erotic element of the gaze is emphasised.⁷⁴ Women learn to think of themselves as objects of the 'gaze' and imaginatively take up the masculine position in order to look at themselves as men might look at them.

Such a theory of the male gaze, much developed in film theory, can be applied to women's magazines where the 'female body' becomes the object of gaze/desire. However, the meaning of fashion for women cannot be reduced to such simplicity, nor can the pleasures offered to women by their own bodies be adequately explained by the giving of pleasure to the masculine other. As stressed by Fiske, 'the pleasure of the look is not just the pleasure of looking good for the male, but rather of controlling how one looks and therefore of controlling the look of others upon oneself.'⁷⁵ In this respect Catherine King writes: 'While women have been represented as vain because they have been socialized to look at themselves...it is, actually, men who exist in the more narcissistic condition, gazing lovingly either at themselves in visual images, or what they think desirable in their objectification of the subordinate "other"'.⁷⁶ These stances become inextricably bound up in the definitions of male (as active) and female (as passive).⁷⁷ As argued by King, 'Women in visual images made by men, usually connote "to-be-looked-at-ness" just as, in life, they are encouraged to play the role of "being desirable" to the male gaze.'⁷⁸ Thus as Mulvey claims the looking/gaze expresses a phallic activity --- as long as the subject/men's scopophilia (pleasure of looking) is satisfied, phallogocentric domination is secured.

⁷⁰Freud, Sigmund, 1977.

⁷¹ Mulvey, Laura, 1989.

⁷²Berger, John, 1972.

⁷³John Berger, 1973.

⁷⁴Ann Kaplan, 1984.

⁷⁵John Fiske, 1989: 34.

⁷⁶See King, Catherine, 'The politics of representation: a democracy of the gaze' in Bonnew, Frances; Goodman, Lizbeth; Allen, Richard, Janes, Linda and King, Catherine (ed) (1992: 136-7)

⁷⁷See Cole, Susan, 1989.

⁷⁸King Catherine, 'The politics of representation: a democracy of the gaze' in Bonner, Frances; Goodman, Lizbeth; Allen, Richard; Jones, Linda and King, Catherine (ed) (1992: 135).

The problem for Mulvey is her failure to come to terms with female subjectivity. Whereas the masculine is always the subject, of the gaze, the feminine as the object merely structures the masculine look according to its active (voyeuristic) and passive (fetishistic) forms. The category of masculinity and femininity become a presupposed but an unclarified foundation of Mulvey's study. We need to problematize a monolithic model which has pre-determined both male and female as subject and object respectively. The spectator in Mulvey's drama becomes a fixed and coherent one, without room for the contradictory, shifting and multiple conflicts of subjectivity. The spectator is presumed to be an already fully constituted subject and is fixed by the text in a pre-determined gender position.

Two lacunae in Mulvey's argument have subsequently been addressed by Janet Stacey.⁷⁹ The first raises the question of the female figure as an erotic object; the second raises that of the feminine subject in the narrative. As David Rodowick points out: 'her discussion of the female figure is restricted only to its function as masculine object-choice...So where is the place of the feminine subject in this scenario?'⁸⁰ Images are, as Rosalind Coward says, defined by contextuality: images of women, naked or otherwise, are not inherently pornographic, but only becomes so when contextualized by a 'regime of representations' --- ie. a particular set of codes with conventionally accepted meanings --- defining them as such for the viewer.⁸¹

One could use a detailed textual analysis to demonstrate that different gendered spectator positions are produced by the film text, contradicting Laura Mulvey's version of the unified masculine model of spectatorship: 'the film text can be read and enjoyed from different gendered positions. To problematize the monolithic model of Hollywood cinema as an 'anthropomorphic male machine'⁸² would at least provide some space for an account of the feminine subject in the context of women's magazines and the readers. Do women necessarily take up a feminine and men a masculine spectator position? How can we understand the depiction of the female protagonist as the agent and the articulator of desire for another woman in the narrative within existing psychoanalytic theories of sexual difference? The limitations of radical feminist binarism which offers only two significant categories for understanding the complex interplay of gender, sexual aim and object choice, are clearly demonstrated here.

Laura Mulvey's revision in 1989 is important for two reasons: it displaces the notions of the fixity of spectator/reader seer positions produced in the text, and it focuses on the gaps and contradictions within patriarchal signification, thus opening up crucial questions of resistance and diversity. However, Mulvey maintains that fantasies of action 'can only find expression...through the metaphor of masculinity'. In order to identify with active desire, the female spectator must assume an (uncomfortably) masculine position: 'The female spectator's phantasy of masculinization is always to some extent at cross purposes with itself, restless in its transvestite clothes'.⁸³

But can women look from a feminine position? The female gaze does exist, according to

⁷⁹See Stacey, Janet, 'Desperately seeking difference' in *Screen* (ed) (1992).

⁸⁰See Rodowick, David N. (1991:8)

⁸¹See Coward, Rosalind (1986).

⁸²See Stacey, Janet, 'Desperately seeking differences' in *screen* (ed) (1992:225).

⁸³See Mulvey, Laura (1989).

Lorraine Gamman in The Female Gaze: Women As Viewers of Popular Culture. As a mockery of machismo, the female gaze offers spectators the possibility of identifying with the pleasure of activity without the sort of mastery or voyeurism associated with the male gaze in pornography or film. ⁸⁴This is not to say that the women in the representation are not objectified, but this objectification can also be created for the female reader/looker. The female gaze can literally throw itself within the frame and outside it to whoever is clever enough to catch it. In this sense it can be said that the female gaze cohabits the space occupied by men, rather than being entirely expelled from it.

If women could be seen as spectators in a non-male position, then they might have access to the power of looking. Does this mean that women, looking as women, could objectify each other? Are women constructed differently as objects of other women's desire, or do the same conventions of looking and desiring merely get mapped on to representations of lesbianism? But as Lorraine Gammon said, 'Many images and narratives depend for their specific meaning on the interplay between culturally defined 'masculine' and 'feminine' elements, and this interplay can shift the boundaries of the definitions themselves'.⁸⁵

Therefore when female viewers look at other women from this male position, are they really engaging in transvestite heterosexuality? Does this mean that female viewers, put in the male position of looking at females also have a homosexual/lesbian gaze? The question which then arises is that of the pleasure of the woman spectator. While this issue has hardly been addressed, the specifically homosexual pleasures of female spectatorship have been ignored completely.⁸⁶

The question is how to argue for a feminine specificity without falling into the trap of biological essentialism. In trying to postulate a theory of femininity and feminine reading/spectatorship, do we imply that every woman has the same relationship to these images? What are the ground for an universal and general theory of femininity, without resorting to essentialism and purism? How can we account for diversity, contradiction or resistance with this general category of 'feminine spectatorship'?

A totalizing theory of male power and domination has simply paralysed any possibility of resistance: to say that women can only be represented as the object of the male gaze simply denies the category of power to the female. For Mulvey, mainstream cinema is so structured by the male gaze that there is no possibility of feminine representation without fetishism. More fundamentally, the binary opposition of 'authentic feminist discourse' vs 'mainstream cultural representation' has presupposed a naive moral highland for the radical feminists who are said to be free from power and phallogentrism. Such extreme elitism has not only privileged the class and intellectual bias of the theorists, but also denied the entire history and experiences of the majority of women and their pleasures. It severely limits our capacity to engage directly with the mainstream discourse of femininity.

⁸⁴See Gamman, Lorraine, 'Watching the Detectives: The Enigma of the Female Gaze' in Gamman, Lorraine and Marshment, Margaret (ed) (1988).

⁸⁵See Gamman, Lorraine, 'Watching the Detectives: The Enigma of the Female Gaze' in Gamman, Lorraine and Marshment, Margaret (ed) (1988:6).

⁸⁶See Patten, Cindy (1989).

If passivity is women's designated role rather than their choice, it is impossible to see passivity as an uncomplicated pleasure for women. Most women still prefer the sublimated masochism of romance to explicit pornographic material and feel uneasy rather than envious about men's use of pornography. Radical feminists, Laura Mulvey included, still treat women's readers as passive victims of deceptive media, thus failing to tackle the issue of pleasure. Contemporary feminist critics have become increasingly concerned with questions of gendered spectatorship and the pleasures of popular cultures.

Post-Mulvey feminist work in feminist film theory --- drawing on the work of feminist psychoanalysts like Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, Nancy Chodorow and Dorothy Dinnerstein, has made considerable revisions to Mulvey's account of the female spectatorship (for example Modleski, 1982, 1987 and Williams, 1987). Annette Kuhn also reminds us of the dangerous tendency to elide 'female spectatorship', in the text, with a 'female audience' shaped by socio-historical categories such as gender, class, race and other social factors.⁸⁷ Recent works suggest the possibility of a deconstructive reading of mainstream texts. Both Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis were used to analyze textual mechanisms which interpellate the subject in the process of reading.⁸⁸

The insights of psychoanalysis remind us that 'femininity' and masculinity' are neither biological nor fixed, but are highly fragile and fluid, and can only be attained through a lifelong process of struggle, resistance and ambivalence. As argued by Jacqueline Rose,

'What distinguishes psychoanalysis from sociological accounts of gender...is that whereas for the latter, the internalization of norms is assumed roughly to work, the basic premise and indeed starting point of psychoanalysis is that it does not. The unconscious constantly reveals the 'failure' of identity. Because there is no continuity of psychic life, so there is no stability of sexual identity, no position for women (or for men) which is simply achieved...Failure is something endlessly repeated and relived moment by moment throughout our individual histories.'⁸⁹

It is in such a context that Janice Radway and Tania Modleski use psychoanalysis, especially Chodorow, in the study of women's fictions and women. Chodorow is relevant in exposing women's continual, unfulfilled search for the 'mother' even after the oedipal turn to the father and heterosexuality. This helps to explain the twin objects of desire underlying women's magazines, that is, the desire for the nurturance represented by the pre-oedipal mother, and the power/autonomy associated with the oedipal father. Reading women's magazines can be understood as a protest against the fundamental inability of heterosexuality to satisfy the desire of women it engendered in the first place. Patriarchal gender division of labour in the family produces an asymmetrical personality development in men and women that prompts them to reproduce same sexual division of labour.

Chodorow sees 'relational potential' as a crucial distinction between the sexes since 'the main

⁸⁷Kuhn, 1984.

⁸⁸Stuart Hall (1980) remarks that the visual analogies in the work of Freud and Lacan, like the mirror stage, voyeurism, scopophilia and gaze, lend themselves to the application of the relationship between the spectatorship and mass media.

⁸⁹Jacqueline Rose, 1986: 184.

importance of the oedipus complex...is not primarily in the development of gender identity and socially appropriate heterosexual genitality, but in the constitution of different forms of 'relational potential' in people of different genders'.⁹⁰ Girls and boys develop different relational capacities because women mother: it produces girls who have the nurturing and relational qualities required for mothering whilst boys are constructed with firmer ego-boundaries.

The early symbiotic union between mother and daughter is especially intense because the mother tends to experience her daughter as an extension of herself and because the father is rarely present continuously to act as a countering love-object. This leads to a prolonged pre-oedipal state in the girl's development that tends to continue her dependency, ego-boundary confusion and affective ambivalence about her mother, thus reproducing a female self who has tremendous difficulties in recognizing herself as a separate, independent person.

The boy feels the need to suppress his feeling of dependence and merging with '(m)other', in order to differentiate herself from the mother, and later, all other women. In the oedipal period when he must repress his attachment to his mother to avoid the competitive wrath of his father, he further denies his connection with anything womanly and becomes obsessed with a personality structure defined by autonomy and independence.

Given her personality as self-in-relation, and the inability of men to satisfy her need, many women derive pleasure and encouragement from the indulgence of the romantic and independent image portrayed in the women's magazines. While readings of these magazines confirm the inevitability and desirability of the entire institutional structure that gives rise to these needs in the first place, the process of reading also challenge the traditional submissive and passive object role played by women. Thus these magazines both confirm the reader's desire for tender nurturing and legitimizes her pre-oedipal wish to recover the primary love of her initial caretaker, thus confirming her longing to be protected and sexually desired.

It is crucial that the girl develops a capacity for empathy in her primary definition of self, in a way that the boy does not. Feminine identity is thus blended with the experience of attachment; girls grow up with a stronger capacity to identify with others' needs and feelings. While girls maintain their primitive symbiotic relation with members of the same sex, boys experience more difficulties with gender differentiation. For boys to establish masculinity, they have to dis-identify with their 'primordial love' --- 'Mother'; thus 'separation' and 'individualisation' are constitutive and definitive of the masculine identity. Whereas the establishment of 'masculinity' depends on the denial of relational and emotional needs, femininity, and its associated values, are seen by men as threatening their maleness.

For Chodorow, the fact that the woman mothers is a fundamental organisational feature of the sex-gender system. It results in a stronger bond between mother and daughter, than between mother and son. Children tend to have a more abstract and impersonal relationship with their father. Divorced from daily mundane interaction, the father's image remains universal, abstract and idealized, appearing only as authority, without a strong sense of intimacy and closeness. The fact that women mother creates a lesser degree of individualisation in the case of girls,

⁹⁰ Chodorow, 1978: 166.

who consequently develop a more flexible ego boundary, which becomes the psychological precondition for the reproduction and perpetuation of women's subordination to men. It produces women and men who are socially engendered into asymmetrical heterosexual relationships; "it produces men who react to, fear, and act superior to women, and put most of their energies into the nonfamilial work world and do not parent. Finally, it produces women who turn their energies towards nurturing and caring for children --- in turn reproducing the sexual and familial division of labour in which women mother."⁹¹

Chodorow's theorization of gender in terms of parenting practice, rather than in terms of Freud's abstract and universal Oedipal complex, has opened up possibilities for changes in the gender structure. She is highly influential in contemporary feminism. Carol Gilligan's theory of male and the female moral development, is informed by Chodorow's work.

However, her theory is criticized for its essentialism and reductionism, for prioritising mothering in the acquisition of gender identity, at the expense of all other social processes. Parenting experiences become another universal psycho-social structure, shifting emphasis from Oedipal relations to pre-Oedipal relations.

Chodorow argues that psychoanalysis provides the explanation for the reproduction of mothering, how women from generation to generation have taken on the nurturing role, without observable coercion or social pressure. Chodorow uses psychoanalysis to reinforce a sociological explanation for mothering. As she makes the assumption of the subject-object, men-women distinction, she is committed to the liberal ideal of equal rights, and thus neutralizes the socio-political specificity of the sexed body. She focuses on the unequal relation between the sexes, leaving the structure of phallogocentric domination unexplained. She tries to examine how women are induced to mother, but leaves intact the socio-political meaning of motherhood, parenting and childcare. The point is that the socio-political implications of 'fathering' are totally different from those of mothering.

Chodorow makes a wider claim that reproduction of mothering is achieved across all classes and all culture where women are primarily responsible for child-care. Her solution is equal parenting. This is however, a reductive argument which takes no account of the economic and social context within which the 'family' operates. The social structure of work, leisure and child-care have to be fundamentally changed in order to attain a smooth functioning of male parenting.

Despite these problems, Chodorow is insightful in postulating a different relational capacity to the sexes and in accounting for the psycho-social constitution of women, especially their roles as mothers. Both Tania Modleski and Janice Radway adopt Chodorow's theories in the analysis of female popular culture.

Modleski analyses the 'female' genre of soap opera and identifies the key subject position projected as being the ideal mother. She says 'soap operas convince women that their highest goal is to see their families united and happy, while consoling them for their inability to realize this ideal and bring about familial harmony'.⁹²

⁹¹Nancy Chodorow, 1978; Dinnerstein, 1981.

⁹²Modleski, 1982: 92.

In Loving with a Vengeance, Tania Modleski notes the anger and rebellion which the heroine of romantic fiction often expresses in response to the hero's apparent contempt, indifference or even viciousness towards her (1982:40). Whilst the heroine initially believes that the hero behaves this way because men often are contemptuous and vicious towards women, the reader knows that (according to the formula) in truth, the hero has actually fallen in love with the heroine. His bad behaviour disguises his attempts to hide this love, even from himself. Thus the romance suggests that the sexist behaviour of some men is actually a symptom of the (positive) way they really feel about a woman; the bad behaviour of the hero shows the power which the heroine actually has over him. Modleski thus suggests that romance fiction contains elements of a 'revenge fantasy' (1982: 45) where the heroine, who expresses her anger against the hero, must eventually swallow her pride and surrender herself to her love for the hero. In short, the romance formula encapsulates a female protest against male mistreatment of women and a corresponding desire to gain power over men.

Modleski also suggests that the pleasure women (readers) gain in losing themselves in the process of reading usually entails perpetual self-consciousness. Drawing on John Berger's theories, she explains how a woman's self is split: into a self which experiences, and a self which watches her own actions. Women, bombarded by media images of female bodies are painfully and constantly aware of how they appear to others. The heroine (and reader) of the romance can let go of this terrible watchfulness in the experience of 'true' love. 'According to popular romances, it is possible really to be taken care of and to achieve that state of self-transcendence and self-forgetfulness promised by the ideology of love'.⁹³

Along with the desire for a loss of self, romantic fiction can also be seen to embody a quest for self-identity. This is not an entirely contradictory notion since the heroine achieves her sense of self through another. In romantic fiction, to be recognized (loved) by a man is crucial not only for the heroine's happiness but also for her sense of self, of completeness. In a similar process to Lacan's 'Mirror Stage', the heroine sees herself reflected in her lover's eye: He loves me, therefore I am. In a society where men's views are generally taken far more seriously than women's, to be 'seen' and 'desired' by a man may simply validate a woman's existence.

Yet Modleski's notion of a maternal spectator position in relation to popular pleasure presupposes a passive feminine subject. Analyzing from a psychoanalytic perspective, a woman is, in part, a woman, and she is, in fantasy, both child adored by her mother, and her mother desiring her father; both father and mother are her fantasy lovers. A romance hero can then be presented as possessing qualities of both father and mother: he adores the heroine. 'Sexuality in these novels confirms and extends the role of the "feminine" woman and the "masculine" man. The men are powerful, aggressive and independent'.⁹⁴

However, this assumption of passivity on the part of the women readers of romance fiction is challenged in Janice Radway's study, Reading the Romance.⁹⁵ Radway argues that the text is not a fixed object, but has different layers of meaning. Readers are not the passive

⁹³Modleski, 1982: 37.

⁹⁴Assister, Alison (1989: 119)

⁹⁵Radway, Janice, 1984.

recipients of data; rather they actively attribute significance to the words on the page on the basis of previously learned cultural codes. Instead of focusing on the texts, Radway analyses a group of readers' response to them. Many of the answers to her questions confirm the view that women readers produce different readings than that preferred by the text.

Janice Radway's study of female romance readers uses Chodorow's theories of gendered development to explain why the women in her study read romances. She argues that, whilst women are brought up to reproduce and nurture others, in the patriarchal family of western society no-one performs this reproducing and nurturing role for women: 'men are socially and psychologically reproduced by women, but women are reproduced (or not) largely by themselves'. In reading romances, Radway suggests, women are able to lose themselves in books:

'It supplies them with an important emotional release that is proscribed in daily life because the social role with which they identify themselves leaves little room for guiltless, self-interested pursuit of individual pleasure.'⁹⁶

Radway concludes that 'emotional gratification was the one theme common to all of the women's observation about the function of romance reading (1984: 96) 'Thus the romance is concerned not simply with the fact of heterosexual marriage, but with the perhaps more essential issues for women --- how to realize a mature self and how to achieve emotional fulfilment in a culture in which such goals must be achieved in the company of an individual whose principle preoccupation is always elsewhere in the public world' (1984: 139) Janice Radway used Chodorow's theory to argue that women read romance because of 'emotional gratification': women are able to lose themselves in the romance. The basic narrative structure of the romance plots women within a patriarchal script. Initially, the heroine is plucked from an earlier relationship and thrust into the public world, a process reminiscent of the girl's break with her mother. The heroine's search for identity becomes synonymous with the promise and the eventual fulfilment of her relationship with a male other who completes her need and desire to attain a selfhood-in-relation.

Radway also argued that women consume popular romance as an act of resistance to the patriarchal family in which they are positioned as wives and mothers. Indeed, her interview of housewife readers reveals that women readers read popular romances differently than that implied in the text. Cultural production of meaning involves active spectatorship, rather than the passive consumption of textually determined meanings.

4. Radical Feminism⁹⁷, Postmodernism and Women's Magazines

In the study of women's representation in popular culture, radical feminism has long been a crucial force. For radical feminists, the primary division in society is between men and women. All other divisions, like class, race, education, age, nationality, are derivative, secondary and epiphenomenal. 'Women' are treated as a class, and 'women' as a class are

⁹⁶Radway 1984: 95-6.

⁹⁷Radical Feminism is neither monolithic nor fixed. In this thesis, 'Radical Feminism' mainly refers to the feminist theories articulated by Mary Daly, Andrea Dworkon, Adrienne Rich and Katherine Mackinnon.

subject to oppression by men --- this is the most fundamental mark of human history. Sex precedes and generates other social evils like racism and classism. Dworkin simply lists 'those forms of social injustice which derive from the patriarchal model of male dominance' as 'imperialism, colonialism, racism, war, poverty, violence in every form.'⁹⁸ 'The alienation of woman from man --- because it was the first and still is the longest-lasting form of human alienation', says Sheila Collins, 'can be seen as a primordial paradigm from which all other unjust relationships derive'.⁹⁹ Rich in 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence' concludes that 'the power men everywhere wield over women...has become a model for every other form of exploitation and illegitimate control'¹⁰⁰.

Radical feminism conceives patriarchy as a system of total domination, universal in all times and space. Ti-Grace Atkinson writes, 'the oppression of women has not changed significantly over time or place'.¹⁰¹ Catherine Mackinnon even suggests that 'male power produces the world before it distorts',¹⁰² as if there is a single-minded, malicious and comprehensive programme of control by men over women.

Radical feminism argues that it is childrearing and childbearing --- the arena of reproduction -- that lies at the root of women's oppression. Catherine Mackinnon sums up the primacy of 'sexuality' in radical feminism: 'Sexuality is to feminism what work is to Marxism...Heterosexuality is its structure, gender and family its congealed forms, sex roles its qualities generalized to social persona, reproduction its consequence, and control its issue.'¹⁰³ The heterosexist nature of romantic love and marriage is concealed and indeed glorified by the patriarchal mystification of romantic love. As observed by Firestone, 'love, perhaps even more than childbearing, is the pivot of women's oppression today'.¹⁰⁴ The myth of love organized around this heterosexist structure, which is further enhanced by the beauty ideal of femininity, produced a massive devotion, investment and energy both financially and mentally to capturing men.

Despite the radical feminists' contribution to the awakening and sensitizing of women to the pervasive and primordial penetration of gender oppression, especially in intimate relations and other apparently non-sexual relations, their ideological and theoretical platform has been seriously criticized since the 80's.

For Daly, Dworkin and Rich, phallogocentric domination is so complete and extensive that only total revolution, or by withdrawing from heterosexist relations, can women be immune from its devastating influences. Not only classism and racism, but also war, violence and environmental problems are regarded as deriving from the root of all social problems --- male dominance. The only ruling class is 'the patriarchy' or in Daly's words, 'the planetary Men's Association'. The totalizing and non-analytical approach to patriarchy encourages radical feminists to opt for separatist politics.

⁹⁸ Dworkin, *Our Blood*, 61.

⁹⁹ Collins, 363.

¹⁰⁰ Rich, 1982 : 660.

¹⁰¹ Atkinson, 1970 :2.

¹⁰² Mackinnon, *Feminist Theory*, p.28.

¹⁰³ Mackinnon, 1982 : 515-6.

¹⁰⁴ Firestone, 1971 : 126.

Radical feminists have mystified and homogenized 'patriarchy' which is said to exist 'everywhere', so pervasively that it becomes the natural order of things.¹⁰⁵ Radical feminism has produced an undifferentiated monolithic view of 'Man', as if every man were the same - -- sexist --- regardless of class, race, age, education, wealth and other social references. By grounding the meta-narrative in the myth of the origin, radical feminism has constructed, legitimized and universalized a culturally specific story of gender construction in which the complexities and diversities of gender relations are assimilated into a primary and totalizing unity.

Radical feminists have actually relied on the hegemonic images of masculine/feminine binarism in their own understanding of gender relation. Their representation of heterosexuality is parasitic and predicated upon phallogocentric representation. The male body is said to be aroused when confronted with the posture of submission: 'He' penetrates the woman's body, takes it, possesses it, conquers it. For males, to be sexual is to control, to penetrate and to kill; for females, to be sexual is to be dominated and be exploited. The pleasant dream of phallogocentrism is identical to the horrible nightmare of the radical feminist.

The a-historical approach to defining the body, childbirth and mothering has led radical feminists to a nature-culture split, pushing sexuality, childrearing into nature, and patriarchy and all male activities into culture. In reclaiming the lost territory of women's bodies, radical feminism risks replicating the same binary structure of patriarchy. Both radical feminists and patriarchal culture resort to 'masculine/feminine' as the primordial conceptual distinction underpinning all other distinctions like passive/active, dominant/subordinate, sadism/masochism. Both have naturalized and essentialized a pre-discursive ontology of womanhood, although the former glorifies it whereas the latter denounces it. As women are portrayed as victims and objects incapable of making their own decisions, radical feminism has ignored the possibility of women occupying multiple and shifting positions in society.

Radical feminists have posited an essential 'femininity' that is shared by all women cross-culturally. Such a notion of 'generic woman' like that of 'generic man' in Western thought, functions to obscure the heterogenities and diversities among women, especially the marginal groups. The experiences and the meanings of gender identity are not the same for all women.

The category of Women must be problematized and politicized in the context of a discursive production of subjectivity. If gender interacts with race, class, ethnic, sex and regional modalities of the discursively constituted subject, then it is dangerous to prioritize gender as 'The cause' of domination in society.

While all women are women, no woman is only a woman. As black and third world feminists have pointed out, white middle class western women are unusual in that sexism is the main form of oppression they face. Most white women in racist societies are unused to thinking of themselves as having a racial identity. As Elizabeth Spelman says, 'Are there any situation in which my being white and her being Black does not affect what it means to us and for us to be women?'¹⁰⁶ The notion of women 'as women' ignores the differences among women: 'white middle-class Western women' are taken as the norm of what 'women' are, thus treating

¹⁰⁵Mary Daly, *Gyn*, p.1.

¹⁰⁶See Spelman, Elizabeth (1990:135)

the differences of white middle-class women from other women as if they are not important.

Women are not a homogenous category. The power of women's magazines lies in the embracing of contradictions and the multiplicity of roles. Modern career-women are the product of contradiction of late capitalism, 'femininity' can never be defined but always in process of conflicts, changes and constructions. Women should not be simplistically conceived as a homogeneous entity. By highlighting the heterogeneity of womanhood, we shall see how reading women's magazines can be used as a strategy to meet different needs.

Although each magazine strives to produce its own distinctive identity, there is no perceived need to be internally consistent. Indeed, a magazine flourishes by offering a diverse number of positions or identities within their pages, although these magazines do offer dominant of preferred readings. Women's magazines do allow contradictions and different discourses of women images. They flourish by offering diverse women identities, suiting the different needs of different women and diverse desires of the individual subject in late capitalism. It is exactly such mobility and complexity that enable women's magazines to maintain their hegemonic position in women's lives.

To sum up, I argued against the hierarchized binarism articulated by the Frankfurt School and Radical Feminism. Women's magazines are not necessarily patriarchal and oppressive to women. Even these magazines carry heterosexist, classist or consumerist messages, the readers need not read them in the same way. It is thus crucial to understand the strategies and practises of reading, and so in this regard, I have conducted in-depth interviews with twelve women readers of local glossy women's magazines. In next chapter, I will examine interviews with women readers, exploring the kinds of pleasure and resistance generated in the process of reading women's magazines. Women's magazines should not be treated as an ideological apparatus to oppress or fool their readers. Not that they are non ideological, but reading women's magazines can be a crucial strategy for women to neutralize their domestic responsibility, and to articulate a language that allows them to reclaim a sense of control of their bodies and leisure time.

Chapter Three: Reader's Construction of Femininity (Interviews)

Introduction: Personal politics of interview

This research engages positively with post-structuralism and post-modernism, especially in terms of the emphasis on readership and spectatorship. That said, post-structuralism is in a serious danger of engaging with the body and everyday life only in the theoretical. While in everyday life, and in this context where femininity and womanhood are discursively produced by a power/knowledge social matrix, such discourse is processed by the people themselves and has profound impact on the people who 'live' the discourse. Without reference to the exact living experiences of the people, discursive analysis has the potential danger of being merely a defence mechanism of the theoretician of his/her own desire for power, objective knowledge, to be God the Father. As a male theoretician who conducts research on 'women's magazines', it is particularly crucial to listen to the women readers themselves who literally read and interact with these magazines.

In this research, interviews are conducted to understand how women account for their own experience in relation to women's magazines. This research does not take women readers as a homogenous group controlled by the media, but actively explores their uniqueness and differences, how they make sense of the territory of women's magazines, how they cope with their own 'womanhood' and 'femininity', and finally explores the social spaces for resistance.¹⁰⁷ Women's magazines are neither fixed texts imposing their meaning on their 'passive recipients', nor are they purely free-floating empty texts awaiting reading and interpretation constitution. Instead, women's magazines have their own historical logic and contextual reference before entering the world of women readers. It is this hermeneutical process of reading, and its wider socio-political practices that become the focus of these interviews.

While historically, media researches did focus on the readers/viewers response, the audiences were usually assumed as merely aggregates of individuals without relating to the wider socio-political context thorough which different readings are produced in the first place.¹⁰⁸ As argued by Elliott, the intra-individual process of this 'uses and gratification approach' 'can be generalized to aggregates of individuals, but they cannot be converted in any meaningful way into social structure and process'¹⁰⁹ Thus David Morley argues that 'the specificity of communication and signifying practices, not as a wholly autonomous field, but in its complex articulations with questions of class, ideology and power,' depends on the 'structural

¹⁰⁷Contemporary feminism has been very sensitive to the issue of 'essentialism'. Radical feminist's notion of 'womanhood', 'sisterhood', 'oppression' and 'power' have been criticized for their essentialist and monolithic nature. It is the endeavour of this research, and interview in particular, to explore the diversities and differences among women readers in Hong Kong. See Elizabeth Spelman (1990) for an vocal critique of essentialism and a positive postulation of the politics of differences.

¹⁰⁸See, for example, Lundberg and Hulten, 1968; McQuail, Blumer and Brown, 1972; Rosengreen and Windahl, 1972; Katz, Gurevitch and Haas, 1973.

¹⁰⁹Elliott, 1974: 252.

conditions which generate different cultural and ideological competencies.’¹¹⁰

Reading must be conceived of in the contexts that enable readers to assume different subject positions in their social relations. They must be seen as subjects intersected by a number of different and often contradictory discourses, not as subjects is spoken by these discourses, but as ‘the person actively producing meanings from the restricted range of cultural discourse which his or her structural position has allowed them to access to.’¹¹¹ This research emphasises the importance of attending to the social dimension of reading women’s magazines and to the ways in which the dynamics of domestic life informs the practises of reading. The context of reading is not unified but diverse, constituted by different household members and relevant texts.

I interviewed twelve women readers of glossy women’s magazines, mainly introduced by different friends or their own friends and relatives. I deliberately selected women readers from different backgrounds especially in terms of age, education, class, occupation and marital status. In general, they are well-educated (more than half with post-secondary qualification), young (aged between 21 and 35), middle-class (or working class but aspiring to middle-class values), and with a strong desire and capacity to consume a middle-class life-style. All the interviewees selected are Hong Kong Chinese career women, as the majority (92%) of Hong Kong women aged between 24-40 are career women.

Not being interested in testing any hypothesis or trying to assemble statistics, I operated the interview in fairly unrestricted fashion, simply absorbing views, opinions, attitudes and perspectives with the aid of my tape-recorder, not to capture an exhaustive picture, but to highlight certain features graphically. Armed with the background information and a tape-recorder, I met (individually and occasionally, collectively) women readers. We talked about their backgrounds, their careers, their families and most importantly, their reading of women’s magazines. I asked interviewees to speak as freely and as frankly as possible about a variety of issues. The interviews were generally informal, for most of the times we met in a quiet restaurant, tea house or comfortable public area. The questions were flexible: some women used the questions as a launching pad for great elaboration and detail, requiring little from me beyond the stimulus of each question. Other women needed far more encouragement.

The interviewer, being male, middle-class and stuck in academia for the past years, is acutely aware of his own biases and limitations. The interviewee is free to talk about anything that is crucial and interesting to her. Indeed, the interviewer was particularly keen to pursue any issues and opinions that did not conform to his pre-conceptions and stereotypes.

The ‘data’ presented in this research, even direct citation of the interviewee, does not directly ‘represent’ their experience, as it signifies a double interpretation/hermeneutic: the first is the interpretations that the women bring to their own experiences, then secondly I interpret their interpretations into the framework of the research. It is here that I adopt Chris Weedon’s insight that we cannot rely unproblematically on ‘experience’ as the source of knowledge, even though we must not deny subjective experience since ‘the way people make sense of

¹¹⁰Morley, David, 1979: 20.

¹¹¹Morley, David, 1986: 43.

their lives is a necessary starting point for understanding how power relations structure society'.¹¹² While this research does provide an ethnography of women subject positions, their differences and coherence in those subjectivities are located in broader socio-structural practises. Women's magazines are not only read by women, they are located and read mostly in a domestic environment which is deeply embedded with specific power relations, including gender power politics and other social axes like class, age and education. In other words, the experience of reading women's magazines should not be extracted as an isolated and discrete entity per se, but should be located in wider social context where it interacts dialectically with readers' experiences.

The purpose of these interview is not to provide an overall account of the position of women in Hong Kong, or an objective situation of women's magazines, but to articulate the readings and meaning-structures of these readers. In no way are these twelve women a representative sample of the women's magazines reader in Hong Kong. The interview results may only serve to shed some light on what some women think about women's magazines. What I really hope to establish from these interviews is the main attraction of these women's magazines for women readers.

I have concentrated on four local glossy women's magazines (Cosmopolitan, In, Elegance and Elle) and a small number (twelve) of women readers. Questions were asked not only on the reading and their perceptions of the magazines, but also about the gender division of labour and gender politics in the readers daily lives. Specifically, interviewees were asked how they would resolve the tension, if any, between public and private, in the context of a capitalist-patriarchal society. If women's magazines could best be understood in the wider socio-political context of capitalist-patriarchal society, it is crucial to understand how the readers integrate the categories of the magazines and their own mundane lives.

Concerning the interview, it is a common (mis)understanding that the difference between survey interviewing and the ethnographic interview is that one is structured, and the other not.¹¹³ It is misleading as all interviews are 'structured'. The ethnographic interviewer approaches the interview with a set of issues and interests to be explored, but without a specific set of questions. By being an active listener, the researcher can respond actively to the unique experiences of the interviewee. As other feminist researchers have stressed, this open approach of interview allows the respondents to raise issues and topics that they feel important and relevant to them.¹¹⁴

That being said, the interview has its intended logic and flow, of course. Briefly, the interview is divided into two parts: First the reader's opinion of women's magazines and second, the living experiences of that reader, so as to understand the relationships between their experiences of reading and their daily life. I began the interview by explaining the background, aim and context of my research. I also briefly explained my academic

¹¹²Weedon, Chris, 1987: 8.

¹¹³Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) for example, hold this view.

¹ ¹⁴See Finch, 1984; Graham, 1984 and Dorthoy, 1992.

background in media and feminist concerns and publications.¹¹⁵ After a brief introduction of the research project, the interviewer begins with more factual and informative questions concerning the reader's background and information about their reading of women's magazines. 'How long have you been reading women's magazines?' is the usual start, followed by 'Which magazines did you read in the beginning, and why?'

Information about the twelve interviewees:

Name	Sally	Mrs Chan	June	Candy
Age	25	29	32	25
Marital Status	Single	Married	Married	Single
Education	University	Polytechnic	Secondary	University
Work	Teacher	Social worker	Secretary	Executive officer (Govt)
Race	Chinese	Chinese	Chinese	Chinese
Which WM ¹¹⁶ is referring to	All Glossies	Cosmopolitan, Elegance	Cosmopolitan	Elle
How long for reading WM ¹¹⁷	Two years	Five years	Four years	One year

¹¹⁵Armistead makes the point of trust by arguing that 'genuine trust and confidence are likely to exist only when the researcher fully explains the reasons for research and those reasons are accepted by the subject'. (Armistead, 1974: 120)

¹¹⁶WM : Women's magazines.

¹¹⁷The women's magazines referred only to those four in this research.

Name	Janice	Liza	Sara	Julian
Age	35	25	33	23
Marital Status	Married	Single	Single	Single
Education	Secretary Institution	University	University	Polytechnic
Work	Secretary	Executive in Ad Agency	Senior Manager in Trading Co	Student
Race	Chinese	Chinese	Chinese	Chinese
Which WM is referring to	Elegance, Cosmopolitan	Cosmopolitan	Cosmopolitan, In	In
How long reading WM	Ten years	Four years	Five years	One year

Name	Vivian	Mary	Stephenie	Mrs Chow
Age	31	30	22	27
Marital Status	Married	Divorced	Single	Married
Education	University (UK)	University	University	Polytechnic
Work	Teacher	Boutique Boss	television reporter	Accountant (part-time)
Race	Chinese	Chinese	Chinese	Chinese
Which WM is referring to	Cosmopolitan, In, Elle	All Glossies	In, Cosmopolitan	Cosmopolitan Elegance
How long reading WM	Six years	Four years	Two years	One year

1. Loyalty, identity and community

As an introduction, it is perhaps useful to start with a few details of how regularly the readers read the women's magazines and how committed they are. The number of hours per week they spend on reading women's magazines is shown in the following table.

Name	Number of hours/week spent reading women's magazines
Sally	2.5
Mrs Chan	4.5
June	1
Candy	3
Janice	2.5
Liza	2
Sara	2
Julian	1
Vivian	2
Mary	1
Stephenie	2
Mrs Chow	4

Obviously the number of hours women spend on reading women's magazines alone say little about their commitment. To gain a fuller picture of the audience commitment, I asked them how they feel if the delivery misses one issue, or if they cannot find their favourite magazines in the book-store. The very dedicated readers generally make sure they do not miss any issue. Candy for example, collects every issue of Cosmopolitan she has read, indeed even buys a new book shelf to keep all these magazines. She is a keen reader:

Most of my spare time goes to chatting (making phone calls) and 'reading'. When I come home after work, I will put the music on and read, anything from novels, magazines to newspaper. Or I may have long telephone chat with my friends, for hours.'

It is relevant to note that unlike most 'modern' cities in the world, making a telephone call in Hong Kong is entirely free of charge. That is why many people, especially women, spend lots of time on the telephone chatting. Sara is an uncommitted reader, claiming that 'even if I miss the magazine for two months, I'm not bothered at all; in fact sometimes I don't even

know that I've missed it.' June, another uncommitted reader, says that 'if there is anything more crucial especially work, I simply forget these magazines. I won't feel depressed, it doesn't bother me'.

The relation between the women's magazines and the readers in Hong Kong is one of commercial and functional impersonality. These readers do not have any loyalty to their favourite magazines. Sally Kwan established a very efficient and cost-saving way of reading women's magazines: she goes to Watsons (a big local chain department store) every Tuesday afternoon (as she has a half day off on Tuesday) and literally spends about two hours reading different women's magazines that happen to attract her. Given the costly price of these magazines (Hong Kong\$25-30), it is an 'efficient' way to consume them.

Amy said that she would definitely change to a different one if her favourite magazine fails to maintain its quality. Her attitude is shared by all the other interviewees. When readers are asked will they feel sorry if they have to drop their magazines for one of a better quality, all the twelve respondents answer negatively, which is indicative of the volatile nature of Hong Kong society: things come and go, nothing stable or static. In a commercial city like Hong Kong, it is 'natural' that readers treat their reading merely as 'consumption' and do not invest much emotional affection in the magazine itself.

The women readers do not seem to exhibit the sense of community, commonality or even solidarity with other readers of the same women's magazine. They read for fun, pleasure or stimulation, not for community. As argued by Sally Kwan,

'No, I do not feel anything as a community with other women readers of Cosmopolitan and Elle. It is mainly my personal taste and choice. Even if we read the same magazine, it does not imply that we are the same person. We take the magazine for different reasons and we take different things from these magazines.'

Studies in UK and USA reveal that reading women's magazines and romantic fictions do generate a sense of community among the women readers, especially amongst housewives and working-class women.¹¹⁸ Yet in the case of Hong Kong, middle-class women readers apparently have the social and economic power to relieve and gratify their emotional needs, and can build up a competent selfhood and social life, without any immense social need for a sense of community by reading women's magazines.

They do talk about the magazines, use it to enhance their relationship with other women. It provides a common ground for women to discuss and interact, though not a sense of community. Discussions are exclusively with other women, as Sara says,

'Oh not for men, they are too dumb for these womanly magazines. Men do not know how to appreciate women's magazines, just thinking that they are boring and unreal'.

¹¹⁸See Radway, Janice: 1987 and Ballaster, Ros, Beetham Margaret, Frazer Elizabeth and Hebron, Sandra: 1991.

Tania Modleski has posited the theory that soap opera offers women a 'fantasy of community', it provides them with an extended family in a culture that more and more denies them the support of a large extended family.¹¹⁹ Yet in the case of Hong Kong, such fantasy of community does not seem to exist. 'Femininity', 'sisterhood' and 'women's spaces' are very much personalized and de-politicized, as questions of personal choice of self-interest and self-development rather than a political platform for gender struggle.

The interviewees are very conscious that women's magazines are only part of their lives. They may be interested in other women's experiences and feelings, but not as a community. The deep anxiety and repulsion at the notion of community and collective identity certainly indicate the extreme individualism which Hong Kong people exhibit; this sense of anxiety is made worse by a political agenda of 1997 where 'privacy' and 'individual freedom' are endangered by mainland China. Such anxieties are well-elucidated by Janice Wong:

'I've read women's magazines for ten years. I enjoy reading women's stories, and enjoy the sharing with other women. But I don't think we have a common identity. We may have certain things in common, but only those certain things. It is stupid to impose the idea of a community or an identity on us...It is only those who are insecure and lacking self-confidence that need a sense of women's community.'

The conflicts among women workers are acutely articulated by Sara:

'When I was a sales girl, I had lots of friends. Now I have my boutique, I find life full of enemies, and many of them are women. I think it is jealousy. I do not think that women are more jealous than men are, but it is the role-conflict that puts you in more difficult positions. I cannot be too frank with my women employees or competitors.'

For Vivian Lau, it is the direct conflict of interest that hinders 'sisterhood'.

'Women don't want other women to compete with you. When you find that your colleagues are more prettier and smarter than you are, it is very threatening, especially in the working environment where there are not many women.'

It is crucial to note that in Hong Kong, 'women' does not constitute a political category. 'Womanhood' is internally diverse, stratified, conflicting and competing between middle-class and working-class women, old and young women, women bosses and their women subordinates, Filipinos and their domestic mistresses, or even between mother and daughter. In Hong Kong, there is no such thing as a 'feminist movement', understood as a collective political movement that unifies local women. As Sara told us,

'Women are divided by different interests. The unity and solidarity of womanhood is only a myth cherished not even by the women themselves...I

¹¹⁹Modleski, Tania: 1984.

have no sense of sisterhood. What is sisterhood? Tell me. Where are my sisterly relations with my nasty boss? I experience intense tension even between me and my mother. It is stupid to claim to be sisters just because we are women. Yes, we share some biological similarities, but it does not mean that we fight for the same cause or that we are sisters.'

Amy stands with Sara, 'The notion of sisterhood is a very naive myth that does not exist. How naive! We are unique individuals before we are anything else.'

The conflict among women is equally acute in another area -- between domestic servants and their employers. In Hong Kong many middle-class couples/families employ female Filipinos as domestic servants.¹²⁰ These Filipinos, have to leave their families, lovers/husbands, friends and most of all, their culture and lifestyle, to go to an alien culture/city (Hong Kong) merely for financial reasons. They face both cultural and financial discrimination: being culturally stereotyped as dirty, inferior, uncivilized, un-educated, with bad-taste, and are financially, sometimes physically ill-treated by Hong Kong employers. A recent survey on employers of these Filipino servants suggest that 63% of these employers support a reduction of the salary (\$3,200) of these Filipinos, whereas the average income for Hong Kong employees in 1992 is Hong Kong\$ 6,700.¹²¹

2. Consumption, pleasure and 'escapism'

Our interviewees seem to be very sensitive to the visual presentation of women's magazines, and take immense pleasure in looking at their photo-series. Candy exemplifies a more extreme case:

'I never read the verbal content of Elle. I just enjoy the fashion photos, they are so gorgeous. You feel great and so happy when you look at these pretty women. They have excellent body-shapes and style and dress in superb clothing. I like beautiful things, people and dress'.

While all the twelve interviewees share the pleasure of 'looking' at beautiful and well-dressed models in the women's magazines, their relationship with consumption, fashion and femininity is far more complex than a naive passive absorption of the patriarchal script. Femininity is not simply the effect of patriarchy, nor 'fashion' the direct product of consumption or capitalism. Even within the capitalist-patriarchal system where the 'beauty-myth' is constitutive and definitive of femininity, women still manage to negotiate with all these social constraints and try to strive for their own spaces. As Candy goes on to say,

'I do not feel jealous when I look at these top models. Different people fit different styles and presentations. There is no need to copy them. Neither do I buy the clothes shown in the magazine. They are different, and I dress differently. The magazines may give you some clues and references of the

¹²⁰In 1993, there were 91,000 Philippines (women) serving as domestic servants. See 22 March, 1993, Ming Po Newspaper.

¹²¹See South China Morning Post, 13 Jan 1993.

present trend, but I choose my own style.'

Vivian shared not only such insistence on personal space, she actually makes her own clothes. She always models upon, parodies with, plays around with or even challenges the dominant code and style of women's dressing found in women's magazines. As she told us,

'I like the fashion series of In and Elle, they are very stylish, not as standardized as Cosmopolitan and other magazines. What I enjoy most is to learn, observe and re-produce the unique pattern and style of these dresses, and try to make one for myself. My father is a tailor. I learned from him since I was fifteen. Now most of my clothes are made by myself. It is a highly pleasurable experiences. I feel a great sense of autonomy and self-achievement, like an artist. It is great fun. And it save me a great amount of money...I think it is stupid for feminist to criticize "fashion" and "femininity".'

Stephenie enjoys a different kind of pleasure in the 'beauty-myth'. She is 'lucky' to have a boyfriend who is very sympathetic to feminism and is willing to explore his own masculinity and manhood differently from the traditional version. Indeed, like Stephenie he reads the women's magazine In and is now more sensitive to his own bodily existence. As Stephenie puts it,

'...while all along he knows nothing about fashion and dresses up in a boring way, he now can differentiate between different looks, say from Armani, Durban to YSL. And he started to use male cologne last year. He always says I teach him the taste of fashion. I feel flattered and am very proud of it...I know I am lucky. But the fact that women enjoy women's magazines and fashion doesn't mean that they are stupid victims of sexism. Most women are clever enough to decide for themselves what to do and how to attain their own spaces.'

The predominance of 'male gaze' and the pleasure of 'looking' in the women's magazines seem to disturb nobody. Indeed, the pleasure of reading the fashion photos are shared by other readers. 'I enjoy Elegance's and Cosmopolitan's fashion photos, especially the dresses for more formal dinners and parties, they are fabulous. But I do not have the chance to wear them,' says June Lam who is a typist working at a legal firm. 'My husband is quite short, so all my high heels have been dropped. I will not buy these formal dinner dresses, there is no chance at all to wear them.' While reading these magazines and fashion photos seem to bring forbidden pleasure for June Lam, she insists this is 'healthy' and 'normal' for her, not some kind of abnormal substitute gratification.

The inadequacy of naive psychoanalytic theory of projection/identification and mechanical Marxist theory of false consciousness is further illustrated in June's case when she talks about 'horoscopes'.

'I love them, they are wonderful. I read Elle's horoscope every issue, because I want to know if anything special will happen to me...of course the prediction is not true and I do not believe in it. But it is highly pleasurable to know what it says about you. It is just for fun. If it is something bad, I drop it; if it is

good, it cheers me up. So you select what you want to know.'

June's reply is shared by Candy ('You know that horoscopes are not true, but it is great fun reading it') and Liza ('I like the Horoscope as you can pick up the things you want to believe'). All these readings indicate the active process of reading-spaces omitted by traditional radical theories of patriarchal oppression (feminism), false consciousness (Marxism) and projection/repression (psychoanalysis). All these radical theories are indeed predicated upon the modernist discourse of hierarchized binarism that has privileged an elitist-classist definition of taste at the expense of popular pleasures.

No one really believes the cliched predictions of the horoscope (which are unfalsifiable and unverifiable anyway) but they enjoy it as an entertainment, as fun, or precisely because it is unreal. It does not matter whether its prediction is valid or not, after all it cheers up the readers. The readers enjoy the horoscope not for its objective reality, but its 'unreality', or more specifically, the readers' capacity to choose and produce their own reality from it.

Most of my interviewees have never written to the magazines. They have a clear sense of 'reality' of what is real and what is not. As Vivian told us, 'Letters to the editors are just created by the editors, even if they are not, it is stupid to ask them for personal advice.' Only Stephenie and Sandy have written but in a more serious context. As Stephenie said,

'I write to In because I think the feature on "lesbian relationships" is very misleading as they just selected three sad lesbian stories where they all face severe pressure and have grown up from broken families. So I requested a more positive representation of lesbianism'.

While for Sandy, 'I write (to In) because I think the column of "life story" is very well-written, and well-researched. I hope my letter can cheer them up.'

The readers flick through these women's magazines, read it in segments, read it voraciously to cut out the family noise around them, and they read the same issue when they have no other entertainment. The readers do not simply absorb it or believe it. They look at it with great humour and fun, believe it if relevant, use it if necessary, dismiss it if silly, laugh at it if naive, parody or even pastiche it for fun. Structurally, reading women's magazines provides uniquely feminine space and pleasures that are unavailable to men. Women readers are engaged hermeneutically with the text they read. For example, in the dialogue between Sally and Mary, they tease and parody Cosmopolitan's obsession with sexuality:

Mary: Sometimes when I read these sections (in Cosmopolitan), I just laugh, can't help laughing...

Sally: Yeh! Like that issue the month before, they taught you how to seduce a virgin man. It is just ridiculous, absolutely ridiculous.

Mary: No! It is fun. It is so cute to seduce a virgin man. I hope I can [laugh]...

Sally: Sometimes I think the editor must be so bored that she has to read and write all these 'idiot' articles.

We cannot assume any direct causal relationship between reading women's magazines and consumption. Women's magazines definitely contribute to reader's consumption, but in a very subtle sense rather than directly 'causing' the reader to consume. In this context, Liza Ng's remark is very crucial.

'Reading Cosmopolitan and Elle and other women's magazines enhances my taste and style. Whereas three years ago I was still a school (university) girl, I can now tell what is the 'Chanel look', what is 'Gucci style', and the trend of fashion in Europe and the States. As a young executive (in a leading ads firm), I need to be sensitive to the kind of dressing that suits different occasions...I may not buy these clothes, and many of them I cannot afford. But what is crucial is to know what fits you and what is trendy.'

In other words, what these magazines generate is not a specific loyalty to certain brand-names but a general consumerist attitude and an overall sensitivity to fashion which is extremely crucial to the market circulation of capital and the socio-economic production of fashion. Mary Ho also refutes any direct relation between reading women's magazines and consumerism.

'I am a free subject, not a stupid consumer machine controlled by someone. I can decide whether the commodity fits me or not. I think women's magazines provide the information about the trends and styles of different commodities, and I decide what to buy.'

In a sample of this size it is impossible to conclude any general link between consumerism and reading women's magazines. Indeed, it is dangerous to generalize such a link at all, not that they do not have a correlation, but that such a link must be contextualized within specific class-race-age social matrices where the desire for consumption and magazines is produced in the first place. These interviewees seem to exhibit great confidence in their selfhood and their personal taste, stressing the uniqueness of their personal style and choice. While these women's magazines do not directly coerce readers to consume, it takes consumption for granted. What they offer are only different styles trends and brands, but not a reflection on consumption itself. The choice for the readers is merely 'Which commodity to consume' instead of 'Why consume'.

What these readers all agree upon is that reading women's magazines is highly pleasurable:

Mary: I buy women's magazines to cheer myself up. Instead of buying clothes and cosmetics which are far more expensive, I spend Hong Kong\$ 25 for a magazine, which is rich, comprehensive and enjoyable. You can spend the whole night reading it.

Sally: I buy it for leisure and pleasure. It is the best way to kill time. When I feel bored and depressed, women's magazines do cheer me up. Cosmopolitan gives me the look and glamour that I don't belong to. It is very enjoyable to have these moments. It is not just a form of escapism.

Mary: True, I think it is not just an escapist joy. You learn things from it, and it is very entertaining in the first place.

Sally: I know the world more from these magazines, the trend and knowledge of fashion, clothing, make-up, women issues and cultural events. Some parts of it (Cosmopolitan) stress too much on sex, but even so, you know more about yourself and the male psyche...and you really need to know more about sex, shamelessly and frankly.

Stephenie argued that women's magazines did teach her something very positive about the world, 'By reading In, I understand about the current issues, and the women's social situation, their plight'.

The immense pleasure obtained by the women readers can also be indicated by Liza and Candy: 'It's hard to say when I do most of my reading. It is mostly in the evenings and during vacations as otherwise I am occupied by employment. But I basically squeeze every chance to read them' (Liza) and 'I read In and Cosmopolitan not merely to fill up the free time. I enjoy reading and do spend lots of time reading it especially when I am depressed and unhappy' (Candy). Sara also echoes Candy's point, 'When I re-read these magazines, sometimes I want to savour and pick up some parts I have left, but more often because I want to cheer myself up.'

Maria Chan, the chief-editor of Elle, argued that consumption can give women 'a sense of control':

'I mean you control the way and style you look, you control which kind of image and impression other people uphold. It is a way to define yourself. Ya, you define yourself. Your personality may be very impressive or nasty, but your outlook is the first thing that people notice, and at the same time the outlook is what people in the first impression attracts you. Of course, you have to spend what you can afford. But it is a fair play. Fashion gives you much psychological gratification.'

In the context of Hong Kong, what these women attain from women's magazines is not a sense of community but a strong social and personal space which is emotionally gratifying and intellectually enriching. Women's magazine becomes an extended education for the readers. As suggested by Mary,

'As modern career woman, you need to be presentable and knowledgeable, but your domestic and career demands are so pressing that you simply cannot afford chances to enrich yourself. So these magazines, apart from being entertaining, are crucial ways for me to acquire more knowledge about the world and all the relevant information I need, from the appropriate skills of make-up, newest fashion, trendy city gossips, taste of dressing to relations and other things about myself and the world.'

Women's magazines provide a quasi-realistic understanding of women. They portray strong women characters, with high degree of power and self-reliance. These stories provide very strong female role models, women who have their own career and achievement in the male-dominated world. My interviewees are certainly not identified with the woman-as-victim characters. In the media that marginalize, stereotype, ignore, and according to Gaye Tuchman, 'symbolically annihilate' women, women's magazines represent, however imperfectly, a

significantly positive image of women.¹²²

Indeed, the fragmented quality, multifariousness, openness and multiplicity of articles and stories within women's magazines reflect the fragmented nature of women's careers and their domestic lives. The narrative structure of women's magazines is similar to many women's lives and therein lie some of the attraction of these magazines. Tania Modleski said that there is a fit between the endless flow of television programmes and the endless flow of domestic labour.

'The formal properties of daytime television thus accords closely with the rhythms of women's work in the home. Individual programmes like soap operas as well as the flow of various programs and commercials tend to make repetition, interruption and distraction pleasurable.'¹²³

The day-time genre assumes a distracted domestic viewer who is constantly disturbed by her domestic responsibility. Tania Modleski considered the female audience for day time television, suggesting that the scheduling and form of soap operas assumes a distracted domestic female viewer, incapable of giving full attention to the screen because of the endless domestic duties.¹²⁴

While suggesting the audiences/readers occupy the subject position offered by the text, it is dangerous to presuppose their uniform behaviour from institutional and textual analysis. In this context, women's magazines serve better the needs of women by the heterogeneity of different genres, print, photography within a single issue. As argued by a recent study on British women's magazines:

'It does not demand to be read from front to back, nor in any particular order, and its fragmentary nature is admirably suited to women's habitual experience in modern society of the impossibility of concentrated attention (distracted by calls on their time from men, children, the conflicting demands of work and home). The magazine's periodicity, its regular appearance once a month or once a week, allows both open-endedness (continuing series or features) and routinisation, confirming its readers in a way of life where leisure, like work, is regulated in time.'¹²⁵

3. Domestic Labour, Women's leisure time and resistance

The mainstream research on popular culture, leisure and women has tended to marginalize and trivialize women's non-paid activities because mainstream academia defines 'leisure' as something outside home, antithetical to work and the domestic context.¹²⁶ This research

¹²²Tuchman, Gaye, 1979: 528-42.

¹²³Modleski, 1983: 73.

¹²⁴Ibid.

¹²⁵Ballster, Beetham, Frazer and Herbon, 1991: 30-31.

¹²⁶For the definition and construction of women's 'leisure' and its relation to the 'work' status, see Deem, 1985; McIntosh, 1981 and Roberts 1981 and Stanley, 1980.

hopes to 'problematize' and study those activities (especially reading women's magazines) that women choose to do in the domestic arena, to assess their strategies in tackling the social and personal expectation of domestic responsibility. This requires an elucidation of the domestic division of labour and the decision making process constituting the wider gender politics of family leisure activities.¹²⁷

Men and women have very different conceptions and constructions of time, especially 'leisure time'. Feminists have long observed that while work and leisure are discrete categories for men, women (and mothers in particular) do not enjoy the discrete category of leisure time. Gender difference is particularly acute if we are referring to mothers and housewives who have to 'work' day and night, without any discrete temporality called 'leisure time'.¹²⁸

In our patriarchal society, men tend to view their time at home as being at their own disposal. They can legitimately spend it on relaxation or hobbies. Such a kind of freedom does not seem to be available for women, especially mothers. 'The home for most women, employed or not, is a workplace in a way that is true for few men, except those that do paid work from home and even in this case it is not the same thing as being a place for unpaid work.'¹²⁹ Rosemary Deem regrets the inadequate attention paid to women's leisure in existing researches where gender is always presupposed, rather than an arena to be problematized. However, in recent years we have witnessed a significant, although a small number of feminist works on this area.¹³⁰ These researches have shown that women's leisure time is more likely to be spent at home when compared to her partner, especially if she has young children. My interviewees reveal that having children or not is a significant factor to the extent to which women can enjoy their 'free time'. All the interviewees with children have tremendous difficulties in pursuing their own interests in the domestic context.

As revealed in David Morley's study on television watching, women are more likely to be distracted viewers. They always watched television not for their own interest but because of their partners/children. When other members of the family are present, women cannot enjoy their home leisure without being distracted. When all members are present, mothers are always supposed to give the priority to their partners and children.¹³¹ Perhaps that is why among my twelve interviewees, television came far lower than reading (women's magazines) in their list of leisure preferences. As well-expressed by Vivian:

¹²⁷Since mid 1980's, the thesis of the privatization of pleasure in the domestic context has been explored both in feminist and popular cultural studies. Golding and Murdock (1983) have pointed out that the home increasingly becomes the place for leisure and entertainment. These studies are particularly crucial in terms of their implications for gender power relations in the domestic sphere. Yet the gendered nature of new technology in the domestic sphere is still an under-explored area.

¹²⁸See Oakley, Ann (1974) and Chodorow, Nancy (1978) for the analysis of mothering and housewife.

¹²⁹Deem, Rosemary, 1986: 80.

¹³⁰Green, Hebron and Woodward 1985, Deem 1986; Dixey and Talbot, 1982; Stanley, L. 1980; Griffin, 1985.

¹³¹Morley, David, 1986.

‘I don’t like watching television. I usually watch with my husband, on sports, movies and other programmes he likes. Sometimes when I prefer another channel for the programme I like, I still let him watch his...I enjoy reading as it is completely mine, I don’t have to read with my husband like watching television.’

David Morley’s research confirms that ‘men state a clear preference for viewing attentively, in silence, without interruption’.¹³² While men have a clear demarcation of work and leisure, women cannot enjoy their domestic leisure time quietly and continuously because it always clashes with their domestic duties. A female’s domestic leisure tend to be fragmented, non-unified and less autonomous than a male’s. Lots of feminists have argued that women’s roles are basically familial and concerned with the personal, whereas men’s roles are defined by their careers.¹³³ While men do live in families and are fathers, they are not primarily defined by this fact. The very existence of the phrases ‘family man’ and ‘career woman’ exposes the ambiguities of these labels.

It is crucial to locate female and male viewing within the specific domestic context of gender power relations where ‘male viewers try to masculinize the domestic sphere’.¹³⁴ Once at home, most men claim their own time. This they justify because they are the major earners, but even when both parties worked, the men are more autonomous, powerful and relaxed at home in terms of domestic leisure. Men are able to switch off from the domestic environment to pursue their own interests and hobbies.

For those career-women with children, there seems to be a strongly felt need to utilise their spare time and not to waste it. They feel guilty when doing nothing. This results in the maximum usage of time: knitting is done while watching television. Other activities that fill these spaces are often extensions of their roles as mothers and/or housewives. They can squeeze time for their own interests only when all the other family members either have their own preoccupations, or literally, when they sleep. Janice, who has three kids, told us that

‘when the children have gone to bed in the evening, and if Peter [her husband] is doing something else like watching television, I can put some music on. Since I ‘ve been working full-time all day, I am keen to have some time of my own; sometimes I’ll just sit down and relax’.

Nine out of the twelve interviewees employed domestic servants to do the housework. This enables women to spend time on other pursuits - both work and leisure. But it must be stressed that although they have domestic servants, it is still the women who co-ordinate the housework, and who do most of the housework not done by the servant. Economic independence does not necessarily guarantee a release from the obligation to do household tasks, child care and other housework. Once the woman has children, under the present social

¹³²Morley 1986: 150.

¹³³Chodorow (1978), for example, provides a psychoanalytic analysis for this gender division.

