

**READERS' REAL-LIFE NARRATIVES  
IN SELECTED  
CONTEMPORARY THAI AND UK WOMEN'S MAGAZINES:  
A COMPARATIVE STUDY**

**Permtip Buaphet**

**PhD**

**The University of York**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The primary aim of my study is to examine how readers' real-life narratives in selected women's magazines from the UK and Thailand construct women in these two different cultural contexts. My research provides an understanding of the social construction of women's gendered identity in women's personal stories in particular women's magazines. This study is based on 84 issues of four magazines covering the period November 2010 – November 2011. Two of the magazines are from the UK and two are from Thailand: *Woman*; *Woman and Home* (the UK and Thai editions); and *Poo Ying*. These magazines were selected because they aim at a similar readership, women in their 30s and over. My analysis shows that the readers' narratives in these four magazines centre predominantly on the following four topics, presented in terms of how prevalent they were: 1) confidence-building, 2) employment, 3) romantic relationships and marriage, and 4) family. These topics form the core of my analysis chapters. Altogether they reveal that women are constructed somewhat differently in the Thai and UK magazines in question. In the UK magazines, women were constructed as imperfect but improvable. Readers' narratives had the function to suggest to actual readers of these narratives how they themselves might deal with similar issues. By contrast, women in the Thai magazines were normally constructed as 'ideal' in terms of already having achieved success. The readers were thus meant to admire the women whose stories were narrated since the women's stories were presented as examples of an already achieved 'ideal' life. But there was no indication how this ideal was achieved. It thus represented a state rather than a process. The magazines provided testimony to the difference between Thai and British public culture in terms of what could and could not be talked about.

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## **AUTHOUR'S DELACIRATION**

I affirm that all the research and writing depicted in this thesis is original and my own. During the period of my PhD, I have presented an abridged version of Chapter Five, 'Romantic Relationships and Marriage in Readers' Narratives' at The Institute for Research in Citizenship and Applied Human Sciences 'Troubling Narratives: Identity Matters' Conference at Huddersfield University in 2014.



## **Chapter One: Introduction**

The primary goal of my thesis is to examine the way in which readers' real-life narratives in selected women's magazines from the UK and Thailand construct women in these two different cultural contexts. As will be discussed in greater detail in the methodology section, this study is based on 84 issues of four magazines covering the period from November 2010 – November 2011. Two of the magazines are from the UK and two are from Thailand: *Woman*; *Woman and Home* (the UK and Thai editions); and *Poo Ying*. These magazines are aimed at women in their 30s and over. I selected them because they appear to address similar audiences in terms of the woman reader they envisage. *Woman and Home* (UK edition) pays particular attention to 35+ women, as shown in the magazine's bi-line: 'The number-one premium lifestyle title to inspire 35+ women'.<sup>1</sup> *Woman* similarly focuses on women in their 40s and over. This is evidenced in its slogan: '*Woman* is the smartest, most stylish, up-to-date weekly for 40-plus women'.<sup>2</sup> By having 'woman' in the title, *Woman* and *Woman and Home* indicate both their content and their assumed readerships. Furthermore, *Woman and Home* (UK and Thai editions) directly connects women to domesticity. The domestic implications simultaneously suggest particular feminine traits to readers. Conducting an analysis of ordinary women's real-life narratives within these contexts reveals the particular ideology of womanhood at play here which I shall discuss in subsequent chapters.

I became involved in researching women's magazines for my Masters degree in 2004 where I did my research on *Presentation Tactics in Celebrity Interview Columns in Thai Women's Magazines*. Through this my interest in the representation of women's lives extended. Initially, I came to realise the importance of 'ordinary' women in women's magazines as I examined the interview columns. Although my particular interest at that time focused on celebrities in magazines, I found that stories of ordinary women as well as those of famous women were published in every Thai magazine issue I investigated. Progressively, I began to notice that

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.womanandhome.com/about.html>, accessed 13/03/2014.

<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.ipcmedia.com/woman.html>, accessed 13/03/2014.

women's stories in the Thai magazines I examined were very conventional in terms of how they constructed women. Inevitably, only certain women were selected to be presented to the readers. I became curious about these stories and whether they actually represented 'ordinary' women's lives or just what was considered 'normal' by the magazines. The reason for the selection of certain women and their stories in the Thai magazines was therefore an issue for debate since there is 'no clear ideal biography for the female life' (Ginsburg, 1989: 13). One might argue that these ordinary women were constructed in a particular way in order to conform to cultural expectations. Such expectations are specific to a given cultural context since, as Guiren (2006) states, 'every society has its own distinct culture and concept of value shared by its people' (237). I decided that examining readers' narratives by and about actual women who are not celebrities would enable a better understanding of ordinary women's lives as portrayed in women's magazines.

Once aware of certain women's lives in women's magazines, my interest enlarged and through considering more magazines, specifically from the UK, I began to explore their cross-cultural differences. The question of the similarities and differences between readers' narratives in the UK and Thai magazines became the subject of my thesis. Examining these enabled me to offer a comparative account of how 'ordinary' women are constructed in these two contexts. I should point out straight away that readers' narratives have not been the object of any research to date, or indeed in the comparative manner in which I shall undertake this.

In this introduction I shall first of all produce a factual account of the magazines I examine and their contexts. I shall then provide a literature review focusing on women's magazines, femininity, and real-life narratives in both British and Thai cultural contexts. Next, I shall also discuss my methodology. This will explain my choice of methods and the way in which I analyse the data. Finally, I outline the structure of my thesis. I turn now to describe the magazines in my sample.

The magazines I examine have a wide circulation. The average circulation for *Woman* and *Woman and Home*, for instance, was as follows (Table 1):

Table 1. Circulation figures for *Woman* and *Woman and Home* (UK edition), December 2011 and July 2012 - December 2012.

<b>Market Sector / Title</b>	<b>Dec End 2011</b>	<b>Jun End 2012</b>	<b>Dec End 2012</b>
<b><i>Woman</i></b>	282,189	279,362	261,170
<b><i>Woman and Home</i></b>	379,896	353,731	352,586

Source: [http://www1.bradinsight.com/bradinsight\\_ABC\\_women](http://www1.bradinsight.com/bradinsight_ABC_women), accessed 17 /11/2013.

Table 1 shows that *Woman* and *Woman and Home* (UK edition) had a circulation of 282,189 and 379,896 copies respectively in 2011. Although the total circulation of both *Woman* and *Woman and Home* (UK edition) decreased slightly between December 2011 and December 2012, sales were relatively steady. Women's magazines focusing on women's lifestyle and fashion constitute the second highest performing market segment in magazine distribution, with an overall circulation of 6,870,661 from July 2011-December 2011.<sup>3</sup>

Unlike for UK women's magazines, the circulation of Thai women's magazines in my sample in 2011 (*Poo Ying* and *Woman and Home*) was not published online. Instead, figures are available in terms of the national readership of magazines in Thailand in general as shown in Table 2.

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www1.bradinsight.com/bradinsight\\_ABC\\_women](http://www1.bradinsight.com/bradinsight_ABC_women), accessed 13/03/2014.

Table 2. National readership of Thai publications, 2011.