¹³⁴Although Charlotte Brunson (quoted in Morley, 1986: 148) refers to television viewing in this context, I think her insight can be applied to in women’s magazines.

arrangement and provisions, it is the woman who will be responsible for the caring of the child. The birth of a child always brings the woman back to a traditional division of labour. And once the child is born, no matter her education and class, she seems inevitably to be involved far more than her husband in terms of child care.

Yet, it is here that women's magazines have a crucial role to play, often unnoticed by traditional theorists and researchers on popular culture. Unlike listening to the radio or music, watching television or video, or simply chatting, reading is an activity that requires a very high level of concentration, not easily combined with domestic responsibilities and other activities. Whereas watching television, 'as a part of home life rather than any kind of special event'¹³⁵, does not require serious spectator concentration, magazine reading requires a far more intense level of concentration.

Reading not only demands a high level of attention but also draws the reader into the text, totally absorbing 'her' as a participant into the text. Indeed, men's rejection and resentment of their women partner's reading of women's magazines has no relation to the exact nature and kind of 'book' she reads except for the plain fact of the 'reading' activity itself, which totally absorbs her and excludes him. The sense of privacy, solitary personal space and intense involvement given by reading magazines provides immense pleasure for women, especially those who lack personal space in their lives. In this sense, reading is both social and a-social as 'it temporarily suppresses the individual's relations with his universe to construct new ones with the universe of the work'.¹³⁶

Reading (women's magazines) becomes a site of power struggle where women can defend and attain a minimal level of personal space from domestic duties. Mary is an excellent example:

'I must admit that I regret sacrificing my interest in novels after having children. The days when I can sit down and read novels one after another are gone now. I did try to start a novel last month, but then it is too frustrating to be disturbed every fifteen minutes.'

But Mary did not give up reading. She turned to women's magazines.

'One of the things that I find most distressing having children is the heavy expectation to do things for them, to take care of their needs. I can never finish a novel now. I was keen about novels before. In my schooldays, I read and read, one novel after another. But now, I can only read either very short stories or magazines. I turn to magazines now because you can be disturbed, you can finish an article in five minutes. I simply don't have time for something that demands long time concentration.'

Women's magazines become a crucial strategy for Mary to negotiate her personal interest/space and the social/familial responsibility.

¹³⁵John Ellis, 1982: 113.

¹³⁶Robert Escarpit: *The Sociology of Literature* (1965). Painesville, Ohio: Lake Erie College Press.

'I find it hard to read after day time as I have to work, and during night time my children all watch television in the living room. So I can only read something light and casual while I sit in the same living room when the television is on.'

Women's magazines are a good choice. Reading women's magazines provides women the spaces to articulate their own individuality. Yet it is pursued within patriarchal boundaries and domestic gender construction -- they read only at night time and only when their housework responsibilities are finished. As Mary went on to say, 'I normally read after ten o'clock when my kids have gone to bed. I never read in the daytime.'

Mrs Chow echoed Mary's dilemma and said:

'I feel uneasy if I disregard everyone and just read my own books/magazines. As I work all day and am disconnected with my children during daytime, I feel strongly that I should be in touch with them during night time. So I 'steal' the time to read magazines only when they go to sleep or when they are out...It is rare that I can have the whole night just enjoying myself, reading or listening to the music I like. I suppose that is the cost that I have to pay when I became a mother.'

These women identity themselves as 'mother' far more than 'housewife'. In this context, Vivian is more 'privileged':

'I think I need to establish my own interest and hobby, even if my husband may have no interest whatsoever. Personal space is very important. I joined a drama group a long time ago. Sometimes when we have performances, I will be entirely pre-occupied, going out every night. My husband has got used to it.'

The fact that some women have no children definitely enhances their space for personal pursuits. Career-women without children tend to treat the domestic environment as a place to relax, and do not have any guilty feeling about enjoying a reasonable amount of leisure and pleasure at home.

Sara, who has a larger house than the rest, is able to use this space when she does not want to be disturbed. Even when her husband watches television in the living room, she can still enjoy a solitary reading in the study room. This physical space is crucial as it enables her to pursue her reading, something not available to the majority of women in Hong Kong, especially working class women who do not have a separate living or reading room. When Sara felt tired, then television would be turned on instead of turning the page of a book/magazine. Also, when she wants to share with other family members, she will stop reading.

'I enjoy reading very much, from novels, magazines to short stories. But I don't want to exclude my husband, so I always join him for television, especially movies he is keen about. He wants to discuss with me while watching. Or when Tim (her seven year old child) is watching television, I will

stop reading and watch with him as I really want to understand his world more and be with him.'

Sara realizes that reading women's magazines would 'exclude' her husband. That is why she always join him for television.

These women in general do not feel guilty that women's magazines have taken some of their time away from the role of caretaker. Even married women don't feel guilty because reading draws their attention away from the immediate family circle. No one felt the need to hide their interest, pleasure or the time they spend in reading. As argued by Amy,

'...my husband sometimes complains that I spent too much time reading women's magazines at the expense of family housework. He once asked me to watch television and movie with him instead...but I do not like the television or movies he chooses...and he spends double or treble the time watching sports programmes on television than I do for women's magazines. So I think I deserve the time and space to read the magazines I like.'

The lack of guilt is also attributed to the changing nature of Hong Kong society from one which emphasizes work and production to one which values leisure, pleasure and fun. Local middle-class young women feel it legitimate to claim their spaces for leisure and pleasure.

Perhaps the relationship between women's leisure time and domestic gender politics can further be elucidated by looking at the male response to their women partners' fascination for women's magazines. My interview results revealed that there are three different male reactions to their partner reading women's magazines. Some men, though rare, do read women's magazines and are open about it. Among the twelve interviewees, only Stephenie's partner read women's magazines with her. She says,

'I read In with my (cohabitated) partner, we always discuss gender issue together. He is very open-minded and sympathetic to feminism. And through reading women's magazines with him, I hope to teach his taste of fashion...and he has improved a great deal. While all along he knows nothing about fashion and dresses up in a boring way, he now can differentiate between different looks, say from Armani, Durban to YSL. And he started to use male cologne last year.'

The second category of male response, who are the majority of my interviewees' partners, are more neutral or even indifferent to their partners reading women's magazines, thus tacitly implying that these women's magazines are women's territory and therefore reading them will be a threat to or derogation of their masculine identity, like other 'unmanly' acts such as crying, knitting or sewing. For example, Vivian says that:

'...my husband never mentions or even bothers with women's magazines. I think he treats it as a 'feminine genre', something I can legitimately possess, and he recognizes my privacy, won't infringe on my own space.'

The third male reaction is hostility to their partners reading women's magazines. As Mrs Chan

remarks, 'David never reads them, he'll go sleeping, watching television and even goes out of the house when I read these magazines. He thinks it's a load of rubbish.' Janice's husband also holds this attitude, Sara says, 'John doesn't like Cosmopolitan, Elle or Marie Claire, just treating them as ridiculous cliché's to kill time for those women who have nothing to do.'

This attitude is of interest because it means that some women are risking the disruption of family harmony or relational tension in order to read women's magazines. Mrs Chan even effectively banishes her husband from their only living room in order to read her magazines quietly. Reading becomes a crucial space that 'excludes' men.

Reading is not only private, it also enables readers to suspend temporarily their familial relationships and to throw up a screen between themselves and the arena where they are required to play the role of caretakers. Reading thus gives the women readers a free space that enables them to deny the physical and emotional demands of domestic responsibilities that otherwise natural and unavoidable. As Mary said:

'Reading magazines enables me to relieve tension, to diffuse resentment, and to indulge in a fantasy that empowers me and enables me to perform better when I go back to my job.'

Their social role leaves these women little room for the guiltless self-interested pursuit of individual pleasure.

Reading women's magazines becomes a crucial strategy to establish and expand her space, to assert her power and individuality, and to resist the traditional definition of the domestic duties of a housewife. Mrs Chan said that when her husband asks her to do housework, she may just say, 'I'm reading Cosmopolitan, wait for a while'. Sally who lives with her family (as a daughter) employed a similar strategy. While reading women's magazine has enhanced certain heterosexist myths as portrayed in the magazines, the act of reading within the household context may help to articulate and legitimize women's resistance to their role as caretaker. While the sample is far too small to suggest any general case in Hong Kong, it is a strategy usually neglected by traditional (feminist) scholars and researchers in popular culture.

Women's magazines per se can never change or subvert gender relation. But contextualized within the specific context of women's readership especially when their social space is lacking, reading women's magazines can be empowering to women.

4. Reading, negotiation and resistance

These interviews are highly suggestive and indicative of the complexity of readers' negotiations with magazines. The readers neither simply take for granted what the magazines claim, nor do they act as blank-sheets to be drawn upon. They are self-conscious agents actively engaged with the magazines to produce meaning that is relevant to their life-worlds. These readers are very active and opinionated readers. When asked about the term 'women's magazines', none of the interviewees mentioned its use as a pejorative term. When asked about the differences among these magazines, most of the interviewees were very articulate about their uniqueness and differences.

Sally: 'Cosmopolitan targets career-women who are aspiring to a strong independent image and active sexuality. The ideal reader is more materialistic and practical; In targets the more intellectual and thoughtful women who concerned the world, and are more uneasy with the image of women as a mere beauty object; Elegance attracts more mature or older women, more conservative and family oriented; Elle is aimed at a younger audience, very fashion oriented, with more visual emphasis.'

Vivian also gives a sharp comparison of these magazines. Indeed, she makes a sharp observation about Cosmopolitan by saying that:

'Cosmopolitan is imported from the USA and with a strong American style, especially in the articles on sex; In is a very serious magazine, concerned with more serious and intellectual matters; Elle's image is more ambiguous, I think it is a fashion magazine, there are not many written articles...I have no idea about Elegance.'

Liza Ng, who works in an advertising agency, and is more sensitive to the image and presentation of these magazines, told me that:

'These local magazines are very concerned with packaging and presentation. Cosmopolitan, for example, is very professional in terms of the package. Even if the content may not be very rich, it looks very impressive and attractive, and it is very pleasurable to read. I read them not only because it relates to my work, but because I really enjoy reading them.'

Among all interviewees, only Candy failed to articulate the image of the magazine she read. That may partly be attributed to the fact that she is largely attracted by the photo-visual series of Elle, and partly related to her education and job background, which are not conducive to the expression of critical perspectives.

When asked about any disagreements or criticisms regarding the women's magazines, these readers are highly vocal and active in articulating their views:

Sally: Cosmopolitan and Elle are too stereotyping, sometimes I think that modern women and relationships are far more complex than what they describe.

June: It's alright if the reader is critical enough, otherwise you may spend too much time and energy 'decorating' yourself, and are too obsessed with your appearance...one needs to expose oneself more to different areas of life.

Julian: Most of women's magazines put too much emphasis on relations, romance and make-up. I think modern women should live an independent life. I will hate and despise myself if I devote all my energy to a man. It is the reason why I like In, you know, it (In) is more broad, with more social concern and is less obsessed with romance and beauty.

Lisa: I work in an advertising agency, I know the advertising nature of commercial magazines. They need to make money and the main source is ads, not the sales...Women's magazine basically are a advertising media, it sells anything that makes money. Sometimes it publishes

some articles that not even the editors like, it is the reality of the commercial world...But I think the difference between good and bad magazines is that for a 'good magazine', the editors know how to balance the commercial factors and will not allow themselves to be overridden by them.

Stephenie: I think the worst thing about women's magazines is that the reader may lose her individuality if she follows them too closely, because your meaning in life would be reduced to mere beauty, knowing how to dress up but knowing nothing else about the world.

Mrs Chow criticized these women's magazines for ignoring the social role and situation of motherhood. She said:

'As a young mother, I do not feel these magazines cater to my needs. When I read these articles that always talk about the pursuit of romance and sexual excitement, I feel excluded. Sometimes, these magazines institute a sense of shame for those women who have no work outside the family, as if all modern women must have a job...But when I turned to those 'typical' magazines for mothers, they look very stupid, traditional, like either a cook book or a guide-book for child-care.'

Mary makes a stronger point as she said:

'These glossy magazines are all targeted towards a small segment of women who are usually middle-class, well-educated, young and have a good job. If you are an old woman, a handicapped woman, a poor woman, a divorced woman, a mother without a job, then you may find these magazines quite irrelevant to you.'

Despite all these criticisms, all the interviewees shared the view that reading women's magazines is highly pleasurable. As Vivian told us:

'I do not agree with Cosmopolitan, but you need to know interpersonal dynamics especially sexual dynamics; you need to know the psyche of men. I will not be seductive as Cosmopolitan teaches, but as a famous Chinese saying goes, 'By knowing yourself and the others, you'll win all battles'. It is naive to use one's beauty and femininity to seduce a man, but I think one should use one's beauty and femininity for more positive purposes, like enhancing human communication, soothing the intense and competitive working environment...I also like In because it gives me totally different kind of pleasures, it is more intellectual, thoughtful, and informative. It tells one more about the world. It simply makes me think and reflect more about myself and the social issues around. Modern women cannot be stupid or just a beauty. There is no difference between women and men in terms of working...I read different magazines for different purposes. Every person is multi-dimensional, shouldn't be confined to any single scope'.

Vivian's view is important because it exposes the multiple and even contradictory nature of spectatorship and subjectivity.

Readers do enjoy very different things. It is problematic to assume that a reader only likes one kind/style of women's magazine, and enjoys that magazine for only one reason. Every reader is simultaneously a number of different readers. Each process of reading has condensed different, multiple and contradictory desires and needs which are both expressed and repressed in women's magazines. Instead of stressing any single aspect of readers' responses, it is crucial to go beyond such reductionist and monolithic discourse, to explore how a specific text simultaneously fulfils, contains and subverts different desires and needs of different readers.

Amy also stressed the point of pleasure:

'I like reading something light, relaxing and entertaining but also informative. They let me know more about society. I pick up Cosmopolitan as I think it is very rich. You don't have to believe anything said by it, or to follow its instructions. Reading women's magazines is just for pleasure, you should not be too serious. And as an adult, you choose by yourself what to read, what to omit and what to believe.'

It is interesting to note how women readers project their ideal image into these magazines and engage with the ideal image projected by these magazines. There is a hermeneutical circle and a space of reading between the magazine and the reading of the readers. The meaning is not fixed or defined by the writer/editor. From the interview, it is obvious that readers who like Cosmopolitan are successful career-women, confident about their career, career-conscious, and more confident about their sexuality and femininity; those who like In are well-educated, independent, less money-conscious, more intellectual, socially conscious, more sympathetic to feminism and less obsessive about their sexual appeal. Cosmopolitan and In represent two very different, if not antagonistic, realities: Cosmopolitan signifies a world of material success, social achievement, financial independence and sexual freedom/adventure, whereas In articulates vocally a feminist platform to counter the capitalist-patriarchal social structure and orientation. Yet the distinction is by no means discrete. More than half of the interviewees read both Cosmopolitan and In for example. Most women's readers in the interviews have no difficulty in reading and enjoying both magazines simultaneously.

The fact that these interviewees are constant readers of women's magazines, yet are simultaneously highly critical of their approach, style and content indicates the inadequacies of the naive theory of media effect which presents the readers as the innocent victim being manipulated and indoctrinated by the media. It also reveals the contradictory nature of reading and the multiple subjectivity/positioning of these readers.

Reading women's magazines is a process of pleasure-seeking; it is a pleasure that cannot be contained or exhausted by any single motive or desire. These readers enjoy reading as identification, projection, encouragement, pleasure and information, all in one. 'It cheers me up'. 'It is highly pleasurable'. 'When I feel bored, reading women's magazines makes me feel happier'. Yet it is not a simple ideological control as the radical theorists postulate, nor the joyful celebration of social differences and personal choice as the liberal fantasizes. To say the least, the subjects are actively engaged in the production of meaning which is circulates hermeneutically between readers and the text, by selectively omitting and choosing what they want from the magazines.

5. Middle-class (sexist) bias

In the interview, I asked the interviewees to choose the preferred 'sex' of their boss. Nobody, among the twelve interviewees, chose a female boss. Nine among twelve said they preferred male bosses, whereas the other three expressed no preference between the sexes. The reasons given for not choosing women included the idea that women are more narrow-minded, calculating, sensitive, harsh and inconsiderate. 'Women bosses are very trouble-some and too sensitive about trivial matters' (Candy); 'Male bosses will be more lenient to me and won't be as harsh as a female one, and at least won't scold me publicly' (Julian); 'There are always some intricate and subtle competitions between women, I don't like woman bosses' (Vivian); Sara, amongst all, gives the most straight forward answer,

'If I have a male boss, my femininity will be a help to my career, my feminine and smooth interactive techniques could do me a great favour. But if I have a female boss, we will be competitors. At least, my femininity is no help to me'.

When asked whether they will appoint/employ women employees, six say no and only two (Stephenie and Amy) preferred to employ women (and the rest said no preference between the sexes). Women workers are not preferred, not because women are inferior, but because women are commonly thought to be more concerned about their family and children than men. As argued by June,

'It is alright when a woman is 25 and single, she works hard and is devoted entirely to her career. But how about when she gets married and has children, she may still work hard, but will be less committed to her career. It's reasonable for a working mother to care more about her children than her job. Married men will still put career as their first priority. It is unfair for women (and not men) to take the responsibility of caring for the family especially since modern women also have to work outside. But it is the reality, no matter how unfair it is. You must admit it.'

Sara puts it more sharply:

'I like to hire men because most women have great ambition and energy only before they are married. A lot of girls have a good education, get into a career, then decide that their next ambition is to find a good husband. Then they care less about their work. I am not talking about clerical workers or assistants. They are managerial level people. I am not trying to discourage women, but men are more devoted. They treasure their career. I have to be wary about these women who always worry about their romance and marriage; they might get married someday, and their ambition gets changed to having children. So, they get pregnant and the next thing is they cannot travel. Men do not want to see pregnant women at important meetings and appointments. I've got more confidence in men...It is very difficult to employ a woman if you know that, in a year or two years' time, she is going to have child after child. We have endless trouble with women asking for time off for maternity leave. Women should have the right to maternity leave, but it is a loss from the company's view-point.'

This idea reproduces and reinforces the myth that 'women = trouble'. Women are perfectly alright before marriage, but when they have children, the family becomes their major concern. In other words, the mere presence of women in top-ranking positions does not necessarily mean the improvement of women's condition. Successful career women are not actively encouraging the hiring and promotion of women, and may even discriminate against women both because of internalizing heterosexist and misogynist stereotypes against women, and because of a practical threat from other women. Top women like to be in a minority. It perpetuates their privileges which are predicated upon the under-representation of women in the senior ranks of the public world. Their minority status makes them feel unique, like a queen bee. Blocking other women from threatening them is a crucial way to sustain their unique privileges.

This is especially true of capitalist and patriarchal societies where the long process of getting to the top to produce male-centred women who adopt male categories to defend themselves. They are imbued with a male perspective of work and family and seem intent on preserving their privileges rather than extending it to others. If career women, especially women in senior and executive positions think like men, then the prospects for the feminist movement are rather gloomy.

Women at the top see no reasons for anything resembling equal opportunities programmes in Hong Kong. Their response to the suggestion would be that there are already equal opportunities, and the reason women are not taking advantage of them is simply because they do not want to. Of course, not every woman agrees. Stephenie said that it depends on the nature of the job and the quality of that person, rather than her gender. Indeed, 'I (Stephenie) would prefer a problem with women having children than a man, especially a bachelor, going around with one woman after another. They bring more problems than a pregnant woman.' Amy says that

'I prefer to appoint females wherever possible, but for practical reasons rather than feminist reasons. It is a male culture that demands workers to be competitive and engaged in office politics. Women are just as ambitious. Even if they are not involved in office politics as men are, it is not because they cannot manage or they are weaker, they just work for themselves. It is silly to say that men are all selfish whereas women are all altruistic.'

Liza, expresses no particular preference for the sex of her employee, yet it is because of a naive liberal attitude rather than support for women's rights.

'I think working in Hong Kong is a fair game. If you are bright enough, you make it. Certain family and social advantages may be a help, but it is your personal talent and effort that differentiates you from the rest. I don't believe there is oppression or exploitation, at least not in Hong Kong. Like me, I work twice as hard as the majority, I think I deserve what I have attained in my present social power and income. It is ridiculous to say that employers oppress their workers. It is the Marxist theory which has proven to be wrong.'

Women, particularly aspirant career women, have a dilemma. They feel capable of performing as satisfactorily as men in all sort of situations, yet are aware that they are considered too soft,

gentle or vulnerable to be effective by male colleagues. Faced with the possibility of being totally excluded, many career-women use whatever resources they might have to enhance their self interest. This tactic may bring women entry to the male's world, but it also reinforces sexist stereotypes and perpetuates the double bind.

Compounding the problem for women of the future is the fact that many career women actually believe themselves to be unique. Women at the top absorb the type of sexist attitudes and beliefs conventionally held by males. As women traverse unfamiliar territory, they adapt to their new environment, rather than attempt to change it. The problem of these successful women is not only that they are individualistic and narcissistic, but that they are using male categories to play the public game. When they rank themselves as unique, they are denouncing the traditional housewife as mediocre and old-fashioned.

6. Misogyny and feminism

Given the capitalistic and heterosexist nature of Hong Kong society, it is 'natural' that the notion of 'oppression' and 'exploitation' are very unpopular, only entertained by small groups of radicals or intellectuals. The statement of Sara Cheng is very typical of local middle-class career-women,

'I do not think there is anything exploitative or oppressive. You see, feminists sometimes can be very bitchy, demanding something which is very unreasonable, and criticizing something which is indeed women's fault. Hong Kong society is basically a fair game. Women are now very powerful and free. You can do whatever you like, as men...These women's magazines are sometimes too biased towards women, just blame men for everything.'

Candy is more direct and blatant in her disagreement against feminism:

'Feminism has confused women and done nothing to help women, it just irritates men and fails to attract women, at least not me. What does feminism want? For women to be like men, to drop her femininity, or to denounce the relationship with men? What is the point? I prefer to be a feminine woman, sometimes a little woman, sometimes independent and career-minded, a balance rather than an extreme...Hong Kong women are already very fortunate. We have equal rights with men in legal, political, economic, education and other aspects. We need to be realistic.'

Vivian Lau also hits on the same point when talking about her Korean friend.

'I have a Korean friend who is a university graduate. She is working as a manager in her company in Korea, but actually doing all sorts of 'caring' jobs for the boss and other male colleagues. When she is back home, she has to do all the housework, whereas her husband just takes it for granted that she should sacrifice herself for the family. She is not satisfied but can do nothing about it. She has no choice, no alternative. Women in Hong Kong are very privileged. Why still fight for women's liberation? What do you want? Do you want women to do men's work, or be as masculine as men? I prefer to be a

woman, a feminine woman...one cannot be too idealistic...I think my husband also faces serious pressure, he has to work hard, to be competent, to be strong. I am not against women's liberation. Some women are in very difficult circumstances and are under-privileged. But we have to be practical and realistic.'

Not everyone in our interview is hostile to feminism. Julian is more sympathetic to the idea of 'women's rights'.

'We are still living in an unequal society, never have men and women been equal. But we are different, men and women are different, even women themselves are different...of course we have to do more housework than men, but we can tolerate it as long as it is reasonable.'

Julian goes on to talk about feminism:

'Women's liberation does not imply that women cannot be housewives, it is indeed oppressive to women themselves if liberation means every woman has to be male-like, aggressive and career-minded. I think the most crucial thing is the right to choose. In Hong Kong, you have the right to choose. We are not perfect of course, but are already far better than many other countries. Though we still have traditional sexist concepts like the double standards on virginity, but at least formally men and women are equal, and the schooling system and the legal system does not discriminate against women. Look at Japan, Thailand, Korea, Singapore and other Asian countries, women in Hong Kong are already very lucky...Everyone has dreams, but they have to be reasonable. Sometimes I wonder if the feminists know what they are doing!'

Julian's viewpoint, reveals the deep-rooted liberal discourse permeating in Hong Kong society. She takes 'discrimination' and 'oppression' merely in the formal or 'procedural' sense, thus concealing and denying the more subtle socio-political process of social and ideological formation. Such a kind of pragmatism is also echoed by Mary Ho who entertains the notion of 'sexual discrimination', but argues that things should not be changed too drastically.

'It is unfair for women. Like me, I go out to work as my husband does, but I do ninety percent of the housework. He is very lazy and resistant to housework. But it is not entirely his fault. Try to think, how can a man do something that he has not done for his thirty years of life. It is very difficult for this generation of men, as they were still socialized by more traditional sexist ideology in their childhood.'

Julian, Mary and Vivian all take a highly pragmatic and libertarian attitude towards gender issues. Though they are not hostile to feminism as Sara and Candy are, they do not entertain the feminist idea that 'women as a group' are being oppressed by patriarchal society. Instead, they show the kind of contentment of modern middle-class women, a contentment which is predicated upon the unequal power relations in which middle-class women are located. Even when Julian Mary and Vivian admit a certain degree of injustice, they immediately resort to a pragmatic strategy of cost-benefits calculation, accepting the present injustice as either

inevitable or reasonable.

Age and class are key factors here. Local women who received their tertiary education in the 70's and 80's, enjoyed the full benefits of Hong Kong rapid economic development for the past thirty years. Being a woman is indeed a favourable factor for personal career advancement given the nature of service and finance economy which requires a more sensitive, well-articulated, presentable and gentle character. These young successful career women are the privileged social class of the new world and are quite unaware of the plight of their working class 'sisters' and their parent 'mothers' and 'grand-mothers'. As the cream of the new finance world, these women find feminism, which rocks the boat of patriarchy and even capitalism, too threatening and 'irrelevant' to their vested interest. They have the personal spaces and financial independence that their working class 'sisters' lack. They have the sexual freedom and social power that their parent mothers and grand-mothers were deprived of. Instead of being the supporters of their feminist 'sisters', middle-class career-women are, more often than not, suspicious, resistant and even hostile to feminism.

As remarked by Ann Ma, the chief-editor of In:

'Class location makes a woman's situation very different. Many middle-class women gain a lot from the economic changes of Hong Kong. As Hong Kong has entered a tertiary economy of services, many university graduated women climb up the social ladder much faster than their male counterparts. That was quite impossible for the women in the 70's or even early 80's. These women are the privileged from the nine-year compulsory free education policy. They enjoy the benefits of feminist movements. They are the cream of late capitalism. Since they are pioneers in the male territory of the decision-making levels in the business sector, they are actually in a very dogging location. At the beginning they are the minorities and may have a difficult time with their male colleagues. But then if they know how to manipulate their femininity and play the game well, they start to gain benefits. Most men are glad to be lenient or particularly kind to them. They climb the ladder faster than men. Once they become middle-class successful career women, the next thing is to employ a Philippine woman as domestic helper. We have a pretty bitter joke that every career woman in Hong Kong have a 'wife', a woman from the Philippines to help her in the road to success. To me, it is really sad, as they enjoy the social privileges but don't feel anything wrong about the social system.'

Stephenie is the only interviewee that offers a sharp and clear support to feminism:

'Feminism gives women a choice, otherwise you can only be a traditional woman. Feminism provides a perspective for women to understand gender relations in terms of power analysis, not only male power in personal terms, but patriarchal domination in social and collective terms. With feminism, women have more alternatives to choose the way she likes. I think the hostility towards feminism is mainly because of ignorance -- misunderstanding feminism as men-hating or bra-burning.'

But she immediately falls back to the liberal discourse of 'choice' which has de-politicized and a-historicized 'personal choice'. She argues that

'I think it is not a matter of right or wrong to choose between the modern independent woman and traditional housewife, it is just a matter of personal choice. Choose as you like. I support feminism as it gives us more choices. But feminism should not discriminate against those women who choose to be housewives.'

For Stephenie, being a housewife or career-woman is a 'free' choice that every woman is in the fair and competent position to choose, thus she is totally unaware of the underlying inequalities of gender and social power relations that constitute women and men's 'social' capacity to choose their 'personal' route.

To appreciate the inadequacy of support for feminism and the feminist movement, we need to distinguish between those who fail to support feminism because of their paucity of knowledge, those who refrain from supporting the movement while possessing a reasonable understanding of it, and those who have misconceptions about feminism and the feminist movement. Their perception of the naturalness of women's inferior position could be so ingrained that they might see the present relation between the sexes as 'inevitable' and the women's movement as irrelevant.

For most women in Hong Kong, there are many ambiguities and disagreements over what the feminist movement and women liberation means. Responses range from confusion - 'what does it mean to be liberated? Family constraints or the right to work? Equality of opportunities or the freedom from motherhood?' to a misconceived notion of role reversal - 'how can you expect men to be pregnant?'

Few people have direct experience of the feminist movement and feminists, thus the mass media become important channels of information and ideas concerning feminism in general and the feminist movement. The radical feminists' demonstration against the Miss America Contest in 1968 was treated by the media with enthusiasm, and communicated to the public with biases and implicit ridicule, labelling the feminists as 'bra-burning fanatics'. Such a blatant media distortion still haunts the present generation, overshadowing the specific feminist purpose of protesting against the patriarchal and sexist nature of such events as the Miss America Contest. Such an image of feminism is likely to alienate any 'respectable' potential supporters from publicly supporting or aligning with feminism.

While the feminist movement is a movement for women, by women and in the interest of women, many women do not support it, or are even against it. Ironically, there are rights that feminists are demanding which women might not want to demand, while there are also privileges that women have which they need to forego in order to achieve total liberation and which they might not want to forego. There are employed women who see themselves as deserving less than men. There are middle-class women who think that they deserve more power, privilege and status than the majority of women. There are women who enjoy the privileges of being the weaker sex -- being helped, exploiting the patronizing concern given by men. There are sufficiently socialized women who see the present gender relations as 'natural', 'biological' and 'legitimate', thus naturalizing the biological ground of motherhood,

housewife and the role of caretaker. Whereas working class women appreciate their male counterparts when they assist in lifting heavy objects, middle-class women allude to social etiquette and to the sense of security and respect provided by middle class men. When women/girls are pursued by men, they are made to believe that they are goddess. Moreover, the oppressors as portrayed by feminism are the loved ones of the women: their husbands, fathers, boyfriends and brothers; how can they support a movement that arouses such distaste in them?

7. Heterosexuality and the beauty myth

Hong Kong is a deeply heterosexist society where heterosexuality is taken-for-granted as the foundation of all the 'normal' interpersonal and social relations. Among the interviewees, no one challenges heterosexism, nor does anyone regard heterosexuality as a political category. For them, and most people in Hong Kong, compulsory heterosexuality is simply taken-for-granted as natural and normal. Given the primacy of the male gaze, 'femininity' is equated with either mothering (care-taker of others) or a beauty/sex-object. As a patriarchal category, 'femininity' has been used by women to advance their interest. Career-women are particularly sensitive to the career benefits of 'presenting' their femininity in a way that contributes to their career advancement and social power.

Liza told us that

'I think a little charm can make life a little easier. If there are two men in a room arguing, they may end up insulting each other. But if one of the two negotiators is a woman, then the gentleman will not shout or get mad at her. So it may not end up in an insult session. If I raise something at a meeting which a man does not like, then he might let me have my own way, at least once or twice, because I'm a woman. Of course, it depends very much on me or any other woman using charm, or call it the instinct of a woman. I don't like it, but I have to live with it and use it for my own purposes.'

Sara Cheng is more straight forward in admitting that she uses her beauty as an asset for her career advancement.

'What's wrong with being pretty? Why does a pretty woman have to be sorry and hide her beauty? I am not using my beauty for anything immoral or nasty. We must admit that 'beauty' does help you, as it gives people a better impression. You become more approachable and attractive. I use my beauty for positive purposes, to give my friends, colleagues and clients a cosy and comfortable impression.'

A woman always has to feel that she has to fall back into a feminine role to secure an appointment, better work relations, in order to impress men.

For Julian:

'If a man stares at me, I feel it is harassment. But I also enjoy being looked at. He looks at me only because he finds me attractive. If a woman stares at

me, I think it is because she envies my beauty, I enjoy it too. Everyone enjoys being looked at and feels flattered. It only means that you are attractive. What's wrong with being attractive. People have the right to look at other people that they find attractive. I cannot stop them. It would be horrible if women cannot present themselves in a glamorous way.'

Julian may sound sexist, but her attitude is shared by Sara:

'If a man looks at me, I will consider whether he is appreciating me or has an ulterior motive. I am flattered if he appreciates my beauty. But even if they look at me as a kind of harassment, I don't feel too bad. I give myself an excuse: he stares at me because he is attracted by me. If you are too ugly, no one bothers to harass you.'

In contrast, Vivian Lau believes that

'Charm is not always a winning weapon. I prefer to rely on my ability as a person rather than abusing my femininity for career interests. I do not show any charm at meetings, not until I know the character of the man. That's just business. Do not try to charm your seniors through a meeting just because you're a woman! I learn and read a lot. I read magazine articles so as to enrich myself, that I will not appear as empty-headed in front of men. I prepare so that I can meet a man on his own terms...But a man has expectations of a woman, from her appearance to her femininity, if she does not measure up to them, then life is going to be very tough.'

In the case of Hong Kong, successful career women are quite content with the present gender power arrangement. No one, among the twelve interviewees, thinks that the public sphere has historically been constructed as a male category. They are pleased to participate in the public (work) and do not feel any intrinsic tension between the 'maleness' of the public (like the requirement to be rational, objective, systematic, authoritative and argumentative) and the 'femininity' of being a woman.

It is a situation where middle-class women, being the privileged group which has successfully climbed up the social ladder, entered the male realm and played the male public game. Middle-class women have thus internalized the male category of 'success' and 'public', reducing success to one's market value, taking the male standard as the social norm of success. Career-women in Hong Kong perceive sexism and gender inequality, not as the structural tension of the public-private split, but merely as isolated and discrete cases within these separate spheres. These women also have internalized the binary structure of the public-private split. Lots of interviewees adopt the strategy of 'separate-spheres' to handle the different demands and sensibility between the public and the private sphere. As Mrs Chow told us, '

'I am always away from home for long hours, but the moment I get back I switch very quickly. I go for a bath, get changed and I am in a different role: not a business woman, but a wife which demands a totally different frame of reference. I undergo a Gestalt switch in which I cease to be a woman at the top

and become a woman about the house.'

Vivian puts a strong case against the traditional stereotype of women as loving, caring and domestic.

'Many women in Hong Kong say that careers are not important and they treasure family and marriage more. I do not believe it. Especially for well-educated career women, they are trying to save their husband's face by saying that they care for family more than their career. It is ridiculous for a successful career woman to claim that she cares for family and marriage rather than career. Career women work hard and they want recognition, achievement and success. Modern women have their ambitions and strong self-images -- only that a 'worse-off' husband and sexist social expectation make her pretend to be traditional and submissive'.

Liza agrees:

'Men are not ready for women at the top, there is something in their mentality that makes them see women as wives and mothers, not as an independent person. Even a woman like me who works ten hours a day and travels on business trips all over the world have always been treated merely as a woman, a beauty and a secretary rather than an independent executive. When other colleagues know that I am not married, they look at me differently. I am always a woman in the eyes of men.'

Vivian shared the difficulties career-women face,

'It is competitive at the top of anywhere and women are not seen by men as equals. Men feel easier competing with other men. A man will find a woman threatening...There is nothing as obvious as racial discrimination or sexual discrimination at work. But when it comes to more subtle arrangements and work relationships, women have to work doubly hard to prove that they are not just a beauty and can be as competent as men. That's why sometimes I get frustrated and become very reluctant to fight for women's rights.'

Such reluctance or resistance to drastic changes is best expressed by Mrs Chan who is contented with her domestic role. 'I am happy with my husband, I am happy with my children, I am happy in my present post forever, no matter whether or not I ever get promoted.' The fact that she addresses herself as 'Mrs Chan' rather than Pat Lee (her original name before marriage) already indicates her deep involvement and contentment with her present role as a wife. This is the kind of mentality many women have: 'they are happy'. Even if they are not happy, women in Hong Kong tend to accept their social positioning of domesticity. For young women, it may be the deep impact of the myth of romantic love, but for older women, it is the pragmatic consideration of finance and her partner's co-operation. It is a situation in which some (middle-class) privileged women can afford to have a career and leave the domestic chores behind (taken up by her Filipino servant); others have to give up their careers - they have no choice.

June Lam said that

'Marriage is more important than my career; no matter how career-minded a woman is, I am still a woman. I care for my career, but when I imagine what happens if my marriage breaks up, then I am willing to sacrifice anything for my family. I do not think it is fair. But my husband expects me to be a traditional woman when I am home, doing housework and following his opinion. This is the fact of life. Marriage or a career: which one is more important when you're 60 years old?'

Janice shares such a view. Indeed, she is very sympathetic to her husband's chauvinism and his demand to her to drop her career and be a housewife. As Janice said:

'If I were in his position, I would have probably done exactly the same thing. Why should I marry a wife who does not take care of me, who is weary, who is unattractive when I come home and so frigid in bed?'

Class is a crucial factor here. In Hong Kong, many middle-class and upper middle-class families employ Filipino (women) domestic servants. There are around 91,000 Filipino domestic servants in Hong Kong, mostly serving young middle-class couples who have at least a reasonable mastery of English to communicate with these Filipinos. In Hong Kong it is relatively 'easy' for middle-class women to handle two jobs because you can hire help, you can get a maid.

8. Gender politics of housework

In the White-West dominated modern world, work is sharply demarcated from the domestic, as something people are paid to do. Work is experienced as the opposite of home, constituting the 'public' and the 'production' in contrast to consumption, non-work and leisure time activity. It is a definition that privileges men's experiences over women. Work is also represented as a masculine domain and home/family one of femininity. Men are thus related to the family as breadwinner while women's paid work is interpreted as an extension of their primary roles as wives and mothers.

It is only since the nineteenth century, with the emergence of industrial capitalist production, that work, being separated from home, became synonymous with paid employment.¹³⁷ Indeed, the concept of a housewife who stays at home caring for house, husband and children is essentially a modern one -- few women before the twentieth century had the option, except the affluent few who had domestic servants.¹³⁸

¹³⁷Pahl, Ray, 'Work and employment', in McDowell, Linda and Rosemary Pringle, 'Defining Women: Social Institutions and Gender Divisions'. 1992 Open University: Polity Press.

¹³⁸Ann Oakley (1974) in her classic work *Housewife*, argues that the housewife is characteristic of contemporary capitalism. Christine Delphy, a French sociologist, suggests that domestic labour constitutes a separate mode of production in which the husband appropriates the labour of his wife and family. She argues that the lack of value attached to domestic work

Feminists interested in work have been concerned with the sexual division of labour, the allocation of tasks on the basis of sex. Betty Friedman in the USA summed up in *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963, saying the problem of being a housewife is 'the problem that has no name'.¹³⁹ As argued by Beechey,

'It is housework, rather than paid work, which preoccupied feminist writers in the early days of the new feminist movement. A central tenet of such thinking in the 70's was the belief that the family lay at the heart of women's oppression, and a major theoretical breakthrough involved the recognition that housework, the 'labour of love' performed by women in the home, was a form of work.'¹⁴⁰

Since the 1970's, feminists broadened the definition of work to include housework, sexual and emotional serving of men, and the caring of children, the elderly and the sick.¹⁴¹

The whole issue of women's leisure at home is closely tied to the division of domestic labour. It is thus relevant to understand which members of the household are responsible for day-to-day domestic servicing like child care, food provision, cooking, washing and cleaning of the house. Whereas many of the male partners in the sample performed some domestic duties, they played the role of 'helper' only. This confirms the relatively autonomous relationship Cynthia Cockburn talks about when referring to the domestic environment in which men are located.¹⁴² Domestic work is usually performed by the women and goes unnoticed by her family, taken-for-granted as the her natural obligation. Because of the unconscious and taken-for-granted nature of the gender division of labour, it is highly difficult to elicit information about it from the interview. Only two among twelve women reported that they shared responsibility for domestic work with their husband/partners. Their initial response was not taken at face value as further discussion revealed the subtle gender nature of the apparent equal gender division of labour.

Nobody among the interviewees thinks that domestic work is women's natural obligation or sacred task, but most of them seem to accept women's disproportionate participation in housework. Vivian's position is rather typical of local middle-class women:

'I do not think the housewife role is the natural obligation of a woman/wife. People should share work, husband and wife should share housework. We are living in the 90's, the age of equal rights, freedom and sex equality. But my husband has got used to being served. I have complained many times. He does try to share more domestic work but is still very lazy, reluctant and shows no

derives from the marriage contract, which is in fact a work contract.

¹³⁹Friedman, Betty, 1963.

¹⁴⁰Beechey, 1987, pp. 171-2.

¹⁴¹Writers like Selma James and Mariarosa dalla Costa (1972) attacked the left for focusing narrowly on the factory, and argued for wages for housework, while others argued that this would only confirm women's entrapment in the domestic sphere.

¹⁴²Cockburn, 1985.

initiative. I am not pleased, but what can I do? What can I do?’

Janice’s experience is similar:

‘He will never change a nappy, or clean the kitchen...he always justifies his laziness by accusing me of being too clean. I am always the one who notices the dust and dirt. Indeed, he is useless at washing, he will wash the pans before the glasses, and forget to put washing powder in for the dishes.’

Sexism works at a more subtle level especially in the age where everyone talks about equality and liberty. Janice was very energetic in talking about how she shares housework with her husband equally:

‘I teach him. He does a lot of housework now. Men have to be taught especially in terms of housework participation...Now I cook, he washes, I clean the house, he plays a lot with our daughter.’

But when I ask her why cooking is hers whereas washing is his, why cleaning the house is hers whereas playing with the daughter is his, Janice attributes this to personal choice and ability. The fact that modern men are involved mainly in leisure activities while the tedious, repetitive work is still left to the women does not seem to disturb these young modern couples.

Stephenie, living with her partner, claims proudly that James (her partner) is significantly involved in domestic duties.

‘No, James does share the housework with me. He irons his own clothes, he makes sandwiches for work, he sometimes cooks for me, and he always vacuums and dusts for me.’

This concept of ‘sharing’ and help’ are very crucial here in understanding gender power politics: When the man does the housework, his contribution is defined as ‘helping’, the wife is really supposed to do the housework. When he does his own part, he is praised for ‘sharing’ the housework! In other words, domestic work is still regarded by men and women to be the natural obligation and arena of women although all of them consciously and verbally deny it. Ideology works in more subtle ways than we are aware of. When talking about James’s participation in housework, Stephenie refers to James as ‘helping her or not helping her’. For the majority of women the home is first and foremost a workplace. It is difficult to find a legitimate space for her leisure.

When going out and doing things together, the women always do the things their partners enjoy. Janice said: ‘My husband likes watching movies and we tend to watch a lot’. She talked of ‘we’ as herself and substitutes her husband’s interest as ‘hers’ by losing herself in the imagined myth of the ‘we’. Going out for a meal was cited by many women as their favourite treat. They went out regularly and enjoy eating a full meal. Perhaps it is relevant to note that Chinese people, women in particular, always express their care and concern towards their friends by treating them to a meal.

These women have full-time professional jobs, and yet experienced a blurring between leisure and work. They expressed a great sense of autonomy and distance from the housework role. They felt a need to have leisure spaces of their own, despite the contradictory pressures on them to carry out their domestic duties. Women have to continually negotiate these contradictory social and personal demands. In this context, reading women's magazines enables them to achieve at least a minimal level of personal space and distance from domestic responsibilities.

The domestic division of labour is more gender based when there are small children in the household. Mrs Chow says:

'Once you give up work you tend to adopt a different attitude at home. It is ridiculous to do the housework when John comes home at night, so I tend to finish all the housework during the day so as to free myself to have a nice chat with him at night. Thus I establish a pattern of scheduled behaviour...At some point I intend to return to my full-time job, but the job market is in recession which simply shuts me out from such a possibility. And my husband has attained successful career achievement, to the extent that he thinks I should stay at home and take care of our children. After all, he can afford all our expenses. I prefer to work. But given all the practical constraints, I accept his suggestion.'

When there are practical constraints posed upon their family, it is always the women who give up. At the time of interview, Mrs Chow was five months pregnant. The coming of the second child will 'force' her to give up even the part-time job. 'I decided to drop my job entirely. As we are well off financially, it's better to concentrate on my child. It is a bit unfair to women but I think one needs to sacrifice it for the love of the children.' Not having adequate contraception, lack of state provision for maternity leave and child care leads many women to re-consider their career prospects when they are pregnant. In another case, Mrs Chan interprets her housework responsibility as a matter of practical, not normative necessity.

'I did housework since I was six and then I took up most of the responsibility for housework, from washing, cleaning, cooking to taking care of my younger brother and sister. My family is very poor, dad and mum both have to go out to work. I am the eldest child. So I had to take up such a heavy role. I do not think housework is a woman's duty. Everyone should share.'

One of the most popular explanations of housework allocation comes from the functionalist analysis of sex-role socialization. June Lam seems to support this position.

'I do not think women should be housewives necessarily, but we are more socialized to be the care-takers. We are more tolerant of the tedious and repetitive nature of housework. I do not like it, but it is still acceptable. That is the problem -- we accept it even when we are not satisfied.'

Socialization involves cultivating both the normative acceptance and practical capacity to occupy these roles. Thus, in the family, from childhood young girls are socialized to fit into their predefined housewife role. This involves both household skills and commitments.

However, many of the respondents said that they did not do housework before they get married. June Lam said that

‘Before I married, I did not know how to cook a meal. My husband taught me. But after six years of marriage, I cook every meal and he insists he does not know how to cook now...I do not think housework is a woman’s duty. It is not fair that I care for him only but not vice versa. But I think it is a matter of fact. You have to accept it. Otherwise, your marriage and social life will have problems.’

June’s situation is a vivid refutation of the socialization theory. Socialization should not be taken for granted. Many of the respondents simply do not accept what is taught, or are expected to accept. Even when the wife earns more than the husband (as in Mary Ho and Vivian’s case), the wife is still responsible for housework.

Stephenie gives her explanation for women’s difficulty with ‘domesticity’:

‘Most women perform roles and are not even aware of it; they just do it without enjoying or thinking about it: I serve my husband; I serve my family; I serve my child; I do everything I can but have no time for myself. They are all roles of the woman. Women try to work, but they often fail to achieve impressive results in their careers because they spend too much time and energy doing these duties.’

The situation is especially difficult for those women who have children. As Mrs Chow put it,

‘I think the responsibility of being a mother is more important. You see, being someone’s wife, you can neglect your other half, because he is a grown up. Being someone’s mother is different. Little kids are so fragile that you cannot neglect them. For cleaning, it does not matter who does it. But for child care it is my responsibility. Many people say that my kid is a happy baby, always smiling and very sociable. I think it is because he is being taken care of by me and my mum.’

The reason that Mrs Chow has to do a part-time job is to take care for her children.

For women, the family seems to be oriented primarily towards the needs of the children. The arrival of children changes drastically the pattern of allocation of housework. The arrival of children, has always led to the quitting of full-time jobs in the case of women, or to the employment of paid domestic help. Both types of decision result in a significant reduction of the husband’s original share. The mother-child relationship now substitutes the husband-wife as the central axis of family relationships. As remarked by Mrs Chow,

‘At home I feel that as a mother, I have to do everything. But as a wife, I do not feel the obligation and pressure to do all these. At least, my husband is a grown-up person. But my son is not...My husband may sometimes play with our son, but he would not look after him. He would not change his clothes,

bathe nor feed him.'

Not only is the amount of physical work done for the child incomparably greater than that given to other items of domestic labour, but the psychological stress suffered as a result of taking care of one's children is very high. Most of the women interviewed referred to the anxiety they felt in relation to their capacity for preparing their children properly for the demands of school, and for their well-being in general.

As privatized labour, housework is done in social isolation, a fact which becomes the most common cause of complaint by women. While finding full-time accountancy too heavy for her, Mrs Chow explained why she did part-time accountancy.

'At home there is no one to talk to you. From morning to night I am faced only with my small daughter and the four walls. Gradually you feel very bored. I hate the feeling of waiting for my husband to come home, especially when you have to wait every day. You become very noisy, ignorant and troublesome. I hate it.'

Apart from the absence of human contact, the privatised nature of housework means that there is an absence of social recognition of its worth. Thus Mrs Chow reminds herself of the importance of her work, even though the financial reward is not very impressive.

'I am very aware that the full time housewife is always looked down upon by society and even by themselves. There is no income, no status and no face. But what I resent most is that even my husband addresses me as 'the cooking-wife' which carries the negative connotations of ignorance.'

Mrs Chow justifies her taking responsibility for housework because she does not work full time. What she does not question is what made her change full time to part time employment. She is not really concerned about the social framework that limits her freedom of action.

Many career women in Hong Kong still believe in motherhood and marriage. Typical is Mrs Chow who sees her life in terms of a hierarchy of personal roles.

'I am doing three jobs all the time: a good worker, a good wife and a good mother. It is very demanding and you can fail in the process. First of all, you should be a good mother; if you fail there, your children will be in trouble. If you fail to be a good wife, you lose your husband. A lot of people nowadays are losing the battle to be a good wife and they divorce. If you fail at work, the only thing you lose is your job.'

Mrs Chow, herself has two children and insists that, while she describes herself as a career woman, she would willingly forsake her seniority if she felt a conflict of interests with her family involvement. 'It is a matter of priorities,' she emphasises, 'my husband expects me to do certain things in home management and he is a man after all. He'll never do it; he'll only make decisions; I'll handle all the details. There's no equality in this sense: woman is always at a disadvantage'.

But why is the woman the one to take care of the children? Why do career women have to face a either-or choice? May we not ask whether a more sympathetic, sensitive and considerate husband might have lent support and encouragement to his wife's endeavour rather than straying into infidelity? Would a career-woman's domestic pressure be relatively relieved if there was institutionalized support for child-care, pregnancy leave for women and their (male) partners? As Vivian protested,

'A woman has a perfect right to have a career of her own and, if her home life suffers, then she should not blame herself. After all, nobody would dream of blaming a man's work if his wife left him or his children ignored him: they'd say she was unfaithful and ungrateful and that the kids were spoiled, or something'.

Some interviewees disagree, of course. Stephenie, for example, strongly resists the argument that women should drop their career when there is a conflict with her family. 'Why is it the 'wife' not the husband who has the obligation to consider dropping her career when there is a financial or practical need?' It is also an issue of ageism: While older women tend to feel such dire situations are largely avoidable, younger women accept the risks as inevitable. The irony of this is that one might expect younger women to be less tolerant of husbands who raise obstacles, however subtle, to their career progress. Given the widespread, virtually global changes of the past 20 years, young women could quite legitimately anticipate less hostility, possible encouragement, from their partners than their counterparts of previous generation.

In this aspect of domesticity, the situation in Hong Kong seems to stand close to that of Western countries: despite women's massive participation in the labour force, they still do the major share of housework. The general pattern that emerges from the study is that women shoulder a disproportionate amount of domestic labour regardless of their past socialization, present employment status or even their financial contribution to the family. With kinship or paid domestic help, their burden is lightened considerably, but the task of supervision and management is still the responsibility of the wife, and not the husband. The bulk of domestic labour is done mostly by women, and this is only marginally affected by a general upgrading of women's employment status and education. Whether they are in or out of employment, women continue to bear the main burden of domestic work. There is no indication that traditional female responsibility for household work has been substantially erode. Men have increased their participation, but not in amounts sufficient to offset women's increased market work. There is little evidence of male unemployment leading to major responsibility for domestic work, nor even to their taking an equal share.

In Hong Kong, several surveys (Hong Kong Council of Women, 1987; Lau and Wan 1987; YMCA 1982; The Boys and Girls Clubs Association 1984, 1990) were conducted in the 1980's, looking into the distribution of housework and child-care in the family. Varying in their degree of sophistication, their sample size, and the socio-economic background of the districts and respondents, these research surveys converge in their findings of a clear cut gender division of domestic labour.

a In the majority of cases (varying from 60% to more than 80%), the woman in the household assumes primary responsibility in both child-care and household, irrespective of their employment status.

- (b) When men are involved, they usually take up some recreational oriented child-care tasks, and non-routine technical and maintenance housework.
- (c) Other sources of housework labour mainly include relations, older children, or domestic employees, part-time or full-time. Extra-familial help usually releases the woman from doing physical housework, but she still has to take up child-care which is considered a qualitatively demanding, and personal job that the mother cannot delegate to others.
- (d) These studies show a wide discrepancy among the respondents', both male and female, ideal of equal sharing, and the reality of women doing the housework.
- (e) Husbands constitute a privileged reserve army of domestic labour, to be called upon in very exceptional occasions (especially in once-in-a-while task), as a last resort when all else fails. Their participation in the mundane routine is conditioned on the wife's inability to carry out her duties.

Hong Kong has shared the trend towards the double burden shouldered by women. Even if women do not take care of the children chores themselves it is they who are expected to organize alternatives. However, the trend is most apparent in research on working mothers carried out by the Y. C. Wong.¹⁴³ This report took a stratified sample of families with mothers employed in professional, clerical and manual occupations. The results showed that the working mothers took a much greater responsibility than their husbands for washing and ironing clothes, cleaning, cooking, washing dishes and shopping. A quarter of the professional group had servants but the manual group carried out most of the tasks themselves. The picture regarding the care of children was similar. Mothers were responsible for most of the energy-consuming tasks such as cleaning, feeding, toileting, putting children to bed, while fathers tended to be involved in recreational activities, such as visits to the park or beach, watching television and so on. Fathers' involvement is typically restricted to fun activities rather than the tedious, exhausting tasks associated with looking after children.

Indeed, the assumption that 'family/household' is a single entity simply ignores the issues concerning the way household decisions are arrived at, and how the dynamics (power relations) among members of household affect these decisions. The assumption of a single household utility function is problematic because it fails to take into account the elements of the power and gender division of labour within the family.

How family work is done is not an individual decision because the allocation of time and resources relates to the organization of the family life as a whole. Therefore, the formulation of the family work strategy can be seen as a social process of conflict, negotiation and compromise among family members who decide the arrangement of individual members' roles in the family, and how domestic and market activities are to be carried out. While family work strategy is by no means simply an outcome of utility maximization, it would also be problematic to assume that individual behaviour is structured by social constraints and therefore does not involve any strategic consideration. This research studies women's manipulation of women's magazines as a strategy to negotiate their domestic 'obligation' and wider gender politics.

9. Globalization vs Localization: Racial 'otherness' of Hong Kong

¹⁴³Y. C. Wong, 1987.

Given the unique cultural identity of Hong Kong society as a hybridized West-East cultural construct, and given the predominately franchised nature of most women's magazines in Hong Kong like *Cosmopolitan*, *Elle* and *Marie Claire*, the interview intends to interrogate the readers conceptions of their own racial-cultural identity.

When asked about their understanding and associations of the 'West', 'East', 'Chinese' and 'Hong Kong', the interviewees demonstrate a rather ethnocentric stereotypical polarization which has hierarchized the 'West' as the superior 'otherness' over the inferior 'East' and 'Chineseness'. Candy represents a typical case when she said,

'The world is now mainly dominated and ruled by the West. The West is more progressive, liberal, open, democratic and hi-tech. The recent developments in Eastern Europe, I mean the collapse of the communist regimes, have simply confirmed the superiority of the capitalist West.'

Sara echoes, 'for me, "West" is something more modern, liberal, individualistic and progressive, "Chinese" represents something old, conservative, traditional, static and resistant to change'.

In general, the interviewees seem to have no problem in dichotomizing the West with the East/Chinese, and to locate Hong Kong as a Westernized city. They tend to lump together the notion of 'capitalist-West' with very different categories like 'modernity', 'modernization', 'industrialization', 'urbanization', 'democracy', 'liberalism', 'progress', 'freedom', 'openness' and 'hi-tech'. Such a 'political' and 'ideological' confusion is perhaps best exemplified when Mrs Chan remarked that

'Hong Kong is a highly successful sample of capitalism, a mixture of Western and Eastern culture. For the past thirty years, Hong Kong has undergone a drastic process of industrialization and urbanization, emerging from a small fishing village to become a major modern financial centre, a liberal and prosperous modern city.'

It is perhaps crucial that Mrs Chan shifted from 'capitalism' to 'mixture of West-East', then 'industrialization and urbanization', and finally equated all these with 'liberal and prosperous modern city'.

Given the intense capitalistic nature of Hong Kong society and its deep historical fear of communist China,¹⁴⁴ it is understandable that Hong Kong people tend to hierarchize the 'capitalist-West' as the superior 'otherness' through which the 'backwardness' of China and the East are defined and constituted.

The interviewees were then asked to associate and assess these glossy women's magazines

¹⁴⁴After the 1949 takeover of Communism in China, there was a huge influx of refugees from China to Hong Kong, constituting not only a refugee population (increased from 0.7 million to 2.5 million from 1947 to 1957), but also a deep fear and distrust of the Communist China which expelled them from their homeland.

within this racial-cultural matrix of West-East continuum. Nobody, among the twelve interviewees, regarded the local women's magazines as 'Chinese'. Though local women's magazines are written in Chinese, presented to Hong Kong-Chinese and supposedly on local topics, the glossy women's magazines are associated as something very 'Western'.

As remarked by Candy,

'Local glossy women's magazines are very Westernized to me. For example, most of the front cover models are foreign women models, the fashion photos are taken from fashion show in New York, Milan, Paris and other Western cities, and the values professed by these magazines, like individuality, independence, career-mindedness, sexual freedom and open-mindedness, are all very Western in nature. A traditional Chinese woman will have to stay at home and take care of her husband and children...But Hong Kong is a very Westernized city. It is natural that these women's magazines are more Western oriented.

Candy is definitely right in pointing out the predominance of West-white models on the front cover of local glossy women's magazines. From 1988 to 1992, all the front cover models of Cosmopolitan, Elle and Elegance were Western women, except three issues in Cosmopolitan (June, 1988, May 1989, Jan, 1990), five issues in Elle and four issues in Elegance.

Vivian gives us a more refined and detailed response by differentiating various degrees of 'Westernization' of these local women's magazines.

'Local women's magazines are basically Westernized, but to different extents. Cosmopolitan is very American and consumerist, especially in the features and articles on sex and relations. It is a kind of *causal orientation* that not many people can afford. Indeed, it may not fit the Hong Kong context. Yet I don't know why Cosmopolitan is so popular in Hong Kong. For Elle, I haven't seen the original French version, but the Hong Kong edition is basically a fashion magazine, taking most of its fashion photos and series from different fashion shows in the West and Japan. I was told that many of these photo series were taken from the mother magazine from France. That's why they are of superb quality. Even for a non-franchised magazine like Elegance, the Western cultural and celebrity scene is put in the beginning of each issue, occupying at least 4-5 pages. The magazine proclaims to be global and international, but it actually means 'Western'. It is quite inevitable as the present global cultural, fashion and political scene are dominated by the West, especially the several successful capitalist countries like USA, UK and Germany...Among all the local women's magazines, In has the strongest local touch. For example, the feature on women's personal stories in each issue were all selected from Chinese-Hong Kong women in the past, and the main feature of each issue discussed some local issues related to Hong Kong women. But they were too theoretical and too serious. That's why it finally closed down.'

Indeed, the 'Western' element of local women's magazines constitutes their glamour and attraction to Hong Kong-Chinese readers who are culturally deeply colonized by Western

values. As a colony of Great Britain, Hong Kong has long been overwhelmed by White-west capitalist cultural and social values. Western movies, songs, restaurants, manners and customs are all commonly regarded as more high-brow and classy than the local ones. Indeed, a crucial distinction between the glossy and popular women's magazines is that the former have English titles, Western model covers and wide coverage of western cultural scenes and celebrities whereas the most popular women's magazines focus on the local media and celebrity scene. Hong Kong culture has been colonized by the White-West capitalist myth of taste, style and classiness. As argued by June,

'We are now living in the 1990's, a cosmopolitan world where no one can survive without knowing what happens in the world. Modern women in Hong Kong have their own career, have to be smart, open and sensitive to current situations in the world. Who will buy women's magazines if they talk about Confucius, Taoism and other traditional Chinese thoughts? The Western world may have problems of its own, yet it is a fact that the Western countries are now leading the world. Like it or not, we have to accept it.'

June's pragmatism is shared by Mary,

'I like the Westernized look of local magazines. I'm not bothered whether they are franchised or locally made, it is their quality that matters. I think even local magazines have to be concerned about the international trend. Say fashion, it is crucial that you know the international brand names like Pierre Cardin, YSL, Armani, Durban and Dior rather than some local designers.'

Winnie Li, the chief-editor of Cosmopolitan, mounted a defence of 'westernization':

'What's wrong with being white-west? Hong Kong is an international city, having international taste. It is indeed the key to success of Hong Kong...Well, you may not like Western values and Western way of life. But you can't deny that the west is leading the world. Like fashion, they spend one million US dollars for a fashion show. How much you spend here? Less than one-tenth. They are really professional.'

It is the kind of situation where 'globalization', actually means 'westernization'. This echoes Frantz Fanon's notion of 'dependency complex', where the colonized cherishes a desire to 'imitate, appropriate the culture, lifestyle of the colonizer', at the expense of the local, indigenous culture and values.¹⁴⁵ It is a kind of neocolonialism where the 'foreign' country exerts a considerable amount of ideological and cultural control over the nominally independent country.¹⁴⁶ Since its opening to international trade, Hong Kong has been susceptible to diverse cultural and national influences. Instead of being exposed to any single culture or country, say Britain, Hong Kong has all along been constituted by 'multi-

¹⁴⁵Fanon, Frantz, 1980: 30.

¹⁴⁶See Harry Magdoff, *Imperialism : from the Colonial Age to the Present*, Monthly Review press, 1978.

culturalism' deriving from the 'West' which conceals a plurality of 'others'.

While Western, particularly American, cultural values are pervasive in Hong Kong, as exemplified by such imports like Macdonald, Madonna, Rambo and other popular 'trends', this cultural penetration is conducted with the support and consensus of the Hong Kong people. This is akin to the 'hegemonic phase' Abdul Mohammad talks about where 'the natives accept a version of the "colonizers" entire system of values, attitudes, morality, institutions...This stage of imperialism does depend on the active and direct "consent" of the dominated'.¹⁴⁷ In the name of globalization, the idealized images of the dominant culture are transmitted to the periphery. As John Tomlinson argues in *Cultural Imperialism*, 'What replaces imperialism is globalization'.¹⁴⁸

Ann Ma summarized the racist nature of Hong Kong culture:

'Hong Kong people are sometimes very racist. We don't treat people equally - we treat whites as superiors and we treat all blacks and Asians (except Japanese) as inferiors. We complain the Philippine women intruding the spaces of Hong Kong people, and exacerbating the tourist industry because they contaminate the tourist areas where Europeans, Americans and Japanese linger around. It's awful, as if only whites and Japanese are tourists, that all other races should be kicked out of Hong Kong! But that is the concept of many Hong Kong people. It is really disappointing. We internalize the racist values of the white-west world. That we think and treat the whites as the most superior mankind. We have all these 'white mind' of thinking deep down in our yellow skin... We not only accept the white-west definition and feeling that the whiter, the better, we also adopt the white angle to read ourselves: complaining people not (western) civilized enough, not (western) well-mannered enough, not (western) feminine enough, not (western) pretty enough, We lost our own subjectivity and cultural perspective. The situation for capitalism is of no exception. Let us compare the percentage of people having mobile phones, pagers and fax machines with that in London, Paris and any other western big cities. I bet we have a much higher percentage. People in Hong Kong are in general so aggressive and insecure. Most of them obsess with consuming brand names and other external "decoration" to prove themselves existing. Perhaps it gives reason to our classism and racism: we heighten ourselves by stepping on other inferior attributes. We are insecure of our own identity. We need some negative otherness to confirm our ego, our selfhood. The 1997 issue aggravates the situation. People plan only short-term, become more insecure and more aggressive.'

Throughout the chapter, we witness women readers having a strong critical subjectivity in their consumption of women's magazines. They are not passive victims manipulated by

¹⁴⁷Abdul Mohammed, 'The economy of Manichaen Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature', in *Race, Writing and Difference*, Henry Louis Gate (ed), Chicago, 1986: 81.

¹⁴⁸Tomlinson, 1991: 175.

patriarchy and capitalism, but actively create meaning in the process of reading, and use women's magazines as strategy to reclaim women's power. In next chapter, I will conduct a content analysis of four glossy women's magazines to explore the room for women's resistance and pleasure.

Chapter Four : Content Analysis

In chapter three I analyzed the interviews with twelve women readers concerning their understandings and perceptions of women's magazines and their own context of reading. While it is the process of reading that produces meaning, it does not take place in a vacuum. We read specific text from specific socio-political positions. In this chapter, we explore these specific texts, women's magazines, its features, emphasis and social references. I will begin with advertising and photography, then proceed to the different aspects of the content of the glossy women's magazines in Hong Kong.

1. Advertising

As advertising vehicles, women's magazines are a specific commodity, targeted at women who have the primary responsibility of consumption, not only for themselves, but for the family. The key conception of women as the primary consumers of goods and services is the fundamental material ground ensuring the continual existence and growth of women's magazines in mass culture. Despite all their fundamental differences from other publications, women's magazines can survive only on the basis of publishing profit, advertising success, and the continuation of women as the primary consumers of goods. Even in the case of apparently 'feminist-oriented' magazines such as *In*, it is the spending power of the reader that is being addressed. Indeed, the commodity base of the pleasure is so pervasive and fundamental that it becomes the essential feature of contemporary female desire.¹⁴⁹

In the 1960's and 70's, many magazines competed with television for advertising money. By increasing circulation and lowering the production cost, publishers strove for mass readership. But since the mid-80's, publishers in Hong Kong have *changed their marketing strategy*, from reaching a mass readership to reaching specialized, affluent segments; targeting a specific 'class' rather than the undifferentiated 'mass' audience.¹⁵⁰ Some magazines deliberately lower their circulation in order to offer advertisers a more exclusive (affluent) readership as well as to economize on production and distribution costs.¹⁵¹

In the contemporary advertising world, magazines reach 'class' audiences both by limiting their readerships and by focusing on special-interest topics. Thus, publishers attract more high-quality advertising, and advertisers avoid spending money to reach people unable to purchase their products, (unavoidable when advertisements addressed mass segments of the population). While contemporary magazines in Hong Kong reap their income mainly through the huge

¹⁴⁹For the relation between consumption, desire and women's magazines, consult the recent research by Ballaster, Beetham, Frazer and Herron (eds), 1991. See also Mike Featherstone, 1991 for a general overview.

¹⁵⁰The argument is most recently articulated by Ellen McCracken (1993) who has studied more than 50 women's magazines in the States and published a book on these magazines.

¹⁵¹The best example is perhaps the *Next Magazine*, the best selling popular gossiping magazine in Hong Kong. In 1991, the magazine was so popular that 60,000 copies of each issue were consumed within the first day of issue. Yet, *Next Magazine* refused to increase printing as the more issues it sells, the more it will lose money (because of the immense printing cost). The major source of revenue is advertising, not the sales.

expenditure of advertisers, it is the consumers, through the higher prices they pay for the advertised commodities, who ultimately pay for the expensive production of advertisements.

Zie Yonder, Managing Director of Yonder Hall (Elegance) claimed that he was responsible for this view of the importance of magazine advertising:

‘I may say I started the new concept of running a magazine by advertisements. By this I mean the advertisements are the main source of revenue. It was a new concept. Whereas before Elegance, it was sales that supported the survival of a magazine... stepping into the 80’s, Hong Kong magazines were tuning into the Elegance formula --- larger-than-life presentation so as to attract larger-than-life advertisements.’

Stepping into the 90’s, magazine sales contribute only part of the publisher’s income, second to the enormous revenue from advertising. This is especially true of glossy magazines which are capable of attracting ‘glossy’ (high consuming power) readers and thus ‘glossy’ advertising. Advertisements are essential for the survival of any glossy women’s magazines, even more so than sales. Winnie Li, the chief editor of Cosmopolitan estimated as a rule of thumb that a glossy women’s magazine can only survive with no less than 40 full-page of advertisements in each issue (for a magazine size of 120-150 pages), ie. more than one quarter of the content pages.

In women’s magazines, there are three kinds of advertising: first the captivating front cover, without which the readers might not go on to read the rest; second the covert advertisements disguised as editorial material or other non-advertising papers/articles; thirdly the purchased advertisements which occupy a large percentage of the magazine’s pages. If all three categories are added together, ‘advertisements’ constitute around 90% of the space in women’s magazines, earning these magazines the more appropriate title ‘women’s advertising magazines’.¹⁵²

I. Cover

The cover is the most important single advertisement for the magazine. It delimits the frame of significations in which the magazines can be read. The cover, not the first advertisement page, the table of contents or any first inside page, is the real beginning of the magazine. The cover helps to establish the brand identity of the magazine, enabling the reader to choose among different commodities. The point is not merely to enhance the sales of the magazines, but to sell other commodities advertised by the magazines. The ultimate goal of the cover is really to sell us products advertised in the inside pages.

The cover offers the reader a series of selective frames to project and construct her fantasized self, hinting at what she might become by purchasing the right goods in the consumer market. While the verbal content of the cover lists the brand name, price, title of the issue and the most distinctive features of that issue, the photographic text markets an idealized image of

¹⁵²See Ellen McCracken, 1993.

women to be desired and identified. The features of the cover woman, her facial expression, make-up, body-pose, dressing, lighting, colour, camera angle and background not only project the image of the magazines, but also offer readers a position to locate themselves.

All the front covers of these women's magazines are photographs of women, ranging from social celebrities, models to great personages, depending on the different style and positioning of the magazine. The April 1988 Cosmopolitan cover portrays a carefree, sexual, white woman gazing confidently into the eye of the viewer. (Photo 1) The focus of the cover is neither her face nor any other details but her breast and the bra top. This image contradicts the inferiority implicit in the headlines --- 'Our bodies need to be stronger and sexier', 'We need a diet that dissolves our fat', 'Crucial guides for women in love'. The headlines refer to success, strength, health and professionalism, but their sub-text is the readers' inferiority and inability which can only be remedied by consuming the magazine and the products it advertises. It is precisely such a contradiction and the gap between the apparent omnipotence and the implicit impotence that creates desires (for the magazines and the commodities it advertises) which sell the magazines.

The June 1990 issue of Cosmopolitan is titled 'Do men devote love to their sex partner?', playing on women's general feeling of insecurity with respect to men and themselves. It simultaneously generates a sexual connotation and interpretation, requiring the female readers to search for a male answer to the question posed on the cover. Furthermore, from 1988 to 1990, only three times (Nov, 88; May, 90; June, 90) are there Hong Kong-Chinese women selected as the cover women of Cosmopolitan (Photo 2-4), all the rest being white (only twice were there black cover women, both famous models in America).

For Elegance, the typical cover model is a local successful woman in the business field. Yet, the inside article featuring the woman always focuses on her personal life, family, marriage and relationships. In Oct 1992, the cover woman was Amy Chiu, a successful business woman, with the caption as 'finance flair'. (Photo 5) Yet, the inside interview spent much time on her marital and family life. In December, 1988, the cover woman was a famous local entrepreneur Joanne Tam, but the cover caption is 'Winter Romance'. (Photo 6) Whereas in May 1990, the cover woman of Elegance presents her, having a cheerful time with her kids, indicating not only her enjoyment as a housewife, but also confirming the 'natural and harmonious' nature of (heterosexual) marriage (photo 7). There is a second level of reading: the fact that this woman (Joanne Li) is a famous successful career woman in Hong Kong has justified and reproduced the myth of the balance between family (marriage) and career (work). The structural conflict between the public and the private demand for modern women is thus denied and covered up by the relaxed posture shown in this naturalized cover photo.

As Elle is a fashion magazine, the cover photo and caption is always based on fashion. In particular, seasonal fashion trends are popular themes for the cover, like 'Beauty under the sun' (Aug 89), 'Matching fashion with accessories' (July 89), 'Pure Colour in Spring' (April 90), 'Summer beauty guide' (May 90), 'Winter beauty special' (Oct 92), 'Christmas fashion charm' (December 92). (Photo 8-13) For In, the cover photo is usually a close-up photo of a local woman, with cover caption concerning local socio-political issues related to women; for example, the cover caption in September 89 is 'Reconstructing Chinese personality', Oct 89 'Middle-class womanhood', January 90 'Madonna: Woman of the year', and April 90 'Green politics'. (Photo 14-17)

Advertisements promote insecurity because the techniques that dramatise reality create expectations of how things should appear to be. What is noticed and treasured is the packaging, not the product.¹⁵³ Consumers are thus imprisoned in an eternal pursuit of desire, are always reminded of their problems and inadequacies. The advertised products never confer complete satisfaction because the consumer is always made aware, through more advertisements, of other products which also promise to fulfil the ideal selfhood.¹⁵⁴

II. Covert Advertising

Covert advertising is promotion disguised as editorial material or hidden in some other form so as not to appear as an advertisement. Covert advertising is best understood not as a series of discrete unrelated instances of disguises, but as an integrated matrix of mutually constitutive elements located within the entire advertising-magazines enterprise. There is no conspiracy among the editors. What is needed is merely the editors' sincerity to sell good magazines and products to the readers. As Winnie Li, the chief-editor of Cosmopolitan, put it,

‘We never advise readers to consume for consumption sake, neither would we suggest a consumption that is not worth the price. We promote good taste, cultivate an elegant style of consumption sensitivity and an appropriate level of consumption that fits her status and needs.’¹⁵⁵

What Winnie Li did not tell us is the structural affinity between advertisements and the magazine that has necessitated a fundamental bias towards consumption. Rather than discrete and unrelated, advertising and editorial material are inseparable and mutually constitutive. Indeed, ‘advertisements’ in women’s magazines should not be seen as interruptions, they are a continuation and extension of the formal content. As in television, advertisements are interrupted by the programme and not vice versa. After a film, documentary or soap opera, advertisements restore a sense of normality, reaffirm a continuous and unshakable reality.

The most important form of covert advertising is the editorial. Both advertisers and editors recognize that overt advertisements are not always the most effective way to sell a product. The recommendations of the editor or authoritative beauty advice for a specific brand of cosmetic can be highly persuasive. While usually not directly mentioning any particular commodities, it is more crucial to sell a consumerist attitude towards cosmetics and other beauty commodities. New and up-to-date information is always provided so as to help the readers catch the newest trend in fashion, cosmetics and other consumerist patterns. It is the ‘newness’ about the commodity information that generates and enhances the readers’ sense of inadequacy which the new products are promise to remedy. As the editorial needs to retain and establish an image of objectivity, it rarely names specific brands of commodities. Instead, editorial active intervention is articulated through the language of objectivity and integrity. A spirit of friendship and experienced guidance are thus commonly adopted.

¹⁵³Consult Guy Cook (1992) for a detailed analysis of contemporary discourses of advertising.

¹⁵⁴Gary Day, 1990.

¹⁵⁵Interview at the 5th January 1990 in Ming Po Newspaper, Hong Kong.

In Elle June 1990, the article on 'How to protect the beauty of your hair', the writer quoted three recent researches in the States to justify the importance of an appropriate conditioner and hair spray for the protection of hair. Besides mentioning seven products and services by name, the feature used the language usually adopted by advertising, like 'You can keep your natural hair style, in authentic shape, indeed with better quality and condition' followed by detailed descriptions of different hair sprays, conditioners and other products in use. This feature becomes a natural extension of the overt advertisements.

Given the critical role of advertising in the magazines, a general consumerist attitude permeates the editorial content. Often, the editorial promotes feelings of inferiority and inadequacy in the readers, and then provides advice for a higher quality of life, style and taste. The need for consumption is implied rather than explicitly laid down. It is thus 'natural' that the glossy magazines are concerned mostly with the area of life which the advertisers are desperately keen about, areas like appearance, cosmetics, beauty, fashion and domesticity. The editorial of Cosmopolitan May 1990 claims that 'we care about clothes, looking stylish, working successfully', whereas the editorial of Elle, September 1991 argues that, 'as a modern woman, you need the right look, good taste and a sharp sense of consumption.'

The editorial renders support through adjacent placement of overt advertisements. Advertisements for food appear with food-related editorials, or with articles on diet and exercise. An advertisement for certain cosmetic product is placed next to a beauty advice article. Or the editorial follows thematically from the previous advertisement --- In May 1990 (Elegance), the article 'Pottery: the Chinese tradition' does not seem to advertise a product, but it is immediately followed by the advertisement for one the biggest antique shops in Hong Kong. Even the monthly horoscope can point readers to consumerist themes. In December 1989, Elegance published to readers several articles and advertisements that promoted American-Europe travel through such phrases as: 'Why not spend your Christmas in Europe?' 'It is time to relax and take a rest elsewhere'. The readers are also reminded that 'the coming week is superb for new health and beauty treatment', 'Have you prepared your Christmas presents? Do not be too late.' Sometimes, the article simply directly mentions the brand names. In January 1990 (Cosmopolitan), the article on 'Protect your winter skin' smoothly mentions Chanel and Dior three times, while in the later parts of the issue both brands have their overt advertisements.

Purchased advertisements appear to be natural extensions of the editorial material. But it is more often the case that the editorial material is the extension of the overt advertisements.¹⁵⁶ If we include different levels of suggestion as covert advertisements, then the proportion of covert advertisements can overshadow that of overt advertisements. For example, in February 1991, Cosmopolitan had a total of 193 pages, only 55 purchased advertisements but 103 pages had covert advertisements; Elle that month had 152 pages, 41 pages of purchased advertisements and 72 pages covert advertisements, and Elegance had 241 pages, 78 pages with purchased advertisements and 90 pages with covert advertisements. When covert advertising is taken into account, then more than 80% of the women's magazines' content is advertising.

¹⁵⁶McCracken, Ellen: 1993.

III. Overt Advertising

The format of the glossy women's magazines is organized around buying: the first five to ten pages are all glossy advertisements, selling trendy fashions, new cosmetics, glossy accessories, new videos and other commodities. The overt advertisements in quality women's magazines are dominated by brand-marked luxury goods like make-up, jewellery, fashion and accessories. Taking *Cosmopolitan* as an example, the most frequent and predominant advertisements are those of perfume, skin care cosmetics, make-up and fashion. Together they occupy more than one third of the total numbers of advertisements.¹⁵⁷ This is very different from popular women's magazines in which household goods, supermarkets, baby articles and cheap cosmetics are advertised for the lower classes. They are also different from the advertisements in quality men's magazines which are dominated by quality electronic appliances, Hi-Fis, cameras, wines, cigarettes and cars, especially luxurious models.

The advertisements appearing in the glossy women's magazines emphasize not just the 'inherent properties' of the products that satisfy certain basic needs, but their exclusive, symbolic value.¹⁵⁸ No matter whether it is a table-top, hair spray or fashion display, the advertisements in the quality women's magazines are produced and displaced with great sophistication. Highly saturated colours, glamorous lighting and well composed subject-matter are the typical characteristics. The most interesting examples are those of cosmetics and 'toilette collection' which are reminiscent to Irving Penn's 'Still life with shoe' and the subsequent 'Clinique advertisement'.¹⁵⁹

The photo/cover has a gender sub-text of male presence/gaze which is the ultimate appeal of consumption.¹⁶⁰ Advertisements often address us through signifiers of male approval. In the advertisements of a hair spray (*Cosmopolitan*: September 91), three smiling women gaze at us, each with a man's hand reaching into the picture to touch her hair. The intrusive yet naturalized hand becomes ours as we read the advertisements --- the female readers assume the perspective of the approving male. The same male attention will be ours if we consume the commodity. Women readers thus are asked to evaluate themselves through male eyes. While gazing at the advertisements, women readers are both the surveyor and the surveyed. Women thus internalize the male surveyor's view of their appearance as their own view.

In the mass media, the position of the camera often coincides with a male perspective of the

¹⁵⁷See **Appendix One: Quantitative Analysis** of the actual proportion of advertisements and the nature of advertisements in the women's magazines from 1988 to 1991.

¹⁵⁸Such symbolic functions of ads is well-articulated by J. Williamson as the main function of ads. See Williamson, 1978.

¹⁵⁹See Roseland Krauss: A note on Photography and the Simulacral in Carol Squiers (eds) : *The Critical Image*. Seattle Bay Press, 1990.

¹⁶⁰The concept of male gaze has a long socio-political tradition in Western thought, especially in cultural and psychoanalytic studies. While John Berger (1973) in the early 70's stressed the unequal power relations between 'to look' and 'being looked', Laura Mulvey (1974) argued that Hollywood films are dominated by the voyeuristic 'male gaze'. Contemporary French feminist, Luce Irigaray goes further to argue that psychoanalysis itself has been obsessed with the 'penis' (Freud) and the 'phallic' (Lacan), both predicated on the primacy of seeing/visual over other senses.

women portrayed. Because of the conflation in mass culture of the denotative/analogic message with the symbolic, cultural code, we always fail to notice connotational procedures such as the implicit male vision.¹⁶¹ While male gaze sometimes manifests itself through the presence of male to remind women readers whom they dress up for, in most cases the man is presupposed from the objectified and sexualized look of the women. The passive and sexualized pose of the women in the advertisements coincides with the perspective of an implied male surveyor. The power to look at and visually consume a woman who does not look back as an equal is a common practice in advertising hinting of violence and domination. The fear and inferiority of women is eroticized and sexualized.¹⁶²

2. Fashion and Series Photography

Series photography is understood as a series of photographs with a certain theme. The photographs take form as a coherent whole, whereby certain fashion concepts, fashion products, images of women, and life-style as related to the theme are conveyed. Series photography constitutes a very important part in women's magazines. Although not consumed directly through buying, fashion photos have a symbolic value (gazed at, dreamed about, talked about, compared with) which produces a great deal of pleasure. In fashion magazines such as *Elle*, series photography is the means to achieve the end of promoting fashion concepts and products. In *Cosmopolitan*, series photography serves a perhaps less specialized function like fashion magazines, but their sophistication is even more remarkable.

In *Cosmopolitan*, series photography appears in every issue. The main purpose is to promote fashion, and women are the protagonists. Themes of various kinds are chosen, but the main concerns are either the charm of women or the social occasions in which women play the leading roles. In September 90, the theme was 'Office Romance', the theme is the colour red, entitled 'I'll get you noticed', in February, it was 'On the Town', March is adorned by 'Flower Pow', April 'Sensual Stretch', May 'Lacy Looks', and January 91 was decorated by 'Encountering Him'.

The most remarkable characteristic of this series photography lies in its attraction for women. This is especially shown in 'Office Romance', 'On the Town', 'Bring on the Night', 'Head Turners' and 'Encountering Him'. In these different series, men play only a supporting role to the women protagonists. Men are dressed more drably. In 'On the Town', one picture shows a woman who is taller than the man standing near her. In terms of posture, men are often being shown more sideways than women. Men are often shadowed by women, put out of focus, e.g., in 'On the Town', the bartender in 'Bring on the Night', or men in 'Head Turners' and 'Encountering Him'. In contrast, women are dressed more brightly, with heavier make-up, showing more dynamic postures and more exaggerated facial expressions.

¹⁶¹Roland Barthes is a crucial figure, not only in proposing the denotation and connotation dimension of ideology, but also vital in integrating ideological and even feminist ideas into common-sense popular cultural critique. See Roland Barthes, 1972, 1976, 1977 and 1983.

¹⁶²For both the critique of Laura Mulvey and the possibility of 'female gaze', see Lorraine Gamme and Margaret Marshment, 1988. See *Bad object-choices* (ed), *How Do I Look?* (1991) which is a study of queer films and videos. Consult also Laura Mulvey's recent book (1989) as the up-to-date version or revision of her theory of the 'male gaze'.

The series photography of Cosmopolitan can be labelled as multi-purpose. Themes of various kinds are chosen, through which different ideas are expressed other than fashion product display and fashion idea expression, themes concerning women in an even wider context and with greater significance. The characteristic liberal image of women in Cosmopolitan is given full expression. These are the charm, the independence, the confidence, the nonchalance and the success of the women in various social milieus and occasions.

In the photo series of Cosmopolitan in September 89, 'Office Romance', there is a rich story line for the series. The woman narrates the story of her meeting a new male executive sent by the headquarters to assist her in developing plans. She was charmed by the man, the cooperation was smooth and successful. She realized that he was unmarried. They dated each other, and she was invited to see his parents for Christmas. The narration is in the first person, and the photography centred upon the woman as narrator and protagonist.

The photos portray the woman as the centre of attention. She is more frontal, more exposed, constantly in focus, and more colourfully dressed. In photo 1 (Photo 18), she is in the foreground and in focus, and even partly covered. In photo 2 (Photo 19), she is frontal and occupies the centre right, also in focus. The man occupies only the left corner and he is facing sideways, more towards the woman. He is also further removed from the source of light. In photo 4 (Photo 20), again the woman is more central in position than the man. She also receives the full reflection of light on her face, while the man is shaded and less frontal than her. In photo 5 (Photo 21), the woman is more frontal and she occupies the main central frame of the photograph, she receives full lighting and is dressed like photo 4 in white, a more eye-catching colour.

Photo 5 is even more characteristic of a female centred picture. We can see the female protagonist in full view, dressed in a rather sparkling green. The man is in full background, and his face is even hidden behind the waist of the woman, leaving his forehead partly jutting out. Likewise, photo 6 also shows her taking a more central position. In photo 7 (Photo 22), the woman occupies a higher position, looking down on the man. In photo 8 (Photo 23), she is still more frontal than the man, occupying the centre of the photograph.

In all these photographs of the series, we realize that the woman is in a more comfortable, relaxing and central position, designating her higher rank both in terms of career and gender power relations. She is more central, visually and symbolically, more dynamic, constantly becoming the focus of attention. Aesthetically, the woman's attraction is presented, by first having her dressed in black, then in a conservative grey, and then in a casual style and a more eye-catching white blouse ending up in colourful green, scarlet red, violet and lilac red.

The series is done in coarse grain photography, in order to bring out a greater artistic touch rather than the usual glossy format. The settings are minimal, counteracting the normal photographers' love of decoration. The series enhances the gradual development of a certain mood and character portrayed by the woman, but without making her too obtrusive or aggressive. This also deviates from the normal position of men at the centre of attention.

'I'll Get You Noticed' is the theme for January 90. It sells the colour red to the readers. The photographic style is not very consistent. In photo 1, 2 (Photo 24), 4 (Photo 26), 5 (Photo 27) and 6 (Photo 28), daylight is used. In photo 3 (Photo 25) and 7 (Photo 29), studio lighting

is adopted, and photo 2 is tinted heavily in yellow. As usual, the photographic portrayals of the models are dynamic. In photo 4, the fireman is a kind of accessory to the model. She is not only the centre of attention, her bright red is a sharp contrast to the black with yellow stripes of the fireman.

In 'On the Town' (Photo 30-36), again the dynamic image of the woman is retained. Photo 1 portrays the model in the road, adjusting her shoe, thus drawing our attention. The tight dress fully exposes the figure of the model. Photo 2 contrasts the brightly clad girl with the drably dressed man. This, with photo 3, can fully show the dominant character of women, attracting the attention of men. Photo 5, 6 7 and 8 all try to establish the sexual appeal of woman. The cutting of the dresses deliberately tries to give greater exposure to the breasts. Photo 10 is also extraordinary in that the woman is taller than the man. This is quite unusual in normal photography, indeed it is abnormal in the usual representation of heterosexual relations, where the domination of man over woman, at least in stature, is the norm. In fact, all the photographs in this series reveal a colourful image of woman. Bright and shiny metallic colours, free postures and natural facial expressions are all important characteristics.

'Lacy Look' (Photo 37-39) of May 1990 is a series of lace products. All are in near shot, exposing the upper half of the bodies of the models. A colourful assortment of lace underwear (lingerie) is shown with very striking models. The photography is studio work, and the aim is to reveal the charms of women in lace underwear (lingerie). Minimal backgrounds certainly focus our attention onto the models with their colourful lingerie. Level shots are used to conflate the identity of readers with the models. The models have only light make-up, casual hair styles and sparing accessories. These are essential for creating a homely environment. The postures range from static and ordinary to manneristic and seductive.

June 1992 is adorned by 'Bring on the Night' (Photo 40-44), promoting 'Seductive Style' in fashion. Accordingly, the series consists of emotionally laden and provocative pictures of women. The setting is domestic, the images of the model are seductive, bordering on sweet sentimentality. The series is tinted heavily in yellow. The man who appears naturally occupies a secondary and supportive position. There is no story line, and the images do not seem to form a very coherent whole. As a matter of fact, the visual impact is considered to be more important than the sequential logic.

The 'Head Turners' (Photo 45-47) of July 1992 is a part of series of 6 photographs. The occasion is high summer downtown, and summer fashion is demonstrated. Photo 1 is a 'super-smiler', the green dress shows not only her figure but also the sexual appeal of the model. This flair is further enhanced by the head of the man who leans out of the window of a pink Volkswagen Beetle. Photo 2 is an American shot of the same model in bright colours. The most attractive part is the shiny orange feather jacket. What reinforces the attraction are the two men behind the model. Both of them are in sailors suit, slightly out of focus, and looking with great interest at the model. Again, they turn their heads towards her. Photo 3 shows the model in a white Chanel catsuit, giving full expression to her action not only as a contrast to the white colour, but also to her femininity. Photo 4 shows the model sitting on the front window screen of a car, with a sexy and romantic posture. Both flowery brassiere and the bright green cyclist-shorts are emphasised in plain sunlight. In fact, both the attractions of photo 3 and 4 are fortified by the backgrounds that are out of focus, but both photos reveal men trying to photograph the model from behind her back. Photo 5 promotes a bikini outfit

with a lilac and green scarf. The great colour contrast is rather unusual. Photo 6 is also an American Shot showing a beautifully harmonized leather suit of white, black and red. A suitable setting of a motorcycle and a male companion is provided, both slightly out of focus. The man is in unattractive blue attire.

All the photos in the series are taken in plain daylight. Interesting contexts and situations are provided. In photo 1 and 2, it is the middle of a road downtown. This scenario adds much to the tension and dynamism. Photo 3, 4 and 6 have street corners as settings, and photo 5 is clearly a beach scene. The woman is portrayed as urban, middle class, independent, confident and self-conscious. Her super-smile in photo 1 is an open invitation to her later sexual and romantic appeal. The postures from 2 to 6 are too pretentious to be real and natural. The half-open eye from 3 to 6 are less attributed to the blazing sunlight than to the romantic mood portrayed by the model. The whole series is dipped in bright colours that characterizes a joyous and even natural summer. The idea of 'Head Turners' is given full expression by the voyeurism exhibited by men behind the woman and the scenes.

The front cover photography of Cosmopolitan manifests characteristics that are typical and consistent of the whole magazine. The camera angle is constantly level, ideal for scrutiny of details as well as identification. The framing is looser than some of the magazines for women, eg. Elle. The most often used framing of the models is to show the half-bodied in the American version. Tight framing of the head alone has been very rare since 1988. This type of framing has the advantage of bringing more of the personality of the models as well as the settings into play. In fact, unlike fashion magazines exemplified by Elle, the make-up and the fashion of the models are not stressed to an extreme extent. Rather, the naturalness and the carefree nature of the models are the main focus. This is further enhanced by the fact that from 1988-90, with only 2 exceptions, all front cover women were imported from the mother magazines in USA, with the typical career women showing great self-confidence, charm to an nonchalant degree, independence and self-possession.

These typical characteristics can also be said to exude from the mood of photography. Instead of the employment of highly saturated colours of all kinds combined together to provide a keen sense of sophistication, the front cover photography in Cosmopolitan is dominated by one main colour in each photo as background. In February 90, it was greyish white, in March 90, it was bleach, in April 90, it was aquamarine blue, in July 90, it was grass green, in August 90 with Madonna, it was again greyish white. The use of a whitish or flesh colour background is typical of Cosmopolitan. In contrast, the popular magazines of Hong Kong usually employ pastel colours, while quality magazines usually employ highly saturated colours. The colour trend on the front cover of Cosmopolitan creates the feeling of freshness, as being neither too cheap nor too highly sophisticated, over-mature or pretentious. This can be seen as the typical liberal image of woman promoted by the magazine.

As regards the styling, one can also say that Cosmopolitan provides its front cover models with a very dynamic image. The models photographed are not quietly and statically posed. Instead, they are very dynamic, and what is captured is their motion, the pose on the move, their hair flowing and dangling in the air. This kind of photography can be achieved only through the remarkable professionalism and cooperation of the photographer and models working together.

The choice of the front-cover persons varies from superstars like Madonna, to models and social celebrities. There are however, certain common criteria. They are all beautiful, fresh, young, rarely exceed 35, and only with the one exception of a local male with another woman, all are women. They are highly cultivated, but never with overdone make-up and clothes. They portray the identity of a liberal career woman who is worldly as well as retaining a sense of innocence, free in lifestyle but still socially conforming.

Abstract themes occupy a very important status in the fashion of Cosmopolitan, and exist practically in every issue, like '24K White' in August 90, 'Head Turners' in July 92, 'Bring On the Night --- Seductive Style' in June 92, 'Sensual Stretch' in April 90 and 'Flower Pow' in March 90. All these abstract themes entailed a lot of imagination and preparatory work. Moreover, accessories like 'Watches' in March 90, 'Mad About Hats' in April 90, 'Sunglasses' and 'Hairstyle' in July 90, all show a great consciousness of the idea of fashion and styling as an important and integral part of the modern life of women in society. January 90 has two important features, one on hand-bags, and another on shoes to accompany the colour red in fashion. Accessories again became an important feature in February 90, this time, diamonds in jewellery design for Valentine's Day. Accompanying it were Valentine's Fashion and Fashion Design of modern Japanese fashion designers, which were more common, both in the world and the local market.

Speaking in qualitative terms, the fashion photography is Cosmopolitan is highly professional, especially those that are of overseas origin. There are a lot of detailed shots, the pieces of work in fashion are given full exposure before the camera, the models are very active and there appears to be a lot of dynamic interaction between the photographers and the professional models, so that the photography shows liveliness, character and good styling.

Yet, the photo series of Cosmopolitan exhibits a racist representation of models, themes and perspective. Most of the models are white-west, and the theme of 'white' was celebrated many times, like 'The seduction of white' in March 90 (Photo 48-50), and the '24K white' in May 92 (Photo 51-54). These two series not only celebrated the white colour, but also the superiority of the 'white' race. After-all, all the models are white.

In magazine manifests little unity in the designing of their front covers. It is generally accepted that the magazine is oriented towards feminism, as it openly professes. Yet, the photography of the front covers shows no characteristic of its being feminist in any way. This may be firstly due to the fact that there is no dominant trend of so called feminist photography in style. Even in the content, there seems to be no deliberate promotion of the image of feministic figures. Social celebrities, successful women figures with no explicit feminist orientation, dominate the front covers, although all of them are women. In this aspect, there is little difference that these front covers have from those of other quality women's magazines.

In the idea of design, there is no definite image of the magazine, except for the typography used. Even then there are irregularities, like the Chinese characters that sometimes run from above to below, sometimes from left to right, and sometimes both ways on the front cover. The photography differs greatly in style; some are frontal, well lit, like August 89, Oct 89 and November 89 issues, in portrait form. The issues of January 90 and March 90 have over-exposed front covers. In December 89 and June 90, the front covers are processed. For the

rest, near shots of the head are used. The irregular use of photography failed to provide the magazine with an identity to attract buyers, and could be considered to be a shortcoming of the magazine.

In terms of style of photography, In employs very often highly saturated colours as background, and tight framing of the head is the normal practice. This carries a image of great sophistication that may, however, border on cliché. The photographic techniques used cannot be said to be highly professional. The lack of competent local photographers, especially those with a feminist orientation, may be the reason.

Given the highly verbal and intellectual nature of In, fashion is never as important a topic as that of other women's magazines specializing in fashion. In In, there is a very specific section called 'Image', reserved for fashion exclusively. There are also different series of photography of world famous designs by world famous fashion designers, eg. August, Sept, December, 89 and February, March, April and May 90 and January, May 91. There are also intermittent series of photographs of fashion by local designers. The range of fashion can include pret-a-porter, haute couture and accessories, eg. August 89 --- hat, September 89 --- the various things from shoes to handbags, in June, 90 --- the jewellery designs of Eric Provent. In contrast to those abstract themes for fashion found in magazines specializing in fashion, or emphasizing fashion as such, the themes chosen in In are comparatively more plain, functional or concrete. Only in rare cases do we find themes like 'Autumn Silhouette (Oct 89) or 'Baroque Nostalgia' (January-February 90).

Elle is a fashion magazine which features on its front cover women, predominantly models, who normally exhibit the attraction of the main fashion theme of the issue. It is interesting to note the use of tight framing as the main approach employed. The models are photographed in bust form, a very intimate way of presentation.

When the technique of photography is concerned, it is characteristic of Elle to use warm lighting to produce a very cordial and comfortable mood. Highly saturated colours flood the photographs to produce an exquisite setting, elegant style and sophisticated atmosphere. This kind of photographic approach is not only highly stylistic but has virtually become a stereotype. With the emphasis on fashion and make-up concepts in Elle, the choice of models has not been given very much attention. In the years 88-90 one model appeared as often as 8 times, in 89 alone as often as 5 times.

In January 90, 'Layering Fashion' (Photo 55-57) is a fashion series of four photos produced by a local designer, William Tang Tat-Chi, who attempted to reform the basic trends of Issey Miyake. There are the emphasized layer and wrapped look characteristic of Miyake, but as a whole the contours are rather simplified. Photo 1, 3 and 4 show actually no differences in material, colour and basic concept. What differs is the cutting and contours. Photo 2 is even worse, in the sense that the skirt is only a very simplified and vulgarized form that bears only the layer look. As for the sweater, only the pleated form and the bell shape sleeves show certain simulations of the Miyake concept; then only in a very remote and mediocre way. As a whole, his reform can be labelled a simplification, rendering casual the avant-gardistic concepts of Miyake, perhaps aiming at local tastes and commercial demand.

The photographic technique of the photographer, Vincent de Mary, is deplorable. The

photography highlighted the contours but not the actual cutting. The light source is not well controlled, and the character as well as the dynamics of the model are not captured at all. Photo 2 is taken from an extremely low angle but then the material's plasticity and texture, so very much emphasized by Miyake who even developed fabrics for his own use, are totally lost. Likewise, photo 3 is supposed to show a long skirt, but the three-quarter shot leaves the lower part chopped off. The American shot of photo 4 at a rather low angle may not be preferable to an eye-level frontal shot. As a whole, the outdoor strong sunlight fails to provide a more exaggerated three-dimensionality and plasticity to the fashion items. The whole impression of this set of photos is one of pretention, technical crudeness and incompetence, and is characteristic of local photography of a poor quality.

In December 90, 'The Flooding Warm Woollen Fashion' (Photo 58-63) is a series of 6 photographs displaying woollen knitwear that belongs to the popular brand-marks of famous ready-to-wear designers like Kenzo, Benetton and Junior Gaultier. The great display of combination colours, patterns and styling is the main theme of this series. The photographer Idris Mootee, employs a very simple background of yellow tint, which also provides the warmth of winter to woollen fashion. The photographic style is simple, down-to earth static and straight forward, avoiding pretention. This is highly compatible with winter as a dormant season, as woollen wear is generally activity inhibiting. The eye-level shot creates a strong documentary sense of fashion items. The patterns are emphasized rather than the model, no matter her facial expression or her figure, which are both toned down to a minimal degree. Except for photo 6, which shows an over lit face due to the reflection of sunlight, the general impression of this series is that of high professional quality.

In January 91, 'A Family of Colour-Tones' (64-70) is typical series photography found very often in Elle, which is based on an abstract concept of colour. Here, olive green, pepper green, mustard yellow, pistachio green and leaf yellow form a family of colour tones together. The purple tinted deep blue provides a contrasting background to the family of colour tones. The photographer, Nadir, finished this series in the studio. The postures of the model are more exaggerated, the style is somewhere between static and dynamic. The shots range from full body to one half. While the former can take care of the styling, the latter can give full splendour to the material used. The series reveals a great effort of research and deliberation that results in a combined collection of well matched items bearing the famous names of Missoni, Emporio Armani, Karl Lagerfeld, Jean-Paul Gaultier and Giorgio Armani. Even the accessories of gold ear-rings and arm-bands are well matched with the family of colour tones.

In June 91, 'Burning Fire and Flames' (Photo 71-78) is a series of 8 photographs depicting the colour tone of orange in winter, an appropriate colour tone, correlated with the winter sun, flames of fire, warm, energy and eye-catching attraction. The tomboyish model with her short hair and wide range of emotional expressions is ideal in representing the high energy of the colour tone. Even her blonde hair is a good match to the colour tone itself. The photographer, Neil Kirk, succeeded in capturing a wide range of emotive episodes of shyness. In February 92, 'Woman in Travel' (photo 79-82) is a series of 4 photos, all putting the woman at the centre of the photo, placing the male in the background, in a very remarkable way. The woman not only occupies the centre, but also looks directly at the readers, whereas her partner is either sleeping, turning around, shadowed by the woman, or showing his back.

Another remarkable feature of Elle's photo series is the androgynous style. Unlike

Cosmopolitan's obsession with the American definition of beauty-- big breasts, sexual body, long hair and seductive looks, Elle always uses models with an androgynous look, like June 90 (Photo 83-84), June 91 (Photo 85-86) and May 92 (Photo 87-90). All the models in these photos are local Hong Kong Chinese women. Maria Chan, chief-editor of Elle, commenting on the androgynous look of Elle writes:

'We are human beings before we are anything. Human nature is more important than elements of class, age, religion, education or gender. I think women should be independent, or should have more social spaces and respect for independent choices. But that does not mean that we are or we should be against men. I am against gender dualism. Sometimes I wonder if people can be discretely separated into masculine and feminine. Certainly, we are either man or woman, but so what? A woman can be very masculine, very independent, very boyish, has so many so-called masculine traits and possibilities. So does man, a man can be feminine, sentimental, subtle, or anything. I won't be too obsessed with gender.'

Fashion photos of local editions of magazines such as Cosmopolitan and Elle are directly extracted from foreign editions. This fashion photography is outstanding in terms of professionalism and fashion concept. Elegance, a local based magazine, is flooded with photos of overseas fashion shows, whilst local photography remains substandard compared to its counterpart abroad, hence the relatively low quality of photos in fashion photography or otherwise.

Women have changed. Modern women want more social and economic power. It does not mean that Cosmopolitan is feminist or liberating. Cosmopolitan's portrayal of femininity is still predicated on the ideology of beauty in terms of fashion consumption, happiness in sex and life, security in financial and heterosexual relationships, and achievement in the capitalist market. Yet, women's autonomy and power are heightened within these limitations. Modern women are encouraged to decide for themselves to be sexy or not (though heterosexual 'sex' is emphasized), they are given all the available information about contraception and how to attain orgasm (though heterosexual relationships are prioritized), they are encouraged to feel entitled to dump their boyfriend (though intimacy is still de-politicized).

3. Letters from the Editor

This section is an analysis of the editorial policies stipulated by different magazines and their publishing corporations, based on the materials gathered during interviews with various editors of magazines.¹⁶³

Local glossy women's magazines all target the section of the female population with the highest purchasing power. Each magazine attempts to develop an unique identity and specific

¹⁶³All the interviews with the editors were taken place during the summer of 1992, when I was back to Hong Kong. See Appendix Three for the details.

image for the magazine that helps to define its marketing positioning. Style and Eve distinguish themselves by being bilingual. Elle and Cosmopolitan have international licensing, while Style, Elegance and In are locally published. The women portrayed in Elle are individual, independent, married and family-oriented; for Cosmopolitan, the image is more career/business based, but liberated personal relationships and sex are emphasised; for Elegance, the emphasis is on culture and society, with an international flavour; 'In' criticizes the unequal power relations of women in society in terms of employment, payment, gender and sexual relationships, Style stresses the psychological needs that are often suppressed in modern women.

When Elle first entered Hong Kong in 1986, it had the advantage of being familiar (it has been a French woman's weekly since 1945 and widely known in the Anglo-saxon world). The magazine is aimed at the new group of women: style-conscious, easy-going, intelligent, trendy, confident, post-feminist, young, middle-class women who are independent and interested in all aspects of life. Indeed, it has no articles on relationships, no agony page, and no 'question and answer' column on sex and relationship problems. It is a genuinely fun magazine over which is not intellectually demanding. What the reader needs to know is the latest fashion, style, trends and a few celebrities.

In Elle fashion dominates all other concerns. There is no problems page, no sex stories, no personal revelations, no forums or seminars, no cultural critics, no psychological advice, only the infinitely perfectible self and the clothes to go with that self. For the editor, this is seen as a policy to instill the image of an independent woman; individualism as a triumph over their male partners is expressed in their responsibility for their own clothes or even their own beautification.

Elegance is targeted at a specific up market group of women, a class rather than a mass audience. The implied readers are those who are married with children. Even if she has a job outside the home, it is less important than the family. This image of affluence, sophistication, beauty and success offers women a utopian vision of themselves that ultimately depends on the marketplace. Interestingly, the readers of Elegance are not necessarily rich women. The opulent images in advertisements and features are savoured and imitated by many readers who can afford only lower-priced products. The sense of participation in luxury and affluence through the consumption of the high-brow magazine continues to attract readers. Elegance expands the cultural spectrum to include advertised fashion and beauty products beside traditional movies, art exhibits, books and records. High culture and high fashion are thus the 'natural' extensions of one another.

It is crucial to note that the editors and writers do not consciously produce consumerist values. As remarked by Grace Wong, the chief-editor of Elegance,

'We never promote spending per se, we promote taste, style and an independent lifestyle. We tell our readers not to spend unnecessarily but only when it does improve their image and confidence. Our goal as editors is merely to help the readers in the appropriate area, from emotional support,

relational guides to financial information.’¹⁶⁴

But she does not see her professional work as ‘political’ and ‘ideological’, and that it may contribute to the perpetuation of heterosexist-consumerist ‘common-sense’ viewpoints. Whether it be a perfectly prepared meal, a well-decorated and landscaped home, up-to-date appliances, a harmonious marriage, stylish dressing or expensive antiques and sense of art, the images of perfected womanhood in Elegance constitute a single cultural axis whose material base is consumerism.

This is further aggravated when the order and nature of content is shaped at the discretion of the advertising clients. Features like beauty news and buying advice appear to be publicity columns for products. Advertising clients often request the advertisements to be put beside sections of relevant interests, or that content is devoid of criticisms of the particular corporations which are the financial sponsors or clients of the magazines. This serves, obviously, to avoid tarnishing the company’s reputation and most of all tainting the good terms between the magazine and the company.¹⁶⁵

In Elegance, the domestic front is presented as cosy, comfortable and unproblematic. Elegance stresses the skilled and non-repetitive dimensions of domestic work, thus concealing the routinized and monotonous nature of housework. Cookery, knitting, sewing, washing-up and child-care are presented not as tedious work, but as leisure and fun. To ensure the voluntary involvement of women and the reproduction of this cycle of domesticity, the language of love and commitment are manipulated to provoke the deepest desires and fears of women. ‘A healthy family is not something pre-given, it is the outcome of a long-term struggle. But if you really love your family, you can taste the joy and warmth at the end.’ (Elegance: July 91) Although the magazines argue for a women’s balance between marriage/family and career/work, the magazines have a subtle bias towards marriage and family. The magazines always select middle class women to tell how successful they are in their careers, followed by their experiences and opinion on marriage and family. The women guests always stress that they never sacrifice marriage and family for career. Editors always pick up conservative quotations from guests, stressing the primacy of marriage and family, in the name of a balanced relationship between marriage and career.

Elegance strives to conjure up the woman’s image as managing both family and work in a well-balanced way. Marriage is important for the Elegance woman, sex is played down. Interestingly, in ‘We are the professionals’ section in 89 issues, sex was explicitly dealt with in a regular column by Yan Kin-Man. Elegance explained that the subsequent scrapping of the column in 1991 was due to personal reasons, because of the departure of the writer, and not because the magazine was trying to be conservative on the matter. The fact that Cosmopolitan had emphasized sex did not instill any urgency for Elegance to venture an article on the subject. But the editor explained that the new content in the section ‘Office Politics’, would include issues relating to sex and psychological health.

¹⁶⁴Interviewed in 5th Jan 1990, Ming Po Newspaper in Hong Kong.

¹⁶⁵The constraint imposed by the advertising clients has long been recognized and studied by cultural theorists and researchers. See for example Janice Winship (1986) for the classic research on Cosmopolitan.

In was at first shocking and innovative; it broke the taboo on discussing serious matters in women's magazines, like lesbianism, women's media representation, ecology, sexual politics, child abuse and marital rape. The popular consensus seems to be that it was ahead of its time.¹⁶⁶ It invites the reader to look beyond, to new ideas and controversial subjects in the homeland and all over the world. It aims at the reader with a head, a heart and a lot of style. The authors try not to write these articles from the position of 'other' but spend some time in the area and attempt to see the culture through the eyes of particular people they introduces us to. In treats women intelligently, assuming that they want to read about international and intellectual issues.

Where the editorial policy is aimed at arousing consciousness, women are portrayed as socially concerned, intellectually active, with strong feminist overtones. The November issue (1989) described and discussed the feminist movement in Hong Kong, introducing various feminist groups and their policies. The fact that women still faced oppression became the frequent catchword in the articles; the November issue includes an article which discusses the (have not) status of women in the traditional Chinese society in which the message, as explicitly put as possible, is that 'women today are submissive, ignorant, impure. Since when and where have women's voices and spaces been allowed to exist?'

It is not only women's social roles that have been challenged, In has also paid attention to women's involvement and positioning in arts, media and cultural representation in general. The January 90 issue analyzed the construction of the women's image as victims of voyeurism in Hollywood films, employing theories of feminist psychoanalysis like Laura Mulvey to debunk and subvert the male gaze in typical Hollywood and Hong Kong popular movies. The March 90 issue interviewed three Hong Kong women artists and discussed the issue of women's participation and representation in the local art scene. The article argues not only against the under-representation of women in the art scene, but the structural and institutional bias that constitutes the patriarchal exclusion of women.

What is also unique about In is its recruitment of feminist editors. As Ann Ma, the chief-editor said,

'We want editors who are passionate towards gender politics, who support rights for women, who are against sexism and oppression of women, and who want to explore the local gender politics.'

She went on to explain the relevance of feminism to Hong Kong gender politics:

'To me, feminism gives us a different perspective to understand gender. It offers a deep and critical socio-political analysis of gender from the perspective of power, especially the unequal power relations in everyday life... Ya.. Hong Kong women are well-pampered, I may say, too insensitive to the power politics in intimate relations. They tend to take gender questions personally, I

¹⁶⁶The feature on women's magazines done by Ming Po Newspaper (Hong Kong) addressed In as being 'avant-garde' and 'radical'. See 22, Oct, 1991, Ming Po Newspaper.

mean... as a discrete individual to another... Ya.. I suppose In locates gender and intimacy in a broader socio-political context of power structure. No matter how sincere or nice a man is , he is still occupying a privileged social position. Basically, women are put in an unequal social relations with men, having far less social power, especially in intimate relationship, in marriage, in public arena, in employment... For example, a forty-year old woman factory worker will have tremendous difficulties in finding a job, as most factories don't employ women over thirty-five. Open any newspaper and look at the advertising vacancies for factory workers. Over 90% of them ask for women under 35. The dominant view of employers is that women over 35 are inefficient, trouble-some as they have to take care of their kids. It is ridiculous. Why is a forty-year old man much more marketable, regarded as mature, whereas his female counterpart is a shit. This is blatant sexism.'

In relationship to foreign editions, publishers, and advertising clients, Cosmopolitan and Elle (both local editions have international licenses) find advantages and shortcomings on affiliating with foreign editions. Local editions are controlled mainly in the visual presentation of the front cover and the graphic layout. The type of verbal content is also largely shaped by the foreign edition, but local magazines benefit from the large variety of articles they select from foreign editions. Translations frequently dominate local magazine content especially Cosmopolitan. Articles about relationships, romance and most importantly sex are rarely contributed by local writers, especially when the column discusses the open sex life and romances of modern women. Even the editors themselves do not deny claims and worries that such translated articles may indiscriminately import Western (especially American) lifestyles and values, ideas which depart from the local context and neglect local needs. As Winnie Li (the editor of Cosmopolitan) put it,

'We try hard to contextualize the American nature of the articles, but sometimes it is difficult because these articles especially on sex are directly translated from the American version. It is difficult to find local writers for the sensitive issue. And the acceptance of the American version of the article is not just a matter of convenience and financial consideration, these translated articles are often of high quality.'¹⁶⁷

Hong Kong version of Cosmopolitan also offers readers vicarious participation in pseudo-sexual liberation, but with much less daring and transgression of established sexual mores than the original US version. At the same time, the magazine promotes images of modernity to attract readers and encourages a consumerist attitude to life. In the case of Elle, local editors strive for a different target audience from that of the French original: while the French version targeted younger women, the local version catered for a more mature and wealthy target group.

The independence and autonomy of the editors is curtailed by the discretion of the publisher, the financial proprietor of the magazine, thus making it clear that editorial concern is subordinate to the marketing policy of publishers which ascertain the commercial function and

¹⁶⁷Personal interview with Mary Chan, 19 Aug, 1992.

role of the magazine. This explains the predominance of advertising over informative content which supposedly is the main function of magazines.

Finally, the role of editors is as an all-in-one entity: as a close friend, touching women's deeper emotion and secrets, consoling them, resolving their life's problems, as teachers, even mentors, with the magazine content providing beauty and health tips, even acting as marriage and love counsellors. They act as the voice of conscience, warning troubled wives not to risk extramarital affairs, safeguarding the sacrament of marriage. While the 'Letter from the editor' in *Cosmopolitan* (June 92) reminds the readers of the danger of AIDS and casual sex, the *Elegance* editor (May 91) explicitly attacks the pursuit of extra-marital relations as 'immature and naive'; the editor of *Elle* (May 92) condemned extra-marital relationship as 'irresponsible'.

Editors assume also the role of the paternalistic father/husband figure and reconfirm women's dependence in a patriarchal society. From their inception, women's magazines have posited female subjectivity as a problem, offering themselves to female readers as a guide to living, a means of organising their experience as women. Women's magazines have been and remained structured by the tension between their self-representation as a voice for women and as women's guide.

Despite their advocacy of modern women, as independent, autonomous, well managed in their lives, readers turn to these magazines for advice and consolation. The editor of glossy women's magazines becomes the 'high priestess'¹⁶⁸ of a new found modern religion --- consumption. While the rosy picture of independence and liberal free choice is intentionally painted, readers fall into an ideological web, thus securing the supremacy of the editor's role as a 'high-priestess'.

Yet, it is dangerous to homogenize the 'editorial' position which actually consists of a complicated web of social relationships. The finance manager may want certain images and representations that the chief-editor finds problematic, the advertisers may have ideological and practical conflicts with the editor concerning the content and representation of a specific advertisement. And each editor comes from a very different background, and may have different conceptions and experiences concerning womanhood, intimacy and motherhood. It is naive to presuppose an invisible hand behind each women's magazine. Instead, we should interrogate the actual process of negotiation and production of different, multiple or even contradictory images and messages of each magazine.

The function of 'Letters from the editor' is to provide information about the contents, new staff and new style/content of the future issues. It also helps sets the future agenda for consumption and reading habits. This represents the image of the magazine, so that readers can aspire to her projected image and participate in the emotional empathy generated.

Many analysts have been struck by the intimate tone employed to address the reader, the cosy invocation of a known commonality between 'we women' (Leman, 1980; Winship, 1987).

¹⁶⁸The nature of editor of women's magazines as 'high priestess' is best illustrated by Marjorie Ferguson (1983).

Despite the obvious differences among status, class, race, sexual orientation and wealth, the magazines assume a shared experience. Not only do the editors and writers use the intimate language, the voices of the readers also resonate with the same register of intimacy. Such an inclusive stress on commonality of womanhood is of course an imagined one --- the ideal or implied reader of these glossy magazines are middle-class heterosexual women, thus marginalising and excluding the working-class, elderly, lesbian and ethnic minorities. But in defining its readers as 'women in general' with the rhetoric of 'We women', women's magazines have both expressed and repressed the exclusion of those who cannot afford to consume the advertised commodity.

The role of the editor is seen as a multiple one; that of guardian, advisor, as well as confidante friend, and gatekeeper of the female world. The target audience is emphasised as a varied one: business women as well as young girls. The letters may serve as an instigator of individual identity as well as a channel for group identification. The working woman identity is deliberately emphasized in the letters. The 'working woman is a good woman' approach as an identification of the modern woman is favoured, while domestic labour is perpetually rejected and despised. Yet, there are crucial changes in recent years in the magazines' attitude towards career, romance and family. Taking Elegance as an example, in March 1988, the 'letters from the editor' quoting a contemporary survey on 'divorce' and 'single-motherhood', commented that:

'freedom must be based on responsibility. It is in respect both to yourself and more importantly, to the people you are together with. *The sadness of single-parenting and divorce is precisely a lack of respect not just to your partner, but to parents, family members and other close friends.*'

Four years later, Elegance discussed 'celibacy' in another 'letters from the editor', saying that:

'Marriage is a free choice, not an obligation, nor is marriage 'indispensable' for every woman. Modern women should have the independent will to determine their own way of living. Celibacy can be a blessing, a joyful lifestyle that women surely have the financial capacity and emotional maturity to enjoy.'

The letters in Cosmopolitan reveal that the magazine fosters vanity. Readers admire the beauty of the models and their fashions, and aspire to their standards. The wish to always stay in front of the camera is predicated on the 'feminine' desire make oneself the object of male desire. The letters positions the male as the presupposed 'significant other' of the women readers. The unequal power relations in heterosexuality are well revealed in the Letter of the editor in April 1991 where the editor asserted that

'A successful woman is successful not only in attaining immense career achievement or climbing up the social ladder, she also knows how to get the heart of her man.

The tone of the 'Letters from the editors' in Elegance is confidential and intimate, reflecting a more friendly approach rather than a superior one. However, the editorial is closely linked to consumerism. For example in November 91, the letter from the editor talks about the

anxieties and excitement of travelling for the modern woman. The editor then refers the readers to the special feature of that issue, 'Travel: don't let your dream fail' in which the article emphasizes the importance of the reputation of the travel agent. The article is followed by a double-page advertisements where one of the largest travel agents in Hong Kong advertise their Christmas trip, and special offers.

Elle has the highest regard for the forum section, for discussion and as a channel for readers to the editors. It places a high priority on the section for the improvement of quality for their target audience, thus ensuring a two way flow of communication and higher rapport between editors and readers. The 'high priestess' image is reduced. The discrepancy between the image fostered by the editors and its perception by readers is narrowed. The section is thus used to clarify the objective of the magazine and to enhance its philosophy. As stated in the 'Letters from the editor' in July 90: 'Elle is a magazine which would not control the thoughts of its readers'.

In this respect, In is an exception. The 'Letter from the editor' in In is distinctively feminist.¹⁶⁹ In differs from other glossy magazines by the socio-political content of its 'letter from the editor'. Rather than an introduction to the inside content of that issue, the section is an independent discourse on specific socio-political issues (like the 'June-Fourth Incident' in August 89, 'Poverty' in November 89, 'AIDS' in February, 90, 'Green Politics' in March 90 and 'Legislative Council Elections' in May 91). The section is highly verbal, often with two full pages of verbal content which is quite rare in other glossy magazines. Instead of treating these socio-political issues as gender-neutral categories, In approaches these issues with a sharp feminist concern. For example, the letters from the editor on AIDS (February 90) stresses that AIDS is also a uniquely 'women's issue', whereas the one on Green politics (March 90) co-related the relations between ecology and feminism, proposing the possibility of 'ecological feminism' --- that both political movements share similar philosophical and political roots and values like peace-loving, concern for nature and critique of the Enlightenment's obsession with control.

Women in the magazine are portrayed as professional, educated individuals who possess a mind and soul behind a 'feminine' body and looks. Rather than the message of an ornamental life overwhelmed by happiness, women in In have to strive and struggle independently in order to find happiness. As stated in 'Letter from the editors' in June 90,

'After exposing the myth of romantic love which is heterosexist and oppressive to women, women realize that happiness and romance are neither necessary nor natural, they are the fruit of a long process of struggle. The so-called sexual liberation may be liberating to men, but 'promiscuity' is not working for women's interest. After all, who would appreciate a woman who changes her sex partner every week.'

This poses a stark contrast to the illusive rosy picture universally painted in other glossy women's magazines of the social condition of modern day women. The root of the feminist

¹⁶⁹The 'letters from the editor' in In is called 'In Words' which is a serious editorial focusing on specific socio-political topic, with a title of its own each time.

idea, especially that of anti-oppression, is stressed. In represents a departure from the normal value system. Early in the debut issue the editor pointed out the significance for modern women to critically challenge the norms erected by the capitalist world in Hong Kong. Women are not only oppressed by the male society, they are often commodified by capitalistic consumerism where human values are defined by what we consume --- I consume, therefore I am.

In stresses that women are 'human' before their gender classification, like the editorial in September 1989 titled 'Please treat females as humans'. It proposed 'androgyny', adopting Virginia Woolf's idea that 'women bear basically human qualities', gender defined male and female personality traits that will emerge in different times. In discussed widely the socio-cultural phenomena of postmodernity in arts, literary, film and social thoughts in general. The magazine gave recognition to women's revised social role, to their contribution to the labour force. The notion of sisterhood was overwhelming in the magazine, promoting a sense of solidarity among women. The magazine focused on a limited readership of educated intellectuals who are highly interested in the arts and other intellectual concerns, thus In ran the risk of excluding the majority of women readers, ultimately precipitated its closing down. As admitted by the editor in the closing issue (September 91), 'We failed to attract adequate glossy advertisements which were irritated by our critical approach to consumerism, sexism and the myth of femininity.'

4. Beauty and Heterosexuality

The concept of beauty/health in women's magazines is a promotion strategy catering for their advertising clients, revealing the inseparable relation not only between magazine and advertising, but also between beauty/health and consumption. As far as the beauty news of each magazine is concerned, it provides a marketplace for advertisements of cosmetics and skin care products.¹⁷⁰ Different magazines reveal a distinct concept of beauty and health: Cosmopolitan always connotes sexual meanings to 'beauty', Elle incorporates health and beauty into a single section, with the health content being negligible. In stresses the intellectual and social dimension of modern women at the expense of a personal pursuit of beauty. For Elegance, the idea of health only emerges with advertisements of physical fitness clubs, which attract readers by free beauty care coupons. A lot of content is devoted to hair care, deodorant, skin care, which implies an older target audience who have worries about hair loss, wrinkling skin and failing beauty.

Each magazine does offer different notions of feminine beauty, yet all these diversities and differences (except that of In) have presupposed:

- a. Women's secret of success lie in their looks.
- b. Such a 'look' can be improved by the deployment of correct cosmetic, skin-care and other accessories.
- c. Only slim, young, middle-class women are celebrated.

Here lies the paradox not only of 'Beauty and Health' section, but women's magazines in general: that 'natural' femininity can only be achieved by consuming the correct commodities.

¹⁷⁰For a feminist-Foucaultian critique on the myth of beauty, see Sandra Lee Bartky, 1990.

Winnie Li justified the classist construction of femininity:

'There is nothing wrong to be beautiful, charming and attractive. It is by no means classist. Hong Kong society has reached the level where most people can afford a better quality of life. Why can't we enjoy what we have... say when you put on a very decent Chanel suit in office setting, it may cheer you up; you are more confident in your look. You may behave and perform better at work. It is an interesting chemical reaction. You really have a different image on yourself. It gives you a sense of pride, confidence and esteem. You are lifted up. And it is more than a psychological effect or self-deception. The whole world may think almost the same and you receive different treatment from others. Other people will be impressed by your confidence and performance. That's why it is worthy. What if you buy a cheap clothing in a department store? You don't feel good about yourself, it may disturb your self-esteem and even working performance. That's why appropriate look is so important. So why don't you treat yourself good and boost up your self-esteem. It works.'

Beauty and fashion magazines are marked by an obsessive concern with physical appearance, especially about the reader's body and the obsolescence of her clothes. Beauty and fashion magazines manipulate the reader's sense of inadequacy through its beauty and fashion features. Common titles like 'Help! I need a new pair of glasses' (Cosmopolitan: November 90), 'I am tired of the childish look' (Elle: June 91), 'Have a new hair style' (Cosmopolitan: February 92), 'What's wrong with my summer dress' (Elegance: December 91), all link negative self images to commodity remedies.

Women's magazines are flooded with beauty products under various brand names, that appear in the numerous advertisements of beauty and buying guides. Different functions are highlighted, distinguishing the need for specialized treatment under different brand names, be they cosmetics or skin care products, the two products advertised most in the magazines. With the objective of beautifying oneself, each brand name competes by creating a unique character/look for their product, labelling them with alluring names like Narcissi, Egoist, Poison, Loulou, Christian Dior, each with different social connotations. A woman using Chanel perfume is distinguished from the user of Estee Lauder, or a woman possessing a Gucci handbag stands out from the one using Millies. The products also reveal the identity, status, style and purchasing power of the consumer.