Types of Publications	Age of Readers				
	Total	6-14 years	15-24 years	25-59 years	Over 60 years
<b>Total</b>	100.0 42,925,164	100.0 7,867,638	100.0 8,173,565	100.0 23,223,671	100.0 3,660,290
Newspapers	63.4	17.1	63.8	80.5	53.9
General knowledge books	36.6	47.3	50.3	30.9	19.2
Novels and cartoons	35.8	65.3	56.5	23.0	7.1
Magazines	35.6	12.0	49.6	41.8	15.7
Textbooks	32.4	93.4	56.4	8.1	2.0
Journals	29.7	12.5	34.1	35.1	22.2
Religious books	27.2	13.0	15.1	29.0	72.8
Others	2.0	1.2	3.1	2.0	1.1

Source: National Statistics Office Thailand, 2012.

Table 2 shows that people's interest in reading different types of publications depends on their age. The most popular publication read by Thai people is newspapers (63.4 per cent). General knowledge books, novels and cartoons, magazines, and textbooks are the second most popular publications in Thailand. They have similar circulation figures, reaching over 30 per cent respectively. Magazines are mainly read by people aged 15-24 and 25-59. Since the Thai magazines I analyse aim at women in their 30s and over, my focus is consistent with the age groups in which these magazines circulate most widely.

As already indicated, in my research I decided to focus on four mainstream magazines produced for female readers: *Woman and Home* (both the UK and the Thai editions), *Woman*, and *Poo Ying*. *Woman and Home* is a monthly magazine. The UK edition of *Woman and Home* was launched in 1982 by the International Publishing Corporation (IPC), a leading magazine publisher in the United Kingdom. The Thai edition is also a monthly magazine by Inspire Entertainment Co., Ltd, Thailand and licensed under the copyright of IPC media as well as the UK Edition. It

was first released in 2008. *Woman and Home* (UK edition) is up-market, designed for readers with high incomes, similar to the Thai version as evidenced in the fact that at the time of writing up my thesis (2014), the English version cost £3.90 and the Thai one 90 baht (approximately £2). Both the *Woman and Home* UK and Thai editions are glossy magazines and vary in length between 240 - 250 pages, and 200 - 210 pages respectively. They tend to have mature cover models on the front pages (see Images 1 and 2 below) every month. For instance, Dame Helen Mirren, an English actor born in 1945, was on the *Woman and Home* UK edition front cover in November, 2010 and Areeya Chumsai, the Miss Thailand of 1994, born in 1971, was on the *Woman and Home* Thai edition front cover of the same month. The selection of the cover models suggests that both the English and Thai versions of *Woman and Home* aim at middle-aged women, if one assumes that cover models in some respects represent the anticipated readership. It is noticeable, however, that the model on the UK magazine was significantly older than the one on the Thai cover. The Thai magazines I examine never featured a woman of Mirren’s age on the cover – their age ideal remained narrower than the British one.

Image 1. Cover of *Woman and Home*, UK edition (November, 2010).



Source: author’s photograph.

Image 2. Cover of *Woman and Home*, Thai Edition (November, 2010).



Source: author’s photograph.

*Woman* (UK edition) is the only weekly magazine in this study, launched in 1937 by the International Publishing Corporation (IPC), whereas *Woman* (Thai edition) or *Poo Ying* are monthly magazines, first published in 1989 by Poo Ying Publishing Co, Ltd., a book and magazine publisher in Thailand. Both magazines are glossies in colour newsprint and vary in length between 70 – 80 pages, and 250 – 270 pages

respectively. *Woman* is very different from *Poo Ying* in its length as it has weekly editions. At the time of writing (2014), *Woman* cost 93p per issue (approximately £3.70 pcm) whereas *Poo Ying* was 90 baht (approximately £2). The prices suggest that *Woman* and *Poo Ying* focus on female middle-class readers who earn a reasonable income. Like the other two magazines, *Woman* and *Poo Ying* place great significance on female readers between 30 and 40, modern family women. Their cover models each month are also mature. For instance, Fern Britton, an English television presenter born in 1957, was on the *Woman* front cover on 22 November, 2010 (Image 3) and Taksaorn Paksukcharern, a famous actress in Thailand born in 1980, was on the *Poo Ying* front cover in October 2010 (Image 4). Already it is clear that these Thai magazine covers feature younger women than the UK ones. The selection of the cover models suggests that *Woman* and *Poo Ying* are magazines aimed at young middle-aged women.

Image 3. Cover of *Woman* (22 November, 2010).



Source: author's photograph.

Image 4. Cover of *Poo Ying* (October, 2010).



Source: author's photograph.

To understand the context of these magazines, I shall now turn to a discussion of the women's magazine market in Thailand and in the UK.

### Magazines in Thailand

Thai magazines are published under the authority of The Magazine Association of Thailand (TMAT). Magazines in Thailand are popular and women are their primary consumers according to research on 'Readers' Behaviours and Trends in Magazines

Reading in 2009' by the Magazine Association of Thailand.<sup>4</sup> The percentage of female magazine readers in general in 2009 was 65.2 per cent compared to 34.8 per cent male magazine readers.<sup>5</sup> The gender ratio is therefore roughly two females for every male reader of magazines. The average age of the readers was 36 years and the average educational level was a Bachelor degree.<sup>6</sup> In terms of this last fact, magazines in Thailand seem to be consumed by middle-class readers. This research also suggests that male and female readers read on average at least four issues per month. Male readers have special interests in music, sports, and cars, while female readers are constructed as interested in fashion, beauty, lifestyle, and horoscopes.<sup>7</sup> In 2005 the Thai women's magazines market rate increased 8 per cent from the previous year and the total value was 6,638 million baht (approximately 133 million pounds).

The magazine market in Thailand is growing, with a number of international magazines expanding into that market. Magazine publishers provide numerous categories of magazines. Many magazines display their titles both in Thai and English. Magazines in Thailand can be categorized into the following three groups according to the sex and age of their anticipated readers:

1. Women's magazines aimed specifically at women of different ages focusing on fashion, beauty, lifestyle, cookery, and motherhood. They include titles such as *Her World*, *Woman Plus*, *Ying Thai*, *Health Today*, *Slimming*, *Beauty Skin & Surgery Magazine*, *Shopaholic*, *Food News*, *Food Stylist*, *Gourmet & Cuisine*, *Mother & Baby*, *Mother & Care*, *Modern Mom*, *Is Am Are*, *Secret*, etc.

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<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.fipp.com/news/fipp-research-award-entry-reader-behaviour-and-pot>, accessed 13/03/2014.

<sup>5</sup> See <http://www.fipp.com/news/fipp-research-award-entry-reader-behaviour-and-pot>, accessed 13/03/2014.

<sup>6</sup> The higher education system which is provided at universities in Thailand is regulated by the Commission on Higher Education in the Ministry of Education.

<sup>7</sup> See *Online Media and Marketing* (2011), at <http://www.marketingoops.com/reports/research/magazine-survey/>, accessed 20/1/2011.

2. Men's magazines aimed particularly at men from teenage to working ages, focusing on sex, hobbies such as cars, computers sports, etc. They include *Maxim*, *Esquire*, *GM Style*, *Car Focus*, *Top Gear*, *Golf Digest*, *Inside United*, *Shoot It*, *Future Gamer*, *Weekly Online*, *Game Start*, etc.
3. Specialist interest magazines intended for both sexes. These magazines are the most common in Thailand and they can be categorized into 11 topics as follows: 1. children, 2. home & living, 3. movies, 4. music, 5. design, 6. pets, 7. travel, 8. IT and technology, 9. business, 10. environment, and 11. education.

These categories are based on magazine market surveys I did and magazine issues on the newsstands in Thailand in 2011 that I collected. The point here is that there are many magazines aimed at both sexes in Thailand, more perhaps than one gets in the UK. I shall now provide some background to real-life narratives within Thai women's magazines.

In the history of Thai women's magazines, in 1922, *Sa Trii Sab (Women's Words)*, a fortnightly magazine, was launched under the motto 'A Fighter for Women who have been Suffering from the Cruelty of Men'. It aimed to acknowledge women in Thai society and encourage them to know their rights relative to men. Its contents including the interview columns, expanded from appealing to a limited group of elite women<sup>8</sup> to 'ordinary' women. *Su Paap Na Rii (Polite Lady)*, a weekly magazine launched in 1930 under the motto 'Information, Knowledge and Entertainment', was a magazine that published a personal interview column based on interviews with elite women such as M.C. Poonpisamai Disakul, a royal niece of King Rama V of Thailand. These interview columns were, in a sense, the precursors of real-life narratives in that they focused on the interviewed women's personal lives. This

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<sup>8</sup> 'Elite women' in this case refers to particular groups of women who were intellectually and economically privileged, with high social status.



column influenced other women's magazines to publish interview columns in their magazines, a custom that persists to the present (Kaiyourawong, 1997). During the reign of King Rama V, the first period of Thai women's magazines, elite women were the main target reader group. Therefore, the magazine contents including the personal interview columns were about elite women in Thai society at that time. However, interview columns in Thai women's magazines changed their form in 1932 when *Ying Thai* (Thai Woman) was launched and there were the first mini-biography columns of famous foreign women such as Florence Nightingale and Marie Antoinette. In 1973, *La La Na*, a fortnightly magazine, presented real-life stories of both ordinary and famous Thai women with their pictures as part of the contents (Pitipatthanakosit and Panich, 1989). From this shift and with the democratization of the popular media, real-life stories in women's magazines became a common aspect of many women's magazines.

### Magazines in the UK

The term 'magazine' in the UK was first used in the third decade of the eighteenth century by a bookseller named Edward Cave in the sense of a storehouse of miscellaneous writing (Adburgham, 1972). Women's magazines in Britain were primarily printed under cheap material conditions and mostly targeted the middle class. For example, *Lady's Magazine*, the women's magazine launched in 1770, aimed at the lower-middle class. This was evidenced by its relatively low price at six pence. New features were introduced each month. The *Lady's Monthly Museum* was an English monthly women's magazine published from 1798 to 1832, and *La Belle Assemblée* (*Bell's Court and Fashionable Magazine Addressed Particularly to the Ladies*) was a British women's magazine published between 1806 and 1837. These three magazines were exemplary versions of women's magazines as the genre we recognise nowadays (Adburgham, 1972). Throughout the 19th century, women's magazines in England addressed models of feminine behaviour.

Since then the magazine market in the UK has become a significant source of information and entertainment with more than 2,000 magazines and read by millions

of people across the country.<sup>9</sup> One of the best-known UK publishers is the International Publishing Corporation (IPC) founded in 1963. This publisher reaches almost two thirds of UK women and 42% of UK men, with more than 60 media brands selling over 350 million copies each year.<sup>10</sup> UK magazines provide a range of entertainment and information on topics such as art, business, cars, computers education, food and drink, health and fitness, hobbies and craft, home and garden, kids and family, news, pets and animals, science and technology, society and culture, sports, etc.<sup>11</sup> Generally, magazines in the UK can be categorized into men's, women's, and both men's and women's magazines as follows:

1. Men's magazines aim primarily at men, focusing on both heterosexual and homosexual audiences. Their contents can be divided into two groups according to their readers. There is a general male audience for magazines such as *Arena*, *Buck*, *Esquire*, *Loaded*, *FHM*, *Nuts*, *Horse & Hound*, *Rugby World*, etc. These magazines when not varieties of porn, centre on particular interests including men's fashion, lifestyle, health, movies, music, sports and sex.<sup>12</sup> There is a gay male audience for magazines such as *Attitude*, *AXM*, *Gay Times*, etc. The magazines' contents are based on fashion, film, music, sex, real-life editorials, gay asylum seekers, gay nightlife, etc.
2. Women's magazines aim particularly at women of different ages for both general and special groups of female readers as follows:

2.1. Magazines for general (heterosexual) female readers can be categorized into several groups such as fashion and beauty (*Glamour*, *Grazia Daily*, *Harper Bazaar*, *In Style*, *Pure Beauty*, etc.), health and fitness (*Women's Fitness*, *Woman's Health*, *Sportsister*, etc.), home (*Ideal Home*, 25

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<sup>9</sup> See UK Magz (2010), at <http://www.ukmagz.co.uk>, accessed 10/4/2011.

<sup>10</sup> See IPC Media (2010), at <http://www.ipcmedia.com/about/>, accessed 10/4/2011.

<sup>11</sup> See *UK Magazines* (2001–2011), at <http://www.allyoucanread.com/uk-magazines/>, accessed 10/4/2011.

<sup>12</sup> See <http://www.whsmith.co.uk/>, accessed 23/10/2013.

*Beautiful Homes, Housetohome, etc.*), gastronomy (*Good Food, Eat Out, Cuisine at Home, etc.*), weddings (*You & Your Wedding, Wedding Ideas, London Weddings, etc.*), motherhood (*Mother & Baby, Pregnancy & Birth, Green Parent, etc.*), TV entertainment (*What's on TV, TV Times, TV & Satellite Week, etc.*).

2.2. There are also magazines that cater for specific identity groups such as lesbian and black readers. Such magazines do not exist in Thailand at present (2014).<sup>13</sup>

3. Men's and women's magazines and/or general interest magazines aimed at both sexes are found in the UK as well as in Thailand. These cover many topics such as country life, education, history and knowledge, art and design, business and finance, pets, science and nature, food and drink, music, home and garden, and travel.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Previously most periodicals about lesbian women in Thailand were published in the form of newsletters such as *Anjaree-san, Jot-mai Khao Anjaree, and Sai Fon Ton Rung Lady*. There were only two issues of lesbian women's magazines: *New Half* and *An - Another Way Magazine* published in Thailand in the 1990s and the 2000s respectively. However, these magazines are no longer published.

<sup>14</sup> See for example, for country life: *This England, Britain, Yorkshire Life, etc.*, education and literature: *The Bookseller Buyer's Guide, Poetry Review, Montessori International Magazine, etc.*, history and knowledge: *Britain at War, Steam World, Family Tree, etc.*, art and design: *Modernism, Art News, Digital Photo, etc.*, business and finance: *IGaming Business, Baseline, Success Magazine, etc.*, pets: *Small Funny Pets, Dogs life, Bird Times, etc.*, science and nature: *BBC Focus Magazine, National Geographic, New Scientist, etc.*, food and drink: *BBC Good Food, Cook Vegetarian, Wine & Spirits, etc.*, music: *Your Choice Music, Vintage Rock, Hip Hop, etc.*, home and garden: *BBC Gardener's World, 417 Home, Victorian Homes, etc.*, travel: *Scottish Islands Explorer, Travel & Leisure, Wild Travel, etc.*

From the lists of magazines mentioned above, it is clear that there are many magazines in both UK and Thailand that appeal to a specific gendered readership. However, women's magazines in the UK are more likely to cover a wider range of readers including lesbians and black readers.