Zie Yonder lamented people's obsession with brand-name:

'I think the problem of Hong Kong people is that we are too obsessed with brand-names. We take the price for their quality. To me, it's stupid. For instance, putting Polo, Durban and Dior together don't necessarily fit. And each kind of high-street fashion fits certain people. Nowadays many people consume the names instead of the quality and style.'

Skin care products dominated the advertisements and beauty parlours are included with the publicised message of 'restoring youth and eradicating wrinkles --- the signs of ageing' (Elegance :July 90). The section termed 'secret address' in Elegance revealed the secretive nature of women's concealment of their aging. The magazine thus appears to have successfully captured private anxieties about the ageing process. The magazine acts as a close friend and advisor, appealing and capturing the most intimate secrets which their readers refrain from discussing openly. Wrinkles are seen as the sign of the career women, the price paid for her overload of work, and of increased social and physical activities. Fading beauty becomes the common enemy of modern women, a factor both of solidarity and competition.

While the 'beauty section' appeals to women readers as 'sisters who should help one another fight ageing, bad taste and nasty men' (Cosmopolitan: June 91 and Elegance: January 92), women soon find themselves competing against one another, for beauty, youth and the common target in life --- to capture and be captured by the ideal man. Love is emphasised as a major part in life, and exciting romances are the new interests for the modern woman. The need to attract one's boyfriend/lover dominates the verbal and visual contents of Elle, Cosmopolitan and Elegance, with titles like 'How to dress seductively' (Cosmopolitan: June 90), 'How to dress up for balls' (Elle: May 90) and 'Match your husband at formal parties' (Elegance: January 91). The pictures in the articles are typically of sexy, self-conscious women with heavy make-up, showing a merry contentment with life and a alluring looks. These women magazines have even been able to cater for the fashion and beauty needs of executive women, and other expanding social groups (Cosmopolitan: September 89).¹⁷¹

For Cosmopolitan, femininity is equated with youth, ambition, career and most important of all, sexual appeal. 'Class' is rarely an issue and never a political issue. And the middle-class bias of the implied readers is the presupposed but unclarified ground of the magazine. The liberal, open-minded attitude of the women's magazines is only a facade, concealing and reproducing the magazines' own middle-class bias towards heterosexual monogamous relationships.

The discourse of the male gaze, heterosexual femininity and consumption are constructed in the name of 'individual choice'. As Winnie Li argued,

'There are different kinds of modern women, for example, both top executive career women and housewives can be very successful. There is no prototype. We object a monolithic image of women. The key point is personal choice. We give our readers lots of suggestions and alternatives. We widen the vision of our readers, from travel, jewellery, books, movies, fashion, accessories to.. um.. all topics really. Well, we project a rich and fruitful perspective of modern women. But it is the woman reader that makes her own choice.'

¹⁷¹For the feminist critique on the image, myth and impact of 'romantic love', see Wendy Chaphis's *Beauty Secrets* (1986) which is an extensive interviews with women on the issues of beauty. See Naomi Wolf (1990) as the recent popular and controversial study on the myth of beauty, which is predicated on the radical feminist paradigm. Consult Jane Gains and Charlotte Herzog(ed) *Fabrications* (1990) for the study of costume and the female body. Finally, see the earlier work in the study of the 'Cinderella Complex' by Colette Dowling (1981).

Cosmopolitan contained 2 pages of horoscopes, giving the issue greater emphasis than other magazines. Contents are generalized, applicable to all horoscopes, but basically constructed according to personality traits of the particular horoscope. Cosmopolitan stands out by offering precise predictions of incidents, that will occur at certain times, to their readers. Exact dates of incidents are mentioned to enhance the credibility of the horoscope. The imperative tone of language reinforces the message of this section. In August 92, the Leo women readers were told to invite their boyfriends to dinner to 'light their fire', and a handsome Pisces man would be lured by the charm of a Virgo woman. Love and exciting romance are stressed as the main pillars of women readers. The imperative tone was used to enhance the direct, open and liberal image of the magazine as well as their readers, but at the same time stressed the paternal role of the magazine.

The glorification of marriage over career is deliberately expressed in interviews of celebrities or successful career women. They act as critical witnesses of women's liberation and participation in the labour force, with the message of 'the repented sinner' looming large in the interviews. This image is stressed in interviews conducted by Elle. In the February 90 issue, the interviewee, Ms Lee Hei-Man (a famous local business woman), resisted the idea of being labelled a 'strong career woman', but hoped to be a 'weak' one --- in Chinese terms, this meant caring about domestic chores, and the family as her ultimate life aspiration. There is virtually no relationship and no consistency between the trailer or title and the content. While the message just described her life history and present occupation, the trailer deliberately emphasized the message that no matter how established her career might be, the interviewee shunned the label of being a 'strong woman', and much preferred to be protected by men, seeing this as more 'naturally beautiful'.

In Elle Oct 89 issue, the interviewee, Cheng Suk-Ji, the 'repented one', was a woman at the height of her stardom, who subsequently married. The photos acted as a catalyst to the idea, visually portraying the happy wife/mother, enjoying the summer breeze with her children --- the highest reward and the 'dream' suppressed and expressed in the modern world. This is the sermon preached to a modern woman, that happiness for a women can only be defined within the social institution of romantic love. This reconfirms the traditional ideology, as articulated by Cheng Suk-Ji,

'No matter how successful a woman might be, her life goal would eternally be romance and marriage, and her interests would be best vested with her man... When I was younger, I thought marriage was unimportant and romance merely optional. But now I have been married for eight years and have two children, I realize that marriage and family are so important to a woman.' (Elle: Oct, 90).

The editorial intervention and support of the political institution of compulsory heterosexuality are seen in the selections of titles, people and topics for the interviews. The interviews with public figures, be it soap-opera stars, successful career-women or celebrities, often focus on their 'domesticity' --- their romance, marriage and family, expecting these successful women to stress the primacy of family/domestic life over their public achievement, thus setting an ideal role model for the readers. In the interviews in Elegance for example, the 'heterosexual-monogamous' order is highlight by the selection of conservative statements for the heading/title of the article, at the expense of the more subversive and radical ideas of the

guests. In February 1990, the interviewee Mrs Ho (top manager in a local travel company), shared the excitement and joy of travelling around the world, discussed the trends of local travel, the consumption pattern, the consumers' need and her personal experiences of climbing the social ladder. While the interview was mostly on her work, it was the statement 'My marriage is my first career, travel agent second' that was picked up as the headline of the article. Again in December 90, Elegance interviewed a divorced woman (now living with her three children). While this woman kept stressing that she never regretted choosing to divorce, and shared how she struggled hard to attain a new life, the editor ironically produced a title which was highly misleading: 'Divorce: the danger for modern women'.

Cosmopolitan is no less heterosexist in its editorial intervention: in May 91, the feature on extra-marital relations interviewed three guests, including one vocal local feminist and two middle-class successful career-women. The title of the article, 'The trouble of extra-marital affairs', and the three headlines within the article, 'I feel shame for those who drop their kids to start an affair just for fun', 'I can love many times, but I just want to love once' and 'Given more sincerity, most marriages can be restored', were all chosen from the other two speakers who were conservative proponents of the heterosexist marital order. The view of the feminist guest, that traditional marriage was itself oppressive to women, was entirely ignored.

Indeed, one thing women's magazines never challenge is heterosexuality which is naturalized and normalized as a-cultural and a-political.

5. Sexuality

Women's magazines in general tend to avoid 'sex', partly because it is a highly sensitive taboo, and we can never have a unanimous viewpoint on the related issues. Any hard-line definite position may easily irritate readers. Thus, many women's magazines simply focus on marriage and family, beauty, career and lifestyle, postulating vaguely a trendy version of modern independent woman with a good balance between career and family. Practically, it is difficult to find appropriate writers and materials. Since the readers of up-market women's magazines are no longer teenagers, what they need is not scientific information or sensuous excitement, but critical insights and mature perspectives in handling their own sex affairs and desires. Elegance never had anything to say directly on sex, Elle did so only rarely, In was concerned with women's representation, the feminist movement and gender roles, but not sex in the specific sense. The only exception is Cosmopolitan, which devoted at least two articles in each issue to the topic of sex, but most of the articles were simply translated from the American version of Cosmopolitan.

Among all glossy women's magazines, Cosmopolitan has put greatest emphasis on the issue of sexuality. Indeed, its emphasis on sexuality exceeds that of marriage and family. Before June 89, Cosmopolitan did not have any special column on sex, but in each issue, there were articles (usually two pieces) directly discussing 'sex' coupled with other columns like 'Psychological Health' and 'Interpersonal Relationships' which really meant 'sex'.

'Sex' is the major concern of Cosmopolitan's columns 'Psychological Health', 'Interpersonal Relationship' and 'Your Body', all of which focus mainly on the relationship between readers and their boyfriends/husbands. 'Psychological Health' is actually about 'sexuality'. It appears

in the form of 'questions and answers', usually with three people requesting advice from the editor on different topics. But it is crucial to note that all wider psychological health problems like work stress, friendship, parental care, religious concern are largely absent at the expense of sexuality. The column 'Human Relationship' is a direct discourse on sex, instead of the wider notion of 'human relationship'. In most cases, the articles discussed (hetero) sexual relationship with boyfriend and husbands, with titles like 'What happens if you love the husband of another woman?' (March 90), 'Extra-marital affairs are not the end of the world' (November 90), 'How can you enjoy sex more with your partner' (May 92). The magazine's attitude towards marriage and affairs are ambivalent, carrying a positive and preaching tone towards marriage, but the content encourages the continuation of active sex lives and (heterosexual) affairs, which is indicative of the heterosexist bias of Cosmopolitan specifically, and women's magazines in general.

Cosmopolitan offers voyeuristic glimpses in the 'Interpersonal Relationship' column where the readers are allowed to participate vicariously in the unusual, forbidden and exotic stories of 'other' people. Whether it is a exotic love affair, extra-marital relations, scandals or other sanctioned affairs, the readers can both attain the pleasure of identifying with these scandalous stories without actually acting them out, and can still morally condemn them as subversive activities. Most of these articles on relationships present a powerfully attractive opportunity for voyeurism; laden with enticing stories, they allow readers to participate vicariously in emotional events of the 'otherness', and then to sanction the other morally, thus participating in the guilty pleasure of voyeurism.

The readers can enjoy temporarily social transgression and the exotic, but in the end the article always ends with the reminder of the dominant social norm. The problems and entanglements of these transgressive affairs usually suddenly end with a return to marriage, monogamy and 'social order', with the problems magically solved and the dominant social order upheld.¹⁷² For example, in May 90 a reader in 'Psychological Health' talked about her extra-marital relationship with a 'Bohemian style (male) dancer. The reader talked in details about the joy and pleasure she had with this dancer who was migrating to Canada shortly. And the editor replied,

'I can share your joy. This young dancer sounds wonderful: sensitive, considerate and passionate. Even if you are married, I don't think you need to feel guilty for your pleasure. Guilt doesn't help. Yet, you need to realize that this charming man has already left Hong Kong... Your husband may not be perfect. But it is a marital relationship that is more secure and long-lasting than a one-night stand. It is perhaps time to pick up your mood and go back to your husband.'

Indeed, it is the common strategy of Cosmopolitan: it links sexual fantasies to traditional values, ultimately containing the subversive and guilty pleasure it generates in the first place.

¹⁷²In view of the rather conservative tone on marriage and sex, Cosmo has already attained a considerable amount of autonomy independently of the American parent version which is far more blatant, explicit and persistent in the pursuit of sex.

The sexual liberation movement of the 60's and 70's generated a new discourse especially in 'liberating' female sexuality and women's independence although the underlying structure of the social relations and gender inequality remained intact. Sexual freedom was confused with women's liberation, and sexual casualness confused with sexual liberation. In that context, Cosmopolitan played a mixed role by supporting sexual independence but also by positioning women within the heterosexist-patriarchal discourse of sexuality.

Sexual representation in Cosmopolitan does prioritize an active female sexuality which is itself a challenge to patriarchal structures. There were dangers for women in the sexual revolution within the context of patriarchy, which could well make them vulnerable to even greater exploitation than the old sexual double standard, in that women were simply more available for men. In representing women's independence as synonymous with heterosexual sex and love, Cosmopolitan constructed the liberation of women in a male gaze. It poses questions to the readers who cannot say no, 'Do you want to be sexy and stylish'.

Cosmopolitan promotes sexual commodification rather than liberation, extending the process of sexual reification which is an essential mark for the contemporary 'liberated' world. In commodifying the erotic pleasure and the forbidden, Cosmopolitan encourages women readers to view both men and themselves as sex objects, further reifying the advertising process of commodification and consumerism. At first sight, Cosmopolitan seems to contradict the traditional ideals of femininity. The magazines allow women to be pseudo-sexually liberated and happily single. But this ideal image is more a male stereotype of the desirable woman than a female vision. In advising women to dress for success, Cosmopolitan subtly implies that correct dress and cosmetics will please male supervisors.

For example, while the article 'Who can afford office romance?' in June 91 (Cosmopolitan) warns its women readers not to risk becoming the office playgirl because it will destroy all the relations and achievements she has attained in her office/career, another article in the same issue ('Are you sexy enough?') reminds readers of the primacy of sexual pleasure for modern women, a sexual pleasure even outside the marital order. Instead of confusing the readers, such contradictory elements both activates desires and also contains them within the heterosexist-marital order. Similar contradictions may arise as readers vacillate between eating and dieting. Regardless of these apparent inconsistencies, the purposes of 'home and food' is fulfilled --- to secure advertising revenue from the makers of food and home products for the magazine.

Most of the articles on sexuality are not written by local writers but 'translated' from the America version, with slight variations. It results in a failure to contextualize local needs and concerns in sexuality. The articles are extracted from the international version, and do not pertain to the local situation. The experiences that suffice to paint the image of the modern woman by the magazine amounts to minority experience in the local context. This reveals the shortcomings of articles imported and indiscriminately used in local editions, especially Cosmopolitan. For example, while pre-marital sex is still a big issue especially for the young women in Hong Kong, the issue is never brought up in Cosmopolitan, largely because it is a non-issue in the States. Most importantly, the perspectives guiding these articles are very American, ie. selling a liberal, middle-class, rational, individualistic, a-moralized, pro-sex, pro-capitalistic orientation, with a strong image of the woman as independent figure. Since Cosmopolitan has the most elaborate discussion of 'sexuality', a more detailed analysis of

Cosmopolitan is presented here:

(a) Liberal Attitude of Pro-sex

Cosmopolitan is very explicit about sex --- topics like oral sex, intercourse, impotence and extra-marital relations are very common. The attitude of taboo and shame is replaced by a rational, a-moral and liberal attitude. Given the liberal and individualistic orientation of America, sex is now constructed as an 'indispensable' element of life. Cosmopolitan never takes sex as a moral issue. In March 1990 the article in 'Psychological Health', 'When you have a bisexual boyfriend' talks about not only bisexuality but also a reader's boyfriend having sex with her sister. The article takes the issue as nothing more than a matter of personal choice and individual happiness --- as long as the partners involved are alright. As the editor replied to the reader,

'I can fully understand the frustration and anger you have with your (bi-sexual) boyfriend having sex with your sister. It must be outrageous for you. But aren't you interested in how your sister feels about the whole thing? Why don't she share your feelings frankly with your sister? Their affair, as presented by you, sounds a one-night stand, without much desire from both parties to disturb your relationship with him. Don't over-react if they just take it as a causal encounter. And it is unwise to blow up the whole thing if you are still keen to retain your relationship with your boyfriend. After all, your sister is just too bored as you said. She just needs some temporary excitement and pleasure.'

The article in August 91 'Infatuated women' argued that infatuation is a-moral and cannot be blamed or explained. In the article 'One Night Stand' (May 90), the attitude is neither one of moral judgement or political judgement but simply tells the reader how to enjoy it better and to avoid unnecessary shame and guilt. The theme of an independent and active sexual woman is always pursued by Cosmopolitan. Numerous articles are written to teach women readers the techniques and approach so as to enjoy sex more (from dating, pursuing, kissing, penetration, oral sex to different varieties of sexualities). After all, as the title of an article in February 90 said, 'Sex is Good --- Sex makes you healthier and happier'.

(b) Independent women

In December 89, the writer in 'Psychological health' argues explicitly that 'the great fault of women is being innocent, those who tolerate suffering and continue with unsuitable men are the most stupid women'. The notion of independence is most vivid in sex. Given that the number of women in New York exceeds that of men, Cosmopolitan always teaches women readers the clever ways to 'pick up the men you want'. Indeed, in February, April, June of 89, January, February, March, June and December of 90, February, March, June, July and November of 91, and February, March, August and December of 92, there are articles in these two columns showing readers how to pursue men, with titles like 'Read this article if you don't want to be an old virgin' (February 89), 'Get the man you want' (March 90), 'Don't waste the chance to pursue a nice man' (December 90) and 'Do you understand the sexual needs of men?' (June 91).

Despite the apparent emphasis on the independent image of modern women, the status and virtue of women are defined by her sexuality: virgin vs loose/active. Whereas for men, their sexuality is never problematized but assumed to be active, aggressive, easily-aroused and self-

centred, thus ironically justifying male sexual assertiveness. The openness of sex does not entail the equality of gender power relationship. Instead, sexuality is still defined and constructed in male terms and interests.

(c) Repressive hypothesis of sexuality¹⁷³

In Cosmopolitan's discourse, sexuality is articulated as something that has long been repressed, denied its full force and expression, and that only with the encouragement of the magazine and its underlying libertarian paradigm can the readers be 'liberated' to express their sexuality freely, shamelessly and healthily. In November 90 'Psychological Health', the editor replied to a reader's sexual problem by saying that she had repressed her sexual desires and needs and was therefore damaging her emotional, mental and even physical life. As the reader had a boyfriend, she was asked to express her sexual desires and needs freely and shamelessly in front of her boyfriend; she should try to enjoy sex and liberate herself. Not only has 'sexuality' become the most crucial element in personal identity, especially gender identity, it is also said to be the 'key' to the knowledge of selfhood, personality and truth. In April 91, in the article 'Repression: the greatest 'sin' in modern sexual lives', the writer argues explicitly for a expressive model of sexuality through which the entire repressed personality and authentic self will be free. She wrote:

'Sexuality has long been treated as something dangerous, threatening to social and economic lives, having to be controlled and disciplined in monogamous familial order. Such a repressive and puritan attitude is not only against the logic of contemporary social lives, it is simply unhealthy. Sex is part of our lives, it needs to be expressed without shame and guilt. It is not an argument for causal sex or promiscuity. Care is the key word. With serious care for yourself and others, sex can be pleasurable and liberating to your whole person. When you have a nice and harmonious sex life, you feel so different about yourself, much more confident, relaxed and cheerful. You are literally different.' (Cosmopolitan: April, 91)

These columns on sex can be understood not as a sign of sexual repression but as revealing the profusion of sexual discourses which fill the air-waves and invade the inner reaches of the domestic sphere. Such proliferation of discourses since the late nineteenth century has gradually erode the sharp division between public and private life. All that can be investigated about sexuality is subject to the scrutinising gaze of the discursive machinery that permeates every aspect of life. The encouragements to confess one's problems, write one's agony, speak ones inner feeling reveals a powerful regulative system of normalization that produces a sense of the subject who is said to be liberated by these expressive discourses. Instead of being repressed and denied, sexuality becomes a topic that should be spoken, not merely as the expression of our inner selfhood and authentic truth, but also as the mark of gender identity. Within this framework of confessional technology, Cosmopolitan defines the contours of sexual desire, fantasy and anxieties, providing readers and viewers with the correct language

¹⁷³The repressive models of sexuality have significantly been refuted by Foucault who is an important 'social theorist' in sexuality in the past twenty years. Consult Foucault's *History of Sexuality* (1977) for the basic statement of his view of sexuality. For a feminist appropriation of Foucault, see Judith Butler (1990)'s *Gender Trouble*.

to construct their selfhood in a liberal and shameless way. It is precisely such liberal discourse and policies that normalize the field of sexuality in a society that has a particularly acute need and anxiety to separate the normal from the abnormal, the healthy from the unhealthy.

(d) Individualism

When tackling the issue of sex, individual choice and happiness are the prime considerations, without any reference to the socio-political context of the individual and her obsession with sex in the first place. The simple rule of the 'harm principle' is universalized and absolutized. But do working class women have the incentive, ability and social power to pursue men? What are the social costs for women of being sexually 'casual'? Do men and women enjoy the same social response to sexual liberation? Does the ethnic minority enjoy the privileged social space for consuming romance as whites do? Do gays and lesbians have the necessary social support for their sexual lives? The problem for Cosmopolitan is that all these socio-political issues are omitted.

In Cosmopolitan, 'sexuality' is treated as an isolated and discrete activity, detached from the wider socio-political context, as if there is no connection between sex and other social activities, as if we can discuss 'sexuality' and improve the quality of our sex life independently of our personal and social being/context. But where do these individual choices come from? What kinds of choices we are talking about? What are the socio-political contexts that generate male aggressiveness and women's submissiveness? What are the social spaces and choices a women have, especially working class, uneducated women, or lesbian women, or 'fat, short women'? All in all, the 'liberation' of women as welcome by Cosmopolitan does not challenge the double standards between the sexes. The heterosexist nature of the unequal power play between men and women is not even mentioned in these magazines.

Cosmopolitan is equally disturbing in its view of men, as they are merely portrayed as aggressors, easily aroused and flirtatious, who threaten women's interests. It is a view of men that is unhealthy both for men and women --- generating either guilt or misogyny in men and radical feminist feelings amongst women, without any room for reconciliation for both sexes. In other words, Cosmopolitan's portrayal of the sexes --- that men are aggressors and women are sex objects---reproduces both the patriarchal and the radical feminist conception of the sexes. It is a stereotyping and totalizing picture of a binary opposition that has denied the possibility of gender subversion and change.

(e) Despite its apparently liberal and open-minded orientation, Cosmopolitan is really neo-conservative in defending the monogamous-heterosexist family structure. In its article about extra-marital relations, quotations from the readers suggest that after all the enjoyment of these guilty pleasures, they realize that family and marriage is their real home. They prefer a stable relationship --- with a husband.

6. Feminist Writing in Women's Magazine

While most glossy women's magazines paint rosy and libertarian values for the fate of modern women, In offers a feminist analytical framework for modern middle class women. In actively engages with feminism and other socially relevant themes, hoping to keep up with the interests of the large number of educated career women who are fed up with the traditional heterosexist and patriarchal representation of women. As beauty and fashion

magazines per se are no longer sufficient to entertain modern well-educated women, In deals with gender issues directly in two regular columns ('In Feature' and 'In Lyricism').

'In Feature' is a special feature that dominates each issue, usually revolving around political and social issues, with special implications for the situation for women. September 89 issue traced human rights in Chinese culture, followed by an article which saw feminism and the women's movement as a genuine application of respect for human rights. The issue of June 90 contextualized Western feminist theories in an analysis of local women's labour situation, stressing the undervaluation of women's worth in their work. Women, in contrast to Cosmopolitan's lavish portrait of women business executives, are portrayed as workers who are confronted with daily work routines but are not paid their worth, and whose situation is exacerbated by the traditional social repression of women. In this light, the magazine takes on a more radical feminist point of view in which women are described as being chained by tradition, repressed by the venomous monstrous claws of male chauvinism. Rather than painting a rosy picture of women's success over career and triumph over men, In stresses the problems plaguing modern women due to patriarchal oppression of women.

In 'In Lyricism', the themes revolved around the (woman) author's daily life and the relationship between the sexes. Her short stories are mainly concerned with the experiences and situation of modern career women. The author is depicted as independent, assertive and strong of character, whereas the male character (her partner) is described as sensitive, considerate and uncalculating, implying the new face of modern men and women. In January 90, the love story between the heroine and her male partner articulates a deviation from and a subversion of traditional heterosexist representation. In the narrative, the heroine (young executive of 25) who is said to be independent, sensitive, critical and career-minded, encounters a business partner of similar age who appeared to be independent and intellectual, but turns out to be emotionally fragile and dependent on her. After the first sex scene where it is the woman who undresses herself, the heroine feels more relaxed and simply enjoys the spontaneous relationship, while the man becomes more insecure, and starts asking questions about her previous sex life, her present relations with other men and their future possibilities. The story ends with the heroine's PhD study trip to England. As she tells the man at the end,

'I enjoyed the time with you, but I must actualize my long-time wish of post-graduate studies. We are still as close friends as we were, but your proposal of marriage really shocked me. We still have many problems in our relationship yet to be sorted out. You are sometimes too possessive and insecure, just caring about your own (ego) needs. My study trip to the UK will be a good time to clear our minds for both of us.'

Indeed, this image of an independent woman pursuing her own fate is not only typical of 'In Lyricism', but the general political position of the magazine.

Though In was criticized for its too narrow content which appealed only to minority interests, the magazine performed an informative, analytical and political function by offering a platform for gender issues. The failure of In lies in its inability to integrate feminist discourse into the mainstream mode of capitalistic entertainment, and the reluctance of local readers to appreciate and consume a feminist-oriented popular magazine. In particular, In failed to interrogate and politicize the structural tension between consumerism and the feminist ideas

professed in the magazine, and subsequently failed to highlight the fundamental extent to which glossy magazines have to rely upon advertisements for survival and success in late-capitalist society. Among the several glossy women's magazines studied, the proportion of advertisements in In is significantly fewer than other magazines,¹⁷⁴ indicating both a naive utopianism and a serious lack of commercial sense in the marketing of this feminist magazine.

By heightening insecurities about the physical appearance of the women readers, reducing women to fragments of consumerist selfhood, and prioritising the male gaze as the best measure of women's selfhood, many advertisements in In contradict the positive feminist messages in the editorial. For example in June 90, the article 'Women have always been sex objects' launched a feminist critique on the 'sexualization and commodification of a women's body', but ironically the article appears next to a cigarette advertisement where a female body is deployed to sell the cigarette to male consumers. The ideological constraints of liberal feminism are revealed in this contradictory structure which demands from its readers both sexual liberation and subjugation.

In raised the question of the definition of women's magazines as appropriate media for, and of women. The philosophy for modern women in the magazine, called for a liberal world view and concern for women's social position. It pursued a policy of supporting feminist ideology and applying to the arts. Social consciousness and the autonomy of modern women are proposed to combat the oppression plaguing women in patriarchal society. The magazine posed itself as a pioneer for a new lifestyle, the perspective being socio-political, arguing for the subversion and revision of capitalist social values and patriarchal gender relationships.

While most glossy magazines have a commonality of content which excludes the socio-political world from women, In magazine was actively engaged with the socio-political world, concerned deeply with all marginalized groups and the fringe culture. In challenges other women's magazines as reifying the existing economic order and reproducing the heterosexist discourse of the patriarchal-capitalist social order. The magazine employs Marxist and post-structuralist critique of patriarchal society, postulating a strong will to overturn the subordination of women under male culture. In deliberately manipulates 'postmodernity' and 'postmodern values' for the subversion of traditional gender norms. In June 90, the feature on 'postmodern art' challenges not merely the traditional binarism of high art vs popular culture, art vs non-art, western art vs non-Western art, the article also argues for the fabrications and pluralization of values, especially in gender terms. The author argues for the reclamation of spaces for historically marginalized groups like women and ethnic minorities.

In postulates the modern woman as a liberal, educated and critical thinking subject who is able to locate herself actively in the feminist discourse of reconstructing a higher quality of women's well being. In extends its liberal attitude to sex to the socio-political level, opting

¹⁷⁴Compared with Cosmopolitan, Elegance and Elle, In has the lowest advertising percentage and volume, never occupying more than 18 percent of the total pages. It is also the only magazine in this research that has a decreasing percentage of advertisements, from an average of 16.7 percent in 1988 to 13.4 percent in 1991 when it closed down. Such a horrendous performance in terms of advertisements is the key factor for its short life expectancy. See **Appendix One: Quantitative Analysis** for the actual amount and percentage of advertisements that In attained.

for the demolishing double standards in sexual attitudes. Sexuality is not reduced to the personalized concern of Cosmopolitan, but extended and transformed into a sexual politics, with disturbing articles on 'Heterosexism' (November 89), 'Lesbianism and Women Sensitivity' (February 90), 'Marital Rape' (March 90), 'Chile Sexual Abuse' (June 90). The article 'Lesbianism and Women Sensibility' argues that

'Lesbianism is not just a personal choice of sexual preferences, it is a political statement fighting against the oppression of heterosexism and male dominance. We are not saying that lesbian or gay is inherently superior or politically correct. But given the patriarchal and heterosexist nature of our society, we need a political platform in gender terms to subvert and challenge male dominance. It is how we support lesbianism as a political institution against compulsory heterosexuality.'

It poses a sharp contrast to the popularity of articles about sex life in the low brow magazines which are based on the manipulation of the social double standard on sex. While sex is still a taboo, these magazines flourish by unveiling voyeuristic sex secrets, scandals and gossips especially of the celebrities.

The magazine is also unusual in so far as it presents homosexuality and lesbianism not as perversion but as legitimate forms of sexuality. 'It always takes a long time to go beyond ignorance. While it takes more than ten years struggle to decriminalize homosexuality and finally succeed in 1991, it will take at last another decade for the society in general to accept homosexuality as a normal form of sexual expression.' (May, 91)

The magazine's explicit feminist preaching rests on the ground that readers are well-educated intellectuals who fully recognize the problems confronting modern women who are still 'crippled' by traditional social norms. In focuses merely on the small segment of women readers who are well-educated and open-minded enough for radical thought. This perhaps explains the low level of sales figure of In (7,000 copies per issue) as compared to Cosmopolitan (47,000 copies), Elegance (28,000) and Elle (23,000).¹⁷⁵ Such a small readership, coupled with its pro-feminist and anti-consumerist attitude, have made In a tough case for advertising. Lacking advertising support, In simply died in Sept, 1991.

In raised the question of the definition of women's magazine right from its debut issue. It distinguished between feminist and women's magazine, implying a magazine for, and of, women respectively, and hence demarcating the editorial difference between In and other women's magazines. As stated clearly in the editorial of the first issue:

'We are a magazine by women, of women and most importantly, for women. We are interested in women's issues and women's perspective. In our male-dominated society, women's issues are always conducted and produced in male terms, by male standards/values, even it is written and produced by women.'

¹⁷⁵The figure is claimed by the editors of the magazine. The usual common sense is to take 20 percent off the editor's readership claims. Yet it does not alter the fact that In has far lower level of sales.

Women's spaces are deeply inadequate. In this sense, we are feminist. We have no prejudice against men, we need them to work together for a more equal and liberating society. What we aim at is women's perspective and women's voices. That's how we identify our unique positioning in the present women's magazines' market.'

However, the notion of 'feminism' in In is often ambiguous and contradictory, implying merely a very vague idea(l) of women's liberation and fight against sexism. In wavers between liberal feminism and radical feminism, sometimes arguing for the 'liberal' notion of equality: female labour should enjoy men's rights and privileges (Jun 90), but sometimes stressing the uniqueness of women's 'specificity' and their fight against patriarchy (May 90). In June 1991 in an article titled as 'Androgyny: beyond feminine-masculine dichotomy', In proposed androgyny as the future for sex traits and relationship between the sexes. As sex roles became increasingly blurred since the 1980's, the modern era should see to the concerted elevation of human qualities androgyny --- the combination of female and male traits. Yet in the same issue, the article on performance arts strongly argued for an unique women perspective, attacking the notion of 'androgyny' as a 'male fantasy of gender equality which is impossible without the exploration, development and identification of women's voice and power.'

Worse still, In is not acutely aware of the problems involving both perspectives, exhibiting great naivety and ignorance with the heavily value-laden concepts such as 'equality', 'subjectivity', 'liberation' and 'authentic femininity'. But what kinds of 'womanhood' and 'woman subjectivity' is In referring to? Is it a specific woman space that is uniquely feminine and excluding men, or is it a (hu)man interest that goes beyond feminine-masculine, homo-hetero binarism. Unaware of the vital theoretical debates constituting these key concepts, In fails to contextualize and actualize a specific political-feminist platform which is relevant to contemporary well-educated women.

Instead of being obsessed with the moral highland of the dream of a pre-discursive authentic womanhood, or a naive pursuit of hu(man) liberal values, Western feminism has gone beyond the liberal/radical feminist paradigm, to the integration of postmodernism and feminist political critique, arguing for the reconstruction of public-private, masculine-feminine, homo-hetero binarism.¹⁷⁶ At a time when Hong Kong society has entered into a postmodern late-capitalist phase where gender relations (especially among middle-class young educated) have undergone drastic changes, In failed to radicalize and 'post-modernize' its feminist perspective to articulate the brand new issues of the 90's. While the majority of heterosexual women regard In as too threatening and irrelevant to their traditional gender lives, the middle-class educated young people find In deeply inadequate and simplistic in tackling their untraditional gender relations. While proposing 'androgyny' as the way out for gender oppression, In fails to examine the historical 'maleness' that constitutes 'androgyny'. The ideal (hu)man being is basically a man. The claim for objective human interest is a claim for (male) power.

Apart from In, other glossy women's magazines are far less keen and sympathetic towards feminism. Cosmopolitan never has a annoying tone, everything is groovy. The word feminism

¹⁷⁶See Benhabib, Selya , 1988 and Bulter, Judith, 1990.

is rarely uttered in the magazine, except the post-feminist sense and the 'I'm not but' sense. Since June 1988, Cosmopolitan has had a new column 'An aloof analysis of feminism' written by a famous male critic in Hong Kong. The section consists of writings stressing the importance of men and women being regarded as human beings, not traditional stereotypes. There is a deliberate effort of the writer to present an image of being critical as well as objective towards the growth of women's liberation from a man's point of view. His message was clearly supportive of the revision of women's social roles and the simultaneous liberation and cooperation of men.

The choice of columnist helped to attain an academic and unbiased image for the column, and the author Shum Y. F. succeeded because he is a famous writer in Hong Kong. Appealing to its target audience --- working women who are economically independent, it confirms the magazine's image as voice of the modern women. Its content deals with the by-products of women's increased independence --- soaring divorce rates --- positively, explaining the function of divorce as preventing family tragedies and reinforcing women's independence and confidence. Special attention is given to the analysis of the progress of the women's liberation. Women had tasted the trails of working and are returning to the domestic home front, but this time at their own discretion. The new age has seen a greater understanding between sexes than before. Both sexes recognize and accept the defects of the opposite sex. This is indeed a progress --- the demythologization of sex relationships.

The column always ends with a simplistic advocacy of gender equality, that women should enjoy equal rights with men. However, in its liberal feminist discourse of gender relations, the (male) author fails to expose the 'male' categories of the supposedly gender-neutral ideal of equality that the traditional notion of 'individuality', 'subjectivity' 'rationality' and 'humanity' are actually predicated upon a male model. The writer's concentration on legal reform and procedural justice tell merely of his ignorance of the deep socio-cultural prejudice and constraints against women. The liberal discourse in this section is indicative and reproductive of the ideology of the entire magazine itself. Cosmopolitan utilizes a spurious feminism to enhance its image of the new woman, yet frequently undercuts feminism by claiming that 'we do not intend to build up the image of women by putting down the image of men. The age of burning bras has gone' (Aug 91). Indeed, Winnie Li explicitly expressed her suspicion about feminism:

'We support sexual equality, we agree that women should have more power and be equal to men. Modern women no longer depend on men, they are more independent and self-determined. But feminism is too radical, too aggressive and too masculine for Chinese women. We prefer a more feminine approach. We don't go to the street to march or demonstrate, but we still have power. Look at our mothers, they are the most powerful figure in the family. Men may have the social status and career achievement that are beyond the reach of woman. However, once back to the sphere of household, women take over. Whenever a man has to make decision, it is always the woman beside him who gives predominating advice. Actually, women in our mothers' era were the upmost leaders behind the screen. Adopting feminism dogmatically would be problematic to local situation... Feminists deny women's right to be feminine, to be a submissive housewife. You see, lots of women attain immense pleasure in playing these submissive roles. They gain what they want, they have sense

of security, they have money, they have their men, they attain men's protection, and they give 'face' to their men, let their men gain the heroic sense of honour and identity. Wonderful, isn't it? Inside is the wisdom gained from tradition that has been practised for centuries. Women can maintain a very harmonious relationship with their partner. It is ridiculous to criticize everything men do, it is even silly to ask all women to be single or to do without men. It simply does not work in Hong Kong. Chinese women have our own way of doing things. Feminism is a western product, it may not fit Hong Kong.'

In Elegance, the most prominent women's column is a series of writings about women, demarcating the psyche of women at different points of life: the columns are titled 'Women at 19', 'Women at 29' and 'Women at 39'.

- **Women at 19:** women at this stage are expected to be carefree, outgoing, mythologising love, active, cheerful, trendy and pro-consumption. The aim was to outline the youthfulness of girls who are relatively inexperienced about love and life. As reflected in the writings, the characters are engaged in modern culture: driving red Porsches, active in relationships with both sexes. But it is interesting to note that since the target readers of Elegance are more mature working women and housewives, the viewpoints of the '19' young women are always written in an older voice, with much 'personal reflection' and regret at the silly things young people do.

- **Women at 29:** the image takes a leap from women at 19, signifying that important and enormous changes in life occur during the ten years. Writings reveal women torn by love: most issues concern divorce and extra-marital relations, with the modern sceptical or opposing views on traditional norms of monogamy or permanent love relationships. Love is demythologized or devalued and the craving for infinite or deep seated love is portrayed as outlandish and a childish dream. This may mean a maturity in relationship between the sexes. But on the other hand, love is rescued by a hedonist, consumerist and sensual pleasure, which may be intense but short-lived. The modern relationship resembles the fast pace of life in the capitalist commercial world. Sometimes, the writing is obviously of a feminist viewpoint: a declaration of women's independence, calling on women to broaden their horizon, preaching against being detached or shut off from society. The reason behind this is that it would weaken women's positions with their husbands/men.

The writings suggest insecurity or scepticism about marriage. The preventive or defence mechanism is to stay out of marriage for fear of desertion by one's husband. The catchword is: 'live a trendy life, and be a trendy person'. The implication is that if the modern woman is able to ward off traditional social constraints, she may well fall into another trap, the web of the 'modern women' who lives a yuppie lifestyle, listening to classical music, consuming luxuries and remaining casual about all relationships.

- **Women at 39:** the common theme is the anxiety about aging. If women's life is defined by her as the possession of beauty and youthfulness, then the column well explains the plight of women: life begins to dim out at the age of 39. The major concern is to preserve fading beauty and youthfulness. The main characters are often housewives bound by marriage and children, who were employed in earlier years, and are confined in the home, economically

dependent on their husband. Housewives are portrayed having old looks, their lives passing away, as compared to the other characters who are unmarried.

It values the modern single woman's view of enjoying life and love. The competition among women of similar age is a distinct message of the writing. The tone is nostalgic: the content is usually related to past memories, old flames encountered, romantic relationships stirred up that are gone forever. The tone is thus gloomy; 'I have travelled this much on life's paths, I am no longer able to ask for more' (August 90).

7. Problem Page and Interview

'Problem Page' has a long history. From Ladies Journal in the 50's, Fair Maid in the 60's and Femina and Domina in the 70's, 'Problem page' has always been a crucial section in women's magazines. In our patriarchal society, women are supposed to be sensitive, emotional, expressive and willing to share their problems. While men's magazines, from sports, cars, political commentary to fashion magazines, never have a special 'problem page' column for more general, emotional and personal issues, the 'problem page' in women's magazines is an important arena for women readers.

To avoid the entrapment in the world of feminine troubles and trivialness, these magazines present these problems as answered by qualified professional experts to advise their clients. For example, the 'problem page' of Fair Maid and Domina are titled as 'Prof Chan' and 'Master and Johnson' (named after the sexologists Master and Johnson) respectively, thus presenting a professional, expertise image of the column. The 'Problem page' of Cosmopolitan since 1987 was written by Dr Wong a social psychologist, and titled simply 'Dr Wong's mail'.

The 'Problem page' serves a crucial function for millions of readers who do not have access to the world of counsellors, sex-educationists or simply lacking the emotional, intellectual and financial competence to solve their problems on their own. This apparently naive and silly problem page plays an important role in confronting and tackling the 'real' problems of its readers.

The pleasure of reading these problem page is the relief in seeing that other people's problem are worse than one's own. It is also closely tied up with the voyeurism which accrues from seeing those other miseries described in print. Reading 'problem page' provides guilty and forbidden pleasure because other people have done what we would like to do but dare not do. The reader can thus both gratify this forbidden desire and also condemn such conduct in 'other' people, finally resorting to a patronizing and privileged position of 'care' and 'concern' for these poor victims.

Problem page does change. The strongly moralistic tone of the earliest advice columns has given way in the past twenty years to a more supportive approach. There is a great explicitness about sex in the problem pages. Much of the coyness has gone and the replies are both firm and frank. Women do not feel obliged to have sex with men just because they are being persuaded; women are encouraged to explore their own active sexuality shamelessly. Contraception is strongly supported especially in having sex in a 'one-night stand'. Assertiveness is encouraged in personal relationship. If a woman is being mistreated and

harassed by her boyfriend, she will be advised to give him up. If her boyfriend is too possessive, short-tempered and takes her for granted, she is also advised to assert herself frankly and directly rather than the traditional wisdom of tolerance.

Even for the more conservative magazine, Elegance, the problem page has undergone great changes with more positive representations of the image of independent women. In June 1991, the editor strongly advised a woman, who was continuously beaten by her husband, to divorce, and to seek an independent life. The editor writes:

‘I must say I am stunned by what you said. It must be a horrifying experience to get married for eight years and continuously being physically abused by your husband. You have been very kind, positive and impressive to try all the familial connections to communicate with your husband. Yet if his mother and friend’s persuasion does not help, I think you should seriously consider the possibility of leaving him... Marriage is not everything to a woman and divorce is not the worst thing in life. The quality of life is more important. I am sure that you can build up a new life. Modern women should be courageous enough to assert her needs and rights.’

Cosmopolitan also has articulated a more assertive and independent image of modern women over the years. In Sept, 1992, a reader wrote and regretted the ‘lack of romance’ in her life which is limited by work and boredom. The editor gave an encouraging reply by portraying a positive image of women’s life without romance. While the editor spent much effort telling the reader of ways to enjoy her work and her lives, she concluded by saying that:

‘Romance and sexuality are not the aim of life. It is stupid to feel shame for their absence. Being single and celibate can be a blessing that modern people tend to forget. The crucial thing is to choose the lifestyle that fits you and live the best of it. Why don’t you use more energy to make your job more romantic and interesting? An interesting and successful job is not just a substitute for romance and sex, it makes life more charming of its own. That’s what a modern woman should be.’

In women’s magazines in the 90’s, romance no longer occupies the central place. With the general awareness of sexual inequality, rise of women’s power and the increasing self-confidence of readers, the typical heterosexist romance in traditional women’s magazines simply makes contemporary young women feel silly and insulted. Instead, contemporary women’s magazines all see their readers as intelligent, discerning and independent. Indeed, in these stories, interviews and discussions about women, women characters are far less passive and less likely to mope about waiting for the telephone to ring. They are less the victims of romance than they once were in the 1970’s. A new sense of realism and practicality engage these contemporary stories in a way that highlights the problems and difficulties rather than a rosy myth of romantic love. The new social climate of sexual relations and gender discourse has rejected and resisted ‘sloppy romance’ as outdated and old-fashioned. Romance does change.

Stepping into the 90’s, with the growth of women’s power and involvement in the (senior ranking) of the public world, career women gradually triumph over the traditional women who

are obsessed with love and marriage. Since 91 percent of the women aged 25-40 are working women, it is commercially suicidal for the glossy women's magazines not to valorize and privilege the area of 'work' and 'career'. Even the sexual and romantic (Cosmopolitan) heroine gradually gives way to the strong independent career women. The editorial in December 1991 is titled 'Career rather than work' in which the chief editor claims that,

'In contemporary Hong Kong, 'working' to a woman is no longer something secondary or subsidiary to her family, it is a 'career', with long-term perspective and ambition. 'Work' is only a means whereas 'career' is an end in itself. We are proud of our career which gives us confidence, pride, personal spaces and social power. We do not need to deny our femininity, to burn bra or to criticize men. What we need is a sense of pride and confidence in our independent lives.'

The editorial stressed that modern women are no longer bound by the traditional role of domesticity, marriage constraints and sexual taboos, and may thus pursue their own personal desires. But the stress on love and romance does not fade away. It becomes the underlying sub-text. As the above quoted editorial (Cosmopolitan December 1991) concluded,

'We do not need romance or marriage to justify our lives. Yet a successful modern woman would not drop her romance or family for her career achievement. Instead, she knows how to balance the two. Career and family are not contradictory or conflicting, they are complimentary to each other. A harmonious family/relationship gives you the firm base to develop your career, an remarkable career gives you the pride, confidence and make you more attractive to your man.'

In other words, romance and family are still the primordial concern. Despite all the worthiness of 'career' and 'independence', it is only a means to make modern women 'more attractive to your man'. Indeed, the political institution of compulsory heterosexuality has shaped women from the beginning; women's aspirations are constructed around their family, thereby rendering husbands and children the most important pillars of women. This tradition has persisted even in the present context, women's labour participation in the society did not break the social association between femininity and domesticity. The price for modern woman is the loss of guidance, care and leadership offered by men. For love and care dominate the majority of women's lives, to lose this would render the loss of women's greater aspiration --- the role and life which has long been culturally and arbitrarily defined.

Despite the diversity in the construction of what women's 'problems' really are, women's magazines are consistent in offering a resolution which are dealt with through the individual rather than through the collective and political level. Whereas the agony columns and editorial all address the problems of readers, women are told that they must help themselves --- their problems are their responsibility and sometimes of their own making. Political resolution, especially in institutional and structural perspective, are absent in the analysis. Whenever problems arise, they are treated as individual failures or personal inadequacies. Family is rarely treated as a socio-political unit, romantic love and sexuality is never politicized. There is no suggestion that women's issues/problems may have political origin. Women's magazines do argue for women's rights but the strategy and perspective for achieving equality are

presented as individual rather than collective. There may be single article asking for more radical changes, but the overall structure ensures the containment and futility of isolated resistance. Women's magazines talk about sex differences, not gender inequality, personal adjustment, rather than sexism. Even when they criticize gender discrimination, they are merely criticizing certain (individual) male practises, not engaging with feminism politically.

Women's magazines acknowledge social class and race differences in terms of lifestyle or consumption, but deny the existence of class and racial conflict, offering only personal and moral resolution. The implied reader has presupposed a middle-class, Hong Kong Chinese background, thus the working class and ethnic minorities are not understood as a political category but an 'aesthetic' category, taken on a par with the division between women who buy Benneton, and those who buy YSL. This is not to say that the subject of politics and other public issues never feature in the magazine. They appear as the 'personal' concern of the readers in their individual context. Even when 'serious' features are offered in the area of world politics and social issues, women's magazine rarely connect the disparate issues they address, presenting a single socio-political problem with single answer, disconnected to the next page of up-market cosmetic adverts. It seeks to stimulate its readers to sentimental identification and moral outrage rather than political resistance. Fundamentally women's magazines cannot recognize the collective noun 'women' as a political category, since the interest of women are always conceived of as personal.

8. Career, Finance and Investment

Articles concerning career, money and car are sections indispensable for contemporary glossy women magazines. Content dealt with in these sections are answers to the needs of the modern career woman reader, who has to keep abreast of the latest information. In fact, such articles become the symbol of women's triumph. Career pages, just like work itself, become the sign of the success of the modern woman.

But viewing the issues dealt with in the career and money page, the findings prove the opposite. Most content is too trivial to answer women's needs. The function of these pages are often nominal rather than substantial. The career page in Cosmopolitan relates issues like manners at business lunches or how to write an application letter. While they do not answer the needs of their professed target audience, they are also not really intended for career women, rather they are intended for lower ranked office workers, who have no experience in formal table manners, or housewives who are ignorant on investment matters. Items pursued in the money column all concern common and popular investment channels for women who may only possess limited capital and investment knowledge. Topics like 'Investment' and 'Her Finance' are popular columns for the majority of small shareholders who may have some idle cash for a little investment.

'Career Ahead' in Cosmopolitan concerns mainly the basic manners, attitudes and information needed in women's job like manners for a business lunch, attending interviews, preparations for an overseas business trip and application letter writing. The inclusion of such sections is to instill the image of the magazine as a career oriented, and liberated, a breakthrough from the traditional stereotype that women's sole concern remains in the beautification of her body.

Cosmopolitan is the woman's magazine that gives the greatest coverage to career, but the articles lack local emphasis, thus there is inconsistency in the content in each issue, with the article largely dependent on international versions. For example, the article in February 90 mentioned the economic depression in the society (by which the author means USA) but at the time, the Hong Kong economy was still in boom. The failure to contextualize local needs and interests is also revealed in the article 'Promotion: for status, or for money' where the writer mentioned the severe tax burden for managerial seniors --- but in Hong Kong the highest personal income tax is merely 15%. Finally, as the section lacks a central and clearly laid out theme, the fluctuating content fails to address the pressing work situation confronting women readers.

'**Money Talk**' in Elegance helps to confirm the most popular issues evolving around women readers in the realms concerning money, thus the inclusion of immigration in the section especially in the period after the June-Fourth Incident in Peking (December 89, February 90, June 90, November 90 and June 91). Immigration has been one of the hottest topic of discussion among women since the late 1980's. The aim of the column is to provide detailed information, especially alternative choices for places of emigration. The article caters particularly to women: apart from language and social security, it includes education for children, diet, public safety, social welfare and women's rights. It appears to serve as a practical guide for the more well-off readers who are disturbed by the gloomy political future of Hong Kong.

The inclusion of the topic in a woman's magazine implies that modern women who are increasingly financially independent and well-off, also have insight and knowledge of financial investment. 'Money Talk' is the most analytical section in Elegance. The focus and approach adopted in articles is mostly geared to current events --- with Elegance taking an even more socially oriented approach (the link with the impact of the June 4th event in China 1989). The implication is that modern women are knowledgeable themselves, but in terms of investment and money matters, they still rely on critical analysis from 'outside sources'.

In these columns of 'career and financial investment', the key to women's success in the business world is the appropriate manipulation of her femininity. These columns only interview those who have succeeded. This is illustrated by photos of young models, well-groomed and trim in executive fashion. There is little mention of sexism, sexual abuse and gender discrimination in the work-place. The gender subtext of work, like the lack of child-care provision, poor pay, part-time work and sexual abuse, are systematically omitted. Whenever difficulties arise, are treated as personal problems.

The purpose of this chapter is not just descriptive, but argumentative, proposing a multiple and even contradictory readership of women's magazines.

While it is true that Cosmopolitan, Elegance and Elle manifest a white-west middle-class definition of taste and style, such hegemonic construction has to negotiate with more diverse and subversive representations and social realities of women images and power. As argued in this and the previous chapters, it is in such multiple and contradictory elements of women images that the seductiveness of women's magazines lies. Modern career women's social location is double-binded --- they have to be career-oriented, yet put family and marriage first. The success of women's magazines lies exactly in their capacity to occupy such a dual

location. Reading women's magazines is highly pleasurable, because women are positioned at their centre. There are multiple gender positions that they identify with, each gratifying different sets of cultural and social expectations and desires. Nevertheless, the entire scenario of pleasure production and fulfilment is implicated in a capitalist, consumerist and heterosexist context. After all, who has the economic and social power to consume the expensive fashion celebrated by Elle, the serene domestic lifestyle portrayed by Elegance, and the sexual possibilities fancied by Cosmopolitan?

In chapter two, I argued for a theoretical turn towards a positive intervention of women's magazines. Popular culture is the constant processes of producing meanings from which social identity is generated. When women readers read the women's magazines, they actually produce meanings, and negotiate with their personal and social space. Therefore, in chapter three, I studied the actual processes through which the women readers make sense of these magazines. It was found that reading women's magazines becomes a crucial strategy through which women can defend and attain a minimal level of personal space from the traditional definition of the domestic duties of a woman. Whereas women's space of resistance is limited by the patriarchal and consumerist nature of local glossy women's magazines, the content analysis in this chapter revealed the multiple and contradictory elements of women's images portrayed by these magazines. Women's magazines are contradictory to its core: where they are produced and distributed by the capitalist network of consumption for its own economic interest, its perpetuation is sustained by the active consumption and usage of the readers. Given such a dual nature, we need a new theoretical horizon that both criticizes their heterosexist and consumerist nature, and enhances women's readers' capacities for resistances. This is what I will turn to in the next chapter.

Chapter Five : Conclusion

This is a research project which is positively engaged with postmodernism and feminism. More specifically, I tried to articulate a feminist perspective that appropriates and incorporates the insight of postmodernism in the context of women's magazines in Hong Kong.

While the research focuses on the representation of femininity in women's magazines and reader's perceptions, the local unique context does shed light on the wider issues of womanhood, sisterhood, pleasure, domesticity and heterosexism. The issues in the local scene include: Is there a common category of women across race, class, age and sex differences in Hong Kong? Is there a common political cause and ideological platform of the women's movement that can be said to negate class, culture and age? Why are middle-class women so suspicious of feminism? What kinds of pleasure do the women readers acquire in consuming women's magazines? What role do women's magazines play in Hong Kong? Are they agents of patriarchal oppression or women's liberation? Are the readers victims of heterosexism and capitalism as radical feminist and Marxist argue, do they enjoy the pleasure of reading as the postmodernists assert? Are the texts of women's magazines free-floating signification or are they fixed and closed by sexism and classism?

In answering these questions, it is crucial that we go beyond the either-or dichotomy. To take postmodern insight seriously, we need to go beyond the category of binary opposition (like patriarchal oppression vs feminist liberation, fixed text vs free-floating signification, masculinity vs femininity) because it is such binarism, which has sentenced women to the private-domestic sphere as a bodily (sexual) object.

Instead of an either-or binarism, I would suggest the 'both-and' strategy. It is a strategy that respects and articulates the contradictory nature of both women's magazines and gender identities. Thus the question is not whether women's magazines are oppressive or not, but how they perpetuate patriarchal-capitalist interest, and simultaneously provide crucial spaces for resistance? How do women readers acquire patriarchal-consumerist pleasure but simultaneously attain their own space? Only when we entertain the multiple and even contradictory meanings, functions and implications of women's magazines can we articulate a positive feminist interrogation of the spaces of women's magazines. There is no need to have one single monolithic unified identity. Instead, the power of women's magazines lies in the embracing of contradictions and the multiplicity of roles.

Women's magazines are a complex site of ideological power struggle by which gender identities and social relations are produced, reproduced and contested. The meaning of women's magazines, like the women's world, is never complete but always in the making. The pleasure offered by the magazine is neither simply liberating nor oppressive, but involves the making and re-making of social reality. After all, culture and gender positions are always in the process of contestation. Women's magazines offer a crucial cultural and social space that feminists cannot afford to ignore. Instead of accusing women for their failure to support feminism, we should ask: 'why feminism fails to attract them?' Instead of criticizing Cosmopolitan, Elle and Elegance and other women's magazines for reproducing heterosexism and consumerism, we should ask: 'why In fails to compete with other glossy magazines?' Instead of denouncing women's magazines as an agent of patriarchal oppression, we should ask: 'what kind of feminist strategies should be deployed to intervene in the under-explored spaces of women's magazines?'

1. Beyond either-or dichotomy: women's pleasure and resistance

Since 1980's, the theorists and researchers in popular cultural studies have been very sensitive to

the role played by readers/viewers in spectatorship. It implies not just a shift of research focus from the text to the readers and the process of reception, nor the naive relativist position that the meaning of the text is an empty or free-floating signification. Instead, the question is 'how are the meanings of the text constituted in the actual process of reading?', 'What kind of pleasure do the readers attain in reading women's magazines?', 'Is there room for resistance in the process and context of reading?'

For the women's magazines in Hong Kong, domestic gender politics are particularly relevant. Men and women are located in different social relations with reference to 'time' and in this context, 'domestic time'¹. Men can enjoy domestic leisure time' in a way that is denied to women. The category of time is 'gendered' --- for a housewife, 'domestic leisure time' is almost a contradictory category in itself. Given the patriarchal nature of the familial order which is tied to the private-public split, the family becomes a place of rest for the man/husband, and a place of work for women, and wives in particular. The family is a site of gender power struggle where women and men are in permanent negotiation about the division of labour. Yet, women and men do not negotiate freely or from a vacuum. Negotiation have been prescribed and predicated upon the wider socio-political practices where women's social space is always limited. Individual women may attain more power than individual men, yet as a collective, women and men are in an unequal power relationship at the women's expense.

It is here that women's magazines have a crucial role to play. In this research, I find that women readers manage to articulate and claim for their own social spaces in reading women's magazines. Reading women's magazines helps the women readers to 'reclaim' the domestic leisure time back from tedious and endless 'responsibility' and 'obligation' in the home. Reading women's magazines is a 'social space' that is necessarily exclusive to women, a 'women space' that excludes men, a 'personal space' where she can legitimately enjoy her fantasy, desire and subjectivity. For married women (especially housewives), reading women's magazines can be a strong defense for not attending to domestic obligations. For single middle class woman, reading women's magazines generates the self-confidence and pride in the image of an independent woman. For daughters, reading women's magazines could be a practical excuse for delaying their 'domestic obligations'. For mothers, reading women's magazines can be the rare occasion in the home (at night when everybody is asleep or out) where she attains her own solitary and private space.

For all these women, reading women's magazines increases their social understandings and assessment of the outside world. In prioritizing the emotional, sexual and personal issues as 'women's concern', women's magazines put women at the centre of all experiences, thus marginalizing 'men' as their 'other-ness'. It generates a women's world of dressing, cosmetics, love, romance and intimacy that is exclusive to women. Though the category of femininity and womanhood in Hong Kong is not a political one, women's magazines generate a women's space that by definition, excludes men. This process of exploring and identifying an uniquely women's space is of course conducted within a (hetero) sexist and patriarchal context where the unequal gender power relations are reproduced. Yet such patriarchal domination requires women's active subjective participation, otherwise, women's magazines cannot successfully appeal to women's fantasies and desire. It is in this contradictory reading of women's magazines that 'pleasure' lies.

There are different kinds of pleasure: the pleasure of reclaiming women's space and time in the

¹In her Phd thesis titled as *Household Culture: Women, Television and Videos*, Ann Gray argued for the gendered nature of 'domestic time'. See Gray, Ann, 1990.

domestic sphere especially for housewives, mothers and daughters. There is the pleasure of widening her world and thus challenge the patriarchal definition of women as being nothing more than sex objects. There is the pleasure of the fantasy of projecting an idealized selfhood of being both an independent career woman and a romantic heroine. There is the pleasure of identifying with the attractive and seductive images of the models in the magazines. And finally, there is the pleasure of a reading articles and stories, by women writers on women issues and for women readers. The pleasure obtained by the women readers is not purely a pleasure of 'losing oneself', or an ally with the patriarchal myth of motherhood/caretaker. As shown in this research, women readers manage to manipulate the space provided by women's magazines to subvert the patriarchal construct.

Women readers get their space to resist by parodying, teasing or even challenging the male definition of femininity and womanhood. This resistance may be too personal and piecemeal to start any collective social revolution or fundamental changes,² yet given the socio-political limitations of women's social situation, these strategies of resistance are active, powerful and crucial for expressing women's identity and pride in a patriarchal world. 'Women' as a group are still living in an unfavourable social position. Resistance, even if merely limited, piecemeal or personal, should always be developed, encouraged and explored. As Vivian told us,

'reading women's magazines may be a form of escapism. But what's wrong with escapism. Why can't I just enjoy the social space that I have? Why should women be revolutionaries all the time? Can we? Do we have the social power to change the world? If I manipulate my limited social position to live a better quality of life, what's wrong with that? If I feel more empowered by reading women's magazines, why not? Even if it is an escapism, it is something temporary that helps me feel more confident, relaxed and powerful.'

It is here that Hong Kong women's magazines offer a vivid context to crystallize, condense and exemplify the postmodern-feminism debate. Although postmodernism has correctly criticized the ideal of disembodied knowledge and the Archimedean viewpoint, it has itself slipped into an endless proliferation of readings and an infinite perspectivism. The impossibility of a positive ontology of women does not imply the endless proliferation of difference. Indeed, the category of 'woman', despite its ontological instability, is a meaningful and useful term when politicized and historicized in its specific context. (³)

2. Middle-class bias against feminism

In 1991, the most vocal local feminist group, the Association for the Advancement of Women's Right in Hong Kong, launched a campaign to choose the most sexist television advertisement in Hong Kong. After asking 2,000 women, a 'wine ad' was selected from 50 advertisements as being the most sexist. This campaign, unprecedented in Hong Kong history, has been widely reported on television, newspapers and journals. One of the reasons for the wide media coverage is that the director and scriptwriter of these ads, were both women and had both denied that the ad is sexist. As argued by Josie Chan (the script-writer),

'...the sexual image of women in the ads have a strong appeal to our sexual fantasies. Both

²See Chapter Three for the actual context and details of Vivian, Stephenie, Mary and Sally's practises and strategies of resistance.

³. See Flax, Jane, 'Beyond equality: gender, justice and difference' in Bock, Gisela and James, Susan (eds) (1992: 199).

men and women are young, sexual and attractive in the ads. Most audience like such glamorous representation of women, only some feminists think it downgrades women. But would these feminists themselves enjoy watching ads if the actors and actresses are fat, short and ugly.’⁴

She goes on to argue that ‘contemporary consumers consume not just commodities but pleasure and desire. It is pleasurable to feel cosy and associated with some cosy images when we consume the wine. I don’t see anything wrong in portraying a glamorous and cosy picture of women in these wine ads.’⁵

This incident was reported by both Cosmopolitan and In. In the special feature in Cosmopolitan (September 91), the writer seriously criticized the naivety of this campaign and the association AAWR, argued that

‘...we play different roles in our society, from traditional mothering to independent career. No one can accuse one and glorify the other. Traditional mothering may be oppressive to one but an expression of love for another. There is no need to pose one single correct femininity to be followed by all women. ‘Sexual and seductive women’ in the wine ads may be oppressive to some feminists, yet it can also be taken as a ‘flatter’ to women’s beautiful body shape. What’s wrong to be sexy, to be seductive and to be attractive? There are handsome and attractive men in sports ads, kind-hearted fathers in ads on domestic commodities, and sexy attractive men in fashion ads. I don’t think it is an insult to men.’

Yet, the position of In (September 91), as expressed by Ann Ma in the ‘In Words’ (letters from the editor), is very different:

‘...we are living in a patriarchal society where women are primarily a beauty, a sexual body, the object of gaze and male fantasy before she has any social or personal identity. This wine advertisement is just a small example revealing the unequal power relations between men and women, exposing the myth of sexual equality in Hong Kong. We are not objecting to consumption, but consumerism; we are not against sexual differences, but sexism. We like pretty women, but object the commodification and objectification of women’s bodies.’

Ironically, this ‘wine advertisement’, which was chosen as the most sexist television ads, has a double-page spread in the issue of Cosmopolitan (September 91). It reveals not only the mutual interests of the advertisers and the magazine, but the wider consumerist nature of women’s magazines in Hong Kong. Predicating their survival primarily on the advertisements, women’s magazines have to take a very positive and inviting attitude towards consumerism. Specific commodity brand-names need not be mentioned, but a positive attitude to consumerism must be promoted and valorized. While In criticized the patriarchal and capitalist nature of this ‘wine ads’, it is symptomatic that this issue is the last issue of In. Free from the severe constraint and pressure of advertisements, marketing sales and economic survival, the editor felt free to mount a strong critique of the main source of the magazine’s revenue --- the advertisers.

This incident exposed not only the differences between Cosmopolitan and In, but the overall consumerist nature and the middle-class bias of women’s magazines. As these magazines have to

⁴See 23, Sept, 1991. South China Morning Post.

⁵ibid.

rely on the advertisers for their survival, middle-class women are the primary target readers. Glossiness, glamour and consumerism must be well-packaged to attract these middle-class readers. Given the taken-for-grantedness of capitalism and liberalism in Hong Kong, middle class values of individuality, personal choice and self-enjoyment are widely accepted and legitimated. The situation is especially acute in Hong Kong where the socio-political consciousness level of local women is not high. Middle class women's social and economic status in Hong Kong is comparatively good, having comparable careers to their male counterparts.

'Class' is a key issue in the discussion of femininity, womanhood and sisterhood in Hong Kong. The ideal image of femininity, as portrayed in these glossy women's magazines, is indeed one of strong middle-class images --- primarily of economic independence, successful career and achievement. In this context, it is difficult to celebrate the sisterhood between working class and middle-class women, or between well-educated young women and their illiterate mothers. As I argued earlier in the chapter three, 'women' as a political category do not exist in Hong Kong. Women do not identify with other women politically for any collective and social action. Indeed, women compete with each other. There is competition between mothers and daughter (especially in Hong Kong where the 'generation gap' is a serious social problem), between Philippine domestic servants and their women bosses (with all the derogative cultural stereotypes against the Philippines), between middle-class and working class women.

Glossy women's magazines articulate both the bond of sisterhood, and the competition among women readers. Women are allies as *they share the same social locations, burdened with similar* problems of fading beauty, love, career pressure and sexual objectification by the male world. The construction of women as a homogeneous group is primarily achieved by the invocation of its presupposed 'natural' opposite --- men. There is a permanent tension in these women's magazines between the emphasis on men as desired by and central to the lives of women and the recognition of men as a problem and a threat to women. Thus, while men are portrayed as violent, lazy, inconsiderate, insensitive, untidy, selfish, sexist and oppressive, men are also regarded as indispensable to the (emotional and sex) lives of women.

In the magazines, the binary opposition between masculine and feminine, public and private, production and consumption, work and family, career women and housewife, continue to structure the content and representation. The world of the magazine is one in which men and women are eternally in opposition, always in struggle, but always in pursuit of each other; relations between them are beset by difficulties, frustrations and failures. In work women have to struggle hard to gain recognition in a man's world. But they are also told to be active in seeking romance and also to be sexually alluring. But it is exactly these shared socio-structural locations that push women into competition for love, beauty and career. These glossy magazines tackle gender conflict by both constructing women as independent salary-earners with sexual autonomy, yet prioritising the heterosexual relationship as the determining force and dominant mode of existence in their life. The apparent heterogeneity of the women's magazines is limited by heterosexism.

Indeed, the heterosexist and middle-class bias of Hong Kong women generates immense difficulties for local feminist movements. The middle-class women's reservation and even hostility towards feminism is well-articulated by my interviewee Candy:

'Feminism has confused women and done nothing to help women, it just irritates men and fails to attract women, at least not me. What does feminism want? For women to be like men, to drop her femininity, or to denounce the relationship with men? What is the point? I prefer to be a feminine woman, sometimes a little woman, sometimes independent and career-

mindful, a balance rather than an extreme... Hong Kong women are already very fortunate. We have equal rights with men in legal, political, economic, education and other aspects. We need to be realistic.'

The problem boils down to the serious lack of social and political consciousness of local women who tend to personalize and de-politicize gender issues. There are women who enjoy the fruits of being 'new women': newly widened socio-economic spaces enable these middle-class professional career-women to take advantages of the 'privileges' of being a new woman. These new women have the privileged social power to choose between traditional femininity and a new femininity, thus shifting to different positions to maximize their self-interest. Middle-class career women enjoy both the benefits of traditional women, and the benefits of modern women. Generating from and relying upon their contradictory location in patriarchy, these middle-class women find feminism too threatening and subversive to their vested interests. The social context is unfavourable for the growth of feminism.

3. Consumerism and heterosexuality

When women enter the public sphere and attain economic independence, possessing the surplus and aspiration to purchase, they become a significant target for advertisers and producers. In order to attract high-brow advertisements, glossy women's magazines have to 'create' desires for the middle class readers, celebrate their values, justify their class interests and confirm their belief system. Women's magazines in Hong Kong are primarily a marketing media, representing the typical Hong Kong capitalistic mode of existence where the construct of femininity is merely a commercial aspect of consumerism. The predominance of advertisements in glossy women's magazines reveals the prime objective of such magazines as sales maximization.

It is thus necessary to examine women readers not just as readers of the text, but as 'consumers' of capitalist commodities in order to understand what ultimately keeps these magazines going --- their advertising revenue. Janice Winship imagines the Cosmopolitan cover to say, 'buy me, buy Cosmopolitan, and buy my recipe for individual success'.⁶ We are supposed to feel that seemingly perfect face not only represents the magazine, but what we want ourselves to be. Williamson argues that it is the two premises of women's magazines, that you should change and can change through consumption, that keeps women's magazines afloat.⁷ Women's magazines have always been very cheery and cosy, the tone is usually congratulatory.⁸ The cover photo often beckons us by asking women to 'come into the wonderful world of womanhood where everyone is beautiful and happy'.⁹

There is a crucial racial-cultural sub-text for consumerism in Hong Kong --- the domination of the 'White-West' commodities for the definition of taste and style in the Hong Kong market. The 'west', superseding the local 'Chinese-Hong Kong' culture and representation, is normalized and naturalized as the standard of femininity, taste and personality. While 'westernization' collapses with modernization and progress, women's magazines become crucial site and agent to naturalize, prioritize and normalize the western-capitalist commodified code of taste and style.

Judith Williamson states the importance of consumption for many Western societies, which in this

⁶Winship, Janice, 1987: 122.

⁷Williamson, 1987: 56.

⁸Cagan, Elizabeth, 1978: 9.

⁹Richardson, Laurel, 1988: 74.

context can include Hong Kong:

‘The product of an ever-increasing range of consumer goods is crucial to modern capitalism while the consumption of those goods is crucial not only to the economy but of the ideology which supports it.’¹⁰

In this contemporary world of consumerism, products perform not only useful but symbolic functions for us, in terms of status, power and identity. For today’s urban teenager it may be a hundred pound pair of Timberland; for the Yuppie it may be the forty thousand pounds Porsche, for the putative new woman it may be leg warmers.¹¹ Consumers rely on the sense of selfhood and confidence from commodities, so they actually ‘become’ what they consume. Instead of being identified with what we produce, we now identify ourselves with what we consume. Media critic Kathy Myers was correct when she affirmed: ‘The prediction that lifestyle would become an indispensable marketing concept by the mid-1980’s has become true.’¹² The Eighties have been a ‘style-obsessed decade’.¹³ Postmodern critic Craig Owen remarked that everything for modern man [sic] exists through representation.¹⁴ There is no longer purely individual style. The clothes and accessories that we wear are representations of what we have seen. As my interviewee Mary, said, ‘I am being seduced to shopping when reading these magazines, nothing particular, just buy whatever I want or anything that happens to attract me’. The consumption mode, a direct product of the industrial and capitalist society, is the contemporary substitute for religion.

Consumption and sex, are the expression of modern women’s independence, freedom and autonomy. The modern women portrayed in the women’s magazines as ‘successful, sophisticated, independent and liberal’, enjoy the glamour of the image of ‘femme fatale’ and a yuppie lifestyle. The femme fatale image especially in terms of sexual liberation/freedom appears to be, a masquerade of the age old role perception of women as sexually pleasing objects of men.¹⁵ While the magazine articulates itself as the pioneer and the liberating force for the modern women, they paradoxically serve as the ‘grudge voice of men’, blaming women for competing in the traditionally male-dominated world of ‘public --- work’. As stipulated in the magazines, fading beauty, wrinkles, failing love relationships are punishments for economic independence and sexual freedom. Women’s magazines still perceive women as an amalgamation of different parts of the body. Sections dealing with the body (diet, beauty, fashion, exercise, facial, hair style) occupy more than 60% of the general content.¹⁶ The care of the corporeal self is deemed to be the central core of a woman.¹⁷ For women, their only possession are their bodies, and the entire meaning of autonomy and independence is exercised only on issues evolving around their own corporality, how to retain youth and beauty and which brand to choose to beautify this or that of the body. Although recent women’s magazines increased the features on socio-political issues, and despite the rise of a strong, independent, career-minded image in recent years, it is still the ‘commodified body’ that defines ‘womanhood’.

¹⁰ Williamson, Judith, 1987: 230.

¹¹See, "The Leg Warmer Syndrome" in Williamson, 1987: 31-36.

¹²Myers, Kathy, 1986: 77.

¹³Sharkey, Alix, 1989: 11.

¹⁴Owen, Craig, 1985: 66.

¹⁵Jeffrey seriously criticized the notion of sexual freedom and liberation as advocated since the 1960’s. She argued that these ‘male’ categories of sexual freedom and liberation entail unequal power relations and different gender implications for men and women.

¹⁶See **Appendix 1** for the actual distribution of verbal content in the women’s magazines.

¹⁷ Judith Butler, in Benhabib, 1988.

The world of modern women is still gender defined. The question is not whether gender difference are biological or culturally constituted, but that the historically predominant rigid gender division is immersed in the political matrix of compulsory heterosexuality, which is itself tied to the consumption marketing economy. Women's magazines become a crucial political institution for gender structure and re-socialization, especially in generating and perpetuating the heterosexist construction of 'femininity'.

Consumerism and heterosexism are the two ultimate cornerstones of women's magazines underpinning all changes of women's images.

4. Myth of The Career Women

The 'New Woman' has been a catchy and trendy topic in recent women's magazines. As early as 1989, Cosmopolitan has a special issue on the 'New Woman', interviewing three successful local career-women, an engineer, a doctor and a general manager in an advertising firm. All three of them are now in their late 30's, receiving their university education in the late 60's and early 70's, enjoying the privileges of Hong Kong rapid economic development in the past decades and the opening of career-opportunities for women. Apart from the interview, this specific issue also includes an article by the editor titled as 'The Age of the New Woman', arguing that

'1990's is the age of the "New Woman". New woman does not need man to take care of them. It is an equal partnership. We have our own career and independent lives. We can enjoy the romance as we like, without the necessary burden of marriage and motherhood.' (Dec 1989, Cosmopolitan).

The liberation of women from the private setting of marriage and family to the public setting of work and career is welcomed with joy and optimism. The increasing number of women workers, the popularization of tertiary education for women and their high-ranking managerial occupations are seen as crucial signs of the rise of women's power. "We are entering the age of gender equality where women have joyful lives of their own" (December 1989, Cosmopolitan). In recent years, the 'New Woman' becomes a popular brand-name adopted by local women's magazines. Janet Lee argues in a thought provoking article that

'The term "new woman" seems to appear with nearly every generation --- from the "new woman" of the late nineteenth century who so shocked society with her independence to that of that present day, who so preoccupies the theorists of "post-feminism".'¹⁸

The road from housewife to worker is not the way to paradise. The growth of women's social status and power is a result of economic prosperity rather than result of women's movement. Instead of being a result of the self-awareness of women's gender position, the rise of women's status and power in Hong Kong is a by-product of capitalistic economic development. Given the prime economic nature of local woman's power, middle-class bias is prominent in these 'successful women'. It would be naive to equate women's economic independence with women's liberation and gender equality. If the existing social structure remains intact, the shift from the private sector of marriage and family to the public sector of work and career merely intensifies the contradictory social positioning of women. In failing to account for the tensions, anxieties, conflicts, dilemmas and the wider contradictory social conditions encountered by career women, women's magazines

¹⁸Lee, Janet, 1988: 168.

both contain and reproduce the contradictory social locations of career-women.

Modern society saw a gradual openness of opportunities, but there is a serious lack of institutional channels open for women's expression of their problems and difficulties. The disparity between their contribution to the labour force and their social recognition remains wide. Their autonomy in sexual activities and economic independence became the new totem for women's liberation. They have to face the new tasks and double demands imposed by the new social role being placed on them. Women in the professional world had to 'neutralize' their gender, but still resist 'defeminization' and 'deprofessionalization': they could not act like a traditional woman, but they have to look like one in order to be accepted.¹⁹ Yet, the beauty qualification is widely recognized and normalized as a condition for women's employment. It is this model of new superwoman that 'can and should have a rigidly split personality'.²⁰ Surveys have recently suggested that women still do most of the housework and child-care in heterosexual households.²¹

Despite magazines' glorification of career women, romance and family is still the 'ultimate home' for women. Women have to face the permanent temptation of going 'back' home. She feels guilty if her baby is sick, if her children become delinquent, if housework is not done properly, if her husband asks for more attention. As argued by Fanny Chan, the general manager interviewed in the above mentioned issue of Cosmopolitan on the new woman,

'when I am frustrated with her job, I will ask, 'Why not go back to the woman's place --- family? Am I so selfish in wielding power and seeking pleasure in work? Have I failed in my duty as a mother and housewife?' (Cosmopolitan: December 1989)

Glossy women's magazines constantly plead for this double role without considering the social and personal cost paid by the career women themselves. Given the existing dichotomy between private and public, work and family, feeling and rationality, to ask women to enter the job market inevitably increases the structural tension between these two spheres. The tension is definitely intensified if she comes from the lower class. Being in a poor financial condition and unable to employ a house servant and helper, going out to work merely doubles her work: she must shoulder the responsibilities of a full-time worker and a full-time housewife.

Those women who enjoy the fruits of the new women/superwomen are mainly middle-class, well-educated career women who have taken advantage of the new social system. She accedes to positions of greater power without challenging the wider social order; deploys her feminine assets but also criticizes the male for being chauvinistic; enjoys the benefits hard won by feminism but also ridicules feminists as failed women --- here lies not only the conflicts and contradictions between feminists and career women, but also the irony of the career women. After all, it is easier to dress for success than to challenge the definition of success.

The contradictory social position of new career-women reveals not merely their dual role and responsibility but the normalization and naturalization of (hu)man rationality which dichotomized the public and private in the first place. Extolling a public sphere of independent, dispassionate

¹⁹Chase, 1988: 283.

²⁰Chapkis: 1988: 90.

²¹For instance: Madeleine Kingsley. 'What Men (think they) Know About Women,' *New Women* (June 1989), 8: 11-2. In the case of Hong Kong, see Lau and Wan, 1987; Hong Kong Council of Women, 1987; YMCA, 1982 and The Boys and Girls Clubs Association, 1990.

citizens entails the creation of a private sphere of family as a place of emotion and care. The proper functioning of the 'public' depends on the expulsion of women, who are responsible for taking care of their men in private. Even when women move from the private to the public, what remains intact is a private-public split. What needs to be challenged and subverted is thus the hierarchized binarism of private vs public, mind vs body, masculine vs feminine, rational vs emotional that has constituted the 'western' ideal of a human being.

The construction of rationality, which constitutes the foundation of modernity, presupposes a gender subtext. Rationality and citizenship in the Western tradition are conceptualized as 'male'. The Western idea of Reason was divided into a binary opposition of 'masculine' universal impartiality and 'feminine' emotive feeling. The equation of male values with the ideal (hu)man personality necessitates the exclusion and denial of women and values associated with the feminine. Iris Young and Selya Benhabib identified Western rationality as 'deontological', paraphrasing Adorno's logic of identity, as it expresses the logic of identity by eliminating otherness.²² The deontological self is not committed to any particular ends, interests or context. The urge to bring particularities into a united identity necessarily creates a dichotomy that excludes otherness.²³

The problem is exactly the built-in maleness in the conception of 'equality' and 'justice' which, expressed in universal, impartial terms, denies individual and social differences.²⁴ We select male attributes and temperament as the prototypes of human nature, thus upgrading the male as an ideal citizen but degrading women as an inferior sex. Masculinity becomes what a human being should be --- independent, autonomous, confident, competent, aggressive, analytical, conceptual, thoughtful, argumentative, detached, authoritative, assertive, rational, critical and career-minded. To be fully human, one must not possess anything feminine.

The issue is not whether women have the right to participate in the public world (which they have), but that the definition and construction of 'public' itself is already male-centred. Even if women are incorporated into the public, they merely adopt the position and values of males and become surrogate men. The project of women's equal inclusion only implies the evaluation of women by male standards. Whereas women are treated as 'equal' under the patriarchal-liberal legal system, they are only equal to men, not as independent individuals, even less as unique 'women'. When women enter the public sphere, they are assessed by male standards, and are therefore playing the male game of achievement and competition. If she succeeds and defeats other males, she will be criticized for being too aggressive, too rational, too strong and thus not 'marketable' in heterosexual relations. In fact, women have their own unique standard of individuality and rationality. They are independent but also inter-related, autonomous but altruistic, yet sensitive to their own feelings. They treasure

²²Selya Benhabib and Cornell Durneilla (ed), 1989.

²³Recent communitarians like Charles Taylor (1985), Robert Unger (1975), Alasdair MacIntyre (1981), Michael Walzer (1983), and Michael Sandel (1982) have seriously criticized the prevalent liberal conception of the self and rationality as an isolated, a-social 'disengaged self' (Taylor) and 'incumbered subject' (Sandel). While sharing the rejection of an egoistic, disembodied ego, contemporary feminists argue that the idea of 'community' is still problematic, as 'family', 'neighbourhood', and 'nation' are 'gendered' concepts. See Selya Benhabib and Cornell Durneilla (ed) 1989.

²⁴Contemporary feminists have argued that many key concepts and categories in modern social theory are actually gender-biased, like morality, justice, cognition, public, theory, autonomy, reason, reflection, critical, citizen and human being. See Luce Irigaray, 1985, Nancy Fraser, 1985, and E. Keller, 1985.

sisterhood and friendship, in harmony rather than in conflict with emotion. Ironically, these feminine traits are criticized as immature, irrational and emotional. In the eyes of male, she is always a woman, essentially irrational, emotional, childish and dependent.²⁵

In other words, the point is not to argue that women are in fact 'rational', but to question the notion that the 'rational' must necessarily exclude sympathy and emotions; the point is not whether women have the right to participate in public (they have), but why the 'public' necessitates the repression of feeling. The point is not whether women are independent and autonomous, but why 'independence and autonomy' must predicate a-social disconnected ego as its prototype; not why so few women succeed in the public world, but why 'success' is defined only by one's market value, (and thus dismiss the value of the housewife and working class women). The point is not to question why women fail the IQ test, but why IQ is defined by one's logical and analytical power alone. The question is not why or what it is which women 'lack', but why males are so obsessed with 'possession' and 'potency'. Given the male dominance in the public game, it is pointless just to fight for women's 'right' to enter the public arena as it produces merely male-constructed women.

The rights-based paradigm of liberal contractual theory has presupposed a self-interested egoistic conception of human nature. The ideal self is inherently governed by male rationality. 'Self' is regarded as disembodied and rational, entitled to universal human rights and duties, and abstracted from concrete particularities. This construction leads to an epistemological blindness to the concrete self and otherness. Market liberals like Robert Nozick and Friedrich Hayek have treated individuals as a-social and disconnected self-interest maximizers. Even welfare liberals like John Rawls and Ronald Dowkin are tied to the notion of self as 'public persona', as the abstract bearer of rights. Rawl's theory on 'original position' has been seriously criticized by contemporary feminists. Susan Okin, in 'Reason and Feeling in Thinking about Justice', argues that Rawls has neglected the gender subtext of the seemingly gender-free neutrality of the 'original position'.²⁶

When women enter the public male sphere, they are already constituted by the pre-public gender-subtext of male dominance. The treatment of all human beings as abstract, universal, egoistic selves has already imposed a male perspective upon women, necessarily making women unfit to play the public game. Given present gender politics, the liberal paradigm of 'rights' is not the road to women's liberation; it perpetuates male dominance, justifies women's 'defective' nature as a 'lack', creates the myth of gender equality, and hides male interest behind the name of (hu)man nature.

It leads to the more basic questions about women's subjectivity, sisterhood and sexual politics in general. What kinds of equality are women expecting? Are women fighting to be a human being on the model of male, or should women fight for rights which cater for their own specificity as women? What is a 'woman' after all and what is 'femininity'? Without debunking the socio-political and gender connotations and implications of 'rationality', 'rights' 'liberation', 'femininity' and 'work', women's participation in the public can only be a replication and reproduction of the

²⁵Maria Markis, in a survey of Hungarian women engineers, found out that they followed an 'internal standard of satisfaction' (emphasising human relationships and a sense of identity) rather than male notions of 'external achievement and possession'. Women are always accused of being 'afraid of success' and lacking career ambition, but Markis argued that women have different standards of excellence which are at odds with the male definition of success.

²⁶Ibid.

underlying male norm which is tied to the hierarchized binarism of masculine-feminine, public-private, mind-body. It is such hierarchized binarism that should be the focus to be targeted.

5. Areas for Future Research

(a) While this research focuses on women readers, future research needs to interview the (male) partners of the (heterosexual) women readers. Particularly, the gender politics of the domestic division of labour have to be elucidated. We need to understand the relationship between women's magazines and the specific domestic gender politics of the women readers. How do the women readers use women's magazines to negotiate with their male partners? How do these men react to their partners reading women's magazines?

(b) In three year's time, Hong Kong will be returned to Mainland China. It is a political reality that has already generated enormous social, economic and cultural anxiety. '1997' is a 'gendered' category in terms of massive women/wife migration to the Western countries, general insecurity towards procreation and long-term relationships, and the attempt to rally women's (voting) support in the political parties' struggle for power. While '1997' is a non-issue in the present women's magazines, we need to understand how the women's magazines would articulate, negotiate and appropriate women in the transitional period of political struggle.

(c) The present research takes a snap-shot view of a specific historical conjuncture of local women's magazines from 1988 to 1992. Since women's magazines are not static and fixed but will change with different social discourses, future research should take the perspective of the historical changes of local women's magazines seriously.

(d) Three of the most recent glossy women's magazines (Women at Work, Mary and Working Women) all are targeted at career women. It indicates the rise of career women's social power and their consumerist capacity. It is crucial to differentiate among middle class career women, majority working class women and feminists. Future researches have to be very sensitive about the classist and consumerist nature of these women's magazines.

(e) Glossy women's magazines are targeted only at the privileged women --- young, middle class, professional, heterosexual, career women. It is crucial to understand those women who do not have social or economic power --- lesbians, women of ethnic minorities, elderly, working class women need attention as well. In particular, the tension among class, gender and race has to be explored. While middle class career women enjoy the privileges of class and race, working class women face multiple oppression and are under-represented in their wider cultural representations. It is exactly why class and race must be focused as the centre of gender analysis.

Appendix One : Quantitative Analysis of Women's Magazine Advertisements and Verbal-Visual Relation

1. The Proportion of advertisements by (a) type; (b) no of pages

Column 1 = no of advertising pages by the type

Column 2 = Percentage of Column 1/total ad pages

Column 3 = Percentage of Column 1/total pages

(Ratio % = no of page/Total page x 100)

Cosmopolitan

Aspect	Jan 88	May 88	Aug 88	Dec 88
Total	144	143	128	200
Ad page	32	55	33	74
Ad no.	29	42	30	69
Ratio %	22.2	38.5	25.8	37

Types of Advertisement

Hair	2 : 6.9 : 1.4	2 : 4.8 : 1.4	3 : 1 : 2.3	2 : 2.9 : 1
Perfume	7 : 24 : 4.9	7 : 16.7 : 2.8	5 : 16.7 : 3.9	10 : 10.4 : 5
Skin Care	7 : 24 : 4.9	6 : 14.3 : 4.2	7 : 23.3 : 5.5	12 : 17.4 : 6
Makeup	2 : 6.9 : 1.4	6 : 14.3 : 4.2	3 : 10 : 2.3	4 : 5.8 : 2
Soap		2 : 4.5 : 1.4	1 : 3.3 : 0.8	2 : 2.9 : 1
Fashion		3 : 7.1 : 2.1		5 : 7.2 : 2.5
Accessory	2 : 6.9 : 1.4	2 : 4.8 : 1.4	2 : 5 : 1.6	5 : 7.2 : 2.5
Jewellery	3 : 10.3 : 2.1	2 : 4.8 : 1.4	3 : 10 : 2.3	5 : 7.2 : 2.5
Shoes		1 : 2.4 : 1.4		4 : 5.8 : 2
Watches	4 : 13.8 : 2.8	7 : 16.7 : 2.8	3 : 10 : 2.3	5 : 7.2 : 2.5
Pen			2 : 5 : 1.6	1 : 1.4 : 0.5
Food	1 : 3.4 : 0.7	1 : 2.4 : 0.7	1 : 3.3 : 0.8	2 : 2.9 : 1
Chocolate		1 : 2.4 : 0.7		
Napkin		1 : 2.4 : 0.7		2 : 2.9 : 1
Bras	1 : 3.4 : 0.7			3 : 4.3 : 1.5

Lens				
Glasses		4 : 9.5 : 2.8	1 : 3.3 : 0.8	1 : 1.4 : 0.5
Home Products			1 : 3.3 : 0.8	
Fitness		3 : 7.1 : 2.1		2 : 2.9 : 1
Furniture				1 : 1.4 : 0.5
Cars		1 : 2.4 : 0.9		4 : 5.8 : 2
Swimwear		2 : 4.8 : 1.4		
Sports		4 : 9.5 : 2.8	1 : 3.3 : 0.8	2 : 2.9 : 1
Mink	3 : 10.3 : 2.1			2 : 2.9 : 1

Cosmopolitan

Aspect	Jan 89	Apr 89	Aug 89	Nov 89
Total Page	152	144	160	192
Ad Page	54	49	36	71
Ad no.	48	44	31	71
Ratio %	35.5	34	22.5	37

Type of advertisement

Hair	1 : 2.1 : 0.7	2 : 4.5 : 1.4	1 : 3.2 : 0.7	3 : 4.2 : 1.6
Perfume	9 : 18.8 : 6.7	7 : 15.9 : 4.9	5 : 16.1 : 3.1	13 : 18.3 : 6.8
Skin Care	10 : 20.8 : 8.6	7 : 15.9 : 4.9	6 : 19.3 : 3.9	12 : 16.9 : 6.3
Makeup	3 : 6.3 : 2.6	5 : 11.4 : 3.4	3 : 9.7 : 1.9	3 : 4.2 : 1.6
Soap		2 : 4.5 : 1.4	1 : 3.2 : 0.7	
Fashion	7 : 14.6 : 4.6	5 : 11.4 : 3.4		1 : 1.4 : 0.5
Accessory	2 : 4.2 : 1.3	2 : 4.5 : 1.4	2 : 6.5 : 1.3	5 : 7 : 2.6
Handbag	3 : 6.3 : 2.6	3 : 6.9 : 2.1	2 : 6.5 : 1.3	2 : 2.8 : 1
Shoes		1 : 2.3 : 0.7	3 : 9.7 : 1.7	4 : 5.6 : 2.1
Watches	7 : 14.6 : 4.6	4 : 9.1 : 2.8	3 : 9.7 : 1.7	4 : 5.6 : 2.1
Pen			1 : 3.2 : 0.7	2 : 2.8 : 1
Napkin		1 : 2.3 : 0.7	1 : 3.2 : 0.7	
Bras	2 : 4.2 : 1.3			2 : 2.8 : 1
Sports			2 : 6.5 : 1.3	1 : 1.4 : 0.5
Glasses	1 : 2.1 : 0.7	4 : 9.1 : 2.8	1 : 3.2 : 0.7	5 : 7 : 2.6
Home Products	2 : 4.2 : 1.3		1 : 3.2 : 1.3	
Fitness	2 : 4.2 : 1.3			
Food	2 : 4.2 : 1.3	1 : 2.3 : 0.7	1 : 3.2 : 0.7	5 : 7 : 2.6
Cars		1 : 2.3 : 0.7		
Cigarette	1 : 2.1 : 0.7			
Swimwear		2 : 4.5 : 1.4		
Ornament	1 : 2.3 : 0.7	1 : 2.3 : 0.7	1 : 3.2 : 0.7	1 : 1.4 : 0.5
Chocolate	1 : 2.3 : 0.7			3 : 4.2 : 1.6
Shaver				1 : 1.4 : 0.5

Cosmopolitan

Aspect	Jan 90	May 90	Aug 90	Dec 90
Total page	152	152	152	256
Ad page	49	72	41	99
Ad no.	40	53	33	77
Ratio %	32.3	47.4	27	38.7

Types of Advertisements

Hair		1 : 1.9 : 0.7	1 : 3 : 0.7	2 : 2.6 : 0.8
Perfume	8 : 18.5 : 5.3	9 : 17 : 6.6	9 : 27.5 : 5.6	13 : 16.9 : 5.9
Skin Care	9 : 22.5 : 6.7	6 : 11.3 : 4.1	9 : 27.5 : 5.6	15 : 19.5 : 6.6
Makeup	4 : 9.5 : 2.7	8 : 15.1 : 5.2	4 : 12.1 : 2.6	5 : 6.5 : 2
Jewellery	3 : 7.5 : 2	6 : 11.3 : 4.1	2 : 6.1 : 1.3	8 : 10.4 : 3.1
Cars				2 : 2.6 : 0.8
Fashion	2 : 5 : 1.4	8 : 15.1 : 7.2	4 : 12.1 : 2.6	4 : 5.2 : 1.6
Accessory	1 : 2.5 : 0.7	4 : 7.5 : 2.6	3 : 9.1 : 2	8 : 10.4 : 3.1
Handbag	3 : 7.5 : 2	5 : 9.4 : 3.3	3 : 9.1 : 2	5 : 6.5 : 2
Shoes			1 : 3 : 0.7	1 : 1.3 : 0.4
Watches	8 : 18.5 : 5.3	2 : 3.8 : 1.3	3 : 9.1 : 2	7 : 9.1 : 2.8
Pen	1 : 2.5 : 0.7			1 : 1.3 : 0.4
Napkin		1 : 1.9 : 0.7	1 : 3 : 0.7	
Bras				3 : 3.9 : 1.2
Stocking	1 : 2.5 : 0.7	1 : 1.9 : 0.7		4 : 5.2 : 1.6
Glasses	1 : 2.5 : 0.7			3 : 3.9 : 1.2
Food	1 : 2.5 : 0.7	3 : 5.7 : 2.3		2 : 2.6 : 0.8
Fitness	1 : 2.5 : 0.7	1 : 1.9 : 0.7		3 : 3.9 : 1.2
Mink	1 : 2.5 : 0.7			3 : 3.9 : 1.2
Swimwear		8 : 15.1 : 7.2		
Sports		2 : 3.8 : 1.3	1 : 3 : 0.7	4 : 5.2 : 1.6
Cars	2 : 5 : 1.4			2 : 2.6 : 0.8
Credit Card		5 : 9.4 : 3.3		1 : 1.3 : 0.4

AV	2 : 5 : 1.4			2 : 2.6 : 0.8
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Cosmopolitan

Aspect	Jan 91	May 91	Aug 91	Dec 91
Total page	160	152	152	256
Ad page	48	61	41	99
Ad no.	40	53	33	77
Ratio %	30	40	27	38.7

Types of Advertisements

Hair	1 : 3 : 0.7	1 : 1.9 : 0.7	1 : 3 : 0.7	2 : 2.6 : 0.8
Perfume	9 : 27.5 : 5.6	9 : 17 : 6.6	9 : 27.5 : 5.6	13 : 16.9 : 5.9
Skin Care	9 : 27.5 : 5.6	6 : 11.3 : 4.1	9 : 27.5 : 5.6	15 : 19.5 : 6.6
Makeup	4 : 12.1 : 2.6	8 : 15.1 : 5.2	4 : 12.1 : 2.6	5 : 6.5 : 2
Jewellery	2 : 6.1 : 1.3	5 : 9.4 : 3.3	2 : 6.1 : 1.3	8 : 10.4 : 3.1
Cars	1 : 3 : 0.7	1 : 1.9 : 0.7		2 : 2.6 : 0.8
Fashion	4 : 12.1 : 2.6	9 : 17 : 6.6	4 : 12.1 : 2.6	8 : 10.4 : 3.1
Accessory	4 : 12.1 : 2.6	4 : 7.5 : 2.6	3 : 9.1 : 2	5 : 6.5 : 2
Handbag	3 : 9.1 : 2	5 : 9.4 : 3.3	3 : 9.1 : 2	4 : 5.2 : 1.6
Watches	2 : 6.1 : 1.3		1 : 3 : 0.7	3 : 3.9 : 1.2
Pen		2 : 3.8 : 1.3	3 : 9.1 : 2	5 : 6.5 : 2
Napkin	1 : 3 : 0.7			
Bra	1 : 3 : 0.7		1 : 3 : 0.7	3 : 3.9 : 1.2
Stocking		1 : 1.9 : 0.7		2 : 2.6 : 0.8
Glasses				3 : 3.9 : 1.2
Food	1 : 3 : 0.7	3 : 5.7 : 2.3		3 : 3.9 : 1.2
Fitness		1 : 1.9 : 0.7		2 : 2.6 : 0.8
Mink	3 : 9.1 : 2		1 : 3 : 0.7	3 : 3.9 : 1.2
Swimwear		4 : 7.5 : 2.6		
Sports	2 : 6.1 : 1.3	2 : 3.8 : 1.3		4 : 5.2 : 1.6
Car				4 : 5.2 : 1.6
Credit Card	1 : 3 : 0.7			2 : 2.6 : 0.8
Shaver				1 : 1.3 : 0.4

Cigarette		1 : 1.9 : 0.7		1 : 1.3 : 0.4
AV	1 : 3 : 0.7			1 : 1.3 : 0.4

Cosmopolitan

Aspect	Jan 92	Apr 92	Aug 92	Dec 92
Total page	164	152	178	200
Ad page	62	75	70	77
Ad no.	50	53	54	69
Ratio %	41	49	39	38

Types of Advertisements

Hair		1 : 1.9 : 0.7	1 : 2 : 0.6	2 : 2.9 : 0.8
Perfume		6 : 11.3 : 4.1	14 : 27.5 : 11.8	10 : 10.4 : 5
Skin Care	8 : 16 : 3.9	9 : 17 : 6.6	7: 13.7 : 4.1	12 : 17.4 : 6
Makeup	8 : 16 : 6.1	6 : 11.3 : 4.1	4 : 7.8 : 2.2	5 : 7.2 : 2.5
Jewellery	7 : 14 : 4.3	8 : 15.1 : 5.2	2 : 3.9 : 1.1	5 : 7.2 : 2.5
Cars				2 : 2.9 : 1
Fashion	4 : 8 : 2.4	8 : 15.1 : 7.2	4 : 7.8 : 2.2	3 : 4.3 : 1.5
Accessory	2 : 4 : 1.2	5 : 9.4 : 3.3	3 : 5.9 : 1.7	5 : 7.2 : 12.5
Handbag	3 : 6 : 1.8	4 : 7.5 : 2.6	3 : 5.9 : 1.7	5 : 7.2 : 12.5
Shoes			4 : 7.8 : 2.2	1 : 1.4 : 0.5
Watches	7 : 14 : 4.3	2 : 3.8 : 1.3	3 : 5.9 : 1.7	4 : 5.8 : 2
Pen	1 : 2 : 0.6		2: 3.9: 1.1	1 : 1.4 : 0.5
Napkin		1 : 1.9 : 0.7	1 : 2 : 0.6	
Bras	4 : 8 : 2.4		1 : 2 : 0.6	3 : 4.3 : 1.5
Stocking	1 : 2 : 0.6	1 : 1.9 : 0.7		
Glasses	1 : 2 : 0.6		2: 3.9: 1.1	3 : 4.3 : 1.5
Food	2 : 4.1 : 1.2	1 : 1.9 : 0.7	1 : 2 : 0.6	2 : 9 : 1
Fitness	1 : 2 : 0.6	3 : 5.7 : 2.3	3 : 5.9 : 1.7	3 : 4.3 : 1.5
Mink	1 : 2 : 0.6			3 : 4.3 : 1.5
Swimwear		8 : 15.1 : 7.2	4 : 7.8 : 2.2	
Sports		2 : 3.8 : 1.3	1 : 2 : 0.6	
Cars	3 : 6 : 1.8	3 : 5.7 : 2.3	3 : 5.9 : 1.7	2 : 2.6 : 0.8
Credit Card		5 : 9.4 : 3.3	4 : 7.8 : 2.2	1 : 1.4 : 0.5
Cigarette	1 : 2 : 1.6			1 : 1.4 : 0.5

AV	2 : 4 : 1.2		2 : 3.9 : 1.1	2 : 2.6 : 0.8
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Elegance

Aspect	May 89	Aug 89	Oct 89	Dec 89
Total page	194	161	154	186
Ad page	75	59	50	84
Ad no.	65	50	41	73
Ratio %	38.6	40	32.5	45.2

Types of Advertisements

Hair	2 : 3.1 : 1	4 : 8 : 2.4	1 : 2.4 : 0.6	3 : 4.1 : 1.6
Perfume	5 : 7.7 : 2.6	6 : 12 : 3.9	2 : 4.9 : 1.3	7 : 9.6 : 4.2
Skin Care	13 : 20 : 7.1	8 : 16 : 6.1	9 : 22 : 5.7	14 : 19 : 8.6
Makeup	2 : 3.1 : 1	8 : 16 : 6.1	4 : 9.8 : 2.6	4 : 5.4 : 2.2
Soap	1 : 1.5 : 0.5		1 : 2.4 : 0.6	1 : 1.4 : 0.5
Jewellery	3 : 4.6 : 1.5	4 : 8 : 2.4	3 : 7.4 : 1.9	5 : 6.8 : 2.7
Fashion	14 : 21.5 : 7.8	7 : 14 : 4.3	2 : 4.9 : 1.3	8 : 11 : 4.3
Accessory	2 : 3.1 : 1	4 : 8 : 2.4	1 : 2.4 : 0.6	3 : 4.1 : 1.6
Watches	3 : 4.6 : 1.5	5 : 10 : 3.1	3 : 7.4 : 1.9	6 : 8.2 : 3.2
Handbag	5 : 7.7 : 2.6	2 : 4 : 1.2		1 : 1.4 : 0.5
Shoes	1 : 1.5 : 0.5			3 : 4.1 : 1.6
Undies	3 : 4.6 : 2.1	1 : 2 : 0.6		3 : 4.1 : 1.6
Stocking				1 : 1.4 : 0.5
Glasses	1 : 1.5 : 0.5		2 : 4.9 : 1.3	1 : 1.4 : 0.5
Home Products	3 : 4.6 : 2.1	4 : 8 : 2.4	3 : 7.4 : 1.9	5 : 6.8 : 2.7
Fitness	2 : 3.1 : 1			
Swimwear	1 : 1.5 : 0.5			
Furniture	2 : 3.1 : 1	1 : 2 : 0.6	4 : 9.8 : 2.6	3 : 4.1 : 1.6
Credit	5 : 7.7 : 2.6	2 : 4 : 1.2	1 : 2.4 : 0.6	2 : 2.7 : 1
Premises	3 : 4.6 : 2.1	2 : 4 : 1.2	4 : 9.8 : 2.6	7 : 9.6 : 4.3
Mink			1 : 2.4 : 0.6	1 : 1.4 : 0.5
Drinks	1 : 1.5 : 0.5		2 : 4.9 : 1.3	
Food		1 : 2 : 0.6	3 : 7.4 : 1.9	1 : 1.4 : 0.5
Dryer			3 : 7.4 : 1.9	2 : 2.7 : 1

AV	1 : 1.5 : 0.5			3 : 4.1 : 1.6
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Elegance

Aspect	Jan 90	May 90	Aug 90	Dec 90
Total page	210	178	162	166
Ad page	86	63	46	63
Ad no.	72	51	41	48
Ratio %	41	35	28.4	38

Types of Advertisements

Hair	2 : 2.8 : 0.9	2 : 3.9 : 1.1	3 : 7.3 : 1.9	2 : 4.2 : 1.2
Perfume	12 : 16.7 : 5.6	5 : 9.8 : 2.9	6 : 14.6 : 3.8	5 : 8.1 : 3.6
Skin Care	11 : 15.3 : 5.1	14 : 27.5 : 11.8	9 : 21.9 : 5.8	5 : 8.1 : 3.6
Makeup	6 : 8.3 : 2.8	2 : 3.9 : 1.1	4 : 9.8 : 2.6	4 : 8.3 : 2.4
Soap	1 : 1.4 : 0.4	1 : 2 : 0.6		2 : 4.2 : 1.2
Jewellery	5 : 6.9 : 2.4	4 : 7.8 : 2.2		2 : 4.2 : 1.2
Fashion	6 : 8.3 : 2.7	7 : 13.7 : 4.1	2 : 4.9 : 1.2	4 : 8.3 : 2.4
Accessory	6 : 8.3 : 2.7	2 : 3.9 : 1.1	3 : 7.3 : 1.9	5 : 8.1 : 3.6
Watches	5 ; 6.9 : 2.4	3 : 5.9 : 1.7	6 : 14.6 : 3.7	6 : 12.3 : 3.6
Handbag	3 : 4.2 : 1.4	3 : 5.9 : 1.7	2 : 4.9 : 1.2	1 : 2.1 : 0.6
Pen		1 : 2 : 0.6		
Food	1 : 1.4 : 0.4		1 : 2.4 : 0.6	3 : 6.3 : 1.8
Undies	2 : 2.8 : 0.9	3 : 5.9 : 1.7		1 : 2.1 : 0.6
Stocking	2 : 2.8 : 0.9	1 : 2 : 0.6	1 : 2.4 : 0.6	2 : 4.2 : 1.2
Glasses	2 : 2.8 : 0.9	2 : 3.9 : 1.1		1 : 2.1 : 0.6
Home Products	6 : 8.3 : 2.7	1 : 2 : 0.6	4 : 9.8 : 2.6	2 : 4.2 : 1.2
Fitness		3 : 5.9 : 1.7	1 : 2.4 : 0.6	3 : 6.3 : 1.8
Mink	5 : 6.9 : 2.4			4 : 8.3 : 2.4
Furniture	1 : 1.4 : 0.4	4 : 7.8 : 2.2		2 : 4.2 : 1.2
Restaurants	3 : 4.2 : 1.4	1 : 2 : 0.6		4 : 8.3 : 2.4
Dryer	1 : 1.4 : 0.4	2 : 3.9 : 1.1		1 : 2.1 : 0.6
Cars	2 : 2.8 : 0.9		1 : 2.4 : 0.6	1 : 2.1 : 0.6
Premises	2 : 2.8 : 0.9	1 : 2 : 0.6	2 : 4.9 : 1.2	2 : 4.2 : 1.2
Drinks		1 : 2 : 0.6	1 : 2.4 : 0.6	

AV	1 : 1.4 : 0.5	2 : 3.9 : 1.1		1 : 2.1 : 0.6
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Elegance

Aspect	Jan 91	May 91	Aug 91	Dec 91
Total page	186	194	162	212
Ad page	84	75	46	82
Ad no.	73	65	41	72
Ratio %	45.2	38.6	28.4	41

Types of Advertisements

Hair	3 : 4.1 : 1.6	2 : 3.1 : 1		3 : 4.2 : 1.4
Perfume	7 : 9.6 : 4.2	5 : 7.7 : 2.6	6 : 14.6 : 3.8	12 : 17 : 5.6
Skin Care	8 : 11 : 4.3	13 : 20 : 7.1	9 : 21.9 : 5.8	11 : 15.2 : 5
Makeup	4 : 5.4 : 2.2	2 : 3.1 : 1	4 : 9.8 : 2.6	6 : 8.3 : 2.8
Soap	1 : 1.4 : 0.5			1 : 1.4 : 0.4
Jewellery	5 : 6.8 : 2.7	3 : 4.6 : 1.5	3 : 7.3 : 1.9	5 : 6.9 : 2.4
Fashion	8 : 11 : 4.3	14 : 21.5 : 7.8	3 : 7.3 : 1.9	6 : 8.3 : 2.7
Accessory	3 : 4.1 : 1.6	2 : 3.1 : 1	2 : 4.9 : 1.2	6 : 8.3 : 2.7
Watches	6 : 8.2 : 3.2	3 : 4.6 : 1.5	2 : 4.9 : 1.2	3 : 4.2 : 1.4
Handbag	5 : 6.8 : 2.7	5 : 7.7 : 2.6	3 : 7.3 : 1.9	3 : 4.2 : 1.4
Pen	3 : 4.1 : 1.6	1 : 1.5 : 0.5	1 : 2.4 : 0.6	1 : 1.4 : 0.4
Food	1 : 1.4 : 0.5	2 : 3.1 : 1		1 : 1.4 : 0.4
Undies	3 : 4.1 : 1.6	3 : 4.6 : 1.5	3 : 7.3 : 1.9	3 : 4.2 : 1.4
Stocking		1 : 1.5 : 0.5		2 : 2.8 : 0.9
Glasses	1 : 1.4 : 0.5			1 : 1.4 : 0.4
Home Products	2 : 2.7 : 1	3 : 4.6 : 1.5	2 : 4.9 : 1.2	2 : 2.8 : 0.9
Fitness			1 : 2.4 : 0.6	2 : 2.8 : 0.9
Mink	3 : 4.1 : 1.6			1 : 1.4 : 0.4
Furniture	3 : 4.1 : 1.6	2 : 3.1 : 1	2 : 4.9 : 1.2	2 : 2.8 : 0.9
Credit Card	3 : 4.1 : 1.6	2 : 3.1 : 1	2 : 4.9 : 1.2	6 : 8.3 : 2.8
Restaurants	1 : 1.4 : 0.5	3 : 4.6 : 1.5		1 : 1.4 : 0.4
Cars	2 : 2.7 : 1	2 : 3.1 : 1	2 : 4.9 : 1.2	2 : 2.8 : 0.9
Premises	7 : 9.6 : 4.3	3 : 4.6 : 1.5		2 : 2.8 : 0.9
Dryer	2 : 2.7 : 1	2 : 3.1 : 1		1 : 1.4 : 0.4

AV	1 : 1.4 : 0.5			1 : 1.4 : 0.4
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Elegance

Aspect	May 92	Aug 92	Ocy 92	Dec 92
Total page	190	162	180	256
Ad page	75	59	66	103
Ad no.	65	50	55	81
Ratio %	38.6	40	38	39

Types of Advertisements

Hair	5 : 7.7 : 2.6	6 : 12 : 3.9	1 : 2 : 0.6	3 : 3.9 : 1.2
Perfume	2 : 3.1 : 1	4 : 8 : 2.4	4 : 7.8 : 2.2	13 : 10.9 : 5.9
Skin Care	13 : 20 : 7.1	8 : 16 : 6.1	14 : 27.5 : 11.8	15 : 19.5 : 6.6
Makeup	1 : 1.5 : 0.5	8 : 16 : 6.1	4 : 7.8 : 12.2	8 : 10.4 : 3.1
Soap	2 : 3.1 : 1		1 : 2 : 0.6	5 : 6.5 : 2.2
Jewellery	3 : 4.6 : 1.5	7 : 14 : 4.3	3 : 5.9 : 1.7	5 : 6.5 : 2.2
Fashion	14 : 21.5 : 7.8	4 : 8 : 2.4	2 : 2.9 : 1.1	8 : 10.4 : 3.1
Accessory	3 : 4.6 : 1.5	5 : 10 : 3.1	1 : 2 : 0.6	4 : 5.2 : 1.6
Watches	2 : 3.1 : 1	4 : 8 : 2.4	3 : 5.9 : 1.7	8 : 18.4 : 3.1
Handbag	5 : 7.7 : 2.6	2 : 4 : 1.2		1 : 1.3 : 0.4
Shoes	3 : 4.6 : 2.1		3 : 5.9 : 1.7	3 : 5.2 : 1.2
Undies	1 : 1.5 : 0.5	1 : 2 : 0.6	4 : 7.8 : 2.2	3 : 5.2 : 1.2
Stocking				4 : 5.2 : 1.6
Glasses	1 : 1.5 : 0.5		2 : 3.9 : 1.1	
Home Products	2 : 3.1 : 1	4 : 8 : 2.4	3 : 5.9 : 1.7	5 : 6.5 : 2.7
Fitness	3 : 4.6 : 2.1		4 : 7.8 : 2.2	5 : 6.5 : 2.7
Swimwear	2 : 3.1 : 1			
Furniture	1 : 1.5 : 0.5	2 : 4 : 1.2	4 : 7.8 : 2.2	3 : 5.2 : 1.2
Credit	5 : 7.7 : 2.6	1 : 2 : 0.6	1 : 2 : 0.6	
Premises	3 : 4.6 : 2.1	2 : 4 : 1.2	4 : 7.8 : 2.2	
Mink			1 : 2 : 0.6	1 : 1.3 : 0.4
Drinks	1 : 1.5 : 0.5		2 : 3.9 : 1.1	
Food		1 : 2 : 0.6		4 : 5.2 : 1.6
Dryer			3 : 5.9 : 1.7	2 : 2.6 : 0.8

AV	1 : 1.5 : 0.5			3 : 5.2 : 1.2
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In

Aspect	Aug 89	Dec 89	Jun 90
Total page	210	186	162
Ad page	36	28	20
Ad no.	31	24	15
Ratio %	17.4	15.1	12.3

Types of Advertisements

Hair	1 : 3.2 : 0.5	1 : 4.2 : 0.5	
Perfume	1 : 3.2 : 0.5	2 : 8.3 : 1.1	1 : 6.7 : 0.6
Skin Care	6 : 19.4 : 2.9	4 : 16.9 : 2.2	4 : 27 : 2.4
Makeup	4 : 12.9 : 1.9	2 : 8.3 : 1.1	2 : 13.3 : 1.2
Soap			
Jewellery	2 : 6.4 : 1	4 : 16.7 : 2.2	1 : 6.7 : 0.6
Cars	2 : 6.4 : 1		
Fashion	4 : 12.9 : 1.9	2 : 8.3 : 1.1	2 : 13.3 : 1.2
Handbag	3 : 9.7 : 1.4		
Shoes			1 : 6.7 : 0.6
Pen		1 : 4.2 : 0.5	
Watches		2 : 8.3 : 1.1	1 : 6.7 : 0.6
Bras	2 : 6.4 : 1		
Undies		1 : 4.2 : 0.5	
Fitness	4 : 12.9 : 1.9		
Lens			
Glasses		1 : 4.2 : 0.5	1 : 6.7 : 0.6
Mink		2 : 8.3 : 1.1	
Camera	2 : 6.4 : 1	2 : 8.3 : 1.1	2 : 13.3 : 1.2
AV	1 : 3.2 : 0.5	2 : 8.3 : 1.1	
Books	1 : 3.2 : 0.5	1 : 4.2 : 0.5	2 : 13.3 : 1.2
Food	2 : 6.4 : 1		2 : 13.3 : 1.2
Home products		1 : 4.2 : 0.5	
Swimwear			1 : 6.7 : 0.6

In

Aspect	Dec 90	Jan 91	May 91
Total page	210	162	150
Ad page	33	20	18
Ad no.	31	15	16
Ratio %	17	12.3	15

Types of Advertisements

Hair	1 : 3.2 : 0.5	1 : 6.7 : 0.6	1 : 4.2 : 0.5
Perfume	1 : 3.2 : 0.5	1 : 6.7 : 0.6	
Skin Care	6 : 19.4 : 2.9	4 : 26.7 : 2.4	4 : 16.9 : 2.2
Makeup	4 : 12.9 : 1.9	2 : 13.3 : 1.2	2 : 8.3 : 1.1
Soap			
Jewellery	2 : 6.4 : 1	1 : 6.7 : 0.6	
Cars			
Fashion	4 : 12.9 : 1.9	4 : 26.7 : 2.4	2 : 8.3 : 1.1
Handbag	3 : 9.7 : 1.4		
Shoes		1 : 6.7 : 0.6	
Pen			1 : 4.2 : 0.5
Watches		1 : 6.7 : 0.6	2 : 8.3 : 1.1
Bras	2 : 6.4 : 1		
Undies			1 : 4.2 : 0.5
Fitness	3 : 9.7 : 1.4		
Stocking			
Glasses		1 : 6.7 : 0.6	1 : 4.2 : 0.5
Mink			
Camera	2 : 6.4 : 1	2 : 13.3 : 1.2	2 : 8.3 : 1.1
AV	1 : 3.2 : 0.5		
Books	2 : 6.4 : 1	2 : 13.3 : 1.2	2 : 8.3 : 1.1
Food	2 : 6.4 : 1		
Credit			1 : 4.2 : 0.5
Swimwear			1 : 4.2 : 0.5

Elle

Aspect	Dec 87	May 88	Dec 88
Total page	132	120	136
Ad page	49	27	43
Ad no.	42	25	41
Ratio %	37.1	22.5	31.6

Types of Advertisements

Hair	4 : 9.5 : 3	1 : 4 : 0.8	2 : 4.9 : 1.4
Perfume	4 : 9.5 : 3	4 : 16 : 3.3	8 : 19.5 : 5.8
Skin Care	5 : 10.9 : 3.9	1 : 4 : 0.8	7 : 17.1 : 5.1
Makeup	3 : 7.1 : 2.3	2 : 8 : 1.7	2 : 4.9 : 1.4
Jewellery	5 : 10.9 : 3.9	3 : 12 : 2.4	3 : 7.1 : 2.1
Fashion	8 : 19 : 6.1	4 : 16 : 3.3	6 : 14.7 : 4.2
Accessory	2 : 4.8 : 1.6	3 : 12 : 2.4	
Watches	6 : 14.3 : 4.5	4 : 16 : 3.3	8 : 19.5 : 5.8
Handbag	1 : 2.4 : 0.8		1 : 2.4 : 0.7
Shoes	2 : 4.8 : 1.6		1 : 2.4 : 0.7
Pen			
Napkin			1 : 2.4 : 0.7
Undies	1 : 2.4 : 0.8		
Glasses	2 : 4.8 : 1.6		1 : 2.4 : 0.7
Mink	2 : 4.8 : 1.6		1 : 2.4 : 0.7
Premises			
Sports	1 : 2.4 : 0.8	2 : 8 : 1.7	
Swimwear		2 : 8 : 1.7	
Furniture	1 : 2.4 : 0.8		
Cigarette	1 : 2.4 : 0.8	1 : 4 : 0.8	1 : 2.4 : 0.7
Restaurant	1 : 2.4 : 0.8		
Cars			
AV			1 : 2.4 : 0.7

Elle

Aspect	Jan 89	May 89	Aug 89	Dec 89
Total page	128	144	120	200
Ad page	37	50	24	96
Ad no.	30	40	22	71
Ratio %	28.9	34.7	20	48

Types of Advertisements

Hair	1 : 3.3 : 0.8	4 : 10 : 2.8	2 : 9.1 : 1.7	2 : 2.8 : 1
Perfume	4 : 13.3 : 3.2	2 : 5 : 1.4	2 : 9.1 : 1.7	10 : 14 : 5
Skin Care	7 : 23.3 : 5.5	7 : 17.5 : 4.9	6 : 27.3 : 5	7 : 9.9 : 3.5
Soap				1 : 1.4 : 0.5
Makeup	2 : 6.7 : 1.6	4 : 10 : 2.8	4 : 18.2 : 3.6	9 : 12.7 : 4.5
Jewellery	1 : 3.3 : 0.8	7 : 17.5 : 4.9	1 : 4.6 : 0.8	8 : 11.3 : 4
Fashion	3 : 10 : 2.3	9 : 22.5 : 6.3		9 : 12.7 : 4.5
Accessory	7 : 23.3 : 5.5	4 : 10 : 2.8		7 : 9.9 : 3.5
Handbag	1 : 3.3 : 0.8			4 : 5.6 : 2
Watches	5 : 15.7 : 3.9	2 : 5 : 1.4	2 : 9.1 : 1.7	10 : 14 : 5
Pen				1 : 1.4 : 0.5
Napkin		2 : 5 : 1.4		2 : 2.8 : 1
Food	1 : 3.3 : 0.8			2 : 2.8 : 1
Undies		1 : 2.5 : 0.7		4 : 5.6 : 2
Bras	1 : 3.3 : 0.8	1 : 2.5 : 0.7		
Stocking		4 : 10 : 2.8		4 : 5.6 : 2
Lens				2 : 2.8 : 1
Glasses	1 : 3.3 : 0.8		1 : 4.6 : 0.8	2 : 2.8 : 1
Mink	1 : 3.3 : 0.8			3 : 4.2 : 1.5
Swimwear		2 : 5 : 1.4		
Cigarette	1 : 3.3 : 0.8	1 : 2.5 : 0.7		1 : 1.4 : 0.5
Cars	1 : 3.3 : 0.8			2 : 2.8 : 1
AV				6 : 8.4 : 3

Elle

Aspect	Jan 90	Apr 90	Aug 90	Dec 90
Total page	136	152	120	208
Ad page	44	61	31	98
Ad no	38	47	28	88
Ratio %	32.3	40.1	25.8	47.1

Types of Advertisements

Hair	1 : 2.6 : 0.7	1 : 2.1 : 0.7		1 : 1.1 : 0.5
Perfume	3 : 7.8 : 2.2	5 : 10.6 : 3.9	3 : 10.7 : 2.5	8 : 9.1 : 3.9
Skin Care	8 : 21.1 : 5.6	9 : 19.1 : 7.2	5 : 17.9 : 4.2	19 : 24.6 : 9.1
Makeup	1 : 2.6 : 0.7	5 : 10.6 : 3.9	2 : 7.1 : 1.7	4 : 4.5 : 2.1
Soap	1 : 2.6 : 0.7			1 : 1.1 : 0.5
Jewellery	1 : 2.6 : 0.7	5 : 10.6 : 3.9	4 : 14.3 : 3.3	6 : 6.8 : 3.4
Fashion	4 : 10.5 : 2.8	13 : 27.7 : 8.3	5 : 17.9 : 4.2	17 : 19.3 : 8.1
Accessory	7 : 18.4 : 5.1	4 : 8.5 : 2.6	2 : 7.1 : 1.7	5 : 5.7 : 2.4
Handbag	3 : 7.8 : 2.2	1 : 2.1 : 0.7	2 : 7.1 : 1.7	9 : 10.2 : 4.3
Shoes	1 : 2.6 : 0.7	1 : 2.1 : 0.7		1 : 1.1 : 0.5
Watches	9 : 23.7 : 16.3	3 : 6.4 : 2	4 : 14.3 : 3.3	9 : 10.2 : 4.3
Pen				
Stocking	1 : 2.6 : 0.7	4 : 8.5 : 2.6		2 : 2.3 : 1
Cigarette	1 : 2.6 : 0.7	1 : 2.1 : 0.7	1 : 3.5 : 0.8	1 : 1.1 : 0.5
Fitness		3 : 6.4 : 2		4 : 4.5 : 2.1
Sports	1 : 2.6 : 0.7	1 : 2.1 : 0.7	3 : 10.7 : 2.5	
Swimwear		3 : 6.4 : 2		
Cars				4 : 4.5 : 2.1
Mink	1 : 2.6 : 0.7			2 : 2.3 : 1
Premises				
Napkin				2 : 2.3 : 1
Glasses		2 : 4.2 : 1.4		2 : 2.3 : 1
AV	1 : 2.6 : 0.7			1 : 1.1 : 0.5

Elle

Aspect	Jan 91	May 91	Aug 91	Dec 91
Total page	136	152	128	200
Ad page	43	61	37	91
Ad no.	41	47	31	71
Ratio %	31.6	40.1	28.9	45

Types of Advertisement

Hair			1 : 3.3 : 0.8	2 : 2.8 : 1
Perfume	2 : 4.9 : 1.4	5 : 10.6 : 3.9	4 : 13.3 : 3.2	7 : 9.9 : 3.5
Skin Care	7 : 17.1 : 5.1	9 : 19.1 : 7.2	7 : 23.3 : 5.5	7 : 9.9 : 3.5
Soap	2 : 4.9 : 1.4	5 : 10.6 : 3.9	1 : 3.3 : 0.8	8 : 11.3 : 4
Makeup	7 : 17.1 : 5.1		4 : 13.3 : 3.2	3 : 4.2 : 1.5
Jewellery	2 : 4.9 : 1.4	4 : 8.5 : 2.6	1 : 3.3 : 0.8	8 : 11.3 : 4
Fashion	8 : 19.5 : 5.8	13 : 27.7 : 8.3	3 : 10 : 2.3	9 : 12.7 : 4.5
Accessory	8 : 19.5 : 5.8	4 : 8.5 : 2.6	2 : 6.7 : 1.6	7 : 9.9 : 3.5
Handbag	1 : 2.4 : 0.7	1 : 2.1 : 0.7	1 : 3.3 : 0.8	4 : 5.6 : 2
Watches	1 : 2.4 : 0.7	1 : 2.1 : 0.7	5 : 15.7 : 3.9	10 : 14 : 5
Pen		3 : 6.4 : 2		1 : 1.4 : 0.5
Napkin	1 : 2.4 : 0.7			
Food			2 : 6.7 : 1.6	
Undies	1 : 2.4 : 0.7	1 : 2.1 : 0.7		4 : 5.6 : 2
Bras		3 : 6.4 : 2	1 : 3.3 : 0.8	4 : 5.6 : 2
Stocking	1 : 2.4 : 0.7	4 : 8.5 : 2.6		1 : 1.4 : 0.5
Premises		3 : 6.4 : 2		2 : 2.8 : 1
Glasses		2 : 4.2 : 1.3	1 : 3.3 : 0.8	2 : 2.8 : 1
Mink			1 : 3.3 : 0.8	3 : 4.2 : 1.5
Swimwear				
Cigarette	1 : 2.4 : 0.7		1 : 3.3 : 0.8	1 : 1.4 : 0.5
Cars		3 : 6.4 : 2	2 : 6.7 : 0.8	7 : 9.9 : 3.5
AV	1 : 2.4 : 0.7			1 : 1.4 : 0.5