For my thesis, and this is my original contribution to knowledge, I decided to work on a wholly under-researched sub-genre within women's magazines - readers' narratives - focusing on the representation of women within these contexts. Readers' narratives in the magazines have rarely been discussed in depth in the literature on women's and media studies as I shall show in the following section. There I shall provide a literature review regarding research on women's magazines and discuss my research methodology before, finally, outlining the structure of my thesis.

### Literature Review

The field of women's and media studies, specifically around women's magazines, is extensive and has involved many topics such as the history of women's magazines in the UK (Barrell and Braithwaite, 1988; Beetham, 1996), English women's class and race in women's magazines (Beetham, 1998), the depiction of women's body images (Cho et al, 2010; Thompson-Brenner et al, 2011; Gow et al, 2012; Tiggermann et al, 2013), and female gender images (Massé and Rosenblum, 1998; Napoli et al, 2003). Barrell and Braithwaite (1988) examined the history of magazines and the magazine industry in the UK from a business perspective regarding their launching, advertising space, magazine distribution, and editorial practices. Beetham (1996) employed historical approaches to trace the emergence of British women's magazines from the 1700s. She explored the relationship between 'Englishness', 'whiteness', and femininity in the 1890s regarding the construction of a classed, raced, and gendered identity in *Woman at Home* magazines. By using close textual analysis to examine the correspondence columns in the magazines, she showed that femininity was redefined by women's magazines and their representation of women was linked to middle-class English women. Her research confirmed that 'true' femininity as it emerged on the letters page, was connected to 'the domestic and the familial'. Friedan (1992) explained the way in which women's magazines conveyed ideas of

femininity to readers by reproducing the concept of the ‘happy housewife heroine’. This allegory of the ‘happy housewife’ became a prominent discourse of femininity during the 1950s – 1960s. Both Friedan’s (1992) and Beetham’s (1996) works focused on the 1890s, 1950s and 1960s respectively and there is therefore a question of the extent to which this representation remains dominant today.

Contrary to previous studies, recent research on the portrayal of women in women’s magazines focuses on women’s body images. Cho et al (2010), for example, investigated stereotypical beliefs about tanned women in beauty/fashion and health/fitness magazines. They found that tanned women were perceived as fashionable, fit, and shallow. However, the tanned women’s images in beauty/fashion and health/fitness magazines were quite different. While tanned women were considered fit and shallow in health/fitness magazines, this was not the case in beauty magazines. Thompson-Brenner et al (2011), on the other hand, examined trends of women’s figure size in African-American magazines from 1969 to 2008. Using content analysis, they discovered that the predominant figures across time were average size. Moreover, African-American women were less likely to express body dissatisfaction than other ethnic groups. These findings, although different from the area of readers’ narratives in my study, show the kinds of representation of women prevalent in the magazines they analysed.

Some of the most influential works in the field of women’s magazines are Friedan’s (1963) *The Feminine Mystique*, Barthes’ (1967) *The Fashion System*, Ferguson’s (1983) *Forever Feminine: Women’s Magazines and the Cult of Femininity*, Winship’ (1987) *Inside Women’s Magazines*, Hermes’ (1995) *Reading Women’s Magazines: An Analysis of Everyday Media Use*, and Gough-Yates’ (2003) *Understanding Women’s Magazines: Publishing, Markets and Readership*. In research on women’s magazines dating back to 1963 Friedan challenged the conventional femininity portrayed in women’s magazines – the idea that women’s lives were fulfilled by being housewives and mothers. Friedan (1963, 1965, 1992) pointed out that the editorial decisions regarding women’s magazines were mostly not made by women but by men. Her work stimulated debate concerning women’s roles in particular. Barthes (1967) conducted semiotic analyses focusing on the language used in French

fashion magazines from the late 1950s to 1960s. Ferguson (1983), a writer and associate editor for a weekly British women's magazine, examined selected British women's magazines between 1949 and 1980 by using in-depth interviews, content, and context analyses. The content analysis focusing on the magazines' prominent themes was divided into two periods: 1949 to 1974 and 1979 to 1980 respectively. The context of production which centred on the roles of editors and a comparison of two leading publishing companies derived from interviews with editors, managers, and journalists both in UK and USA. Winship (1987), on the other hand, focused on more contemporary British women's magazines: *Woman's Own*, *Cosmopolitan*, and *Spare Rib*, by combining feminist and Marxist approaches. Her *Inside Women's Magazines* illustrates a strong sense that women's magazines domesticate women and support male dominance by reinforcing the idea that 'women do no work except housework and work to keep their bodies beautiful and get and keep a man' (Winship, 1987: 18). She suggested that this construction of womanhood in women's magazines should be rejected and reconsidered:

Many of the guises of femininity in women's magazines contribute to the secondary status from which we still desire to free ourselves. At the same time it is the dress of femininity which is both a source of the pleasure of being a woman [...] and in part the raw material for a feminist vision of the future (Winship, 1987: xiii).

This old-fashioned gendered image leads to the question whether this construction of women which was portrayed in women's magazines more than 25 years ago persists in the 2010s. The old gender construction is, for example, obviously present in the titles of some women's magazines such as *Woman and Home* and *Good Housekeeping* which suggest women's roles as housewives and restrict women's place to the domestic sphere. According to Winship (1987), women's magazines are an amalgamation of 'survival skills and daydreams' (14).

Hermes' (1995) *Reading Women's Magazines: An Analysis of Everyday Media Use* opened up a new aspect of women's magazine research; previous studies had primarily emphasized the production of women's magazines. Hermes (1995) used textual analysis and in-depth interviews with readers to explore what contents were

useful for women's lives, what readers were (or were not) interested in in women's magazines, what readers thought about women's magazines in contrast with what feminist scholars assumed that they thought:

The worry and concern in older feminist media criticism led to a highly unequal relationship between feminist author and 'ordinary women'. The feminist media critic is prophet and exorcist, even while being, as many claim, an 'ordinary woman' too. Feminists using modernity discourse speak on behalf of others who are, implicitly, thought to be unable to see for themselves how bad such media texts as women's magazines are (Hermes, 1995: 1).

This implies that readers are victims who are unable to understand women's magazines. Because of this, one might argue that research on readers of women's magazines has mostly focused either on imaginary actual readers or on actual readers perceived as unenlightened according to Hermes (1995). Hermes' work is an example of research on readers as consumers of magazines. My research will instead investigate readers as narrators within women's magazines. Further, I am interested in how readers are constructed in the narratives that tell their stories.

Gough-Yates's (2003) analysis of women's magazines in the UK in the 1990s is one of the most significant studies in this field. While Hermes (1995) and Beetham (1996) focused on how readers utilized and interpreted media products by using discourse analysis, Gough-Yates (2003) produced an analysis of women's magazines by combining business and cultural-impact aspects and ethnographic exploration. She challenges the idea of women's subordination in women's magazines (Ballaster, Beetham, Frazer and Hebron, 1991; Wolf, 1991) stating that 'such accounts of women's magazines offer, at best, only a partial account of the industry' (Gough-Yates, 2003: 7). Gough-Yates' (2003) *Understanding Women's Magazines: Publishing, Markets and Readership* relates to the work of previous scholars such as Ferguson (1983) and McRobbie (1991) whose research involved interviewing editors since they play a critical role in producing magazines.