Elle

Aspect	Jan 92	May 92	Dec 92
Total page	132	136	192
Ad page	31	48	74
Ad no.	42	41	656
Ratio %	38	33	38

Types of Advertisement

Hair	4 : 9.5 : 3	2 : 4.9 : 1.4	1 : 1.5 : 0.5
Perfume	5 : 10.9 : 3.9	7 : 17.1 : 5.1	5 : 7.7 : 3.6
Skin Care	4 : 9.5 : 3	8 : 19.5 : 5.8	1 : 1.5 : 0.5
Makeup	5 : 10.9 : 3.9	2 : 4.9 : 1.4	2 : 3.1 : 1
Jewellery	3 : 7.1 : 2.3	3 : 7.1 : 2.1	3 : 4.6 : 1.5
Fashion	8 : 19 : 6.1	6 : 14.7 : 4.2	13 : 20 : 7.1
Accessory	6 : 14.3 : 4.5		3 : 4.6 : 1.5
Watches	2 : 4.8 : 1.6	8 : 19.5 : 5.8	4 : 6.2 : 2.1
Handbag	2 : 4.8 : 1.6	1 : 2.4 : 0.7	
Shoes	1 : 2.4 : 0.8		5 : 7.7 : 2.6
Pen	2 : 4.8 : 1.6	2 : 4.9 : 1.4	2 : 3.1 : 1
Napkin			2 : 3.1 : 1
Undies	2 : 4.8 : 1.6		14 : 21.5 : 7.8
Glasses	1 : 2.4 : 0.8	1 : 2.4 : 0.7	3 : 4.6 : 1.5
Mink	2 : 4.8 : 1.6	1 : 2.4 : 0.7	
Premises			2 : 4.6 : 1.5
Sports	1 : 2.4 : 0.8	3 : 7.1 : 2.1	2 : 3.1 : 1
Swimwear		2 : 4.9 : 1.4	2 : 3.1 : 1
Furniture	1 : 2.4 : 0.8		
Cigarette	1 : 2.4 : 0.8	1 : 2.4 : 0.7	1 : 1.5 : 0.5
Restaurant	1 : 2.4 : 0.8		5 : 7.7 : 2.0
Cars			2 : 3.1 : 1
AV		1 : 2.4 : 0.7	2 : 3.1 : 1

2. Relationship between verbal and visual content (by no of pages)

Percentages

(a) verbal and visual %: percentage over total page no

(b) 'Fashion': categorized under the 'Visual'

(c) Total pages = Ad page + Verbal + Visual

Elle

	Feb 88	%	Oct 88	%	Nov 88	%
Total page	112		128		132	
Ad page	24		42		47	
Verbal	28	25	35	25.8	29	18.2
Visual	60	53.6	51	39.8	56	42.4
Fashion	42	70	24	47.1	36	64.3

Distribution of verbal content

Profile	7	6	10
Film (feature)	2	3	7
Fashion	5	5	4
Beauty	1	4	2
Travel	2	2	4
Food	1	2	6
Culture	4	4	6
Buying guide	4	3	4
Horoscope	1	1	1
Health	1	2	1
Crafts		1	1
Int dec		2	1

Elle

	Jan 89	%	May 89	%	Aug 89	%
Total page	128		120		120	
Ad page	37		33		29	
verbal	39	30.5	33	27.5	27	12.5
visual	52	40.6	54	45	64	53.3
Fashion	39	69.2	23	42.6	44	68.8

Distribution of verbal content

Fashion	1	1	1
Beauty	2	5	4
Access	3	3	
Health	3	2	2
Psycho	2		
Culture	4	4	4
Profile	10	10	7
Buying guide	4	3	4
Travel	5	1	
Money	2		
Int dec		2	2
Food	1	1	2
Horoscope	1	1	1
Craft			2
Medicine	1		

Elle

	Jan 90	%	April 90	%	July 90	%	Oct 90	%
Total page	136		152		136		196	
Ad page	44		62		45		87	
Verbal	33	25.7	37	22.4	31	22.8	46	23.5
Visual	59	44.1	53	34.9	60	44.1	68	34.7
Fashion	45	75	36	67.9	40	66.7	12	17.6

Distribution of verbal content

Fashion	4	2	3	3
Beauty	4	1	3	3
Access		2		3
Health		1	2	3
Profile	7	6	6	6
Food	1	1	1	1
Int dec	3	2	1	2
Travel	2	2	1	4
Arts	4	1	2	3
Money		1		1
Culture		4	4	
Psycho		2		4
Women	2	2		4
Medicine				2
Exercise		2		2
Buying guide	5	6	7	4
Horoscope	1	1	1	1

Elle

	Feb 91	%	Jun 91	%	Aug 91	%	Nov 91	%
Total page	132		120		128		196	
Ad page	47		33		37		84	
verbal	29	18.2	33	27.5	39	30.5	46	23.5
Visual	56	42.4	54	45	52	40.6	66	34.7
Fashion	36	64.3	41	72	40	78	34	52

Distribution of verbal content

Fashion	1	2	2	8
Beauty	1	2	2	10
Accessory	1	4	1	1
health	2	1	4	1
Psycho	1	1	2	2
Culture	3	3	3	3
Profile	6	7	9	7
Buying guide	4	4	4	4
Travel	3	3	4	3
Money	1	1	2	1
Food	2	1	1	1
Horoscope	1	1	1	1
Craft	1	2	2	1
Medicine	1		1	2
Arts	1	1	1	1

Elle

	Feb 92	%	Oct 92	%	Nov 92	%
Total Page	136		128		200	
Ad page	48		42		47	
Verbal	28	25	35	25.8	49	2.5
Visual	60	53.6	51	39.8	104	51
Fashion	42	70	24	47.1	36	64.3

Distribution of verbal content

Profile	4	6	6
Film (feature)	2	4	6
Fashion	5	4	8
Beauty	4	4	6
Travel	2	2	4
Food	1	2	5
Culture	4	4	3
Buying guide	4	3	9
Horoscope	1	1	1
Health	2	2	
Crafts		1	
Int dec		2	1

Elegance

	Dec 88	%	Jun 89	%	Oct 89	%
Total page	184		192		164	
Ad Pages	92		76		71	
Verbal	52	28.3	76	39.6	57	34.8
Visual	40	21.7	40	20.8	36	22
Fashion	23	57.5	26	65	12	33

Distribution of verbal content

Writing	11	15	6
Sex	1	1	
World	5	6	4
Music	4	4	2
Horoscope	2	1	2
Profile	8	7	6
Art	1	5	1
Film	1	2	1
Medicine	1	1	1
Lifestyle	4	3	
Food	1	5	3
Beauty	1	3	1
Access		2	
Travel	1	4	3
Int dec	1	4	4
Buying guide	3	3	3
Fashion	3	3	5
Social Function	1	2	2
Culture	2	2	4
Career		1	7
Fitness		2	2

Elegance

	Jan 90	%	Jun 90	%	Aug 90	%	Nov 90	%
Total page	210		178		162		166	
Ad Page	100		58		48		67	
Verbal	68	32.4	72	40.4	76	47.2	58	34
Visual	42	20	48	27	38	23.5	41	24.7
Fashion	31	73.8	22	45.8	27	71.1	22	53.7

Distribution of verbal content

World	5	12	15	9
Travel	1	1	1	1
Music	2	2	4	2
Film	2	2	2	2
Beauty	4	5	8	5
Art	5	5	5	3
Book	4	1	3	3
Writing	6	3	3	4
Women	3	3	3	3
Fashion	4	5	3	2
Profile	5	5	5	5
Horoscope	2	2	2	2
Medicine	1	1	1	1
Access	4	3	4	4
Money	5	4	4	2
Int dec	1	2	2	3
Food	2	2	2	2
Buying guide	6		4	4
Social function	3		4	1

Elegance

	Feb 91	%	Apr 91	%	Aug 91	%	Nov 91	%
Total page	192		184		162		166	
Ad Pages	76		92		48		67	
Verbal	76	39.6	52	28.3	76	47.2	58	34
Visual	40	20.8	40	21.7	38	23.5	41	24.7
Fashion	26	65	23	59	27	71.1	22	53.7

Distribution of verbal content

Writing	15	11	7	8
Sex	1	1	1	1
World	6	5	5	5
Music	1	1	1	1
Horoscope	2	2	2	2
Profile	7	7	6	7
Arts	4	2	2	4
Film	4	1	1	1
Medicine	2		1	
Lifestyle	4	3	3	3
Food	2	1	1	2
Beauty	4	3	3	3
Accessory	5	1	2	2
Travel	1	1	1	1
Buying guide	6	4	4	2
Fashion	4	4	4	5
Culture	3	2	2	3
Career	1	1	1	1
Money	1	1	1	1
Car	1	1		3

Elegance

	Feb 92	%	May 92	%	Dec 92	%
Total page	184		190		204	
Ad Pages	92		74		59	
Verbal	52	28.3	76	39.6	98	49
Visual	40	21.7	40	20.8	47	23
Fashion	23	57.5	26	13.8	12	5.9

Distribution of verbal content

Writing	11	15	6
Sex	1	1	2
World	5	6	4
Music	2	4	2
Horoscope	2	1	2
Profile	8	7	8
Art	4	5	4
Film	1	2	4
Medicine	1	1	1
Lifestyle	4	3	6
Food	1	5	5
Beauty	1	3	5
Access	1	2	8
Travel	1	4	6
Int dec	1	4	4
Buying guide	3	3	10
Fashion	3	3	5
Social Function	1	2	2
Culture	2	2	4
Career		2	7

Fitness		1	2
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Cosmopolitan

	Nov 88	%	Mar 89	%	May 90	%	Jun 90	%
Total page	200		152		176		200	
Ad page	97		63		57		77	
Verbal	38	29	38	25	42	23.9	54	27
Visual	65	32.5	53	24.9	77	43.8	69	34.5
Fashion	45	69.2	23	43.4	46	57.4	42	60.9

Distribution of verbal content

Film	2	2	2	2
Art	2	2	3	4
Music	3	3	2	3
Book	1	1	1	1
Beauty	3	3	3	2
Psycho	2	3	3	3
Sex		1	2	2
Health	2	1	1	2
Int dec	2	2	2	4
Quiz	2	2	2	2
Horoscope	2	2	2	2
Career	4	2	2	2
Profile	4	3	5	7
Talk	3	3	3	3
Social		2	3	3
Places			2	2
Travel	1	2	2	4
Buying guide	2	2	2	2
Writing	3	2		5

Cosmopolitan

	Jan 90	%	May 90	%	Aug 90	%
Total page	152		164		152	
Ad page	59		71		62	
Verbal	47	30.9	57	34.8	37	22.4
Visual	46	30.2	36	22	53	34.9
Fashion	23	50	31	85	35	70

Distribution of verbal content

Film	2	2	2
Art	2	2	2
Music	2	3	3
Books	1	1	1
Psycho	2	4	2
Sex	2	2	2
Health	1	1	2
Beauty	3	2	2
Money	1	1	1
Horoscope	2	2	2
Profile	6	5	3
Career	2	2	2
Quiz	2	2	2
Car	2	2	2
Profile	3	7	
Writing	2	6	2
Travel	1	1	1
Buying guide	3	3	3
Food	2	2	2
Talk	3	5	
Places	4	2	2

Cosmopolitan

	Feb 91	%	May 91	%	Aug 91	%	Nov 91	%
Total page	176		152		152		200	
Ad page	57		82		54		75	
Verbal	42	23.9	42	27.6	48	31.5	54	27
Visual	77	43.8	48	31.5	50	32.8	69	34.5
Fashion	46	57.4	30	62.5	32	64	42	60.9

Distribution of verbal content

Film	2	2	4	4
Art	2	3	3	4
Music	2	2	2	2
Book	1	1	1	1
Beauty	3	2	4	3
Psycho	3	3	3	3
Sex	2	2	2	2
Health	2	2	2	2
Int dec	2	2	2	4
Quiz	2	2	2	2
Horoscope	2	2	2	2
Career		2	2	2
Profile	3	3	3	5
Talk	3	3	3	3
Social	2	2	4	4
Places	3	2	2	2
Travel	2	2	2	3
Buying Guide	2	2	2	2
Writing	4	3	3	4

Cosmopolitan

	Feb 92	%	May 92	%	Dec 92	%
Total page	160		164		200	
Ad page	59		71		71	
Verbal	47	29.3	57	34.8	67	33.5
Visual	54	33.7	36	22	62	31
Fashion	23	42.5	31	85	35	70

Distribution of verbal content

Film	4	2	2
Art	2	2	2
Music	2	3	3
Books	1	1	1
Psycho	2	4	2
Sex	2	2	2
Health	1	1	6
Beauty	3	2	6
Money	1	1	1
Horoscope	2	2	2
Profile	4	5	6
Career	2	2	2
Quiz	2	2	2
Car	2	2	2
Profile	3	6	1
Writing	2	6	5
Travel	1	1	1
Buying guide	3	3	8
Food	2	2	8
Talk	1	6	4
Places	4	2	2

In

	Sep 89	%	Feb 90	%	Jun 90	%
Total page	202		170		162	
Ad Pages	39		29		27	
Verbal	89	44.1	71	41.8	88	54.3
Visual	74	36.6	70	41.2	47	29
Fashion	44	59.5	54	77.1	35	74.5

Distribution of verbal content

Feature	10	8	24 (Film)
Architecture	4	2	4
Profile	11	8	11
Books	4	2	2
Film	7	3	2
Art	3	3	3
Culture	3	3	3
Dance	4	8	2
TV	2	2	2
Music	2	2	6
Economics	2	2	2
Interrel	2	2	2
Health	3	2	2
Beauty	3	3	3
Fashion	4	4	3
Makeup	4		
Food	2	2	2
Theatre	8	8	5
Story	7	3	6
Culture News	4	4	4

In

	Jan 91	%	Apr 91	%	Aug 91	%
Total page	170		162		120	
Ad Pages	29		27		29	
Verbal	71	41.8	88	54.3	64	53.3
Visual	70	41.2	47	29	27	12.5
Fashion	54	77.1	35	74.5	20	72

Distribution of verbal content

Feature	10	14	11
Architecture	4	3	2
Profile	11	15	9
Books	3	3	2
Gender	2	7	2
Film	8	10	8
Art	3	3	3
Culture	3	3	3
TV	2	2	2
Health	3	3	3
Beauty	3	3	3
Fashion	3	4	3
Food	2	2	2
Theatre	8	10	5
Music	2	2	2
Story	4	4	4

General Comments

This chapter studies the quantitative make-up of glossy women's magazines and in particular the advertising component. From the above quantitative survey, several common features can be detected.

(a) Advertising plays a key role, not only in the economic financing of women's magazines, but also in occupying a significant portion of the magazine's volume. Cosmo has sustained the highest percentage of advertisements in each issue, while In has the least advertisements, both in terms of volume and percentage. For the issues in 1991, Cosmo has a mean of 38 percent of ads pages (over total pages), Elle has the average of 37.5 percent, Elegance 36.7 percent and In 13.6 percent. There is obvious structural affinity between percentage of ads pages and the influences of ads client over the editorial policy and magazines' content. The affinity is structural rather than direct nor causal, because it is the middle-class luxury ads that has positioned and produced the target audience of these glossy magazines --- middle-class women readers who are supposed to be obsessed with their bodily presentation. While Cosmo, Elegance and Elle manage to maintain a reasonable level of (overt) ads for their survival in the market, their content are structurally pre-determined, emphasizing on fashion (Elle), sexuality (Cosmo) and the life-style of middle-class women (Elegance). In this sense, the major 'target' of these glossy magazines is not the readers but advertisers which define the target readers/consumers and the content of these magazines. In, having the lowest percentage of advertisements (less than 15%), ironically possesses significant degree of autonomy and power over the style and approach of the general orientation, specific feature/articles and writers of the magazine. Deplorably, such a low level of ads quantity and income become a detrimental blow to their survival, finally resulting to the closing down of In in 1990.

(b) There are obvious seasonal variations in the quantity of ads. December sees the peak month for the number of ads as the advertising clients flood the magazines with ads to lure sales to reveal Christmas consumption mode among readers. April-May was the second peak season, when consumption rose because of the change of season. Thus, the highest ads number and total page numbers of these magazines are all attained during Christmas (December). For Cosmo, it is the issue in December 1991 that attains the highest ads pages (99 pages) and total pages (256 pages), Elle is in December 1990 (208 total pages and 98 ads pages), Elegance is in December 1991 (212 total pages and 82 ads pages). The only exception is In which the ads numbers and percentage has dropped since the very beginning.

(c) The advertisements in these glossy magazines mostly concentrate in very narrow categories of luxury 'beauty-industry' products like skin-care, perfume, make-up, accessories, cosmetics and fashion which occupy more than 90 percent of the total ads. Whereas lower brow magazines often flooded with domestic products like detergents, washing powder, paper tower, margarine, stationary or super-market they are negligent in glossy magazines, reflecting the status the luxuries taste and high consumption power of its target readers.

(d) The emphasis on verbal content implies the editorial policy of informative function (Elegance) and analytical flatform (In). A disparate policy of valuing visual representation entertains and caters for the fast paced reading habit of Hong Kong city and the fashion-conscious of women readers. The lack of visual content in In and Elegance bespeak the substandard local inhouse photography and the insufficient supply of foreign photography as in the case of Cosmo and Elle. Cosmo has not only the foreign 'advantage' of high quality fashion photo (especially series photography of no less than 6 pages per issue since 1990), it also has contributed articles in Psychological Health, Interpersonal Relationship and Your Body which are directly translated from American edition.

Cosmo has the greatest ads proportion, rising from the average of ads pages (over total pages) of 34.3 % in 1988 to 38 % in 1992. Whereas the lowest percentage in 1988 is 22.2 % (Jan) and the highest in that year is merely 38.5 % (May), the situation is much improved in 1991, lowest being 27 % (Aug) and highest 47.4 % (May). Concerning the content of the ads, more than 90 % of the ads consists of skin-care, perfume, jewellery, accessories and other luxuries of the 'beauty industry'. Given the major target readers as young successful career-women, it is not surprising that Cosmo consists of ads mainly targeted at the 'bodily needs' of middle-class women: the beauty, skin-care and in general the packaging of their appearance. Finally, since Cosmo is licensed with its mother version from America, it manages to have high-quality of photo-fashion.

Elegance also has high level of ads pages, rising from the average of 32.8 % in 1988 to 36.1 % in 1991. As Elegance targets her readers as high-brow, middle-class, mature, married women, their ads are unique in emphasizing lots of 'home products' like dryer, furniture and premises that are simply absent in other glossy magazines. Indeed, these home products make up of around 20 % of ads number in each issue. While skin-care still topped in Elegance ads throughout 88-92 with fashion ranking 2nd, it has larger variety of ads than in Cosmo and Elle, ads like cars, camera, dryer, driving schools and premises. Because of such high-brow purchasing power of its readers, 'mink' becomes a commodity that only appear in Elegance. Besides, it has the greatest verbal-visual ratio of about 3 to 2 with the highest verbal content. In 1991, the verbal content occupies 38.5 % of the total pages, compared with 28.5 % for Cosmo and 23.6 % for Elle, revealing an informative function rather than the visual pleasing/pleasure editorial policy.

Elle witnesses the greatest increase in the percentage of ads, from the average of 29.8 % in 1988 to 37.1 % in 1992. It has also the greatest fluctuation in the seasonal performance of ads. For example, in Aug 89, it has 20 % of ads (over total pages) while five months later (Dec 89) it has 48 % of ads, more than double increase in a different season. Skin-care continues to dominate Elle from 1988-92, with 27.3 % in Aug 89. As Elle positions herself as a fashion magazine, it is reasonable that 'fashion ads' becomes particularly crucial and acute compared to other glossies. In May 91 for example, it has 13 pages of fashion ads (27 % of total ads pages), whereas from 1988 to 1992, fashion ads occupies about 15 % of total ads. While fashion ads is prominent, the section of fashion itself is equally vital in Elle. In Jan 90, the issue has 136 pages, and 45 are on fashion; 42 out of 112 pages in Feb 88. Besides, it has the highest visual ratio to the verbal content. It has the highest fashion photo, with a mean of 33.3 in 1990, whereas Elegance has 25.5 % and In only 18.6 percent. For example in Feb 88, the visual-verbal pages ratio is 60 : 28 (ads pages apart).

In has the lowest advertising percentage, never occupies more than 18 % of total pages. It is also the only magazine (in this research) that has a decreasing percentage of ads, from the average of 16.7 % in 1988 to 13.4 % in 1991 when it closed down. Indeed, the first issue (Aug 89), having 17.4 % ads number, has the highest ads pages number in the two years history of In. It is perhaps not surprising that all the typical luxuries of the 'beauty industry' do not occupy the vital proportion as in Cosmo or Elle. For example perfume ads has at most attained two pages in In (Dec 89: 8.3 % of total ads pages), whereas it has 10 pages in Elle (Dec 89: 14 % of total ads pages), 12 pages in Elegance (Jan 90 : 16.7 % of total ads pages) and 13 pages in Cosmo (Nov 89: 18.3 % of total ads pages). It never has any ads on mink, cars, premises and other luxuries targeting at wealthier class (only in Dec 89 does In has two pages ads on mink). Instead, In is the only glossy magazine that attracts ads that advertises 'book'. It has high proportion of verbal content, usually at least double than the visual content (in July 90 for example, it has verbal 88 pages, constituting 54.3 % of total pages). In Aug 91, the verbal-visual ratio is 64 % vs 27 %. Not only is In stressed on the verbal content, it's content is also very intellectual, with lots of serious articles and features on theatre, feminist movement, socio-political thought/movements, books review and other cultural-

intellectual issues, all untypical of glossy magazines.

It is a case where capitalism and its consumerist mode of existence, with all the global socio-political and economic network support, has become the constitutive and definitive feature of Hong Kong society. While In has contributed significantly to all its readers who are stimulated, enriched and empowered by its feminist orientation, its limited scale and circulation are detrimental, and almost self-defeating, to its aim as a popular magazine.

The fact is not that In refuses advertisements and rejects its ideological underpinning, but that their lack of marketing professionalism and capitalist-consciousness have hindered and weakened its competitive power in the advertising market. Here is a society of middle-class values, despite majority working class women, but no feminist movement, no historical background and cultural soil for fertile feminist movement. Despite all the classist nature of middle-class women, it is a social facticity that they are the privileged group of modernity, benefited from the economic prosperity of past decades of Hong Kong, tries to immense power.

Appendix Two: Career Women in Hong Kong

The existing labour force in Hong Kong is around 2,800,000, of which the labour force participation rate for male is about 80%, while the female participation rate is only 48%. As a whole the labour force participation rate is maintained between 64% and 65%. It shows that the labour force participation rate for female is much lower than the male, but women employment still plays a crucial role in the contribution of GDP in our society.

By 1961 the total labour force has swollen to 1,211,999 with an actively working population of 1,191,099. Of these 849,572 were male and 341,527 were women. Overall between 1961 and 1986 the proportion of women in the labour force increased from 36.8% (1961) to 42.8% (1971) to 51.2% (1986).

Table 1: Change in crude LFPR by component, 1961-1986. (Source: HK Statistics, 1981, 1986)

Period	% net change in crude LFPR		% attributable to variations in age structure		% attributable to variations in age-specific LFPR	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1961-71	-6.3	+16.3	-6.0	+4.1	-0.3	+12.2
1971-76	-5.1	+1.9	-2.8	-2.9	-2.3	+4.8
1976-81	+2.4	+13.6	+0.9	-1.0	+1.5	+14.6
1981-86	-2.0	+3.4	+1.4	-0.4	-3.4	+3.8

Table 2: Crude LFPR and standardized rates of population aged 15 and over, 1961, 1971, 1976, 1981 and 1986. (Source: HK Statistics, 1981, 1986)

Year	Crude LFPR		Standardized LFPR		1971	84.7	42.8
	Male	Female	Male	Female			
1961	90.4%	36.8%	90.4%	36.8%			
	90.1	41.3					
1976#	80.4	43.6	88.0	43.3			
1981	82.5	49.5	83.7	49.3			
1986	80.9	51.2	80.9	51.2			

Note: # The figures have been adjusted to exclude all students taking up work during the school summer vacation and first-time job seekers who were students last term.

The absolute increase of women working between 1961 and 1981 was from 324,000 to 843,000, a 2.6 times increase (Cho, 1987:225). If we look over a more extended period of time (see table 3 and 4) we see the overall participation rate being sustained at around the 64-65% level, although with a minor tailing off in the last couple of years. We also see a continuing rise in the number of women in the labour force up to a peak of 1,014,500 in 1988 before dropping away a little since. As the nature of work changes in HK due to technological and socio-economic factors more qualified and skilled labour force is required, more young people are staying on to pursue their education and are thus entering the workforce later. At the other end, improved standards of living are allowing some people to retire earlier.

Table 3: Women employment rate

Age	1976	1981	1986
20-24	71.8%	79.7%	83.7%
25-34	47.8	56.8	64.8
35-44	42.7	53.4	57.9

Table 4: Labour force participation rates by sex, 1961-1990 (Source : HK Statistics, 1971, 1976, 1981, 1986)

	1961	1971	1976	1981	1986	1988	1990
Male	90.4	84.7	80.4	82.5	80.5	80.0	79.3
Female	36.8	42.8	43.6	49.5	48.9	48.2	46.5
Total	64.6	66.1	63.3	66.3	65.1	64.5	63.1

The increased number of women in the labour force is in part attributable to the overall increase in the size of the female population. For example, the population aged over 15 rose from 1,477,110 to 2,026,224 between 1976 and 1986. However, in a decomposition analysis of the supply factors Cho (1987) attributes 26.6% of the increased female labour force to the increased intensity of women's economic activity with 47.65 attributable to the increase in female population size for the period 1961-1981. Thus, HK women have actually become more willfully active in the labour market to a marked degree.

Table 5: Labour force participation rate by age and by sex, 1961-1990. (Source: Hong Kong Statistics, 1976, 1981, 1989, 1990c)

Age	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54	55-59	60-64	65+	total
1961												
Male	54	89	98	98	97	97	73	90				
Female	48	51	34	38	42	21	37					
1971												
Male	50	90	98	99	97	70	85					
Female	56	70	40	39	39	24	43					
1976												
Male	43	88	98	98	95	80	32	80				
Female	47	71	48	43	40	22	11	44				
1981												
Male	45	91	98	99	99	98	97	94	83	62	31	83
Female	43	80	61	49	52	54	49	45	37	31	14	49
1986												
Male	35	88	99	99	99	98	97	94	82	57	25	81
Female	32	84	72	55	53	56	52	40	31	22	10	49

1990

Male	31	93	99	98	87	35	79
Female	25	80	53	53	32	10	47

There is a single peak in the 20-24 age range, a decline in the 25-29 group and then a bigger decline from there to the 30-34 group and a more gradual decline through the remaining categories. For both men and women the LFPR has progressively declined for the 15-19 category from the 1970's onwards. This partly reflects the increasing availability of educational opportunities as an alternative course of action but there has also been a proportional decline in this sector of the general population through the past 15 years or so. Female LFPR has continued to grow in the 20-29 age group though the past couple of decades until a more recent decline. There is currently about a 20% decrease from the 25-29 group to the 30-34 group.

It has been frequently argued that this type of pattern reflects the marriage and/or child bearing behavior of women. They enter the work force in large numbers upon completion of their education but there is a significant drop out rate after marriage or childrearing. Cho (1987) suggests that marriage is a more significant factor than childbearing in explaining this drop-out rate. The age group from 20 to 50 all show increased participation rates but the fastest growth through the 80's was in the age 25-29 group with the 30-34 group also showing strong growth. This may well reflect changes in marriage patterns with people tending to get married later. The 50-60 age group has a mixed pattern with a small peak in the early eighties and then a decline. The median age of the female labour force has risen progressively over the past two decades.

Table 6: median age of labour 1976-1990 (Source: HK Statistics, 1986, 1988b, 1990b).

Year	Median Age	
	Male	Female
1976	35.5	28.1
1981	33.3	28.1
1986	34.3	30.3
1988	35	30
1990	36	32

Again this is likely to be related to marriage patterns and family structures. Women have been getting married later: in 1961 nearly 85% of women were married in the 25-29 age group, by 1981 this has dropped to less than 70% and for the age group the corresponding figures are 51.4% and 28.7%. By 1986, the figures had dropped to 21% (20-24) and 61.7% (25-29) (HK Statistics: 1986, 1988). The median age for the first marriage of females was 23.6 in 1978 and had risen to 25.6 by 1987 (HK Statistics, 1988a). This does not reflect the fact that marriage is getting more unpopular generally : standardized marriage rates in 1987 were actually higher than in 1978 and the proportion of never married is actually lower in 1988 than in 1983. However, divorces rates are increasing: there were 2,087 divorce decrees in 1980 compared with 5507 in 1989 (HK Statistics, 1990).

It has been argued that marriage and the reproductive role that accompanies it represents one of the major barriers to women entering and participating in the labour force on an equal footing with men (e.g. Ferber, 1982).

Table 7: Percentage distribution of women in the labour force by age and marital status, 1989 and 1990 (Source: HK Statistics, 1990b).

Marital Status	Age group	Apr-Jun 89	Apr-Jun 90
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Never Married	15-19	24.1	23	30-39	95.5
	20-29	91.0	90.9		
	40+	57.8	55.3		
	Total	68.5	68		
	96.2				
Ever married	15-19	36.3	38.4		
	20-29	56.7	57.4		
	30-39	45.3	45.8		
	40-49	51.2	50.7		
	50-59	33.3	32.1		
	60+	10.8	9.3		
	Total	36.9	36.3		

It will be noted that the highest never married participation rate was in the 30-39 category and that it was by this point more than twice the rate of married women. However, the growth rates for married female labour force participation have been higher in more recent years than for unmarried women (see, Ho, 1984:949). There tend to be more unemployed unmarried women than married in the official statistics, but this may represent the fact that married women who are out of paid work simply revert to their domestic labour or to unpaid family business activities and never appear as officially unemployed.

Fertility rates may also be influential in women's employment calculations. Fertility in Hong Kong has declined markedly since the mid-1960's and has remained at a low level. The trend is moving towards a nuclear family structure with a small family size. In 1986 the average family size was 3.7 compared to 4.2 in 1976, and about 60% of the households belonged to the unextended nuclear family type. The fertility rate has dropped progressively over the past of decades and women are also tending to have children later. Total fertility rates per woman are now less than 2 compared with 5.17 in 1961. Indeed, the actual birth rate per thousand of the population has dropped from 17 in 1980 to 12.2 in 1989 (from as high as 40.1 in 1951, Chan, 1966). There was a dramatic 55% decline in crude birth rates between 1961 and 1983 (Chan, 1986:27). In 1980 there were over 24,000 births to women aged 20-24, by 1989 this had reduced significantly to 9,277, however, there was an increase in the 30-34 and 35-39 age group. The declining fertility rate is in part due to changes in the overall population structure but also to the rising marriage age, significant recourse to family planning, rising educational levels of female and increased female employment and income. In HK, Chan (1986) has shown that 'the higher the woman's educational attainment, the smaller the number of children she had' (p.34). The average number of children born to working women was less than that of women not working for every age range (Ho, 1984:949, 1984b). Furthermore, 'fertility was found to vary inversely with income.' (Chan, 1986:35)

While in 1961 there were at least 20% of households having the size of 7 members and above range, by 1990 this has dropped to less than 5%. Instead, by 1990 around 60% of households were classified as 'one unextended nuclear family' with less than 15% classified as an extended family composition. A study of Kwai Chung and Tsuen Wan districts of HK in 1985 (Chow, Tang and Chan, 1985) put the percentage of nuclear families as high as 77.6%.

In the Hong Kong context work is not seen as an individual woman's right as a means to self-actualization, a vehicle through which to express talents and creativity. Rather it is seen as an

extension of typical female roles into the workplace for reasons that are to do with greater good of the community or the benefit of the family. As long as woman's work is seen as an extension of their service role in the 'private' realm, it is unlikely that there will be a major power redistribution within the family or a fundamental re-allocation of roles.

Career-women are well accepted if the nature of work coincide with cultural stereotype of 'femininity'. Women are acceptable as director of RTHK, director of information, director of social welfare. But if we have women Director of Industry, of Civil Aviation, then they are regarded as too 'soft' to be qualified. We are talking about perfectly qualified women who are capable and have proven themselves. Then men are going to be suspicious and probably afraid. People presume that women are equipped better in dealing with people. They have a human relations skill. Given that a man and woman might have equal qualifications, you'll find that a woman will find it easier to progress in occupations where service is important.

In Hong Kong, 'work' considered suitable for women will be coherent with their roles in the family and will reflect the authority hierarchy found there where the male is dominant and of higher status. The fact that there are a number of women in hard side positions does not necessarily violate what seems a reasonable argument. In the public sphere, one could point to Anson Chan, the Secretary for Economic Service; in the private sphere, one might identify Theresa Lau, director of Evergo Industrial Enterprise Ltd. But these people are part of a minority within a minority: their numbers are so small that they are very exceptional and unrepresentative.

The sexual division of labour in the workforce has frequently been characterized by the differential spread of men and women into different sectors, industries and occupations.

The utilities industry has remained at a fairly constant level at around 0.5-0.6% of the working population since the early seventies and has remained heavily male dominated with women never constituting more than 10% of the workforce. The construction industry has also displayed a fairly steady level in terms of the proportion of the overall working population running at between 3 and 5% for most of the seventies and eighties but again has been extremely male dominated. It was always argued that it was the nature of the required work that was considered too arduous and dangerous for women, despite recent development in technological investment and improvement have undermined the importance of sheer physicality. The exclusion of women from these sectors represents more of a perpetuation of stereotypical conceptions of women as the 'weaker sex' rather than a rational consideration of actual work requirement.

Employment in transport, storage and communication has increased slightly over the past decade although it remains heavily male dominated: in 1961 only 2% of the workforce were women, by 1990 this had increased to nearly 30%. Similar pattern appears in the wholesale and retail trade, restaurants and hotels sector where the proportion of women workers has increased from 10% twenty years ago to 40% today.

Table 8: Percentage distribution of working population by industry by sex 1961-1990 (Source: Hong Kong Statistics, 1968, 1976, 1981, 1990c)

Industry:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1961 M	67.2	86.1	91.7	83.7	97.9	/	59.7
F	32.9	13.9	8.4	16.3	2.1	/	40.3

1966	M	58.8	91.7	91.2	77.8	96.4	/	63.5
	F	43.2	8.3	8.8	22.2	3.6	/	36.5
1971	m	59.3	94.2	92.6	76.5	92.4	73.8	50.5
	F	40.7	5.8	7.4	23.5	7.6	26.2	49.5
1976	M	54.1	92.8	93.8	73.8	91.4	68.5	61.4
	F	45.9	7.2	6.2	26.2	8.6	31.5	38.6
1981	M	54.4	90.0	93.2	69.5	88.0	59.7	59.7
	F	45.6	10.0	6.8	30.5	12.0	40.0	40.3
1986	M	50.4	91.4	96.5	64.1	75.3	61.0	51.5
	F	49.6	8.6	3.5	35.9	24.7	39.0	48.5
1990	M	52.2	90.3	96.5	60.2	71.1	59.2	48.8
	F	47.8	9.7	3.5	39.8	28.9	40.8	51.2

Notes: 1=manufacturing; 2=electricity, gas and water; 3=construction; 4=wholesale and retail trade, restaurants and hotels; 5=transport, storage and communication; 6=financing, insurance, real estate and business services; 7=services.

Overall trends, irrespective of gender, show a recent decline in the percentage of production and related workers from highs of over 52% in the 70's to less than 40% in 1990. This clearly reflects the shift in HK's industrial organization as it diversifies out of manufacturing. Declines in the proportion in production occupation have been matched by increases in all other categories except for agricultural workers and fisherfolk which, expectedly have continued to decline throughout the period. The biggest increase has been in the proportion of clerical and related workers from 5.8% in 1961 to close to 20% in 1990 providing further indication of the move from blue collar types to jobs of white collar, and the growth in the service sectors. There has also been a noticeable increase in professional, technical and related workers as technology becomes more sophisticated and the service professions have grown (5.1% of the working population in 1961 compared to 7.5% in 1988). There is the increasing participation of women in the clerical and related jobs where there are currently a majority of female workers (over 60%) compared with a male dominance in the early 60's (around 16%). This has become the second largest occupational category among women after production with more than 20% of all working women located here. Over 55% of working women were in production by the mid 70's but this has since declined to less than 35%.

Table 9: Percentage distribution of working population by occupation by sex 1961-1986. (Source: Hong Kong Statistics, 1981, 1986)

Occupation:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1961 M	64.5	93.4	84.0	82.0	54.0	64.0	72.0	89.7
F	35.5	6.6	16.0	18.0	46.0	36.0	28.0	10.3
1971 M	55.6	91.8	68.0	78.0	65.6	64.8	65.5	64.5
F	44.4	8.2	32.0	22.0	34.4	35.2	34.5	35.5
1976 M	59.0	91.0	58.0	76.0	66.0	68.0	63.0	71.0

	F	41.0	9.0	42.0	24.0	34.0	32.0	37.0	29.0
1981	M	62.3	86.0	47.2	72.6	65.9	67.9	65.7	73.2
	F	37.0	14.0	52.8	27.4	34.1	32.1	34.3	26.8
1986	M	57.0	83.0	41.0	69.0	63.0	65.0	67.0	88.0
	F	43.0	17.0	59.0	31.0	37.0	35.0	33.0	12.0

Notes : 1=professional, technical and related workers; 2= administrative and managerial workers; 3= clerical and related workers; 4= sales workers; 5= service workers; 6=agricultural workers and fisherfolk; 7= production and related workers, transport equipment operators and labourers; 8=armed forces and unclassifiable.

Women's role in the service sector has always been significant and remains so. Given the total number of men and women in the labour force it could be argued that women are over-represented in production and in clerical works. Women also feature strongly in the professional and technical category but one must remember that this category includes professions like nursing and teaching which women dominate and which are stereotypical perceived as 'women's occupation'.

Around the world women's pay has tended to lag behind that of men even when they are in comparable jobs. This pattern is certainly apparent in HK.

Table 10: Median monthly income from main employment of the working population by sex at current and 1986 prices (excluding unpaid family workers and voluntary workers in social or religious organizations). (Source: Hong Kong Statistics, 1986).

Sex	1976	1981	1986
Male (Current)	858	1801	3067
(1986)	1962	2745	3067
Female(Current)	559	1165	2143
(1986)	1278	1775	2143

Table 16 shows how women overall have continued to receive a lower level of pay relative to men and the disparity has only decreased slightly in the ten year period. However, these gross figures do not, on their own indicate pay discrimination since the categories of work upon which the figures are based are not equivalent. The table below shows average daily wages of labourers and thus gives some ground for a more meaningful comparison.

Table 11: Average daily wages of labourers engaged in government building and construction projects 1979-1989 (source: Hong Kong statistics: 1990)

Year	Male	Female
1979	85.4	70.0
1980	94.6	78.2
1981	105.5	85.3
1982	113.7	93.3
1983	119.1	93.0
1984	123.5	103.4

1985	129.7	103.3
1986	145.7	118.6
1987	185.7	154.2
1988	226.9	188.0
1989	270.4	221.9
1990	287.5	233.4

These female workers have consistently earned around 20% less than their male equivalents. The situation has not improved over the past 10 years. The differentials in pay are often justified on the ground that women are not often the main source of economic support for the family and that their wages can be viewed as supplementary. This is a spurious argument which begs questions about the role of women as 'breadwinners' and which fails to address the economic realities of many families and individuals.

Lai Wong May Ling (1980) studied the Hong Kong Civil Service and concludes that Hong Kong Civil Service is neither ethnically nor sexually representative of the population at large. Only 24.6% of civil service positions were occupied by women and only 4.9% of the directorate posts. Furthermore, male respondent in Lai's research indicated that 33 % of them preferred their wives to work as compared with 12.5 % who wished their wives not to work and that 53.4 % had working wives. However, both male and female respondents found the idea of a husband giving up work and the wife supporting the family to be 'totally unthinkable', thus implying that women may work as long as they do not pose a threat to man's dominant position.

The picture at Hong Kong University is probably not untypical of Hong Kong in general. In 1986 at the lecturer level there was one female for every 2.4 males. At the senior lecturer level there was one female for every 5.5 males and at professional level, one female to every 6.5 males. Some of this difference may be explained by poorer educational opportunities for females twenty or thirty years ago, so fewer had the qualifications necessary to progress to higher levels but it is unlikely to account for such very large differences at the senior levels and it certainly does not account for the differences at the lower levels. Ann Hughes (1985) refers to this phenomenon as tokenism; the employing of one or two women to demonstrate non-discrimination, a strategy which fails to address the main issues. It does not lead to the development of sexually integrated occupations and it does not eradicate vertical and horizontal job stratification.

Theoretically Ho has focused on sex-role stereotyping and sex-role socialization and its implications for sexual discrimination at work and the participation of women in the labour force. Thus she argues that 'the occupational choice process for men and women are accountable for by gender specific orientations which are attributable to the roles that men and women assume' (Ho, 1984:20). Women in HK are socialized into specific and sexual determined roles. This is clearly tied to the traditional conception of femininity and womanhood in traditional Chinese society where the role set of women is characterized by the reproductive function as child-bearer/rearer and as responsible for the accompanying domestic duties that support the productive role of others. The specificity of the position of women arises from the ideological assumption that women's place is in the family and in the prevalent assumption of the general subordination of other roles, if any, to the claims of domestic responsibilities. This sex-role attribution and socialization is deemed to have consequences for the career options society makes available for women, and more importantly the type of career/working options the woman legitimately perceives and is likely to pursue for herself.

Ho recognizes that women's roles have become more complex and that the exigencies of the industrialization and modernization processes have pulled women into workforce and created

situations in which they may assume multiple roles. It is likely that the reproductive roles remain predominant but this still means that women have to somehow balance their multiple roles. Ho argues that because of traditional sex-role expectations and sex-stereotypes women will find it difficult to conceive of a managerial role for themselves and may not make appropriate choices that prepares them for the assumption of the role subsequently. Many women will never come to perceive a managerial role for themselves at all and will not therefore take any steps to prepare themselves for such a role. Meaningful anticipation of the role is also hampered by the absence of many viable female role models.

Cashmore (1989), in his indepth interview of 35 successful career women, found out that many career women have to make very sharp demarcations between their executive roles and the private roles that they are expected to fulfill. A man may partially carry his managerial role around with him in social settings whereas a women has to shed that identity in the home and other arenas. She becomes fully a wife and/or mother - a woman - in other arenas and did not expected to appear as woman-executive in these other social terrains. In other words, a man's social identity can be seen as holistic. His identity is tied to his work role and there is no requirement to make identity adjustments in other settings. A woman's identity is fragmented. She may be a woman-executive at work but she must assume a different identity as wife-mother at other times and drop the executive component of her identity.

Chow (1986) proposes that women tend to have lower pay expectations than men and this may contribute to their continued underpayment relative to men. Chow surveys about the career expectancies of undergraduates students revealed that males had significantly higher pay expectations than women at both the entry level position as well as in relation to their highest anticipated pay at the peak of their career. At the peak of their careers men expected to be earning at a level 74% above that of women's expectations. The observations made earlier about women's lack of commitment to a career are partially born out by the finding that male graduates expected to be in full-time work for 29.6 years compared to females 25.6 years.

In Chow's survey, whilst both sexes rated promotional opportunities and interesting work as the most important career facets, female rated job security and high salary much lower than males and rated important work and friendly co-workers more highly. Women were the least dissatisfied with their promotional opportunities, but remember they did not rate this as important. They were most satisfied with the respect they received; the friendliness of those they worked with; the way they were treated by others; the amount of job freedom and the amount of job security.

Arnold and Luk (1989) surveyed a larger and more varied sample of women managers in HK and revealed a different pattern of importance and satisfaction factors than that of the Chau study. Recognition for good work, god pay, ability to develop skills, chances for promotion, and challenging and interesting work, were the five most important items from a motivational point of view. A great deal of responsibility, being provided with adequate resources, fringe benefits and working for a prestigious and respected company were the lowest ranked items. These display a difference from Chau study and reflect a balance of intrinsic and extrinsic factors. In terms of satisfaction, having good relationships with superiors and colleagues, challenging and interesting work, superiors who listen to ideas, fair treatment and having efficient and effective higher managers were the five factors ranked as most important whilst convenient location, good working conditions and having a job without too much rush and stress and being able to control the work pace were identified as the least important for satisfaction.

In short, there has been some equalization in employment over the past twenty years. Vertical

segregation remains a major problem: women are still be more apparent in lower level positions and occupations and are severely under-represented at the managerial level. Similarly significant wage differentials persist and are likely to do so without the impetus of protective legislation despite a slow trend towards equalization.

In comparison with women in other South-east Asian countries, women in Hong Kong rightly consider themselves very well-off indeed. But more surprisingly local women have higher level of contentment in gender issues than that of many Western countries. For example, Theresa W. N. Tsang (1987) compared attitudes to the future of two classes of adolescents, one class in a comprehensive school in the United Kingdom and the other in a government-funded school in Hong Kong. Eighty-eight per cent of the girls in Hong Kong sample wanted to further their studies at university with definite careers in mind in comparison with only 45 percent of the sample from the United Kingdom. This is particularly interesting in view of the greater opportunities that exist for a university education and the fierce competition for university places in Hong Kong. Eighty-eight per cent of the sample from the United Kingdom expected to be married with children and mostly not working by the age of 25. Eighty-eight per cent of the Hong Kong sample expected to be single and developing careers at the same age, delaying marriage until their late twenties.

These surveys tend to show that there is a relatively low perception of discrimination in relation to work amongst both sexes in HK, although women are more sensitive to the issue than men. However, there is also evidence to suggest that the awareness amongst women is growing. There may exist an apathy or ignorance about discrimination. There is likely to be a degree of acceptance, even legitimation, of inequalities. There may even be a perception that you can 'make it' in HK whoever you are and whatever your gender. But more objective data does reveal a higher level of discrimination than that perceived.

According to a study by Cashmore (1989: 120-141) on women in the upper echelon of employment, it was found that these women were no longer keen to promote the welfare of their lots once they have reached the more respectable positions. In fact they would even adopt a more discriminatory attitude towards their female colleagues as compared to their male counterparts. Women in the less advantageous position and in the production industries in general did make a few headways in improving their working conditions such as better leave and retirement benefits. Nevertheless, in terms of basic structural changes such as terms of employment and pay package, not much ground has been gained.

More basically, is the right to work itself the road to liberation? When women enter the public arena, does it relief their burden in the private? Does the development in late-capitalism enhance the choices and possibilities of working women or is it a new form of domination? Women are often said to have won the right to work, although they were already fully occupied with children and domestic responsibilities. In fact, women now have two full-time jobs; one paid and other unpaid, a phenomenon which has given rise to another expression: the double burden.

Appendix Three : Interview With Four Editors

1. Winnie Li: Chief-editor of Cosmopolitan

Date: 11-7-1992

Place: Coffee shop, Regent Hotel

Chou: What's the background of your readers?

Li: Modern women, mostly aged 23-40, career-women, progressive, open-minded and cosmopolitan.

Chou: Have you done any survey on the background of your readers?

Li: Yes, we do survey on every five years, the recent one was done in 1990. We sent 30,000 questionnaires and received 2,000 returned copies.

Chou: What kind of data and information did you gather?

Li: Lots of useful information. Such as the background of our readers, including their education, class, income and age, and more, many readers give lots of interesting and useful comments, both positive and negative.

Chou: Like what?

Li: Some are confidential, and for the rest, they suggest Cosmo should be more localized, less American; some prefer to read more on finance, China trade and other areas for women executives. We do incorporate many of their comments, and working on that direction.

Chou: What are the education, class and income background of your readers?

Li: Quite diverse, but most of them are young, executive, middle-class working women. Yet among our readers there are still 10% full-time housewives.

Chou: What is the main purpose of your magazine?

Li: We equip our readers to be a successful modern women. Successful in the way that she strikes a balance career and the emotional life in a positive way. Modern women have to face social expectations and pressure from different directions. We are talking about shouldering a double role --- successful career and successful emotional life, both are very demanding, requires immense effort, commitment and maturity. There are conflicts between the two. Career-wise, you have to be independent, aggressive, ambitious, objective, and bold, whereas your boyfriend or husband expects you to be sensitive, sentimental, soft, considerate and submissive to him. It is no easy task to manage the two. Well, I suppose the aim of Cosmopolitan is to help the readers to handle both worlds with wisdom and care.

Chou: Does Cosmo has an ideal image of what a modern should like?

Li: Not really, um...it depends on personal choice as well as personal style. There are different kinds of modern women, for example, both top executive career women and housewives can be very successful. There is no prototype. We object a monolithic image of women. The key point is personal choice. We give our readers lots of suggestions and alternatives. We widen the vision of our readers, from travel, jewellery, books, movies, fashion, accessories to...um...all topics really. Well, we project a rich and fruitful perspective of modern women. But it is the woman reader that makes her own choice.

- Chou: But you must have prescribed some styles, and preferences, say career, family, independence or fashion sense...
- Li: Yes, of course. We sell openness. We groom them to different ways of lifestyle, and teach them how to improve themselves in that style. For example, we tell them the differences among JPG, Gucci, Chanel, YSL and Dior. You do not have to dress their products, they may be too expensive for you, but you can appreciate them and select the style or look that fits you.
- Chou: Do you think Cosmo is classist then?
- Li: Not at all! Indeed, quite the contrary, we teach our readers to be a wise consumer, know how and what to consume so as to fit your own needs. There is nothing wrong to be beautiful, charming and attractive. It is by no means classist. Hong Kong society has reached the level where most people can afford a better quality of life. Why can't we enjoy what we have. Why do you think Cosmo is classist?
- Chou: I am just asking whether Cosmo is portraying a certain mode of existence and style that is inaccessible to the majority of women in Hong Kong, not to mention other working-class people in the third world.
- Li: No! you don't have to be rich to become stylish. The lifestyle that Cosmo sells are to be elegant, sharp, cosy and open-minded, not expensive or extravagant. For those brand names, they really deserve it. it is ridiculous to think that a 800 dollar (73 pounds) T-shirt is very expensive. Say if you buy a 100 dollar (Around 9 pounds) T-shirt, after washing once or twice in the washing machine, the quality or colour or whatever fades away, then indeed, the wearable cost for each time is very high. And a 100 dollar T-shirt can't give you the pleasure that a better quality and brand-name of better quality offers. I think such wisdom and philosophy fits most career-women here. That's why we are rather successful and popular in Hong Kong. Reading Cosmo is highly pleasurable, otherwise, don't buy it. We don't fit everyone, but why should we?
- Chou: What kind of pleasure it is in consuming these expensive dressing, say a 800 dollar T-shirt??
- Li: You feel more confident, you feel different. You even treat yourself and other people in a different way. It is not classism, but...um...say when you put on a very decent Chanel suit in office setting, it may cheer you up; you are more confident in your look. You may behave and perform better at work. It is an interesting chemical reaction. You really have a different image on yourself. It gives you a sense of pride, confidence and esteem. You are lifted up. And it is more than a psychological effect or self-deception. The whole world may think almost the same and you receive different treatment from others. Other people will be impressed by your confidence and performance. That's why it is worthy. What if you buy a cheap clothing in a department store? You don't feel good about yourself, it may disturb your self-esteem and even working performance. That's why appropriate look is so important. So why don't you treat yourself good and boost up your self-esteem. It works.
- Chou: Do you think such a stylish look is a middle-class game?
- Li: Well, There is nothing wrong to be middle-class, right? Um...and all magazines must have your own positioning and target audiences. You can't and shouldn't cater for everyone's needs. It's a myth. Cosmo is for the more successful career women in Hong Kong. We have a strong base. After all, we earn money and the readers favour us. That's why we are the most popular and the best-selling women's magazine in Hong Kong.

Chou: How about housewives? What is Cosmo's attitude towards housewives? It seems that Cosmo mostly concern with single career women.

Li: No, it is again another misconception. We definitely concern housewives. They constitute a big market, for us and for the advertising. Indeed, we have around 10% readers who happen to be full-time housewives and around half of our readers are married. SO housewives are within our target.

Chou: How would you cater for their needs?

Li: as a modern woman, you need to be cosmopolitan, knowing the world around you. I am not just talking about things like dressing, cosmetics, beauty, but also human relationships, office politics, social events and the finance sector. So we aim at housewives who are willing to open themselves to resources and information to the wider world other than routine and made-up. Hong Kong women have changed a lot. Most women want to have career of their own, not just a job, not just a family. For those married, it is the same...The new generation of housewives are indeed very energetic and open, they expose themselves to our on-going society and keep up with it. That's what we aspire for. Our image of full-time housewives is very positive, not some who is boring and bored, not a woman who knows and does nothing but cooking and waiting for her husband. Most of our readers aged 27-45, very energetic. We hope that modern women can be proud of themselves, as a modern woman. Whether or not you are married does not matter. It is the sense of confidence and independence that counts.

Chou: How about the working class women? Do you think they are excluded in the game of success in Hong Kong?

Li: Well, we don't exclude them, but they are not our target readers. Our readers are not necessarily rich. Well, I am not rich myself, ha ha...um...neither are my fellow editors. The key is your personal taste and aspiration. I like fashion, I like accessories, and I aspire to the value of elegance and style. So I work here. Working class women still have their style. If we don't fit you, then try others.

CHou: Do you think you have reduce the issue of taste, aspiration and style to a question of personal choice, without any perspective of the social and political?

Li: We are not a political magazine. Why should we talk about politics? Well, feminist always talk about gender politics. But that's not true, it doesn't fit Hong Kong. I don't see any problem for a woman presenting herself in a very pretty or even glamorous style.

CHou: How would you assess feminism then?

Li: It depends on what you mean by feminism. We support sexual equality, we agree that women should have more power and be equal to men. Modern women no longer depend on men, they are more independent and self-determined. But feminism is too radical, too aggressive and too masculine for Chinese women. We prefer a more feminine approach. We don't go to the street to march or demonstrate, but we still have power. Look at our mothers, they are the most powerful figure in the family. Men may have the social status and career achievement that are beyond the reach of woman. However, once back to the sphere of household, women take over. Whenever a man has to make decision, it is always the woman beside him who gives predominating advice. Actually, women in our mothers' era were the upmost leaders behind the screen. Adopting feminism dogmatically would be problematic to local situation.

Chou: Why do you think feminist is too aggressive and masculine?

- Li: Obvious. Feminists deny women's right to be feminine, to be a submissive housewife. You see, lots of women attain immense pleasure in playing these submissive roles. They gain what they want, they have sense of security, they have money, they have their men, they attain men's protection, and they give 'face' to their men, let their men gain the heroic sense of honour and identity. Wonderful, isn't it? Inside is the wisdom gained from tradition that has been practised for centuries. Women can maintain a very harmonious relationship with their partner. It is ridiculous to criticize everything men do, it is even silly to ask all women to be single or to do without men. It simply does not work in Hong Kong. Chinese women have our own way of doing things. Feminism is a western product, it may not fit Hong Kong.
- Chou: How about the American element in Cosmo? Don't you think Cosmo adopt the white-west definition of beauty and femininity?
- Li: Not really. What's wrong with being white-west? Hong Kong is an international city, having international taste. It is indeed the key to success of Hong Kong. We are open and are willing to expose ourselves to the whole world. We learn from others. We speak English, listen to western music, watch French movies, eat Italian food, read international news. We are receptive to the new trends and concern latest developments from all over the world. That's something we should be proud of. Traditional Chinese people cling to be too exclusive and narrow-minded. Most of them still have their minds stuck in the ancient world. We are living in an open universe, a global village. Well, you may not like Western values and Western way of life. But you can't deny that the west is leading the world. Like fashion, they spend one million US dollars for a fashion show. How much you spend here? Less than one-tenth. They are really professional. Look at their fashion trends, look at the creativity and quality of the fashion scene in Paris and New York. Look at their models --- superb body shape, stylish and professional. How can you complain about racism. No one discriminate against you. You have to improve yourself to compete.
- Chou: Why do you think western body more stylish and their shape better than Chinese?
- Li: It is simply aesthetics, the common sense of beauty. No one would think a short, fat, dirty woman is beautiful. Tall, slim women are just good-looking. You can't deny that. And what's wrong to be good-looking. Everyone wants oneself to be presentable and attractive. To em, it is silly that feminists criticize the beauty-industry. My naughty speculation is that most feminists are not beautiful at all. That's why they are so critical on women's beauty.
- Chou: How about beautiful feminists? Why they become feminists?
- Li: I never saw one, at least not in Hong Kong.
- Chou: How about the verbal content? Do you think Cosmo is too Americanized?
- Li: It is Americanized, but not 'too' American. Well, you know, we are a franchised magazine. The American Cosmo is our parent company. WE have to be consistent with their style. But it doesn't mean that we are racist. We learn a lot from them. We can use their photos, which are of far better quality. We can see their articles, again of high quality. But we are keen to add more local elements.
- Chou: You mentioned that readers did complain about the Americanized mode...
- Li: Not 'complain', but they preferred more local writings. Actually, we try hard to contextualized the American nature of the articles, but sometimes it is difficult because those articles, especially those on sex are directly from the American version. To find high quality local writers for such a sensitive issue is no easy task. Using translated American

articles is but for their quality, not mainly out of convenient or financial consideration instead.

Chou: You mentioned about 'sex'. It is a common stereotype that Cosmo is very explicit about sex. What do you think about it?

Li: True. Compared with other women's magazines, we are more explicit about sex. It is our strong point. That's why we attract lots of women readers. Sex is indeed a normal part in life. It just happens, no need to be shy, ashamed of or guilty. Cosmo does not treat sex as taboo, but encourages and teaches our readers to enjoy it. We are sexual being, ha ha...right? We have the right to enjoy sex. It is extremely crucial for women. Women are always told to avoid sex, to despise sex, to treat it as a male subject or privilege. It is silly. It is the real oppression to women. Cosmo treats women as independent sex beings and encourages them to explore our sexual potential and desire. We are very feminist in this aspect, fighting for women's right, doesn't mean to hate or override men, but to extend women's choice.

Chou: What are the readers' response?

Li: Very positive. You see, in Hong Kong, lots of women complain their sexual lives as too boring, repetitive and routinized, and their partners not very sensitive, too selfish, just want to fulfil their own sexual needs, etc. Yet, many women are too shy to talk about it and share their grievances openly. And they don't know what to do or how to share their feelings with partners. They tend to accept it, take it for granted, or internalize the concept of shame and guilt. We think it is ridiculous and so we bring out the issue as no big deal and encourage our readers to be open about sex. Many of them are still too shy to discuss the subject with other people. So they read our magazine and learn things from it. On and off we receive letters sharing their emotional or even sexual life. Somehow we are educating them. A great job we have done.

Chou: Cosmo is very liberating to some women then.

Li: Yes, we are.

Chou: How is your relationship with advertising? How important is advertisement to Cosmo?

Li: They are our boss. We live on advertisements. We are living in the age of advertising. You read ads before you consume. And you come across ads rather unconsciously. You have impressions and knowledge of certain brands but you won't be conscious that they are the images you have gone by sometime, somewhere...They are the Ads in magazines. Ad is very important for and in the modern world. They give you information, inspiration and even instructions to consume. And it is highly pleasurable to read ads. There are always cosy, charming, pretty people in it. Ad is our major source of income. Just calculate, selling out one inside-page's ad equals to selling another extra 2500 copies of Cosmo. Which one is easier? Selling one ad more, of course. It is so difficult to bid up the quantity of sales.

Chou: Do you think the editing direction of women's magazines are controlled by ads?

Li: No! But why! Ads helps us to develop our business and we help them to promote their commodities. it is a fair game. Both gain from it. Otherwise, we can't make a deal. Without ads, the magazine will be finished. And I think most media companies will be finished. That's why ads takes up considerable pages in each issue.

Chou: What is the general proportion?

Li: It varies. If you run an issue of 200 pages then you must have 50 pages ads in order to

survive. If your issue has only 150 pages, still, you need 40 pages ads. Otherwise, you will have a difficult time.

Chou: Do you think ads are sometimes very deceiving? They sell certain goods of bad quality. They give certain information that are wrong.

Li: No, it is rare that ads deceive people. No one will believe you if you have no ground...It ruins our reputation. And we do try the commodities ourselves. Say, certain cosmetics. We try the samples. If it is of appalling quality, we won't sell it. But I think consumption is a free choice. Hong Kong is a free market. Free competition is the best way to sort things out. The government is spending more effort on the supervision of ads. You can complain any ad that you think is deceiving.

Chou: Is there any conflict between the editorial and the advertising?

Li: No. We negotiate. It is a compromise. Indeed, everything is a compromise. Advertising agents and the commodity company can't intervene out policy. We have the final say, definitely. But we want to give our ads agents more choices of expression. Sometimes the ads agencies want us to add some articles or visual effects related to their ads. It is a fair request. Through negotiation, we agree on a mutually acceptable way, usually a cosy way to present their commodity. We don't have much conflicts, we share common interest. The ads sell their commodities in our magazine, and we earn money from it. Fair game, isn't it?

Chou: What are the future plan of the magazine?

Li: Confidential. Ha ha...maybe I can tell you that the verbal content will be more localized. Hong Kong is becoming more and more independent, having its own style, sensibility, concern and perspective. Hong Kong is very unique, where East and West meets, but at the same time it is in neither way. Readers enjoy topics with a strong local sentiment. The young generation is particularly proud of Hong Kong. We will develop a stronger style and image with the identity of Hong Kong. So the proportion of translated articles will drop. That will make our magazine more localized.

Chou: Thankyou.

2. Ann Ma: Chief-Editor of In

Date: 27-8-1992

Place: Coffee Shop, Regent Hotel

Chou: What is the background of your readers?

Ma: Quite diverse, but mostly young independent women who are more open to explore different issues...and who are quite fed up with the more traditional and patriarchal representations of women. In a way, they want to read the world from the women's or even feminist perspective.

Chou: Have you done any survey on the background of your readers?

Ma: Once, in 1990, we did a questionnaire. The result showed that around 90% of our readers aged between 23-40, 78% had tertiary education, and 15% of our current readers were university students. That means our readers are quite young and well-educated. These figures are quite different from those collected from other women's magazines.

Chou: How does that affect the orientation or style of your magazine?

Ma: Quite a lot. A lot of our readers are quite young and of higher education, they are more open-minded and more receptive to new ideas. They are mostly born in the 60's, grew up in the 70's, received tertiary education in the 80's and started their career in the 90's. They are less bound by traditional values and more receptive to feminist gender politics. Ask an ordinary 20-year old woman whether or not she thinks women should be married. I bet most likely she says that marriage is a personal choice, not something compulsory. 90's is an age of choice, women have different alternatives and possibilities. Many of them do not favour the idea to be a full-time housewife. Women in the 90's want a career of their own, a lifestyle that suits their expectations. They don't want to be confined by family, marriage or husband. They are not against marriage, but they know that when they get married, they will immediately become housewives, and that the husband will pose his demand and expectations of marriage on her. It's not what women of today want. They don't want to go through the same road as their mothers and grandmas did. They want to have independent lives of their own. This new generation is crucial to us because we need readers that are willing to explore possibilities for women.

Chou: Is In a feminist magazine?

Ma: Yes of course, and all our editors are feminists.

Chou: You mean all the editors claim to be a feminist?

Ma: Not in that way. We concern the quality of our editors. When we interview an editor, we discuss gender issues with her to see her viewpoints and how she feels. We need someone who has her own perspective, who is open and positive to feminism. She may not necessarily be a 'feminist' in the strict sense. For example, a year before we recruited an editor who is very bright and very passionate on gender issues. But she insisted that she was not a feminist. She found feminism too 'loud', too 'arrogant' and too 'aggressive'. We employed her in consideration of her competence and other sharp qualities. Then half a year later, she suddenly claimed herself to be a feminist. I didn't ask her why. But I think the working environment and experiences has changed her in one way or another, well positively. And she made for herself a new political statement. That's how it may work. We are all feminist or pro-feminist, not those waving the flags, but rather, I may say, in the essence.

- Chou: Is 'pro-feminist' your requirement for employment?
- Ma: I don't think there is only one kind of feminism, but many. We don't ask for the label, but how they think about women, femininity and some other women's issues. We want editors who are passionate towards gender politics, who support rights for women, who are against sexism and oppression on women, and who want to explore the local gender politics.
- Chou: What is your view on feminism?
- Ma: To me, feminism gives us a different perspective to understand gender. It offers a deep and critical socio-political analysis of gender from the perspective of power, especially the unequal power relations in everyday life...Ya...Hong Kong women are well-pampered, I may say, too insensitive to the power politics in intimate relations. They tend to take gender questions personally, I mean...as a discrete individual to another...Ya...I suppose In locates gender and intimacy in a broader socio-political context of power structure. No matter how sincere or nice a man is, he is still occupying a privileged social position. Basically, women are put in an unequal social relations with men, having far less social power, especially in intimate relationship, in marriage, in public arena, in employment...
- Chou: What is the problem in employment?
- Ma: For example, a forty-year old woman factory worker will have tremendous difficulties in finding a job, as most factories don't employ women over thirty-five. Open any newspaper and look at the advertising vacancies for factory workers. Over 90% of them ask for women under 35. The dominant view of employers is that women over 35 are inefficient, trouble-some as they have to take care of their kids. It is ridiculous. Why is a forty-year old man much more marketable, regarded as mature, whereas his female counterpart is a shit. This is blatant sexism.
- Chou: Would it be also affected by the subsequent moving of local factories to Mainland China?
- Ma: Definitely. Since the open policy of China in the 80's, most Hong Kong factory owners and business people have shifted their industrial plants to Mainland (China), enjoying cheap rent, cheap labour and cheap resources. The local women workers are facing a very severe blow. Many of them have to change to part-time simply because they are underwork, underpaid and most of all, they have to face severe competition from China. Those workers over forty are particularly difficult. Hong Kong bosses are now very reluctant to employ middle age women workers. They like young women who can stand more overtime work and heavier workload. And now they simply turn to China and employ Chinese workers who are far cheaper. The salary is less than one-tenth of that in Hong Kong.
- Chou: But what can be done? It is the by-product of the open policy of Chinese economic development?
- Ma: No. It's not something natural. The Hong Kong government is approving more and more applications of 'importing' Chinese labour into local industries, on the request of employers. The government takes the so-called 'economic growth' into account, but the idea caters only the big bosses. Influx of cheaper Chinese workers may lower down the production cost. But then it endangers the livelihood of local workers. The government doesn't really care about them. I agree that we have to try best to maintain high level of economic growth. But what has been done is only figures put on table. The reality is different. Don't rely on the government figures. It says that Hong Kong maintains high economic growth for the past five years, when the western world was and is in economic recession. But there is a gender and class subtext. The economic growth is beneficial only

to the investors; for the women workers, they are actually facing a more depressing situation...And, the situation for women workers in China are no better. They move from other provinces to Guangdong, the most prosperous province in China, leave their family, friends, partners, relatives, staying alone in Guangdong. Quite a number of them become prostitutes, or are severely exploited by the factory bosses and managers. They work in appalling working conditions. They are even forbidden to talk when working. Time for toilet is limited: three times a days and each time five minutes. They are locked in the factories for lunch, without any privacy or personal space. Time for relaxation is luxury to them. And more, they have no assurance on industrial safety as well as security. Take the recent factory fire and building collapse for example, more than a hundred died, nearly all of them were Chinese women workers. The accidents ended up in such tragedies mainly because the entire building was locked with no fire exit. Workers could not escape even when fire or some other accidents happened. Both Hong Kong investors and the Chinese government denied responsibility. And the compensation for the Chinese women workers who died in the accidents was only 8000 dollars (about 700 pounds) for each. It is ridiculous.

Chou: Is it also a matter of classism, as the situation you mentioned is that of working class women, whereas their middle- class professional counterparts are now very marketable in the business field?

Ma: True, we should always differentiate the situation between working class and middle class women...um...I mean, class location makes a woman's situation very different. Many middle-class women gain a lot from the economic changes of Hong Kong. As Hong Kong has entered a tertiary economy of services, many university graduated women climb up the social ladder much faster than their male counterparts. That was quite impossible for the women in the 70's or even early 80's. These women are the privileged from the nine-year compulsory free education policy. They enjoy the benefits of feminist movements and have a more flexible gender perspectives for women. They are the cream of late capitalism. Since they are pioneers in the male territory of the decision-making levels in the business sector, they are actually in a very dogging location. At the beginning they are the minorities and may have a difficult time with their male colleagues. But then if they know how to manipulate their femininity and play the game well, they start to gain benefits. Most men are glad to be lenient or particularly kind to them. They climb the ladder faster than men. Once they become middle-class successful career women, the next thing is to employ a Philippine woman as domestic helper. We have a pretty bitter joke that every career woman in Hong Kong have a 'wife', a woman from the Philippines to help her in the road to success. To me, it is really sad, as they enjoy the social privileges but don't feel anything wrong about the social system.

Chou: What's wrong with the social system?

Ma: To put it simple, it is classism. People in Hong Kong are too privileged and too insensitive to the issue of oppression. Not just on the topic of gender, but also race, class and culture. The 90,000 Philippine maids here leave their homeland, their culture, families, partners, children, friends and stay here alone to serve for the Hong Kong middle-class. Yet they are degraded by Hong Kong people and get very derogative stereotypes --- dirty, uncivilized, rude, impolite, ruthless, stupid, selfish and some other nasty attributions. Don't you think this is racism and classism? Most Hong Kong people look down upon them. However, when we meet a white man, we think he is superior. This kind of racist conception also applies to the case of a white woman. Many Chinese men are so proud and eager to have a white woman partner. He feels superior for it. It is also blatant sexism. When a white

man has a relationship with a Chinese woman, we think she is taken by him, whereas when a white woman engages with a Chinese man, we think he gets her.

Chou: How does In address these social issues?

Ma: We condemn it and make it a political issue. Most women's magazines don't deal with these issues of power and oppression, they reduce them as matter of personal choice. I suppose that is the unique position of In. Our standpoint is: there are various kinds of social oppression and racial discrimination underlying these 'so called' personal choice. Some employers may be kind to their Philippine maids. But the problem is not personal but political. We don't read an individual in a vacuum. Even when the boss is nice to her, it is not the point, as oppression is social and political. When you see a Philippine woman, you don't see a human being, neither do you see a woman, you see a Philippine. This premise presumes and implies an unequal power relationship: that the third world people are being politically oppressed and discriminated against. Since 'Philippine woman' means dirty, uncivilized, rude, stupid...those kinds of things that are inferior to what Hong Kong carries. Power and oppression is not concerning any personal deeds or vice only, but a more structural and cultural problem. It demands more fundamental changes, in the structure and the value system of Hong Kong. That's what we concern.

Chou: That's why In incorporates so many racial and cultural issues.

Ma: Yes. Gender issues never exist in a vacuum, but in a specific racial and cultural context. Hong Kong people are sometimes very racist. We don't treat people equally --- we treat whites as superiors and we treat all blacks and Asians (except Japanese) as inferiors. We complain the Philippine women intruding the spaces of Hong Kong people, and exacerbating the tourist industry because they contaminate the tourist areas where Europeans, Americans and Japanese linger around. It's awful, as if only whites and Japanese are tourists, that all other races should be kicked out of Hong Kong! But that is the concept of many Hong Kong people. It is really disappointing. We internalize the racist values of the white-west world. That we think and treat the whites as the most superior mankind. We have all these 'white mind' of thinking deep down in our yellow skin.

Chou: That's why In is very persistent on race issues, which is quite rare in Hong Kong's media scene.

Ma: Yes. Hong Kong is too white and too privileged. I always feel that Hong Kong is 'whiter' than the white-west, more capitalist than New York, Paris, London and other modern cities.

Chou: Can you elaborate?

Ma: We are whiter, as we not only accept the white-west definition and feeling that the whiter, the better, we also adopt the white angle to read ourselves: complaining people not (western) civilized enough, not (western) well-mannered enough, not (western) feminine enough, not (western) pretty enough, We lost our own subjectivity and cultural perspective. The situation for capitalism is of no exception. Let us compare the percentage of people having mobile phones, pagers and fax machines with that in London, Paris and any other western big cities. I bet we have a much higher percentage. People in Hong Kong are in general so aggressive and insecure. Most of them obsess with consuming brand names and other external 'decoration' to prove themselves existing. Perhaps it gives reason to our classism and racism: we heighten ourselves by stepping on other inferior attributes. We are insecure of our own identity. We need some negative otherness to confirm our ego, our selfhood. The 1997 issue aggravates the situation. People plan only short-term, become more insecure and more aggressive.

Chou: How's that related to gender?

Ma: As far as I know, Western feminism has been increasingly sensitive to the issues of race and class, and their relationships with gender. Hong Kong women always take their class and race privileges for granted, that we deserve all the privileges and power we have. We have no sense of what gender politics is, or how does racism constitute our mind set. In thinks differently. On and on we try to articulate our position, sensitize our readers to the unequal power relations between men and women, black and white, middle-class and working-class. So we did quite a number of related features on black feminism, local Philippine maids, women immigrants from China, middle-class women, etc.

Chou: How's the response from the readers?

Ma: Good, I may say. Many readers gave very positive comments on our features. They told us that they didn't have these perspectives, topics and quality of thinking seen in any other local source. In general, they found us very stimulating. Maybe because we are the only feminist magazine in the mainstream culture. But our problem is: how to popularize these ideas, and how to be in touch with a wider level of audience.

Chou: What is your main difficulty?

Ma: People in Hong Kong are very suspicious and even hostile to feminism. The usual stereotype of locating a 'feminist' is to see if she is aggressive, violent, ugly, bitchy, divorced, a bra-burner and a man-hater. Under such a misogynist social environment, it is difficult to sell feminism, or even be a feminist. People have all the weird ideas panning on you. Once I had a chat with a business woman in her 30's. I told her that I am working in In. She turned to me and said, 'Why are you so hostile to men? I don't want to be separatist!' I got stuck and wondered why we have such a stereotype of feminist. It's deadly disappointing.

Chou: What was your response to the lady then?

Ma: I asked her how many feminists she had personally come across. She said not even one. She confessed that it has been the general idea on feminists. Somehow she was quite uncomfortable and apologetic. But then her reaction reflects a wider social issue. People are hostile to feminism. They have serious misunderstanding over the subject.

Chou: Why are Hong Kong people so suspicious about feminism?

Ma: Hong Kong does not have our indigenous feminist movement. So the common stereotype that feminists are bra-burners, man-haters, aggressive, dropped by men...actually comes from the West. The local middle-class women have their own way to success, which is making use of their femininity rather than being feminist. They don't need feminism to back them up in attaining social status and power. And for those working class women who face multiple oppression of gender and class, they simply don't have the social power to fight for their rights. We feminists are fighting a lonely battle in Hong Kong.

Chou: Why don't the middle-class women support feminism?

Ma: That's simple. In Hong Kong, middle-class women are the privileged cream of race and class and even gender. They enjoy the social spaces provided by the booming economy of Hong Kong. Since the 80's, Hong Kong's economy offered abundant job opportunities for more women executives, especially in the service industries. Look at the figures of women studying in universities, working as executives in business, and even entering the political arena, you realize a significant increase since the early 80's. They are not the victim, but the privileged from the prospering economic development. These career women are very

clever and if needed, they even sit on the fence. I am not against them personally, but many of them twist around traditional womanhood and that of modern, depends on their situational interests and needs. If feminism helps to fight for their rights and benefits, they are eager to support feminism. But if they need help from men, they are the most willing to play the traditional role. Doing so they can get much help from the male easily and can avoid responsibility when they make mistakes. These middle-class women are not very friendly to feminism as feminism asks them to drop their patriarchal privileges.

Chou: Why should they drop the 'patriarchal privileges'?

Ma: It's not a matter of 'should' or not, but the reality is that these privileges are oppressive to most women, and at the same time it encourages men to play a more patriarchal role. If you understand more about the situation of local, majority working class women, then you won't take our privileges for granted at ease.

Chou: How does In confront the gender problem in Hong Kong?

Ma: Anyway, it is impossible to please everyone. And we must respect individual preference. But our task is to enhance our readers' sensitivity and concern to the deep root of socio-political reality of gender politics.

Chou: How?

Ma: The first thing is to politicize gender. Hong Kong is a very capitalistic society. Everything is reduced to a contractual market relationship, and we name it fair game. Gender is always de-politicized as a personal choice, personal negotiation and personal effort. There is no sense of politics here. It sounds ironic, as our society becomes more political in terms of voting, election, party dynamics and relationship with China; however, gender issues get more neglected. Gender becomes a popular commercial commodity, in cinema, pop songs and popular journals, no more than a casual entertainment. It helps people to get away from their working pressure and the disappointment from the political scene. It is very difficult for us to pursue the political notion of gender. People's sense of politics is just too narrow, to be confined in the area of government, 1997 and the international balance of power.

Chou: In's approach to gender is obviously very serious and feminist. How can you manage such kind of a-political social reality?

Ma: Difficult, of course. But anyway, we survive.

Chou: I mean, what is the response of your readers?

Ma: Overall, it's quite encouraging. Although our readership may be lowered than that of Cosmo and other popular women's magazines, our readers are very devoted and our relationship is very coherent. On and off we receive personal responses from readers sharing their experiences, pleasures and even changes in reading In. Recently, we received two impressive letters from readers. One from a woman now working in the Hong Kong Bank. She migrated from China when she was 15, having great difficulties in integrating to Hong Kong society which was too arrogant to accept Chinese immigrants. She felt deep to heart the cultural chauvinism of the 'Big Hong Kong-ism'. She was very impressed by our features on race and gender, black feminism, middle-class womanhood and Chinese immigrants. She said that they really touched her and have widened her vision. Another letter was from a local Hong Kong young woman who said that In enlightened her into the insights of feminism and gender politics. She mentioned that all along she was dissatisfied with the social and cultural demands to play the submissive feminine role. But she didn't have the language to articulate her grievances. After reading In, she was increasingly aware

of the mechanisms of gender politics and felt more relaxed and confident to articulate her female subjectivity, to regard herself as an independent being. It is very encouraging when you receive letters like this, something like a confirmation of what you have done. You are cheered up by them. That's why we survive.

Chou: In had organized an open forum in the women's day. Why is it so?

Ma: It is still experimental. We keep on trying different ways to present gender issues. In is a magazine, but we think it would be strategic that it can be used for multiple purposes. Organizing forum is definitely one of the alternatives. Early this year, we were thinking how to expand the readership of In and how to popularize our political platform of feminism. And we thought an open forum may combine the two. After all, we have a rather steady readership. And it is superb to understand your readers and to communicate with them, face to face. It is also a test to In. How many people will turn up, how would the response be? All are interesting and crucial to our future plan for survival. And women's day is a good choice. So settled.

Chou: How did you advertise the forum?

Ma: We only have the forum programme attached in our magazine, for two months, the Jan and Feb issue.

Chou: How's the response? How many people turn up and what was the format of the forum like?

Ma: Very satisfactory. We had about 150 audiences. We had three speakers, a local feminist activist, a feminist scholar, and me. After addressing for almost one hour, we had the floor discussion, which was very hot. It lasted for one and a half hour. We talked about general issues of women's situation in Hong Kong, the local feminist movement, government policy and some other things. It was a very exciting forum. We are quite satisfied with the results. We charged 30 dollars for each audience, but we still had 150 readers joining us. Quite good, isn't it?

Chou: Will you organize more forums like this?

Ma: We are still thinking. Resources is one of our problems; we have only three editors. The work-load is very heavy. But we are very eager to organize more forums, because I think the forum helps to develop and consolidate our ideas. It also serves as a promotion for In. Nevertheless, resources is a real problem. We are approaching a feminist group here. Perhaps we may collaborate a forum by the end of this year. We haven't decided yet. But both parties are quite keen. So anything can happen. Let's see.

Chou: How would you assess the local market for a popular feminist-oriented women's magazine?

Ma: Starting from the very beginning, we know that it will be a difficult battle. After all, feminism has a bad name here. The market is small, and Hong Kong readers are for a long time being pampered. They don't stand long and serious articles. It is typical fast-food mentality: people want short, easy-reading, sensuous articles, but no heavy stuff. It's not easy to run a serious magazine in Hong Kong. Hong Kong society is still misogynist. Feminism does not sell...has no market here. But...we still have a positive view. I always think that 'market' is not a fixed entity, but rather, it can be created, expanded, developed, explored or contracted. After all, no one is born with feminism or any other political belief and perspective. The ideas are learned from experiences, school, the media, books, friends and the mundane life. To be a feminist is a process. You have to be stimulated, sensitized and then you adopt certain part of it. You are changed then. It is an educating process. That's what In is aiming at. We try to explore the new territory of feminist magazine in

Hong Kong. We are the first and the only in the mainstream market, competing with other glossy women's magazines.

Chou: In always has very long articles, up to six or seven thousand words which is really against the norm in local media here. How do you make your readers patient enough for this sort of easy-type articles? Doesn't it scared your readers?

Ma: I suppose you must pass yourself first, otherwise you can't win your readers. We believe that there is a very serious side in gender issues. We try to educate and convince our readers what we believe. That's it. Yes, we have long essay in every issue. Usually, we have one 4-5000 words article for our main feature. The longest one was 9,000 words, which may be a record for a women's magazines, I mean, it's not a fiction or a story, but an argumentative essay. Quite unexpectedly, we never received negative comment on the length of our articles. Ya, I suppose it is a matter of habit. Hong Kong readers in general are pampered. Um...alternatives are possible. Sometimes you think alternative is impossible, only because no one tries different alternatives. If we stick to the norm and say things can't be changed, it's self-defeating.

Chou: What is your practical strategy to gain more audiences for a feminist magazine?

Ma: Um...just produce good stuff...um what else...One thing is crucial. You need to persuade readers feminism or any feminist idea really relevant to everyday life. Hong Kong people are very practical and utilitarian. Theoretical essay has no market here, especially in the mainstream women's market. You need to use very practical life context to demonstrate how would it be different if you 'buy' feminism. For example, in last issue, we had a long article on black feminism. We talked to the writer and ask her to relate the theoretical ideas to Hong Kong. At last, the final part of the article is about situation of Philippine maids and their relationships with local feminism and womanhood in general. It is a very good essay. I learn from it. It works. Ya...you must contextualize all the feminist theories in the Hong Kong scenario. After all, feminism has been a white-west cultural product. We need to have our own 'feminist theory' and movement that fits our family and social structure. Although our articles are quite long, they are relevant to everyday life of local women and not something very theoretical or abstract. I think relevance is very important. So far if it is relevant, even the article is quite long, it is still very attractive.

Chou: You mentioned that your readership is not too satisfactory, can you tell me the sales figure?

Ma: No, it's confidential.

Chou: But then how do you maintain the survival of In?

Ma: Luckily the advertising is not too bad. They feed us, ha ha.

Chou: Is it difficult to gain advertising for a feminist magazine.

Ma: Yes, very difficult. To be frank, it is a very serious problem for us. Money! Ha ha. I must admit that our advertisement is dropping, we have lesser ads than in the beginning. Maybe our feminist stuff is too scary for advertising agencies. It's really a tough case. Ads agencies do complain that In is too serious, too theoretical and feminist to put their ads in...um...they do have their thorough consideration for it. We have articles criticizing consumerism. So it is difficult to ask someone to sell their product in your magazine. And more, sexism is another serious problem. We are consistently against gender binarism. We criticize the myth and the obsession of women's body and the heterosexist ideology behind the idea of cosmetics and fashion. In the mainstream culture, women are reduced to nothing but an object of beauty. We condemn it. And it is very hard to attract cosmetics and

fashion ads. Naturally...I suppose. The other question is the stereotyping. I wonder if the ads agencies really read our magazine. I doubt even if they do, they are not serious. But then it is a common stereotype for a 'feminist' magazine, which is not a reputable name for ads. They think that your women readers are not friendly to the beauty industry. So they are more reserved when we talk about money. This is the reality, you have to live with it.

Chou: How would you balance the two, I mean having feminist perspective of your own and finding sexist ads to give grounds to your feminist project.

Ma: It is a compromise. But that's life, right? Life is compromises, depends on how you manage it, what you gain and what you lose. It sounds contradictory to use heterosexist ads to sell feminist ideas, but the point is 'do you want to sell feminist ideas?' We have conviction of our own, about gender relations and gender politics. In order to put forward our premises, we need to compromise and even concede. Anyway, we manage to stimulate our readers and have nice rewards...and I don't think one can live in the utopia. Consumerism and sexism are the social reality in Hong Kong, like it or not, it is a reality. The point is how to face it, tackle it, there is no point to stay away from it.

Chou: What is the future plan for In?

Ma: We do our review and evaluation all the time, and we always have flowing new ideas. Try to do a better job, of course.

Chou: Thank you.

3. Zie Yonder: Managing Director of Yonder Hall (Elegance)

Date: 1-9-1992

Place: Yonder Hall Building, Hong Kong.

Chou: When do you start Elegance?

Zie: In 1977.

Chou: Why do you start Elegance at that time?

Zie: I have been for a long time very keen on media. I liked to try various media, styles and presentations. By that time, I was quite free; I have just finished another business in media which has earned me great money. Then I was thinking over and over how should I use the money, on which medium to spend and in what form of presentation. Finally I decided to try something more adventurous and innovative. So I started a women's magazine.

Chou: Why, as a male, are you interested in starting a women's magazine, but not something else, like a men's magazine or other media form?

Zie: First of all, I didn't treat my gender (as a male) as a hinderance to the magazine. Concept, idea and ability seemed far more important. The main theme is how to do it. I was quite dissatisfied with local women's magazines at the time, which were confined to very feminine issues like love, relationship, domestic care, housework, cooking recipe and so on. I found it very sexist. They were out-dated and were using the concepts and modes of thinking in the 60's. I didn't think women should be confined to the domestics. As I knew, many women have been very liberated and open-minded. 70's was an interesting period. Partly because of the economic growth since the 60's, and partly because of the impact of the Hippie's 'sex and peace' social movement in the west, more and more young women in the 70's insisted to have career of their own, delaying their marriage, and wanting to know more about the world. So I thought there were space for me to start a different kind of women's magazine.

Chou: How different was Elegance then?

Zie: Have you seen our previous copies in the late 70's?

Chou: Yes, but only three issues in 1979 and 1980.

Zie: Then you can see that they were very different from the mainstream. Elegance was very serious, it was the only women's magazine that concerned socio-political issues, ranging from Marxism, ecology, homosexuality, human rights, hippies to many others. Can you imagine a women's magazine talking about Marxism, homosexuality and other radical issues twenty years ago?

Chou: Was you a Marxist at the time?

Zie: Yes, very devoted. Just like many other young people in Hong Kong.

Chou: How about now?

Zie: Ha ha...only idiot will remain a Marxist now! Time's changed. Since the rise of Deng Xiaoping and the Four Modernization programmes of China in early 80's, I was more and more sceptical on Marxism. There must be something wrong with Karl Marx. Or, should I put it this way, his contribution as a critic to capitalism, has accomplished and the process completed. He hasn't had many insights, that we find useful, left. Marx should be put to an end. The June-Fourth and the downfall of East European Communist regimes marked a full-stop to Marxism.

- Chou: Back to Elegance, is it true that the entire magazine was run by you alone, even the actual process of co-ordination, writing, proof-reading, photo-taking?
- Zie: Yes, basically yes. I was the proprietor, publisher, editor, graphic-artist, photographer, manager. Yes, it is my dream to run a magazine all on my own. The other thing is: I didn't like to compromise with other colleagues. So I did everything, except that I had a part-time staff to help me in paste-up and proof-reading. It was a hard job but at the same time it's really great fun. I attained tremendous satisfaction from it. The key is that you have literally full autonomy; the entire magazine was produced by you alone, from nothing to the first word, up to the end. That's why the magazine was so experimental!
- Chou: Was the magazine's division of labour rather loose at that time?
- Zie: Oh yes, normally only two or three editors handled the whole magazine. There was no division of labour between reporter, artist, photographer or marketing manager. We did several things at the same time. Before 1980's, women's magazines were mostly managed in very simple form of division of labour. Since the market was small and financial support was mean, each magazine was worked out only by 2-3 full-time staffs. The chief-editor and another editor usually shared the work of reporter, artist, photographer or marketing manager. Though they might have several student volunteer helpers assisting in the editing, the kind of 'persona' scale of production was typical in the 60's and 70's.
- Chou: How can you manage?
- Zie: To be fair, running a magazine was very different at that time. Far more simple and straightforward, I think. Advertising was not popular, or appeared in very minimal amount. So you didn't need a full-time marketing manager or account manager. Photographs were usually taken from foreign magazines. There was no respect for copyright, at least no one paid attention to the rule. So you didn't need a professional photographer. Whereas nowadays, each magazine must have one or even a whole team of photographers. For art work, it was also very rough in that era. Readers didn't expect glamorous packaging. They could swallow a full page of verbal content. So you didn't need an art-work designer. In this case, it's a different concept. And that's why two or three full-time staffs were enough.
- Chou: You mean you wrote all the articles?
- Zie: Not all but at least half of them. I invited some friends and guest writers to write articles. But at least half of the articles were written by me. I wrote the bulk of the magazine under a variety of different names, often female personae. This form of all-inclusive mode of production was not uncommon in the 60's since the circulation and the quality of the magazines did not require a sophisticated form of organizational division of labour.
- Chou: Did the readers know that you wrote so many articles in lots of female personae names?
- Zie: No. Otherwise, they might feel cheated. One column by 'Jenny' was a very popular one. I received so many letters from readers sharing their own experiences with Jenny. I did struggle for a while whether I should replied personally. I decided not to because I might easily disclose 'Jenny's gender. I just picked up one or two more interesting letters and then replied openly in Jenny's column. It worked. The column lasted for five years. Then I felt uncomfortable to go on. So I said that Jenny migrated to Canada and stopped the column.
- Chou: Why did you feel uneasy for writing Jenny?
- Zie: Um...stepping into the 80's, I was more keen to develop other media enterprises, and I started another magazine. So I simply didn't have time to write so many columns. I began to employ two staffs to run Elegance, later increased to three in 1985. And then I withdrew from the

editorial and became the managing director of the entire Yonder Hall enterprise. It's time for me to stop Jenny's column in 1982.

Chou: You mentioned that the mainstream women's magazines were still very traditional, very 'feminine'. So how did you marketize Elegance and to ensure its survival?

Zie: That's the most exciting part to start a magazine. Basically, you know whether you succeed or not in three issues/months. In terms of marketing, the first issue was the most important. But then you must consolidate your potential readers. Otherwise, even the best magazine can't survive. Nobody knows you. So I sent 3000 copies of the first issue free to saloons, hairdressers, beauty parlours and the women-hall in universities. I literary spent all the money on the first issue. It was a gamble. But it worked. I immediately received 500 annual subscription, which is still an incredible record.

Chou: Did you ever sent other issues free to your potential readers?

Zie: No, of course not. The first time you do it is wisdom, the second time is stupidity. And I needed not send the rest of them free, as the first issue already established confidence. They liked it and naturally were willing to pay from the second issue onward.

Chou: How different was the first issue, compared with other women's magazines?

Zie: Almost like a revolution. I used very glamorous package: top-quality paper, hard and full-colour cover, with all coloured photo pages. It was unprecedented. Content-wise, I chose the most famous TV star at that time, Wang Ming-chuen as the cover woman, using her great success in the TV soap-opera 'Family Changes', to attract our readers. And I put many advertisements, also unprecedented at the time, up to thirty pages in the first issue, which had only 120 pages.

Chou: How can you manage to attract so many advertisements even for the first issue?

Zie: Again, it was a packaging strategy. Ads sell your magazine. All the ads in our first issue were high-brow expensive commodities, presented in a larger-than-life style. It conveyed a sense of up-market high-street image of your magazine. Readers will take your magazines differently. As for the ads, since I have been working in the ads field for almost 10 years, I was well-connected to the ads agencies. I gave very handsome discount to the agencies so as to attract ads.

Chou: How about the content?

Zie: It was again based on a larger-than-life concept. It was very middle-class, targeting at those women who were rich but fed up with the lousy or low-market women's magazine. These kind of women don't like magazines teaching them how to be beautiful. They want something more. They want to learn to be thoughtful, intellectual, cultured. So Elegance stressed a rich lifestyle, not just high-street fashion, cosmetics, accessories, but more serious topics like book and movie reviews, columns of a woman scholar and a special feature for a special woman in Chinese history every issue. However, women readers always like to read more sentimental, more personal stories, with human touch. With such concern, though I put so many serious elements, they were presented in a more human and personal manner. It worked quite well, it became something quite high, almost intellectual, but not bored or academic.

Chou: How were the responses at that time?

Zie: Talk of the town, indeed. Partly because of the unprecedented package and partly because it was started and run by a man. Newspapers, magazines picked up Elegance and me as topic of discussion. I was interviewed by so many papers, magazines and even radio stations. The

comments in general were very positive, affirming how creative, innovative and revolutionary I did. I was flattered of course.

Chou: How about the readership and the sales?

Zie: I survived. The readership was quite steady, enough to attract up-market ads. From then on, the concept on magazines has changed. I may say I started the new concept of running a magazine by ads. By this I mean the ads are the main source of revenue. It was a new concept. Whereas before Elegance, it was sales that supported the survival of a magazine. I believed the importance of images. Especially when Hong Kong was increasingly developed and rich, people's living standard improved tremendously. I saw the future trend of image, packaging and grooming. So, I took Elegance as an experiment. Readers were very positive and receptive to Elegance. As you can see, stepping into the 80's, Hong Kong magazines were tuning into the Elegance formula --- larger-than-life presentation so as to attract larger-than-life ads.

Chou: How about the sales?

Zie: It's a commercial secret. But as I've said, that's enough to attract adequate ads for my survival. I can tell you, Elegance began to earn money since 1979. That was just the third year of the business, which was quite an incredible achievement, given the money I spent and the risky pioneering positioning Elegance was adventuring into. From then on, Elegance becomes a highly profit-making project in my enterprise. It has already been a very popular up-market women's magazine, up to now. Our readership may not be the top one, maybe less than Cosmo, but I suppose our profit margin is far better. It's the ads that make profit. We manage to attract very high-brow ads, and our price is quite high.

Chou: Does the fact that Elegance is produced within the Yonder Hall corporate lowers the production cost for Elegance?

Zie: Definitely. It's now very difficult to run one magazine. The production cost is simply too high. You need at least one photographer, one ads account executive, three editors for proof-reading, paste-up, art-work, writing and other editing co-ordinations. Then you need at least five full-time staffs. Above all an office, of course, so the production cost will be very high. It's very difficult to maintain. That's why media production has been colonized by big corporate. Like my Yonder Hall, we have 10 magazines, all are high-brow up-market, which includes horse-racing, cookery, car magazines, Penthouse and Elegance. This is mass economics. We have a group of six photographers, taking care of all the ten magazines. We have a photo-development room, things would be within our control, faster, more efficient, cheaper and with better quality. We save money by accommodating all the staffs of ten magazines in a big office. You know how terrible the rental cost or mortgage for an office in Hong Kong. That's why we work in this way.

Chou: But how about Cosmo, Elle and other independent magazines, how can they survive?

Zie: They are not self-sufficient. They are franchised. First of all, they can use the articles and photos of their parent companies. It is very beneficial as photos are very important section in a women's magazine. The cost for photography is enormous. On one hand it saves money, on the other the quality can be maintained in a high level; sometimes it may be better than employing a local photographer. Advertising is even a more fundamental part. These parent magazines, like American Cosmo or French Elle, usually have a deal with their advertising clients, that most of their ads, like Chanel, YSL, and Polo, will advertise in all their franchised magazines in Hong Kong, Japan, Taiwan and other places. Even when Cosmo and Elle started their business in Hong Kong, they already had many big advertising clients. That's utterly

crucial for their survival and profit-making. For example, if they get 10 ads from the parent company, and each account puts two-page inside page ads, let's assume 10,000 dollars as the average for one inside page, then each month they are assured an income of 200,000 dollars, just from these 10 ads. These are only profits obtained directly from the parent company, not to mention those they get from local market. We are merging in the international game. That's why we have more franchised magazines now.

Chou: Why didn't you start Elegance with a franchised magazine?

Zie: The scene was so different at 1977. Hong Kong was then in very elementary level of consumption. There was no enough ground to attract those international brand names. In that climate, Hong Kong market was not yet mature for franchised international magazines.

Chou: How was that different in the 60's and 70's? Why were these things like franchised, up-market-ads appeared only since the 80's?

Zie: The entire society was different, in style of living, in values, in presentation, etc. In terms of marketing and readership, women's magazines in the 60's and 70's had scarcely any particular specialization. Readers were mainly lower class and working class women. Women's magazines by that time sold very typical myths for working class women, such as tracing a young boss in love with the queen (young and pretty woman worker) of the factory, things alike. The fact that Hong Kong was still a developing city made the ability of consumption remain low. People consumed for necessities rather than for pleasure, images or style. Advertising strategy was very traditional, very loud, stressing basic needs. In the case of women's magazines, advertisements were confined to the covers or the pages at the beginning and the back. These ads were quite primitive, mostly verbal, with low quality of photography and messages posing direct appeal to basic needs. People simply didn't have the consumptive ability for luxuries. But then throughout the decades, women's magazines have changed a great deal. From the 80's on, those glossy magazines dominated the market. Most of them were controlled by big corporate, international cross-cultural and trans-national corporate. They were the by-product of late-capitalism, where people are rich enough to aspiring for a more stylish way of life. The investors intended to create new demand for their commodities, to bid up the capital accumulation and to expand their market. To achieve this they had to manipulate the desire for consumption, for one's leisure. People had entered the period of consuming style, image and form, more than the content.

Chou: How would you assess such kind of consumerism?

Zie: I think the problem of Hong Kong people is that we are too obsessed with brand-names. We take the price for their quality. To me, it's a stupid. For instance, putting Polo, Durban and Dior together don't necessarily fit. And each kind of high-street fashion fits certain people. Nowadays many people consume the names instead of the quality and style. Obviously we are rich enough to enjoy a higher level of pleasure and leisure life. There are millionaires everywhere. We are quite fortunate to maintain a well-off standard of living, especially when the whole world is still in economic recession. Lucky as I regard, for the last 10 years, we had the Mainland China providing cheap land, cheap resources and cheap labour for us. China as our backyard provides ground for Hong Kong to make money, so to maintain that kind of style of living. That's why all the magazines in the Yonder Hall promote excellency, the pursuit of perfection, a very elegant lifestyle. Well, that's why I coin the name Elegance, ha ha.

Chou: Going back to Elegance, what is your main target audience?

Zie: More mature women, middle-class, with immense consumptive ability, looking forward to

more sophisticated and stylish things.

Chou: Is it the same group of people you targeted when you started *Elegance* in 1977?

Zie: Basically yes, except that the age group of our target audience has raised slightly than in the beginning. I suppose some of our readers have followed us since the 70's or early 80's. We found that our readers are growing with *Elegance*.

Chou: How do you know the actual age range of your readers?

Zie: We can't be very sure. But we have done a survey two years before. According to the information collected, 98% of our readers were over 25, and 76% were over 30, the average age was around 35-38. We organized annual cocktail party for our readers. From these gatherings you briefly know what your readers are like. Of course those who come are always the devotee. Most of them fit in the type constructed by our survey, that means they are largely in their 30's or early 40's, middle-class, independent and mature women.

Chou: How is the form of your annual party? Is it casual or do you have a forum?

Zie: It's casual. I and the chief-editor will talk briefly for twenty minutes, then it goes to the audience to have a chat or whatever they like.

Chou: Usually how many people attend? How do you invite them?

Zie: Usually we have around 200 people. This year, we have 240, about 150 are readers and the rest are guests. We attach the invitation form in the magazine and on the other hand we invite our writers, some artists and other colleagues and helpers to join the party. For the guests, it is free of charge; for general readers, they have to pay for their own.

Chou: How much?

Zie: This year, it is 300 dollars (around 27 pounds), including a full-set dinner. We charged a little higher, only for the purpose of screening those who are very keen to join. Otherwise, we may have 800 readers packing in the ball-room. In spite of the charges, we still have a great deal of readers joining us. It is very encouraging and this is golden opportunity to exchange ideas and communicate with them.

Chou: Do you think *Elegance* is promoting a middle-class ideology? Well, 300 dollars for a dinner is quite expensive.

Zie: Expensive or not is a relative concept. In the eyes of a big boss, 300 dollars for a dinner is very cheap. But as I've said, we set the price a bit higher to control the number of attendants. We don't want to have 800 readers squeezing in the ball-room, turning happy gathering to suffocating chaos. We cannot manage. Put it this way, devoted readers no doubt enjoy reading our articles. Now they have chance to meet all the writers and editors, to talk to them and share with them. To be fair, I don't think 300 is too expensive in that case. And we offer a very decent dinner, free drinks, dance, lucky draw and most of all, fun. That's why every year we have more than a hundred readers joining us.

Chou: Anyway it is a middle-class lifestyle. There are still many readers cannot afford a 300-dollar dinner even if they want to meet their favourite writers.

Zie: Not really. On the whole it is the elegant lifestyle we particularly concern. We emphasize a fruitful, varied lifestyle of abundance, not necessarily middle-class. It's not the money or brand-name one's wearing that counts, it is the mood, the quality, the style. That's our attitude: to give our readers more high-brow alternatives, from music, books, movies, dance, literature, art, fashion ...even to cookery. As I've mentioned, our readers are comparatively

mature and quite well-off financially. So it is not our role or theme to educating them. We are trying to offer as many high quality alternatives to them as possible. And they enjoy...Um...of course you have to be practical to choose a lifestyle that you can afford. If You earn 6000 a month, it is foolish to aspire for buying a Porsche, however you can maintain very elegant lifestyle of your own.

Chou: You have stressed that your readers are already mature and stylish, then why do they need to read Elegance?

Zie: The point is, Hong Kong doesn't have much choices of entertainment for mature women. We don't expect a woman in her early 40's going to disco, Karoke or even tennis court, for fun. She is even too 'old' to appear in some popular 'seen-and-be seen' cafes. She has scarce good choices for nightlife or leisure. Obviously there lays sexism inside, as alternatives for a man of the same age is much better. In such kind of social atmosphere, reading magazines becomes the very important pleasure for mature women. Apart from entertaining themselves, they may obtain current information to keep in touch with the world outside. Here we don't have many high quality women's magazines catering this group of mature women.

Chou: Why not?

Zie: The concept towards middle-aged women in the mainstream remains very traditional. People expect a woman in her 40's stays a housewife devoting her time and effort to nowhere but her family. She knows only cooking, cleaning and caring for her children but has no sense about the world. The stereotypes for career women are no better. They are regarded as old-fashioned and boring shrew, with no interest in social events, fashion or trends. My experiences tell me that these stereotypes are wrong. I find our middle-aged readers very energetic, liberal and have concern over current trends in social changes. Even housewives, who constitute about 30% of our readership, are lively and up-dated. These women are more stable or settled in emotional life, career and financial situation. So they won't be too eager to chase after fashion trend, to pursue mythical romance or one-night stand. That's why Cosmo, Elle and Sister have no attraction to them. These women look for something deeper, solid, serene and cultured.

Chou: How does Elegance cater for their needs then?

Zie: First of all, we present them varieties of elegance and emphasize a balanced mode of life. In the first few pages, we have hot issues or recent news from big cities like New York, London, Paris, Toronto, Vancouver etc. Many readers have been to these cities and may have friends and relatives living there. Naturally they have great interest in knowing what's going on in these places, especially topics on fashion, scene, immigration policy of happenings of Chinese immigrants. Going on we have a number of features on local successful women from different fields. These features share how they manage their lives with colours. This section takes up at least 8 pages and has been very popular. Then we have the fashion series which stresses not trendy things but their practical and functional appeal. This series is sponsored by several up-market boutiques. Normally we have two local series of fashion, which are indeed advertisements of these boutiques. We earn money from this series and they present fashion that is easily within the touch of our readers. Furthermore, we have one fashion photo series from the West. In these years, we have established fairly good relations with some fashion magazines in France and the States, so we can get good quality photo in a fair price. What follows the photo is the lifestyle section which has ten columns, each with a special writer, on album critic, book review, dance, painting, fine arts, finance, China trade. Our strategy is to articulate a balanced lifestyle with so much specialities and pleasure. As our readers are no longer teenage or fresh graduates, our articles are more in-depth and professional. We look into personal finance rather than teach our readers how to attend an interview. We feature on

the art of marriage rather than passionate dating. We appreciate the art of tea rather than Christmas fever. It is the kind of elegant lifestyle with high quality. Then we have the column of woman in her 19's, 29's and 39's which can hit different target audience.

Chou: But you have mentioned that most of your readers are over 25, why do you have a column of 19-year-old woman?

Zie: It is a publishing strategy. Adults, no matter how old, are always interested in youths. It may be a kind of personal projection. Young age is always the most adventuring and fascinating in life. Even when you are in the 40's, you are still interested in the mind set of youths, to know what their lifestyle are and how they think. The column is quite popular, it is personal and easy-reading, a nice emotional relaxation for many.

Chou: How about the writer? How old is she? 'She', I suppose.

Zie: Yes, the writer is a woman. Not at 19, but still very young. Nowadays in Hong Kong, you can't find a woman of 19 who can have an elegant mastery of written language. And their thinking are too shallow. But we find someone young, in her 20's, at least not too far away from 19. She does quite well.

Chou: Which section or column is the most popular?

Zie: Personal features and stories. I suppose women tend to identify with something more personal. As we can see, the business world is too masculine for women. They have to struggle with men in a very tough manner. They have to be very independent, aggressive and ruthless. But once when they are alone reading a women's magazine, they prefer something related to them with sentimental approach, with human touch.

Chou: Are you suggesting something of a 'compensation'?

Zie: Not really. Put it more general, our society is achievement-oriented. It is a matter of fact. The entire society runs in that way. That's why it works. But when you are off duty and leave the office, you prefer something soft, more humane and sentimental. Many readers said that they want to split their world shapely, between public and private, the cold public world of competition and the private world of intimacy.

Chou: Isn't it a bit sexist to think that women necessarily like more sentimental things and human touch?

Zie: No, it is human needs. Men also want human touch. But society does not allow men to be soft and feminine. They have to pretend to be strong and competent. If society allows men to be more feminine, I am pleased to produce a different kind of male magazine, a more gentle one.

Chou: Do you think that we are in the trend that feminine men become more marketable now, more popular in ads and media representation, don't you think so?

Zie: I am rather suspicious. Media representation can be more subversive and off-bit. But it doesn't mean that it corresponds directly to the reality. We have more feminine representation of male in the media, but in real lives, men are still very concerned or even obsessed with the male image, a strong and potent image. I think a feminine presentation of a male make men more attractive and charming. I think it is a clever strategy for the modern men to reclaim their power.

Chou: Do you think they are hijacking femininity or are you supporting the feminization of men?

Zie: I don't want to make a general statement like that. I mean men are facing very challenging demand. In this age, you are not expect to be very sexist. Otherwise you will be seriously

criticized by women, especially feminists. But then if you are really feminine, then you will be accused as gay or too sissy. And there are too many men who still do not know how to deal with their emotions. Men are kept in a dilemma, a very difficult time. That's why I think it is unfair to criticize men as too sexist or anything.

Chou: How would you assess feminism then?

Zie: Put it this way, gender is not the most important thing in life. So it is foolish to over-emphasize the importance of gender. There are so many things a person should possess, elements like to be sensitive, considerate, open-minded, independent and have taste of your own. Let me trace an example: local feminists always criticize the beauty contest. But these contestants join the beauty contest voluntarily. They think they are pretty enough to compete. They acquire great pleasure throughout. Also it is a faster way to success. They sell their bodies, whereas a factory worker sells her working abilities, and an artist sells her talent. What's wrong with selling the body? Especially we are talking about adults who are doing something voluntarily, with complete consent.

Chou: But consent can be a very 'dogging' concept, you may consent to a very oppressive situation as you may not have much choices.

Zie: Yes, but it's the same for men. We have to pretend to be strong and competent. We are pressurized to attain career achievement. Otherwise, men and women will both look down upon you. In this sense, men consent to play the masculine role.

Chou: How does Elegance handle gender issue?

Zie: Our readers are mostly in their late 30's, having passed the stage of very passionate for feminism or any ideology. They have passed the stage for crazy love, silly ideas and foolish illusions. When you are 20, you think everything can be changed. Men and women should be equal and so on. But when you start working, then have career of your own, you get married, have two kids, in your middle age, things are very different. You won't think, 'how things should be', you think, 'what is the reality now, what will I lose if I do otherwise? Can I afford to lose?' Elegance never postulates an utopian world of gender equality. We ask for respect for both sexes. But the key point is to improve oneself. Don't just complain, about men, about job, about family or anything. Elegance really helps our readers to pursue for elegance, for excellency, for a serene and relaxed world of style. It is a very feminine world, not the sexist type, but one that you choose for yourself, that fits you.

Chou: What are the future plans of Elegance?

Zie: We have been doing very well all along. I don't expect any drastic changes. Our readers won't accept. And we are becoming more and more international, in the sense of exploring new markets in different cities and also in the sense of opening more global perspectives into the local Elegance. We are actually negotiating with an agency in London and planning to start a franchised magazine in London.

Chou: You mean there will be an English version of Elegance in London?

Zie: Yes, quite likely. The terms are still in negotiation, but the prospect is quite optimistic. I can't tell you more.....Um...our strategy is clear: go international.

Chou: Thank you.

4. Maria Chan: Chief-editor of Elle

Date: 25-9-1992.

Place: Elle's guest room, Central, Hong Kong.

Chou: What is the background of your readers?

Chan: Very diverse, they are from different social, class, religious and educational backgrounds.

Chou: Are there any common points in terms of style or orientation of your readers?

Chan: Um...fashion conscious, of course, otherwise they won't buy our magazine. Since we have readers from very different backgrounds, I don't think there are any common point apart from their fashion sense.

Chou: Have you done any survey on the background of your readers?

Chan: Yes, early this year. We sent out questionnaires and received around 900 valid returns. Most of our readers are young, with different social or education background. Concerning marital status, 71% are single, 29% are married.

Chou: How many copies have you sent out?

Chan: Around 20,000.

Chou: Do you have figures on age and class distribution?

Chan: Yes, you can see here, 93% are under 40, 81% are between 25-35. But the income and educational background are more diverse: 17% earn under 8,000 HK dollars, 25% between 8,000 to 12,000, 33% earn between 12,000 to 20,000, 27% between 20,000 to 30,000 and 8% earn more than 30,000. We got similar results on their education and class: quite diverse.

Chou: Why is it like this, I mean the diversities of your readers' background?

Chan: Um...fashion is not a certain group's exclusive favourite or interest. I suppose every woman loves fashion. Especially in the case of Hong Kong, you can't survive without fashion sense. Starting from childhood, a small girl is taught to dress in a beautiful way and to be highly conscious of her body. Look at the teenagers today, they are highly fashion conscious. Did you watch the TV programme last week? It featured the teenage girls, at fourteen or fifteen, who are very obsessed with their look. They read Japanese and American fashion magazines and they spend much money on these trendy, stylish dressing. They know the trend so well, and are even more fashion conscious than I do. That's why all women's magazines have a certain section on fashion, are filled with photos, models, dressing and accessories. And for the grown-up women, fashion is partly for career's sake, and as a kind of survival strategy. You need to have a presentable look, an attractive style to up-grade your market value. People expect you to dress good. The problem is particularly acute in Hong Kong. The pop culture of Hong Kong changes unexpectedly fast. We follow the western world, I mean largely their trends, very closely. We follow closely the fashion shows, the performances, and the fashion style in Paris, Tokyo, New York. As a modern woman, you need to know the trend.

Chou: Why are Hong Kong people, and in this context, women, so obsessed with fashion?

Chan: Hong Kong people are generally quite well-to-do. Look at the youths. They have so much

money to consume brand names. I have no idea where do they get the money, but the general scene is that, they are encouraged or forced to take up fashion and brand names. When most of the students in school buy Mandarin Duck school-bags, then how can you stay in peers without one? You may condemn this kind of attitude, but the social and group pressure is so terribly real. You cannot avoid it. It is not good, but it is a matter of fact. Hong Kong is a strange society, fashion trend of one kind or another lasts just three months. When I was small, people told me 'one generation' was twenty years. But last Friday, I met a seventeen-year old woman who was quite trendy and 'in'. She told me that she couldn't communicate with teenagers. I was puzzled as she is herself a teenager. She is only seventeen. Then I asked, "How old are 'those' teenagers?" She said, "They are around fourteen and fifteen." She said she was too old to communicate with them. I was stunned...Heavens...Hong Kong is quite a bizarre society. Things change too fast here, in between the seventeenth and the fifteenth may have several generations. The situation for fashion is similar. Fashion comes and goes. Not only is clothing, but also other popular trends, such as Karaoke, it was fun of the town for a year, at that period everyone went for it. There were once more than 600 karaokes, but then it has been out-dated. People will laugh or even ridicule if you say 'I love karaoke' now. Just one year ago, everyone in town was crazy for karaoke.

Chou: Is it a very demanding task to chase the fashion trend?

Chan: Not necessarily, it really depends on your own attitude. You can feel the social pressure, of course. But then, not being in the trend may denote compliment. If you know nothing but to stick to the trend, then you are playing a losing game. There is no pleasure, just pressure. It seems to me foolish and dull to copy the trend and style of New York or Tokyo. However, if you take it as entertainment, as a way to please yourself, or if you are finding something that fits your style, that may cheer yourself up and if you do appreciate designers' creativity, it becomes interesting and pleasurable.

Chou: What kind of pleasure is there?

Chan: So many. For instance, beauty. Everyone loves to see beautiful things, beautiful people, beautiful dresses, beautiful bodies. When you see a gorgeous model dressing in very stylish and marvellous way, you enjoy her beauty; and it stimulates you, cheers you up. You may have a new perspective on fashion or even on yourself. Then you learn from it, you may copy it, modify it, then gradually you know how to dress in a more stylish way. You try to present yourself in a different way from the days before. It seems that you control your body, how it is like, how to cover your weaknesses and how to show your beauty. Look at those who have good fashion sense, they always give people a new and fresh look. They look different every time. That's why so many women are so obsessed with fashion, cosmetics, accessories and style.

Chou: You mentioned that consumption gives you a sense of control, about your own body. Can you elaborate?

Chan: Most women like to consume, it is highly pleasurable. When you are too bored, not in a cheerful mood, consumption can be a good way out. Try to recall the last time when you was in a wonderful look, you must be so proud of yourself. You would feel confident. It cheers you up.

Chou: How about 'you control your body', as you said?

Chan: It's obvious, I mean you control the way and style you look, you control which kind of image and impression other people uphold. It is a way to define yourself. Ya, you define

yourself. Your personality may be very impressive or nasty, but your outlook is the first thing that people notice, and at the same time the outlook is what people in the first impression attracts you. Of course, you have to spend what you can afford. But it is a fair play. Fashion gives you much psychological gratification.

Chou: So you are very positive to consumption, I mean Elle is very positive to consumption, isn't it?

Chan: Yes and no. As a consumer, you have to be very careful. Many people spend much money buying expensive clothing, but are still dressing in bad taste. It is the style and taste that matters. That's what Elle is about. We hope to uplift, to educate and to share with our readers the sense of fashion and beauty. The problem for Hong Kong people is that they are very fashion conscious but not many have good fashion sense. Many women spend much time on fashion, some simply cannot go out within one-hour's time for dressing. Many of them put as much brand-name clothing and accessories as they can, in a very awful manner. Really weird. They are very fashion conscious but have no sense of fashion. That's what bad taste is.

Chou: What kind of style or fashion sense Elle prefers? I mean fashion style?

Chan: We adopt no specific rule, depends on your style, taste, body shape, personality, career...um...and the social trend. The models of Elle are not the glamorous type with big breasts and sexy eyes. Our audiences are young, independent, stylish and not too rich. So we explore more possibilities like ethnic style, peaceful mood, teenage look, pregnant women's look and so on, more alternatives, I mean. Our enemy is standardization, that everyone rushes for the same style, same look, same dress. We encourage our readers to be more novel, more independent, have style of your own. Be young, energetic, confident, that's what fashion is about.

Chou: Do you think there is an agist bias here?

Chan: Why agist? What do you mean by that?

Chou: I mean consumption can be a nice way to cure emotional problems, at least temporarily, but only so for those who can afford. For ageism, I refer to the image of Elle as for the young, stylish women. It seems that local women's magazines focus mostly on young women. Older women are neglected.

Chan: No, it is not the case. For us, 'young' is a state of mind, not necessarily the age. You can see, many women today at the age of forty-five or fifty can still be very young. It is the attitude and the style that cheers people up and they may express their mood of serenity and positive attitude of life on the way they dress. People won't feel your age, but are touched by your open-mindedness and passion towards life. Therefore, there is nothing agist here. I think the traditional concept of youth and style has been very conservative and biased, as if only young people could have trendy look and style. We encourage our readers to break through the structured categories of style, like the dichotomy between serious art and popular cliché, male dressing and female dressing, and so on. We don't need much preconception of what beauty is. You can create it, something that really fits you. If there is anything we strongly prefer, it is the style. You can call it postmodern if you like. To my understanding of postmodern fashion, it precisely articulates a sense of energy, creativity and urbanity that are not confined by one's age.

Chou: What do you mean by 'postmodern'?

Chan: It refers to the general condition of our society for the time being. People today consume

not only the commodity itself but also the image and style represented by the commodity. It is the package that first attracts you. Go to buy a watch, a dress, shoes, or even very functional goods like a TV set or a rice-cooker. Then you realize that apart from their functions and practicalities, you also concern their styles and presentations: do they make you feel good, modern, trendy and stylish, things like that. When we consume, we consume more the feelings and the sense of urban, modern, young, style, classy and other adjectives that are positive in our society. The functions of the commodity becomes minor.

Chou: How about gender roles and identity? Do you think postmodern has anything to do with gender? And what is your view on it?

Chan: As I understand, postmodernism challenges the rigid gender roles and boundaries of traditional society. Things like girls like dolls, boys like machine gun; girls are feminine, big boys shouldn't cry and so on. It is no longer the case in Hong Kong now. Even the conservatives won't insist that men should have striking career and women should be submissive housewives. Times has changed. More men accept a relatively feminine portrayal of men, more men use perfume, wear ear-ring, some male celebrities even wear skirts. Generally speaking, we are more open on gender roles. And for women, the situation is even more acute. Most women are not going to play the submissive roles any more. They feel free to express their subjectivity and develop their identity. Woman no longer need a man or a husband to confirm or define herself. Many women are very comfortable with a single status. Being single doesn't mean anything particular, she has her own life, career, emotional life and is financially independent. I don't mean modern women are rejecting marriage or men, just that they want equal partnership and relationship that enhances their subjectivity, instead of confining themselves to the traditional expectations as care-takers and sacrificers.

Chou: Then do you think Elle is feminist-positive?

Chan: Depends on what you mean by feminist-positive. We support women's right and think that our society has long been patriarchal. Things have to be done to improve the situation, especially on women's social status and spaces. But we cannot just stress women's right or women's power, because we are also human beings. We are human beings before we are anything. Human nature is more important than elements of class, age, religion, education or gender. If the rights and privileges of certain sex is over-emphasized, say women's rights, then it becomes reverse discrimination. For Elle, we stress that we are human beings before we are man or woman or anything.

Chou: Do you think that feminism is trapped by the kind of reverse discrimination you are talking about?

Chan: I am not sure. I don't know many feminists personally. I think women should be independent, or should have more social spaces and respect for independent choices. But that does not mean that we are or we should against men. I am against gender dualism. Sometimes I wonder if people can be discretely separated into masculine and feminine. Certainly, we are either man or woman, but so what? A woman can be very masculine, very independent, very boyish, has so many so-called masculine traits and possibilities. So does man, a man can be feminine, sentimental, subtle, or anything. I won't be too obsessed with gender.

Chou: Do you think Elle promotes androgyny?

Chan: The word is too big...um...androgyny may not be the right word. I prefer to say diversity. Elle does have a great number of models and photo series with very androgynous looks.

But that is not the policy or our ideal type of model. We think women should have more choices, more alternatives of different style. In general, we do not fancy the traditional definition of women's beauty, which means white, sexy, seductive, big breasts, slim, glamorous and very feminine. We promote diversities. We don't have a standard definition of women or what women should be like. We respect differences.

Chou: What do you think about the trend of feminine men? How popular is it and do you think it is very positive to gender equality?

Chan: I think it is too early to say, the scene is still changing. For the time being, it is still a very middle-class trend. Only those westernized, middle-class yuppies dare to dress in more feminine way. The mainstream remains largely conservative. When a man wears ear-ring, gels or colours his hair, dresses in a more avant-garde way to go shopping in arcades, he may be criticized as too feminine, too sissy or gay. For Elle, we are very positive to feminize men; or should I say we support diversities, hoping that more men are willing to explore more fashion possibilities. Of course, it is more important that men not only concern how to change their outlook but also their behaviour: to be more sensitive, to have more respect for women and to develop more subtleties.

Chou: You stressed 'diversities', it seems that Elle actually prefers a rather middle-class, brand-name type of fashion which may has its own class bias. Do you agree?

Chan: No, we are not emphasizing brand-names at all. We even condemn obsession of brand-names, putting them together in a loud manner, or dressing certain expensive clothing that doesn't suit your body and personality. Concerning the class bias, I think a minimal degree of class bias is inevitable. And it may not be a bad thing. Better quality and stylish dressing usually cost more, which isn't a bad something. They are better designed, with better cutting, better quality, and well-promoted. Naturally, they deserve a higher price, isn't it? Concerning the photo series, sometimes they are not completely controlled in our hands. Some of the fashion series are sponsored by certain famous boutiques down-town. They borrow us the clothing which are the newest and of superb style and quality. They cost much more of course. As a fashion magazine, we need to have sponsorship for the fashion photos, otherwise, we will go bankrupt.

Chou: How do you bargain with the sponsorship? Can't you select the clothing that suit Elle?

Chan: Yes of course, but the practical problem is: we don't have enough staffs. We can only afford to talk to our sponsors briefly, and then they select the clothes for us. And we call our photographers to take photos. The boutiques have to promote their products and we need photos and money. So it is a fair game. I suppose the source of high quality fashion photos is always a vexing problem for a fashion magazine. And money is a practical constrain of course. How can you manage to get constant supply of high quality fashion photo? A real problem. That's why sponsorship from these boutiques is necessary and so common.

Chou: Is Elle still a fashion magazine? It seems to me that Elle is changing, as previously it is a fashion magazine mostly consists of photo series on fashion. But recently, it has been stressing on the verbal content, with increasing articles concerning different lifestyles and forms of life in Hong Kong?

Chan: It is, we have changed a lot in this aspect. It is not an abrupt process. Since 1991, we started to add more verbal contents to the magazine, hoping to enrich the magazine. We don't want merely fashion photos, but energetic and diversified of entertainments. At first,

we added more interesting and catchy topics, like a column with local famous women and features on issues like dating, romance, family, office politics. Later we have several columns on movies, books, albums, performance arts review etc. Since early this year, we have had a special feature in each issue, usually occupying around 10 to 12 pages, on local issues like cohabitation, intimacy, homosexuality, feminism, health food, women's movie and feminist art in Hong Kong. Our topics are quite diverse and content rather serious. Yes, we have significantly increased our verbal content.

Chou: Why is there such a change?

Chan: To be frank, managing an up-market fashion magazine in Hong Kong is a hard job. All women's magazines have a considerable portion for fashion. But those fashion fanatics, they will subscribe foreign fashion magazines from Tokyo, Paris or New York, like *Moda*, *Haute Couture*. These magazines are far more professional, rigorous, and in. Above all, they locate the fashion trend of the entire world. Hong Kong fashion is not yet gone by the stage of copying the newest trend in the West and in Tokyo. So if you are really a fashion fans, why not read their latest 'in' magazines? For general readers, a general women's magazine has adequate fashion information and photos. I may say, *Elle* is in a catch 22 dilemma.