Women's magazines research in Thailand, though interesting, has remained focused on actual readers' attitudes towards product-buying (Komutsakunee, 2008;

Phummarin, 2008), readers' characteristics and behaviours (Sirikrai wattanawong, 1998; Nuray, 2004; Aekwasinchai, 2007), and advertising (Chulpongstorn, 2001; Teerasorn 2008). In order to provide an understanding of Thai research on women's magazines, I shall briefly discuss studies conducted over the past fifteen years (1998-2013) on the media and women, particularly women's magazines. The purpose of emphasizing the years 1998-2013 is to consider contemporary sources. In reviewing the Thai literature on women's magazines of the past fifteen years, I found that there were five prominent themes: 1) the roles of women's magazines in women's health (Kaiyourawong, 1997; Chaithongsri, 1998; Sittipalakun, 2004); 2) the representation of women in women's magazines (Nirannoot, 2003; Chaiyasin, 2004); 3) content analysis of foreign women's magazines in Thai editions (Sodsathit, 2009); 4) advertisements in women's magazines (Chulpongstorn, 2001); and 5) sex and gender in women's magazines (Thummasarnsoonthon, 1995; Rasdranuwat, 2001; Nuray, 2004). However, the majority of these writers only looked at Thai women's magazines. Although a few collected data from western media such as television and magazines, my research investigates women's magazines in both the UK and Thailand in a comparative manner. This has not been done before.

Thai research into the roles of women's magazines in women's health broadly agrees that women's magazines influence women's lives in particular ways (Chaithongsri, 1998; Sittipalakun, 2004). Chaithongsri (1998) investigated how readers applied health knowledge from four Thai women's magazines (*Kwanreun*, *Kulasatri*, *Dichan*, and *Praew*) to benefit their health. Using content analysis regarding health issues, interview data, and an opinion survey, she found that women's magazines play a significant role in readers' health behaviours. By reading the magazines' health section, readers could adjust their knowledge to retain their good health. These findings, although different from my work in terms of scope and topic, affirmed the important role of women's magazines in women's lives, in relation to health in particular. Sittipalakun (2004) explored the influence of western mass media in constructing female body images. This research was based on both quantitative and qualitative data which included 200 survey questionnaire responses. The findings showed that women's magazines had an influence in constructing a thin



ideal body image among Thai female students through an internalization process. This study used a cross-national sample from western and Thai media including women's magazines and television. It was similar to my research in terms of using a cross-national sample. However, my study focuses specifically on women's magazines, not on television, and a particular unresearched sub-genre with the magazines. Sitipalakun's study is relevant to my research because I shall also investigate the construction of women in western women's magazines, specific British ones that are sold within the Thai cultural context.

Research on the representation of women in women's magazines in Thailand has argued that women are misrepresented in the media with particular reference to women's magazines (Maison, 2001; Nirannoot, 2003). Maison (2001) examined the power of Thai women's magazines in the construction of models' body images. The findings showed that the representation of models' body images in Thai women's magazines was determined by magazine' owners, the editing process, and social norms in Thai society. A prominent theme of this study is viewing women's bodies as sex objects for public enjoyment. This study is related to my research in the sense that it demonstrates how the representation of women's images is shaped by Thai women's magazines. Maison's analytical method was partly similar to mine in her exploration of photographs. However, mine concentrates specifically on both UK and Thai women's magazines, not only Thai ones.

Nirannoot (2003) explored sexual relationships and the reproduction of patriarchy in Thai women's magazines. Using a wide range of data collected from 1981, 1986, 1991, 1996, and 2001, 360 copies of selected magazines were analyzed. The research confirmed that women's magazines represent female identity as subordinate and inferior. Nirannoot argued that women's magazines are used as a means to subordinate women due to the complexity of patriarchal practices in Thai society. As I shall show, this is not exactly the case in my study.

When the negative representation of women as subordinate and inferior became extensively acknowledged, scholars began to investigate women's images from different perspectives. Chaiyasin's (2004) analysis of the identity of competent

women in Thai women's magazines 1997-2002 is one of an expanding number of works that reinforce women's positive images instead of negative ones. Such identities of competent women were defined in terms of 'knowledge, professional capability, vision, and leader personality'. The identity of capable women, according to the study, was discussed along three dimensions: work, achievement, and personality. Skilled working women were associated with high leadership positions together with vision and having the ability to inspire new employees and setting up an optimal work environment, whereas competent women with a pleasing appearance were valued in terms of their ability to choose appropriate clothes. Chaiyasin's (2004) findings reveal a different angle of the representation of women in Thai women's magazines in terms of gender culture: she shows that women are not inferior to men but play equal roles in both domestic and public spheres. This is an interesting finding because it contradicts Maison's (2001) and Nirannoot's (2003) studies. They claimed that women are misrepresented in women's magazines, portrayed in patriarchal terms. These different findings resulted from researching different types of magazines and a different timeframe of the studies. Chaiyasin's (2004) analysis has direct relevance to my own work but her research is ten years old. My research centres on a more recent timeframe. I will thus reveal any changes in women's images in women's magazines between the early 2000s and 2011 when I collected my data.

Research on Thai editions of foreign women's magazines tends to focus on content analysis around different topics such as environmental issues, news for public relations purposes, and self-improvement. This is the case with a recent study: Asipanya (2011) examined the pattern and contents of environmental issues in international magazines, the Thai editions of *Marie Claire* and *Madame Figaro* and the Thai women's magazines *Kullasatree* and *Sudsabdah*. She states that environmental content in foreign and Thai women's magazines is different in terms of their sources of information. That is to say *Marie Claire* and *Madame Figaro* presented original environmental stories from their English editions and translated them into the Thai language for their Thai editions. Thai women's magazines, on the contrary, sought and used their own environmental content. These Thai magazines

tended to integrate and display globalization and localization in their environmental content. Sodsathit (2009) undertook a content analysis of public-relations-related news coverage in the Thai editions of foreign women's magazines for different readers: teenagers, first jobbers, and working women. She analysed a sample of 48 women's magazine issues from January 2009 – December 2009. While my study focuses on readers' narratives, not news in the magazines, this research, as well as Asipanya's (2011), is methodologically relevant to my investigation in terms of the concern with Thai editions of foreign women's magazines. Puengworn (2000) also carried out content analysis of international women's magazines, namely *Cosmopolitan*, *Cleo*, and *Elle*, on self-improvement. Using content analysis along with opinion surveys and formal interviews, the author reported that the effect of women's magazines in relation to personal development could be divided into two dimensions: appearance and disposition. With regard to appearance, dressing, clothing, making up, and hair styling were considered. Disposition, on the other hand, was directly linked to self-confidence. This investigation reveals a reported influence of international women's magazines on Thai readers in terms of personal development. This study is relevant to my research because I shall also investigate readers' narratives' content regarding women's images and self-confidence.

The content of Thai women's magazines was occasionally analysed in comparison to men's magazines. Chulpongstorn (2001) examined creative strategies and information content in men's and women's magazines by analyzing 1,044 advertisements published in 2000. The findings indicated that advertisements in women's magazines, compared to men's, were more informative. The advertisements in women's magazines were studied in relation to readers' attitudes. Charoenying (2002) investigated the magazine consumption of working women. Based on 400 questionnaires collected from working women in Bangkok aged 20-39 years old, and 12 in-depth interviews, the study demonstrated that working women had different styles of magazine consumption. Most women had positive attitudes towards women's magazines because their information was useful and up-to-date. This is an interesting finding because not only advertisements were investigated

within the context of women's magazines but readers' attitudes were also examined in a specific age group.

Most of the recent studies on magazines focus on the relation between readers and narratives in particular forms, such as readers' attitudes and expectations towards narrative events (Rapp and Gerrig, 2006; Gerrig and Jacovina, 2009). Rasdranuwat (2001) used content analysis and in-depth interviews with magazine editors to examine gender and negotiation in Thai women's and men's magazines published in 2001. The result demonstrated that being good-looking and successful were desirable characteristics for women, whereas weakness was considered an undesirable characteristic in Thai women's magazines. In men's magazines power, success, aggression, and sexuality were regarded as masculine traits and weakness and nurturing were rejected.

The investigation of gender and readers' attitudes in Thai women's magazines has provided some interesting outcomes. This has led to research on similar topics in foreign women's magazines. Nuray (2004) examined information seeking, usefulness, and female readers' satisfaction with sex education in western women's magazines (*Elle*, *Cleo*, *Cosmopolitan*, and *Slimming*). The results show that readers aged 18 to 60 reported a moderate level of satisfaction in information seeking and uses of sex education from the magazines. Moreover, readers tended to use this sex education in their sex lives. However, the way in which women's magazines presented knowledge about sex was less gratifying to the readers. The findings displayed a significant role of foreign women's magazines in the sex education of Thai readers.

These are some of the key topics which have been engaged with the field of women's magazines in both UK and Thai contexts since its inception. Many of the studies to date either rely on cultural analysis or combine this with research on actual readers. None have looked at readers' narratives. These are interesting because they combine actual readers with the construction of reader-derived content. My research is original in terms of this focus. I shall now briefly turn to discuss real-life narratives.

Some of the most influential works in the general field of narratives by actual women are Personal Narratives Group' (1989) *Interpreting Women's Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives* and Smith and Watson's (1998) *Women, Autography, Theory: A Reader*. *Interpreting Women's Lives* discusses women's lives as portrayed in autobiographies, biographies, and life histories, and uses feminist theory with a particular focus on the role of women in constructing social reality (Personal Narratives Group, 1989). In other words, this book emphasizes how personal narratives reflect social reality and social norms rather than just analyzing the typical structures of life narratives. Personal narratives, in this way, were investigated within their social contexts. My thesis will do the same but looking at personal narratives which appear in women's magazines. Smith and Watson's (1998) *Women, Autography, Theory: A Reader* is a collection of essays that examines narratives in various forms such as diaries, letters, coming-out stories, and spiritual autobiographies. This book provides an overview of the study of women's autobiography in relation to postmodern, poststructuralist, postcolonial, cultural studies, and feminist theories. This overview is useful but does not address the form of personal narrative I engage with.

Despite the fact that real-life narratives are part of many women's magazines, there has not been any research on how women are represented in readers' narratives or on the topic of cross-cultural differences in readers' narratives between British and Thai women's magazines. The lack of research in this field motivated me to investigate those narratives. Overall the Thai literature on women and media demonstrates that readers' narratives or real-life stories have not been analysed. Instead, magazines have been analysed for their influence on readers, in particular on attitudes and personal development in relation to gender issues. All the research is on actual readers' attitudes and readers' characteristics. My study will focus on the construction of women in readers' narratives and fill a gap in understanding of how these narratives represent women in two different media contexts, the British and the Thai one. My thesis thus contributes original research to popular cultural work on women's magazines, and in particular to the area of readers' real-life narratives.

### Femininity within the Context of the Women's Magazines in this Study

Women's magazines are an important source of information and entertainment for women. As already indicated, they reach a large audience (Del-Teso-Craviotto, 2006). Women's magazines are also a useful source to study feminine images because they focus expressly on femininity (Zoonen, 1994). Moreover, women's magazines seek to shape and influence their audience in daily life from personal appearance to life style through focusing on topics such as 'weight-loss breakthrough' narratives (*Woman*, 15 November 2010, p. 11). Different magazines may present topics or images on issues or groups differently (Cho et al, 2010). Real-life narratives provide a particular perspective on women's lives. For instance, a 'true crime' narrative (*Woman*, 8 November 2010, p. 25) may suggest that if you face domestic violence or sexual abuse you must not accept this as your destiny. By reading women's magazines, the audience gets ideas about what to do, how to behave, what to expect, and what sense to make of their feminine identity. More specifically, female readers draw meanings as 'women' from these magazines' discourse (Currie, 1997).

In Britain during the mid-1970s, feminists condemned women's magazines for contributing to women's oppression (McRobbie, 1997). It was argued that women's position in society was secondary, and that women were represented only within the already established parameters of conventional femininity (Kirca, 2001). However, with the impact of post-structuralist writing, feminist scholarship on women's magazines moved beyond the question of ideology. As McRobbie writes: 'instead of seeking to uncover the truth behind ideology, the question now was to consider the power of meaning' (McRobbie, 1997: 193). In her study of women's magazines, Anna Gough-Yates (2003) argues that early feminist accounts of women's magazines were concerned with the ways that magazines presented 'unreal', 'untruthful' or 'distorted' images of women. Women's magazines did not simply offer their readers innocent pleasure. They were a key site for the development of a self-identity that undermined women's 'essential', 'real' feminine identities (Gough-Yates, 2003: 8). A traditional ideology of femininity constructs women, according to Winship (1987), as weak and passive. She also claims that the editorials in women's

magazines produced a world of 'we women' for readers of different cultural groups. However, there are limited groups of women involved in the particular world of any magazine. Those constructed as 'other' such as black women, lesbian women and older women were mostly excluded from many mainstream magazines.<sup>15</sup>

*The Dictionary of Feminist Theory* defines femininity as 'a term which describes the construction of "femaleness" by society and which connotes sexual attractiveness to men' (Humm, 1995: 93). It is here a heteronormatively conceived notion, articulated in relation to men. In this sense, women are disciplined by the male gaze and attractiveness is defined in terms of male judgement. Women who perform a certain ideal of femaleness are considered to be properly feminine (Toerien and Wilkinson, 2003). However, femininity is not fixed but is a construction forged through cultural work, for instance, cultural representations construct the meanings which are given to femininity rather than being a reflection of an a priori femininity (Dibben, 1999). Paechter (2007), following Judith Butler, states that femininities are performative. Performativity, according to Butler (1993), is the 'reiteration of norms which precede, constrain, and exceed the performers' will or choices' (234). In this sense, gender identity is shaped by culture.

Femininity is the way in which gender identity is embodied and enacted, rather than a more or less adequate reflection of some underlying bodily reality. Thus a person is male not only because he is born with male genitalia but also because he dresses, speaks, or acts in certain ways that are socially recognized as befitting a man (Butler, 1990: 325).