Chou: Then how come you have more verbal content? Is it a survival strategy to win more readers?

Chan: All along, we try to win the local market. But then, we gradually realize that readers do want to read more, not just fashion. The psychic is very interesting. They take *Elle* as a fashion magazine and are proud of buying and reading us. It somehow confirms and defines their fashion sense. Nevertheless they find it too boring to read a 200-page magazine with only fashion and things related to fashion. When we put some interesting articles in between the photos, they read them quite positively. Maybe when they read a 200-page fashion magazine, they are well-prepared to shift to some verbal elaboration, other than just fashion, fashion all the time. These articles need not be directly related to the fashion series. Readers have different interests, need not be confined to any single area. We stay a fashion magazine. But we decided to have more diversities and that's why we decide to increase the proportion of verbal content.

Chou: What are the responses of your readers?

Chan: Quite good in general. Many columns and features are highly appreciated. For example, the interview features has always been a popular one. Many readers mention about it. Readers like to read something more personal, especially when the woman interviewee has some interesting stories and very impressive feelings of her own, readers enjoy them very much. Women want to share with others. Our feature in each issue is also well-received by readers. Last feature on homosexuality received very popular and good response. Our sales figure is among the top for the past two years. Take the last issue as an example, we presented a very serious and objective perspective on homosexuality, with the opening essay narrating the recent academic researches and findings in the past twenty years in the Western world. It was followed by an article featuring the local situation of lesbian and gay movement, both the general history and the present situation. Then came three more personal interviews on three lesbians of very different style. Finally, we had an article on the situation of the lesbian movement in Hong Kong, or why wasn't there a powerful lesbian movement in Hong Kong. This feature proved to be very popular. I think the reason is that, we have been very objective and tended to be more lesbian-centred, which is quite rare in local journalistic features on homosexuality. We didn't treat homosexuality a sin,

disease, sickness or any weird thing. It is just a different sexual orientation. We tried to understand homosexuality from their own perspectives. That's why we invited one lesbian to write the essay on local lesbian movement, a local gay activist to write the history of lesbian and gay movement, and an academic scholar to write the article on academic researchers concerning homosexuality. It is quite unusual here, indeed it is the first time, that all the articles in our main feature were written by guest writers. We play the role of co-ordinating the entire feature and writing the preface only. It turned out to be quite a successful one. We did worry would it be too serious or academic, but the readers' response was quite encouraging. I think there have been too many distortions on gay and lesbian. And it is not common to focus on lesbian without distorting them to be just a male-female, or butch-femme role play, or the standard cliché that they come from broken families, are disappointing children, dumped by their boyfriend, hostile to men and so on. So if we have high quality features, readers would like it even if it is very serious. Anyway, don't underestimate the readers. They are not of low standard. It is the media participants who always give excuse to themselves, saying how crap readers and the masses are, so they go on to produce all these rubbish products. In our experiences, Hong Kong audiences are quite selective. However, there are not many real alternatives. That's the problem.

Chou: You mentioned about homosexuality, do you think that the local women's magazines are in general rather heterosexist, that they always take heterosexuality as the norm and rarely respect homosexuality as a legitimate form of sexual orientation?

Chan: I think it is true that heterosexuality has always been taken as the norm, like it or not, it is the fact here. We do not promote homosexuality, but we think they should be respected.

Chou: Elle is a French franchised magazine, do you have to follow any instructions and guidelines from the French parent company?

Chan: No, we do have autonomy. We send every issue to France and they will have comments on us. Usually, the comments are quite fair, mostly concerning the quality of photos, style and the general flow of the magazine.

Chou: Do you have to translate the verbal comment to them?

Chan: Not word by word. But we have a short summary of each article. Very occasionally they will ask for the full translation. Because they have to pay for it anyway.

Chou: Can you tell what kind of comments you usually received?

Chan: Most comments are on the photo-series. For the verbal content, the French company to a large extent respects our cultural context and specific needs.

Chou: Is it true that in 1989, the French parent company did intervene severely and asked Hong Kong Elle to minimize the verbal content?

Chan: Yes, at the summer of 1989, we received a letter from the French company, saying that the quality of the photo series was very unstable and mediocre, thus pressing us to have stricter control and quality control over the quality. They promised to supply more photos for us to choose. They also reminded us to keep the visual-verbal proportion, to put emphasis back to fashion and photo series, as Elle is and will continue to be a fashion magazine.

Chou: What was the reaction of the editors here? Do they feel irritated?

Chan: No, I think the comments was fair. Our photo's quality was sometimes quite unstable. The quality has improved after they sent us more varieties and more up-to-date fashion photos. After all, the quality of their fashion series is really of international professional quality.

It's the result of first class design, first class photographers, first class management, and of course, first class investment. I mean they spend much money on fashion shows, design, production and promotion. Concerning the visual-verbal proportion, we have different ideas. But we are a franchised magazine, as a matter of fact, we have to respect the parent company's original style. We hope to have more verbal content. However they have their style and policy. We have signed contract with them, so we have to live with it.

Chou: Then how come Elle in these two years has increased its proportion on verbal content?

Chan: It's largely because of the changes of the policy of the parent Elle. In early 1991, they informed us that they would suggest greater autonomy for different franchised offspring. They supported each has her own approach in catering her own unique needs in different socio-cultural context. They opted for localization and de-centralization, urging us to have Elle suiting the specific context and needs of the indigenous cultural market. We argued for a greater proportion of verbal content. They agreed. So, that's it.

Chou: How would you assess the changes in these two years?

Chan: As I've said, the changes have been welcomed by our readers.

Chou: The publishing industry in recent years complained on the dropping of general readership for serious books. It seems that the audio-visual industry has seriously threatened the publishing. I mean verbal content is not as popular as before. So it's interesting that Elle manage to use verbal content to attract more readers. What do you think?

Chan: Depends on what kind of medium you are referring to. I will say we and the audio-visual industry, like TV, are mutually dependent on each other, at least in an indirect way. We need their celebrities and their programmes to sell certain styles and ways of dressing. Although we are a printed magazine, we are very much visual and photo-oriented. We don't take the rapid development of the audio-visual industry as a threat. It is a different context.

Chou: How would you comment on the future prospect of women's magazines?

Chan: I really don't know. It's difficult to predict. I suppose women's magazines would be very diversified, more or less like the situation of today. Hong Kong women have every different needs. Different styles and different kinds of women's magazines cater for very different targets. It is difficult to generalize.

Chou: How about fashion magazine?

Chan: It's quite different for fashion magazine, as foreign fashion magazines are the major enemies. All along, we are really competing not with the women's magazines in general, but certain foreign fashion magazines. The recent changes in our style, I mean we put more emphasis into the verbal content, make our positioning become more unstable, or deviate even more from the traditional form of fashion magazine. We keep exploring the best mode of existence. It's difficult to say for the time being. But the sales figures are quite encouraging and promising. Following the increase of verbal content, our sales figures rise gradually. It is crucial to secure advertising clients because sales figures mean too much to them.

Chou: How is your relationship with the advertising agency?

Chan: In a word, mutual benefits. We both gain from the market. The market is a huge one. No one can bit it all. A very tiny segment is enough for our survival. In general we co-operate with them.

Chou: Are there any conflict of interest?

Chan: No, why? There are conflicts, but only on actual terms, not conflict of interest. We are on the same boat.

Chou: What kind of boat it is?

Chan: A prosperous society. To run a magazine, you can't survive without advertisement. So we are keen to attract them. It is a simple relationship of mutual benefits. It is capitalism that rules here, right!

Chou: Thank you.

Appendix Four: Photo illustration of women's magazines in Hong Kong

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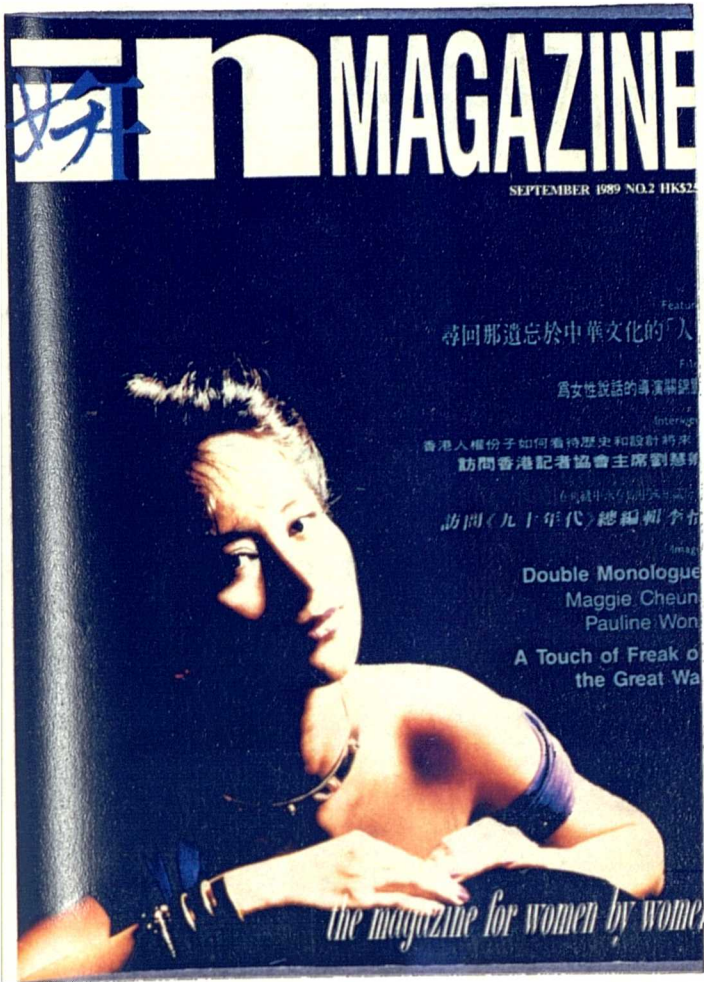
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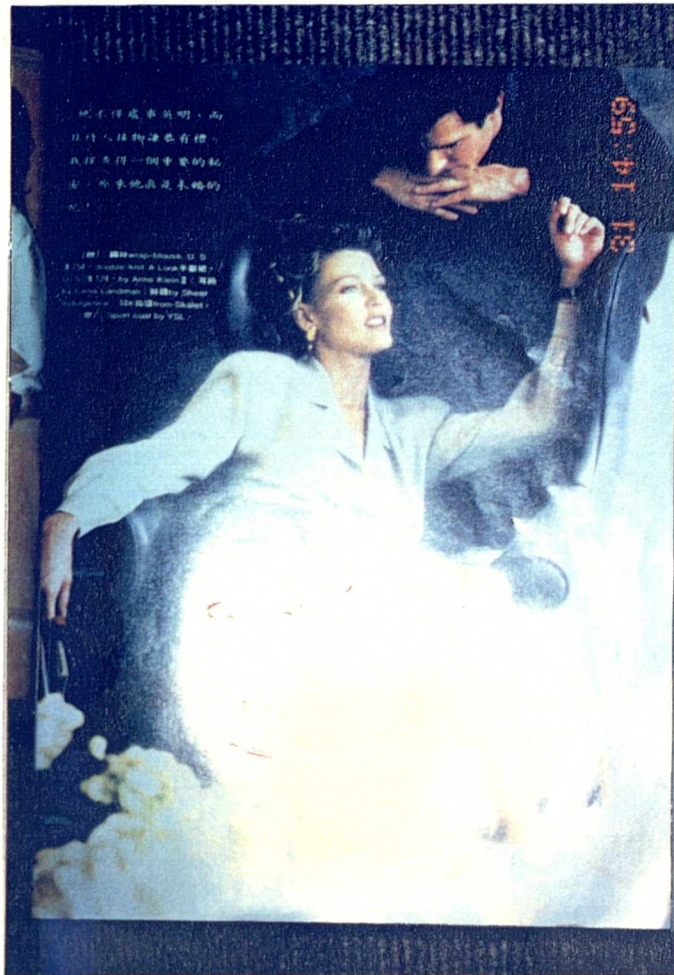
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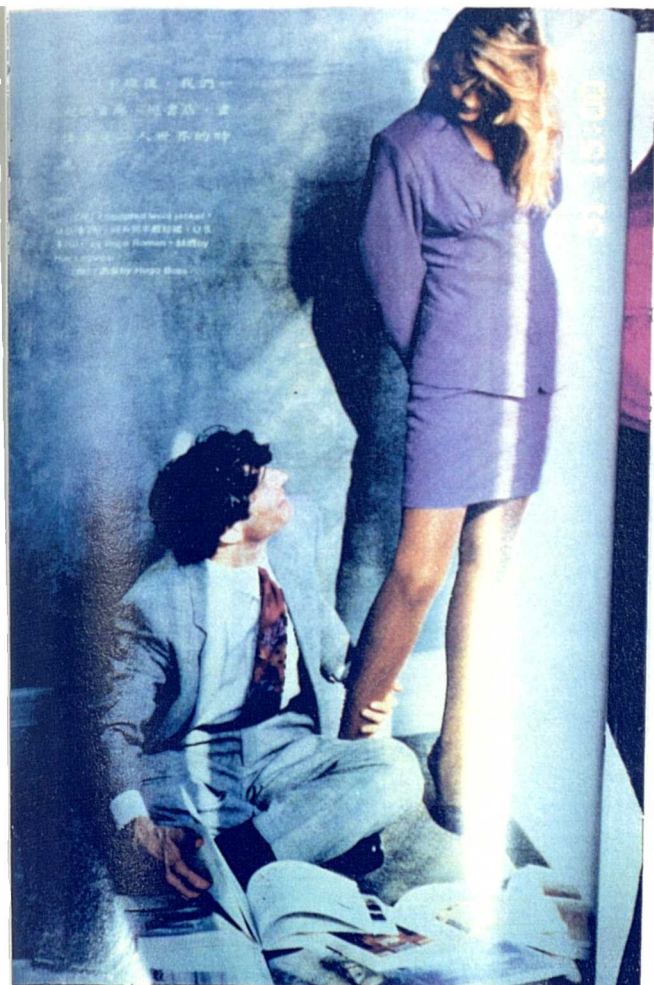
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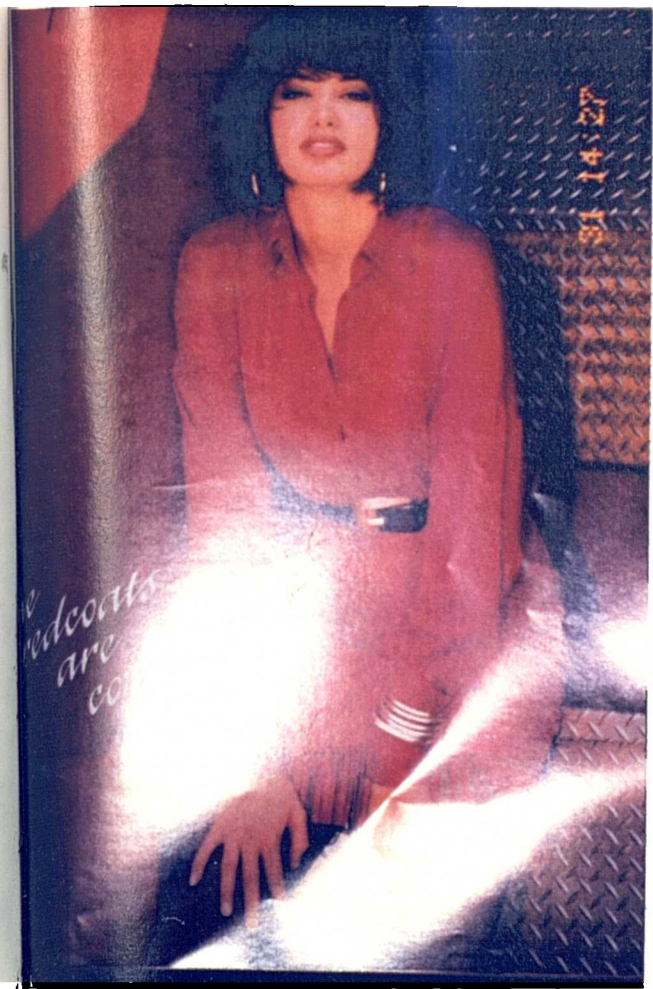
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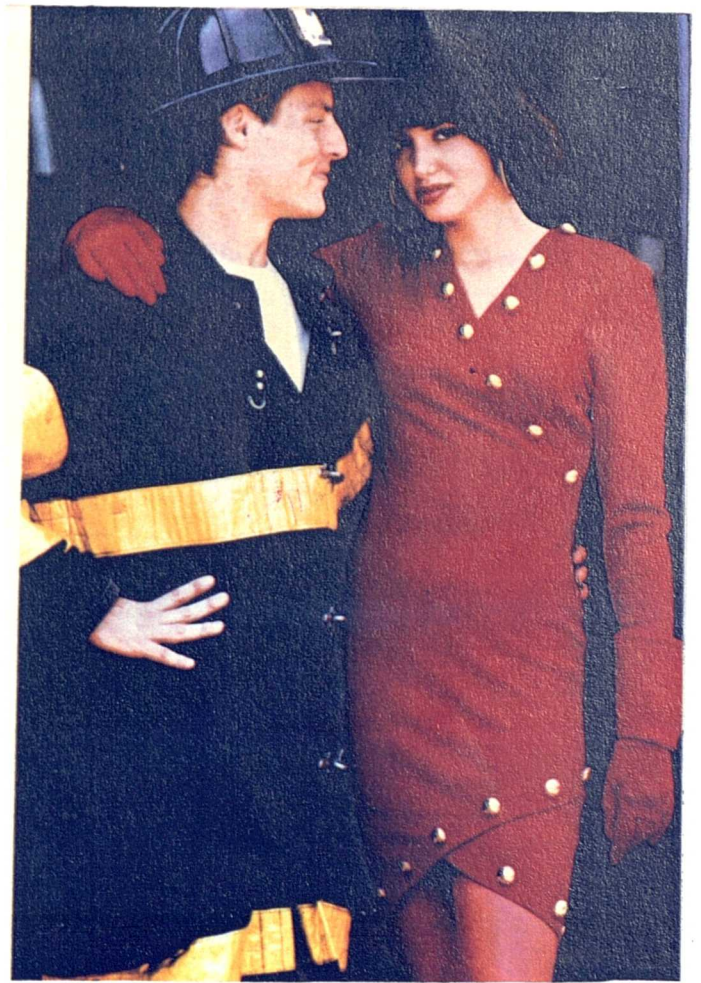
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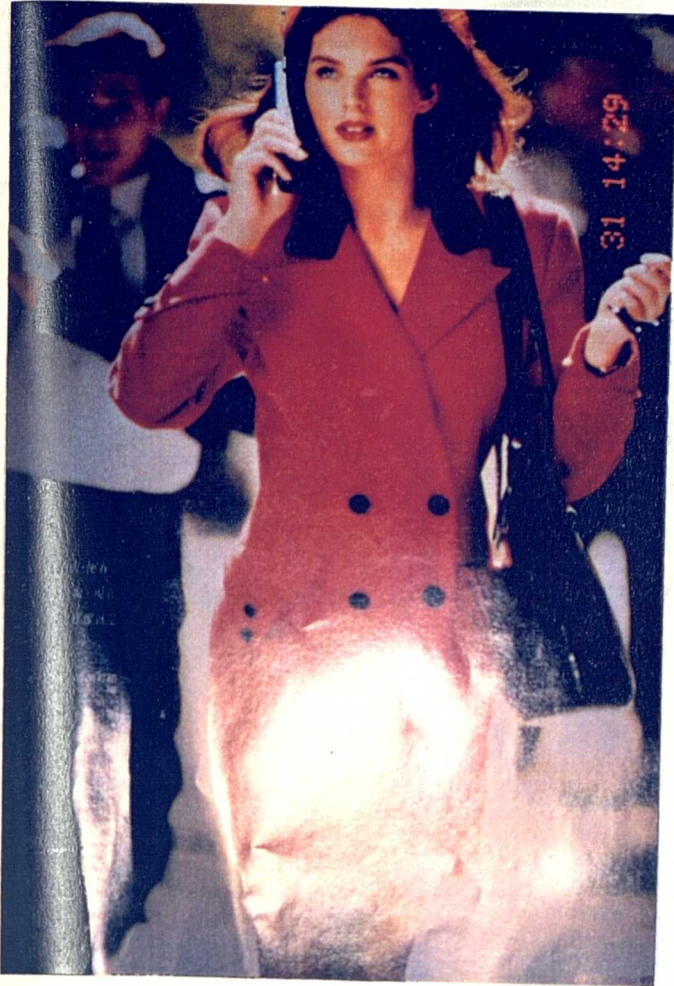
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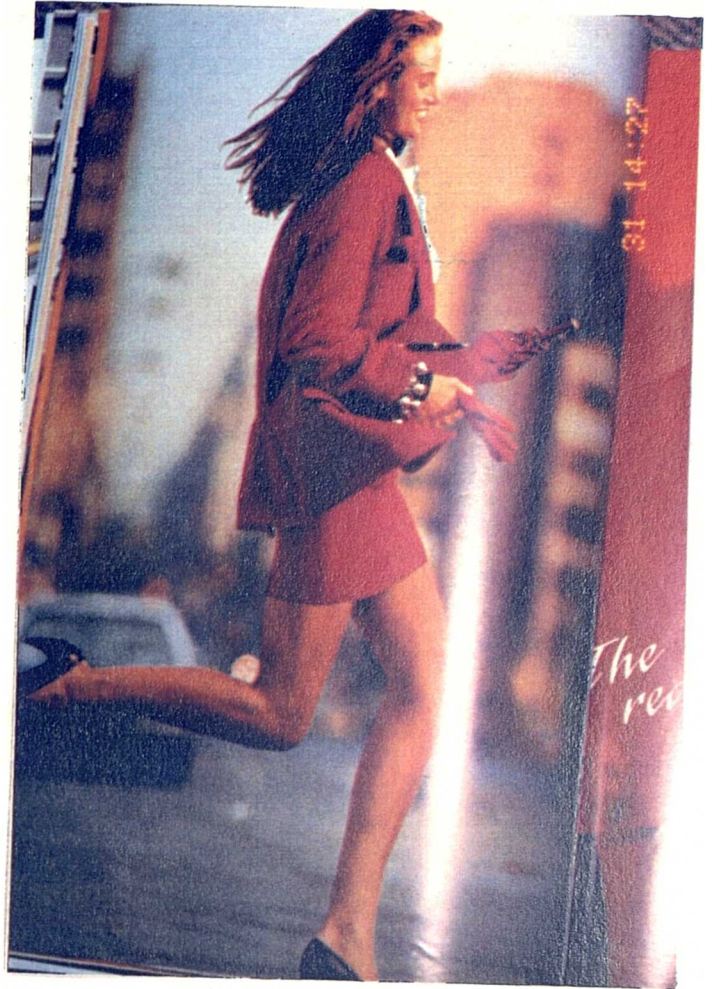
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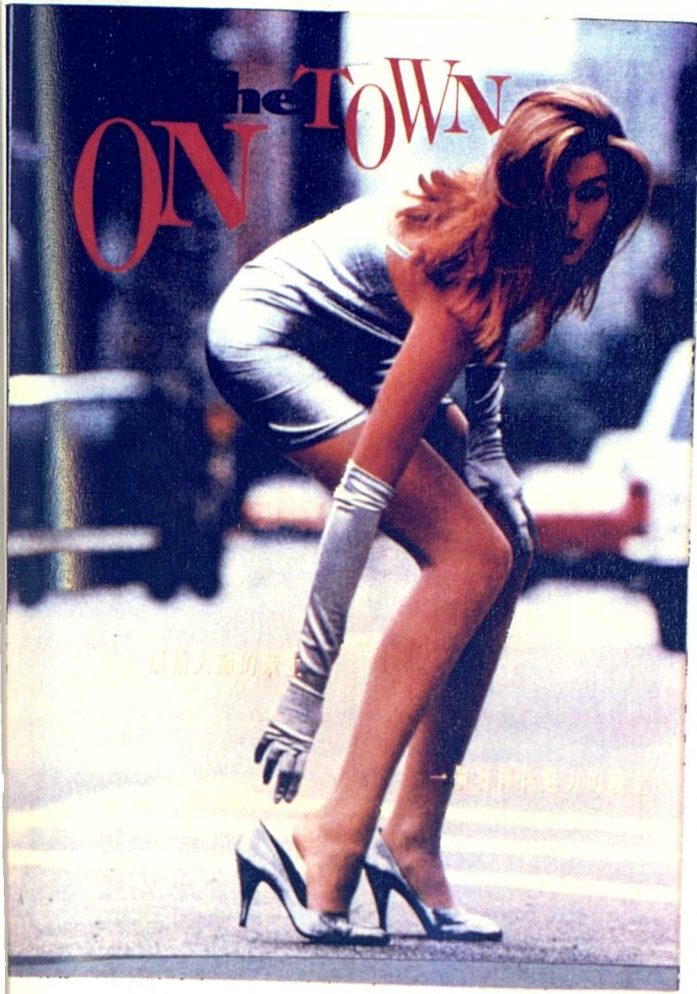
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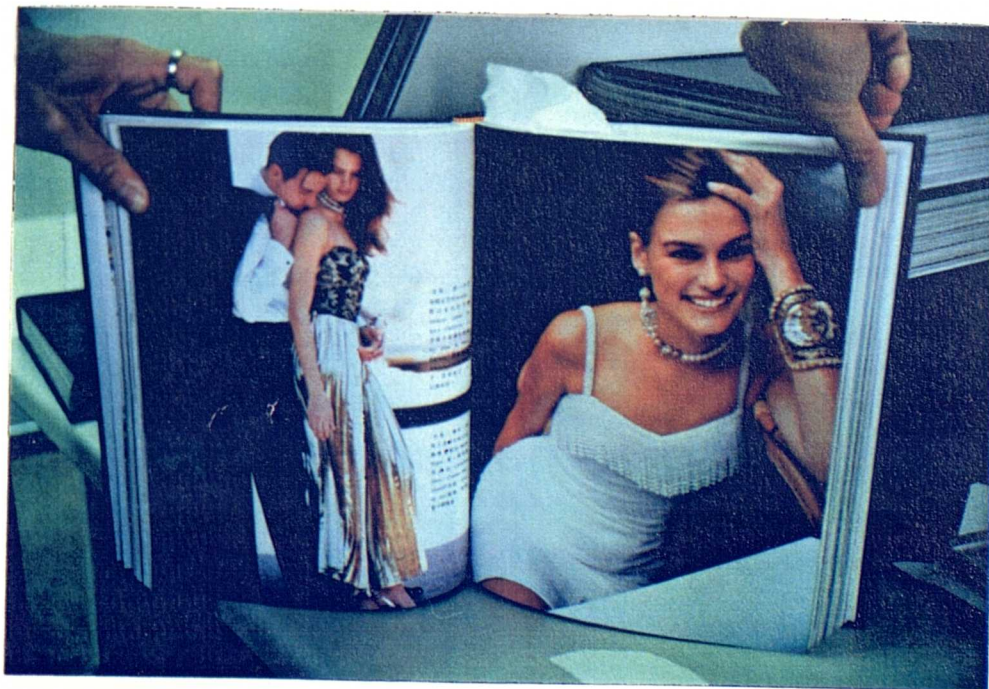
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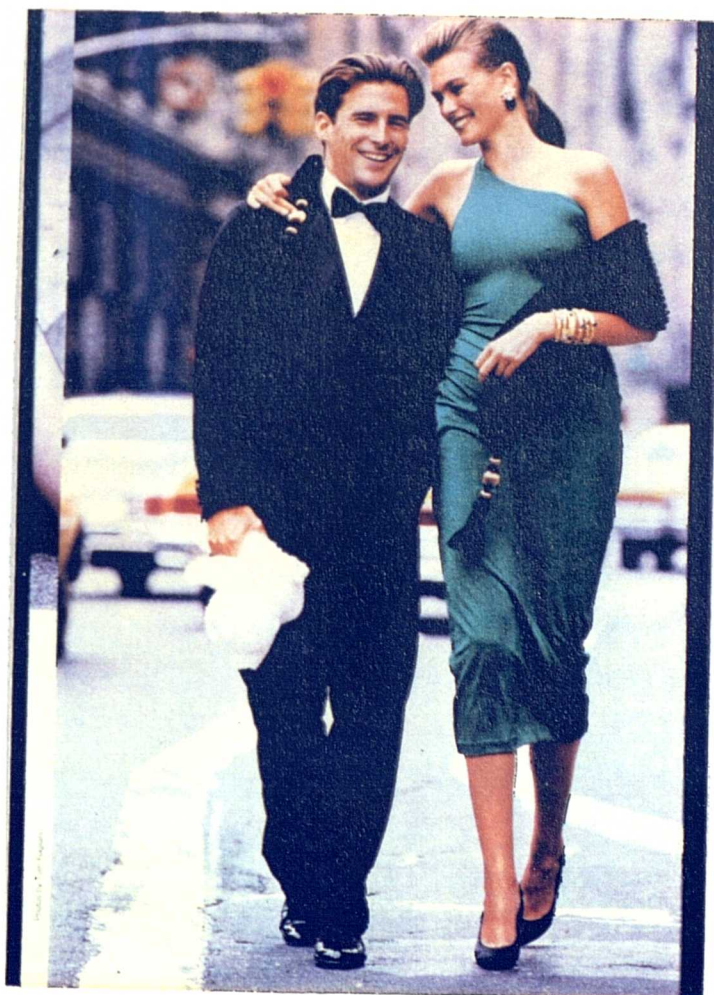
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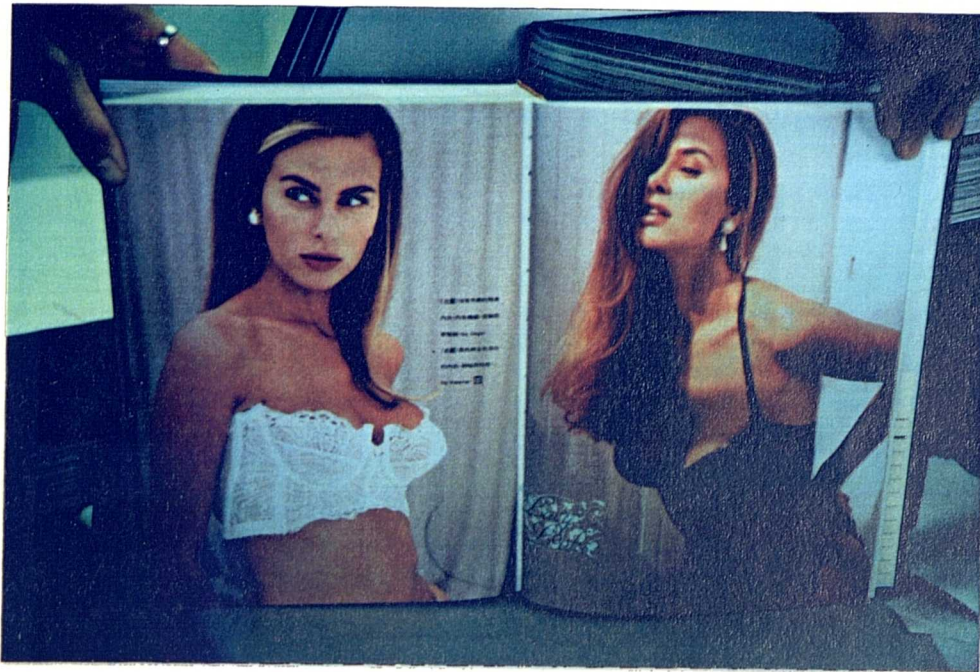


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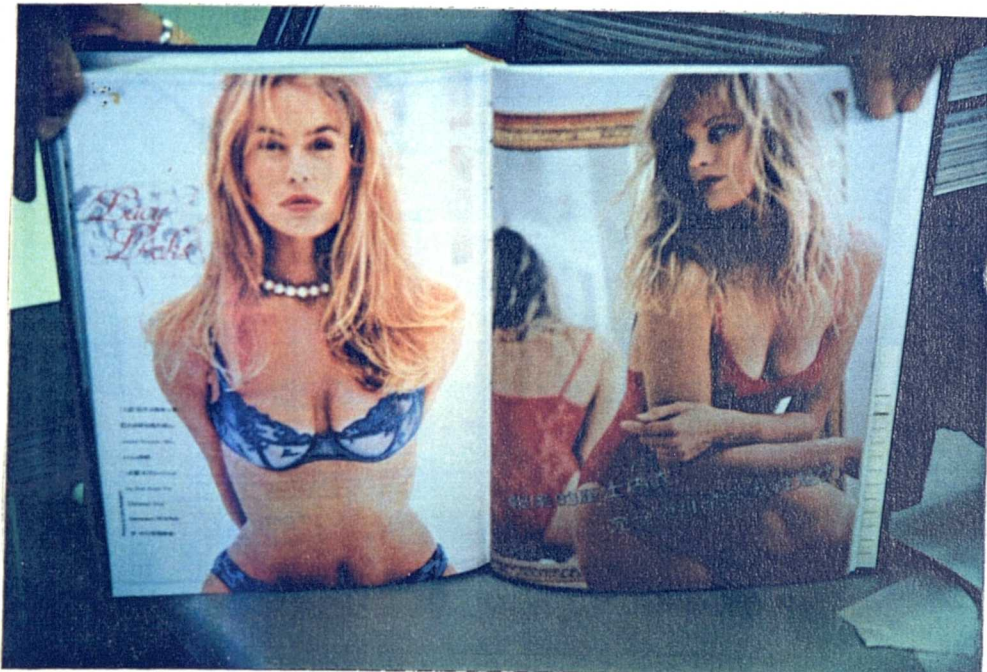


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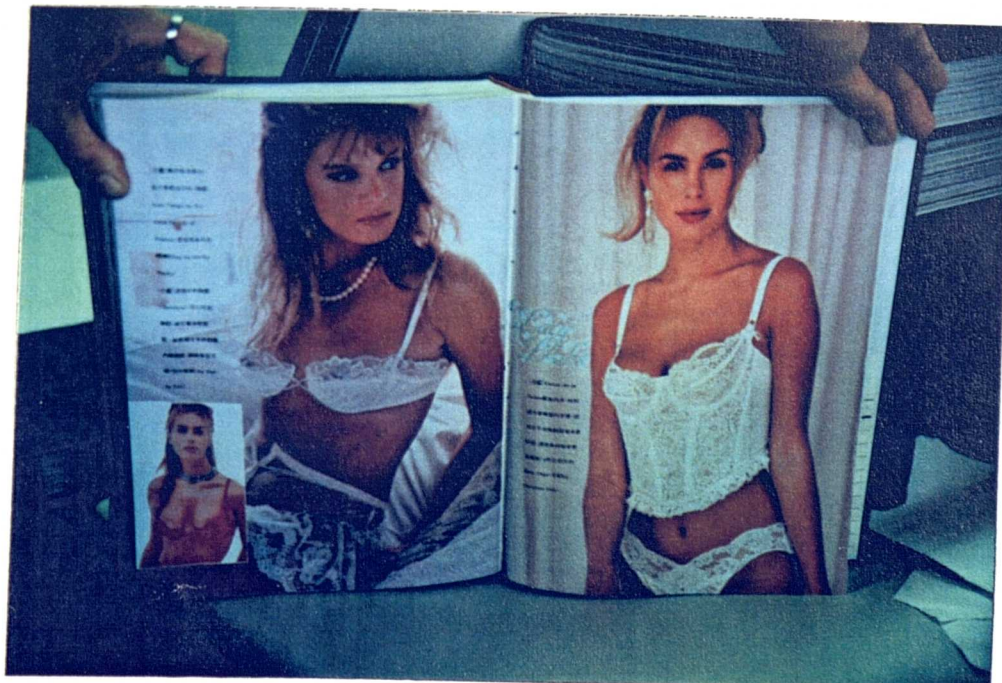




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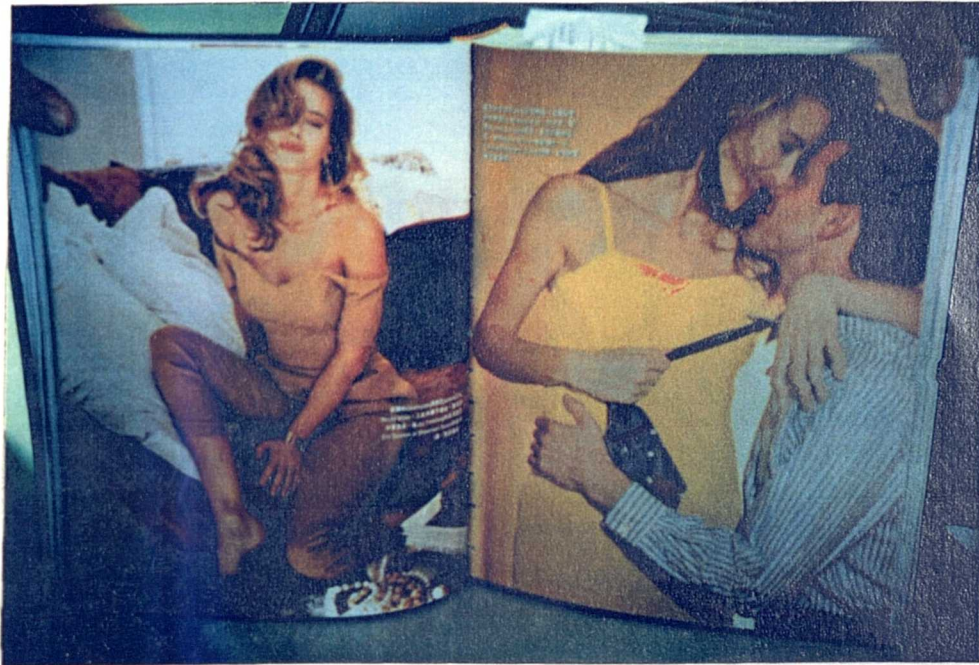
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24h White



這是一組由時尚界
最頂尖的設計師
所設計，以夏季
度假為主題的
服裝系列，包括
了許多不同風格
的服裝，如：由
Gianni Versace
所設計，由
Tommy Hilfer
所設計，由
Calvin Klein
所設計，由
Armani 所設計
的服裝，以及
由 Michael
Corleone 所設計
的服裝，這些
服裝都展現了
夏季度假的
風格。

白色的薄紗、麻布、軟緞襯金色
耳環、手鐲、鞋，是夏季的最佳配搭！

52



這是一組由時尚界
最頂尖的設計師
所設計，以夏季
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夏季度假的
風格。

點點金片共揚帆！

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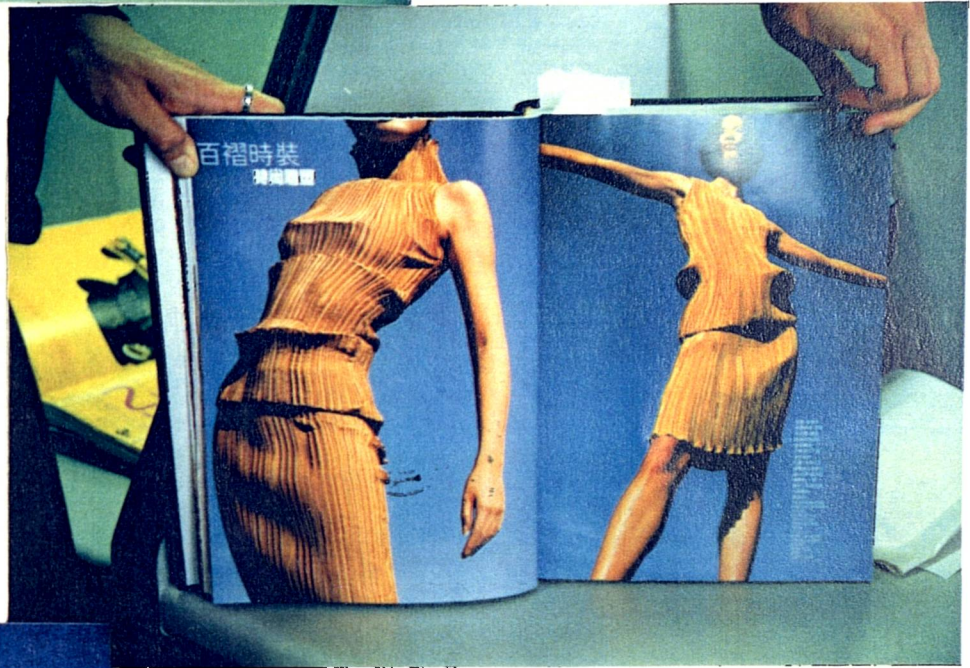


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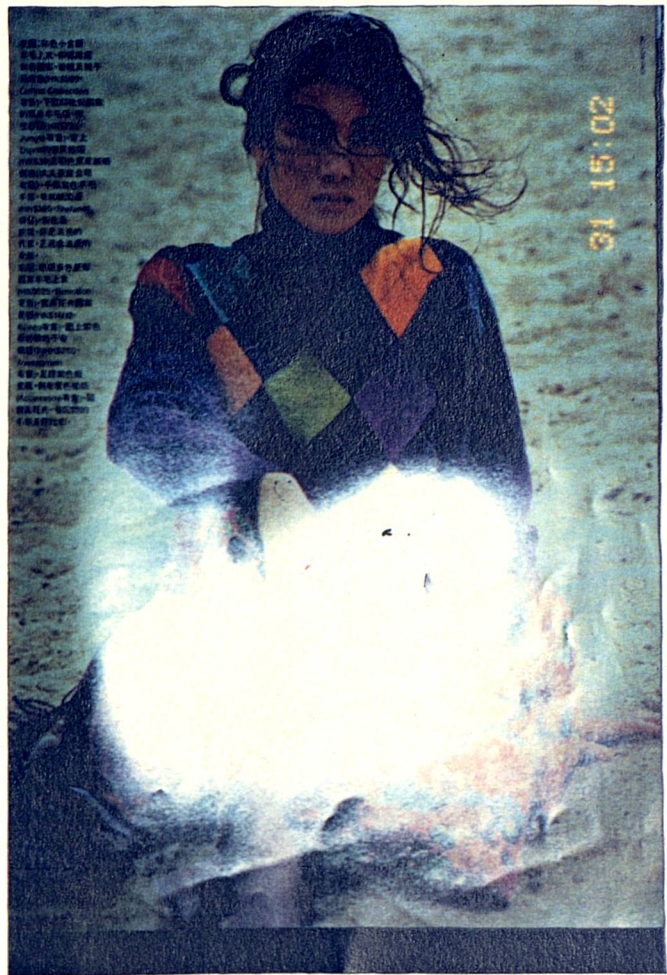
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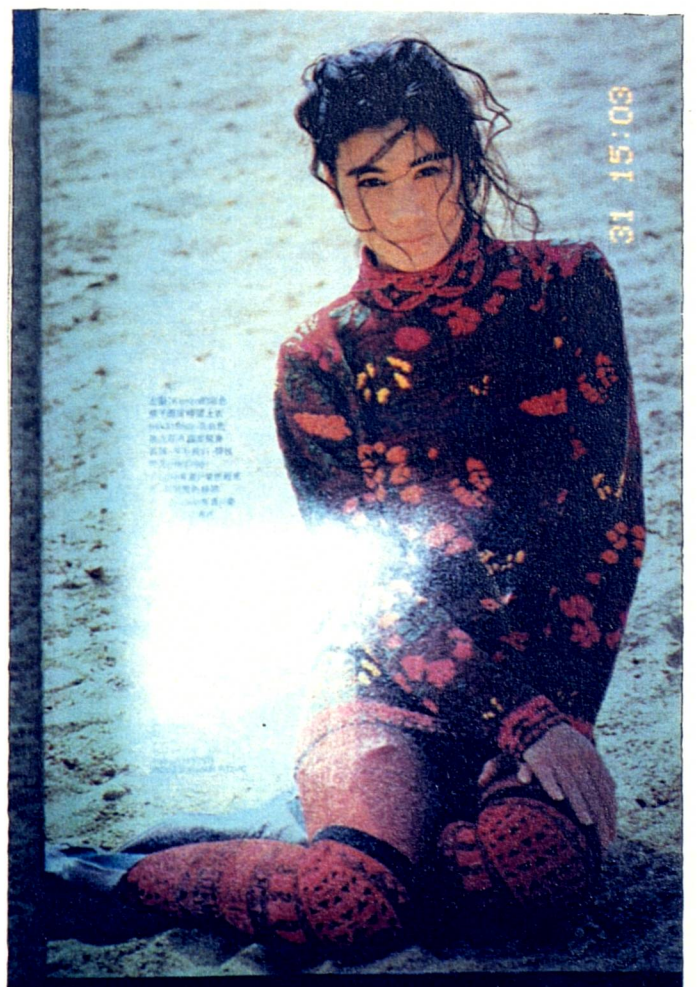
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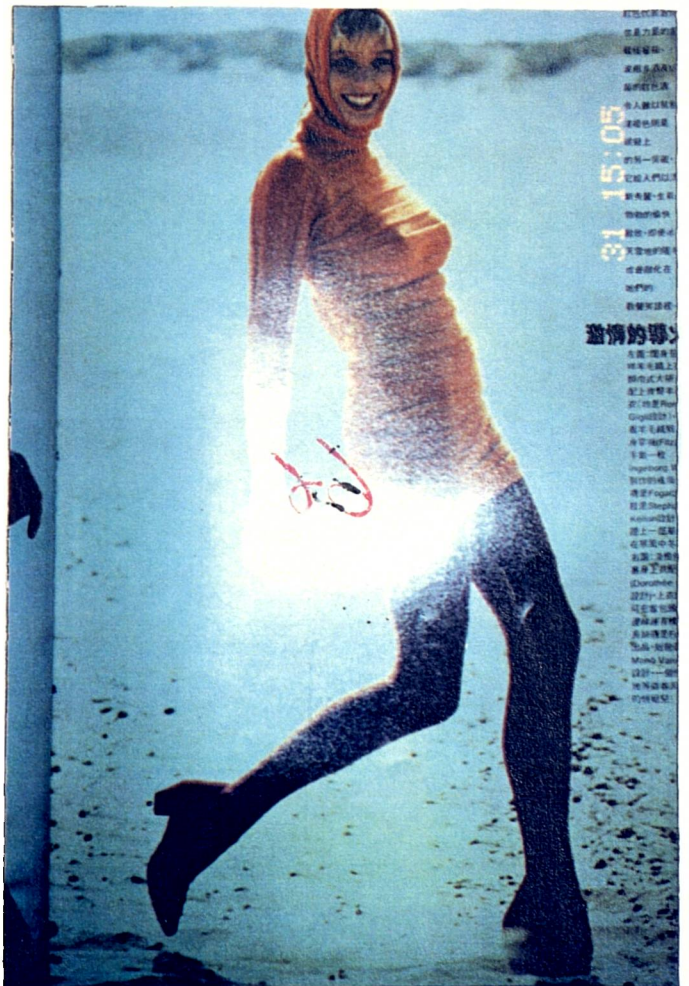
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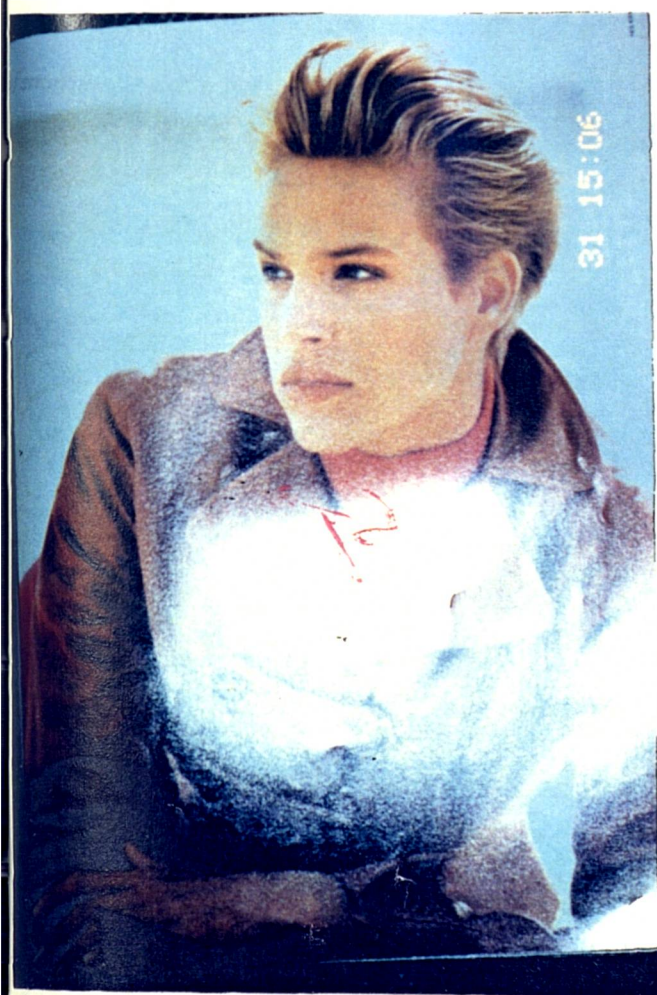
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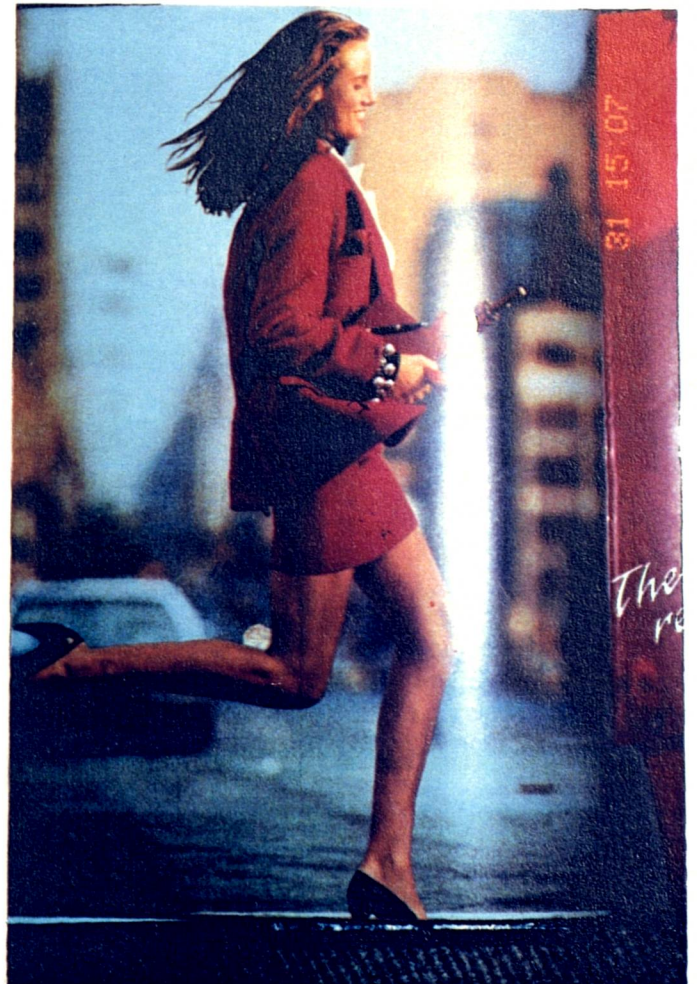
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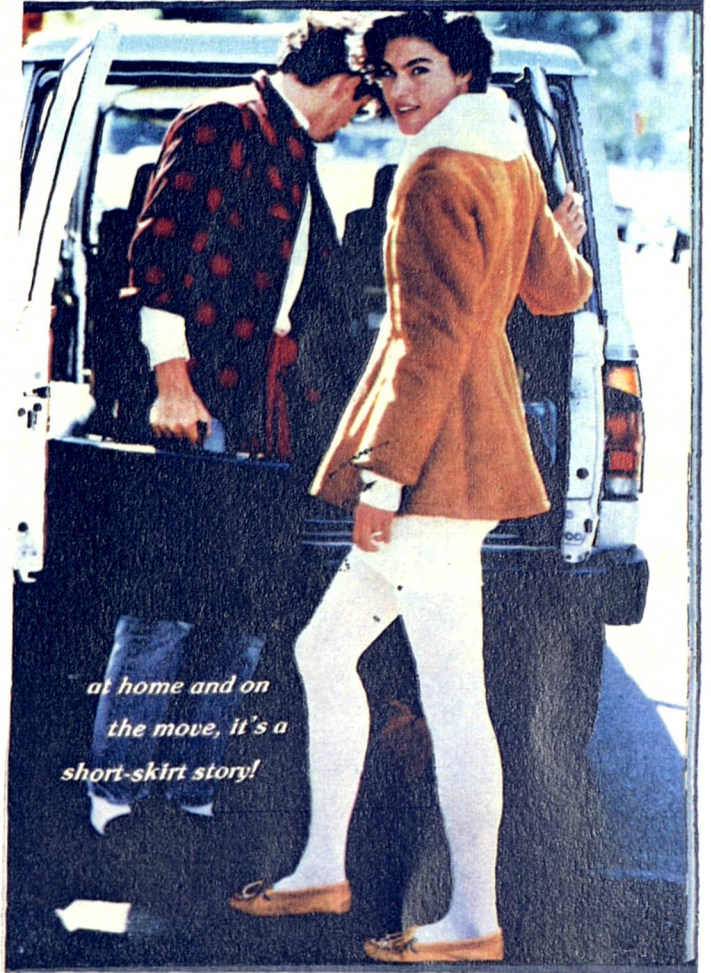
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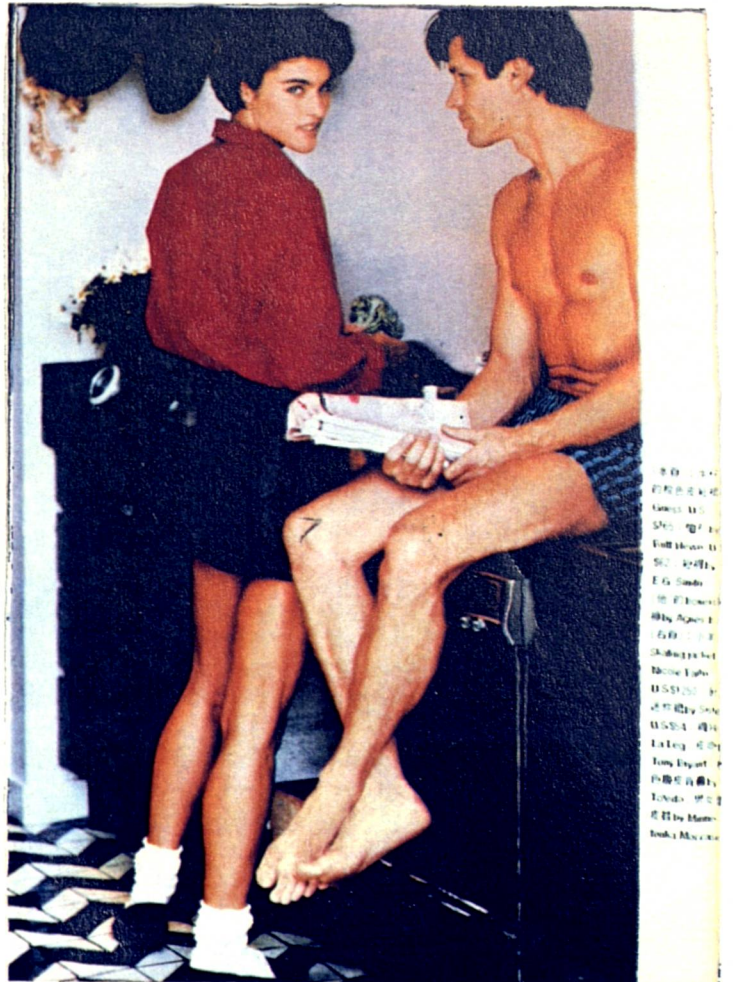
*at home and on
the move, it's a
short-skirt story!*

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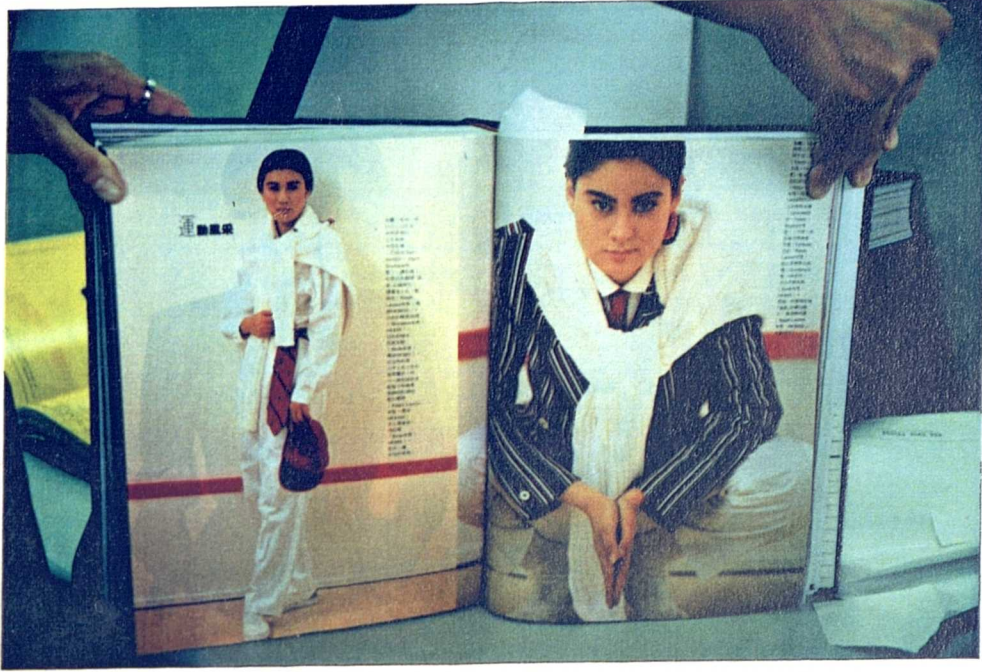
warming trend: layers of snug suede and wool

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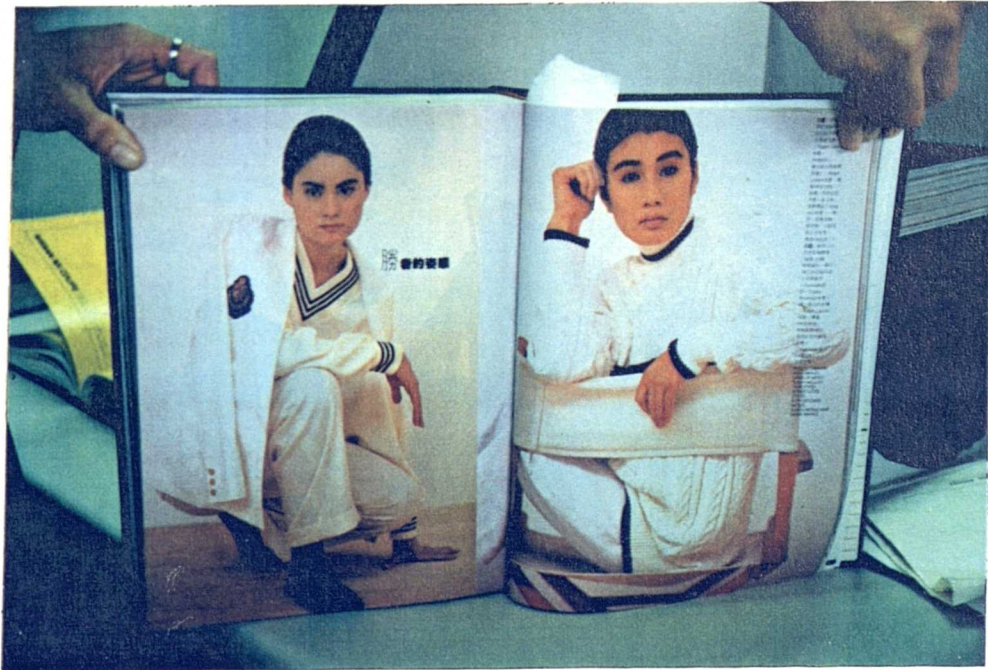


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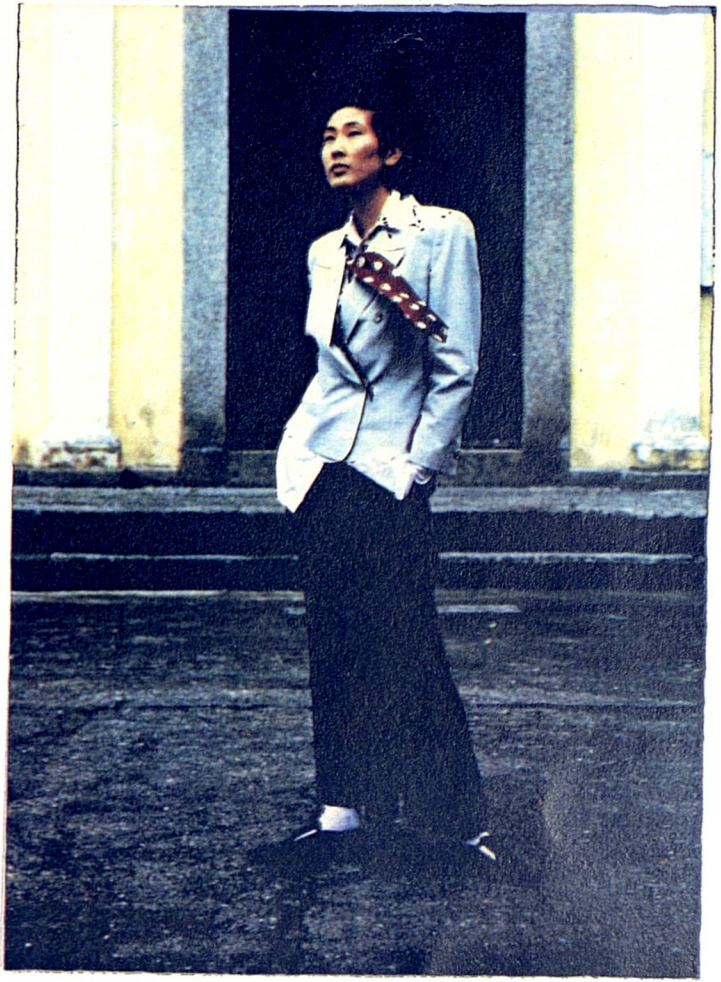
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