Sex and gender are thus a practice of self, governed by social norms. In their account of femininity, Rachel Alsop et al (2002) state that femininity is determined by

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<sup>15</sup> While there are some magazines for black women in the United Kingdom such as *Essence*, *Black Beauty and Hair*, and *Black Women UK*, none of these black women's magazines are currently available in Thailand. There are also magazines for lesbians in the UK such as *Diva*, *Lesbilicious*, *Fyne Times*, *Diva Direct*, *Out North East*, *G3*, and *Gay & Lesbian Humanist* that cannot be found in Thailand. However, there used to be Thai lesbian magazines such as *Anjaree San*, *Sai Fon Ton Rung*, *Pink Ink*, and *An Another Way Magazine* but they are no longer published because they are illegal in Thailand.

context and changes in accordance with social context and life path. The performance of gender is mutually dependent with the performance of other aspects of our identity, and the performance of ourselves and others towards us forms our gender identities. As Holland explains:

There are a variety of accounts of what femininity is and how is it 'done': for example, femininity has been seen variously as a normative order, that is, a set of psychological traits (such as that women are considered to be more nurturing than men, be less aggressive and have fewer spatial skills); it has been seen as a performance; and it has been seen as a process of interaction (Holland, 2004: 8).

I shall explore how femininity is displayed in the women's magazines I analyse. In this, cultural context plays a role. 'What it means to be a "woman" or a "man" varies according to other differentiating features of positionality, historical time, class, ethnicity and bodily abilities' (Alsop et al, 2002: 81). Femininity is the process through which women are gendered and become specific sorts of women. This is different for women of different classes, races, ages, and nations (Skeggs, 2001). However, as my research shows there are also similarities, apart from dissimilarities, across cultures regarding femininity as I shall discuss in subsequent chapters.

In my study, I have drawn on the intersection of two interdisciplinary academic subjects: women's studies and cultural studies. Culture, according to Anderson (2006: 46), is 'a pattern of expectations about what are appropriate behaviors and beliefs for the members of a society'. Culture includes the norms, values and beliefs of a society. Thus it defines our lifestyles and everyday life, for example how to behave in given situations, how to react to others, and what others expect from us. In this respect, I consider culture as a way of life in a particular society from a particular period. To investigate the construction of women in the magazines, it is necessary to understand the specificities of the British and Thai cultural contexts in relation to the way women are depicted in women's magazines. Conventional femininity in contemporary western culture used to be described regularly as 'emotional, gentle, kind, understanding, warm, able to devote oneself, completely to others, helpful to others, and aware of others' feelings' (Case, 1995: 103). This conforms to conventional views where women are perceived as 'placid, patient,



submissive, meticulous, uncomplaining, respectful of authority, clever with their hands, and slow to organize themselves' (Potter, 2003: 32). This image no longer quite holds. In Thailand, traditionally women were considered inferior and subservient to men in terms of social status, education, and occupations (Vichit-Vadakan, 1994). Women were expected to be 'good' wives, mothers, and homemakers. They were economically dependent on men and had to be solely responsible for household chores (Vichit-Vadakan, 1994). Additionally, women in traditional Thai society were expected to expend much effort on keeping beautiful. Beauty, in this sense, was considered a woman's resource for happiness and wealth because it enhanced her chances of getting a 'good' husband and/or maintained her husband's love (Vichit-Vadakan, 1994). This underlines the inferiority of women to men, their dependency both economically and emotionally. However, images of women in contemporary women's magazines may be different from the past because the meanings of being a woman have changed over time. The traditional notions of what it means to be a Thai woman are being made regarding women's sexuality, identity, and so on (Thaweessit, 2011). The reconstitution of femininity in contemporary Thailand thus involves the interplay of modern choices and social expectations and there is no single way of being a woman in Thailand (Thaweessit, 2011). This is consistent with contemporary notions of femininity in western culture in the sense that it is not seen as fixed but changes over time as a result of changing cultural values.

By drawing cultural studies into my work, the dissimilarities, as well as the similarities, in the representation of women in readers' narratives in both UK and Thai women's magazines will be explained in terms of cultural values. Cultural values are considered to inform the judgment of appropriate behaviour (Rokeach, 1973; Smith and Schwartz, 1997). This means that cultural values, on one level, for instance, define what kinds of topics and photos are appropriate to display in public. On another level, cultural values are used to explain the dissimilarities between British and Thai societies regarding femininity and masculinity. Geert Hofstede describes different cultures as 'masculine' and 'feminine' and argues:

[Masculine cultures] expect men to be assertive, ambitious and competitive, to strive for material success, and to respect whatever is big, strong, and fast. [Masculine cultures] expect women to serve and to care for the non-material quality of life, for children and for the weak. Feminine cultures, on the other hand, define relatively overlapping social roles for the sexes, in which, in particular, men need not be ambitious or competitive but may go for a different [goal in] life than material success; men may respect whatever is small, weak, and slow (Hofstede, 1986: 308).

In this context, material success and assertiveness are emphasized in masculine cultures whereas welfare and sympathy are accentuated in feminine cultures. Societies, according to Willem A. Arrindell et al (2003), can be divided along masculine and feminine lines, and this creates sex role identities for a particular society. More specifically, feminine and masculine societies have different societal norms which define particular attributes in each society. Feminine societies, according to Hofstede (1980), have specific features such as the ‘belief in equality of the sexes; less occupational segregation (e.g. male nurses); men and women can both be breadwinners and follow the same type of higher education’ (Hofstede, 1980: 296). Masculine societies, on the other hand, have different characteristics: ‘belief in the inequality of the sexes; some occupations are considered typically male occupations, whereas other occupations are considered typically female; men are breadwinners, women are cake makers; men and women follow different types of higher level education’ (Hofstede, 1980: 297). With regard to these characteristics, the UK can be considered a feminine society whereas Thailand may be regarded as a masculine one. This cultural context has implications for the articulation of femininity in women’s magazines, as I shall argue.

Although ‘the notion of femininity does not define as determinate and unitary phenomenon’ (Smith, 1988: 36), historically, femininity has been conceived as being rooted in the female body, that is, as a function of biology or nature. However, variations of the construction of femininity across cultures and time have increasingly led to other ways of thinking about femininity as rooted in cultural contexts, as a social construction rather than a biological given. For example, in patriarchal culture Connell (1987) suggests that the dominant form of femininity is ‘emphasized femininity’ which is ‘organized, financed and supervised by men’

(Connell, 1987: 188). Theories of the social construction of gender, according to Alsop et al (2002), can be divided into two categories: materialist and discursive theories. Materialist theories focus on the social structure that women and men are fitted into within society and the concrete social relations of family, work, sexuality, etc. Discursive theories emphasize the meanings of being male or female produced by language and culture (Alsop et al, 2002). Since I focus on constructions of women in magazines, my emphasis is on the discursive dimensions of femininity. I examine the notions of what it means to be a woman, what is valued about contemporary femininity in British and Thai cultures, as expressed in the magazines I analyse.

In my research I see 'femininity' as the social construction of femaleness that is the result of (textually) mediated discourses. In examining contemporary ideas of femininity in magazines, I analyze femininity as it is presented in certain texts. I focus on what is valued about contemporary femininity and how the feminine might be constructed in the narratives from different cultures. There are patterns both of readers' telling and narrators' arranging women's real-life stories in terms of a fixed moment of readers' lives. Since becoming a woman, as Simone de Beauvoir claims, includes the ways we describe ourselves (de Beauvoir, 1997), these women's narratives reveal a certain ideology of femininity. I shall now turn to discuss some of the features of women's real-life narratives in the UK and Thailand to indicate how they are constructed.

#### Focusing on 'Real-Life' Narratives: What Makes Them 'Real'?

In general, women's real-life narratives may be presented in many forms such as biographies, autobiographies, life histories, diaries, journals, and letters. Women's life experiences in their historical and cultural contexts can be apprehended through these narratives (Personal Narratives Group, 1989). In my work I focus on women's magazine readers' stories which I term 'real-life narratives'. By this I mean that the stories are presented as based on actual experiences which the main character of the narrative had. This does not mean that these experiences are presented in some unmediated fashion. Rather, they are mediated by a range of social and cultural conventions including, for example, what it is acceptable or unacceptable to talk

about publicly in a given culture, how experiences one has had are conventionally discussed, the conventions that govern these narratives and their accompanying images. Further, as I shall discuss, the narratives I analyse are mediated by the reporters that 'help' the women to tell their stories. The conventions which govern story-telling include that a story may be constructed in terms of a beginning, middle and end, even though the experiences are embedded in the reader's overall life-course which does not usually either start or end with that story. These stories then, according to Dan McAdams (1993), are not factual accounts of an individual's past, but are interpretations and recollections of their experiences. They are stories of how individuals explain events and their lives as 'human actors striving to do things over time' (McAdams, 1993: 30). As individuals' lives develop in relation to others, making decisions about how to construct their life stories is usually set within the context of other stories (Savickas, 1997). These narratives are also constructed within individuals' cultural contexts (Savickas, 1997). This means that their stories articulate and reflect that cultural context, and that a real-life narrative of a woman from a culture that practises polygamy for example may therefore be quite different from the narrative of a woman coming from a culture where monogamy is the norm. The real-life narratives in the magazines tend to focus on particular events and experiences. They thus do not necessarily relate a whole life course but may only centre on a particular moment or period in a person's life. Real-life narratives in my research then are mediated narratives focusing on the telling of particular events or experiences, and, in the context of the women's magazines, on the experiences of a particular woman.

The narratives are given a real-life dimension through the use of factual and biographical details of actual people such as names, ages, and careers for the purpose of identifying and differentiating the particular woman from others. A name, for instance, personalises a woman. Using an actual name offers a sense of primary access to the factual existence of an individual woman. At the same time, it can also be the case that attempts are made to obscure a woman's identity. This, too, has the effect of asserting the woman's actual existence since presumably one would not need to obscure her identity if she did not exist unless one wanted to pretend that she

is a 'real' woman. Though the narratives I analyse may well be 'genuine', they are constructed in a particular genre in accordance with the conventions of each magazine. They are thus always mediated. My study of these narratives will focus on the storylines, vocabularies and images that make up the stories in order to examine the ways in which they construct femininity. I will explore what kinds of women's images emerge through the processes of narration in terms of the development or the structure of the stories and the language they employ, to understand how these relate to the way women are presented and femininity is asserted. To contextualize my research, I shall begin by discussing the notion of narrative. I shall then examine how the women readers' narratives are constructed in women's magazines in general and in my specific sample of selected women's magazines in the British and Thai cultural contexts.

### Readers' Narratives in Contemporary Women's Magazines

There is no single definition of narrative (Randall 2007; Riessman 2008). The word narrative is rooted in 'gnarus' in the Latin which means 'knowing'. Narrative, associated with knowing, can be considered as both a way of telling and of showing a story (Bamberg, 2006; Phoenix and Sparkes, 2009). The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines narrative as 'a story' and 'the part of a fictional work that tells the story, as distinct from dialogue' (Soanes, 2010: 498). A story normally features some sort of plot or sequence of events and characters. Lewis P. Hinchman and Sandra K. Hinchman's (1997) definition of narrative is useful for my research: 'Narratives (stories) in the human sciences should be defined provisionally as discourses with a clear sequential order that connects events in a meaningful way for a definite audience and thus offers insights about the world and/or people's experiences of it' (Hinchman and Hinchman, 1997: xvi). People then use narratives to construct their lives discursively.

There are increasing numbers of narrative studies in the human sciences. Researchers' methods and theoretical approaches to narrative and how different genres function are diverse (Mishler, 1995). For example, they may focus on the structure of the narrative, or they may focus on the actual vocabulary used. In

*Narrative Analysis*, Riessman (1993) describes narrative analysis as ‘a family of methods for interpreting text [e.g. oral, written, and visual] that have in common a storied form’ (Riseman, 1993: 11). Gubrium and Holstein (1998) identify two particular relevant aspects of narrative analysis that should be considered: ‘how a story is being told’ and ‘what is involved for example, the substance, structure, or plot of the story’ (Gubrium and Holstein, 1998: 165). As Hiles and Cermák (2008) argue, ‘in narrative analysis we must focus on both the what and the how of the re-telling, upon both the story that is being told as well as the way in which it is being retold’ (Hiles and Cermák 2008: 155). The what and the how of stories then become significant aspects of narrative analysis. It has to be remembered, of course, that stories themselves are theoretical and analytical because people apply analytic methods to construct their worlds when they tell their stories (Ellis and Bochner, 2006).

William Labov suggests that narrative structure begins with an abstract, followed by the orientation, a complicating action, an evaluation, and a coda<sup>16</sup> (Labov, 1967, 1972, 1982). Viney and Bousfield (1991) similarly argue that narrative structure in both spoken and written accounts starts with an identification of time, place and person or orientation. This is followed by the narration of the story or the complicating action. Mishler (1995) proposes three typologies of narrative: the reference and temporal order, textual coherence and structure, and narrative functions. The reference and temporal order deals with the relationship between the order of the events in real time and in narration. Textual coherence and structure relate to the linguistic and narrative devices employed. Narrative function refers to the context of the story in society and culture. Riessman and Speedy (2007) maintain

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<sup>16</sup> By ‘abstract’ Labov means a beginning clause that informs the whole sequence of stories. For example, ‘She is going to tell ...’ By ‘orientation’ he means clauses that provide the context such as time, place, and participants, in which events take place. ‘Complicating action’ refers to a subsequent clause that states a following event. ‘Evaluation’ relates to the point of the outcomes of the event and the ‘coda’ refers to a final clause that indicates the end of the story, for example, ‘they lived happily ever after’. (Labov, 1967, 1972, 1982).

that narrative is differentiated from other forms of discourse by its sequence of events. Events are chosen, arranged, combined, and assessed meaningfully. Generally, these framings of narrative identify common features in the narrative structure, namely a beginning, middle and end (Riessman, 2008). Narrative structure thus articulates conventions of narration, or, in not doing so, subverts them. But, as I shall show, the readers' narratives in the magazines I examine, all follow specific conventions.

Some scholars have argued that particular linguistic choices are significant features in narrative analysis; without these communicative tools narrators cannot accomplish their purposes. In this, language is viewed as constitutional rather than representational. Helene Ahl (2007) states that language is a means to understand the world as well as to comprehend a particular context in which action occurs. Since real-life narratives reflect the positionalities of the individual, gender as one factor in that positionality may play a certain 'role' in how these narratives are constructed.

Narrative is the most typical form that the representation of social life takes, in that people use narrative forms in order to understand their own lives and they do the same when they try to understand the lives of others (Czarniawska, 2004). Alasdair MacIntyre (2007) claims that 'human actions' are 'enacted narratives'; if 'we all live out narrative in our lives and... understand our own lives in terms of the narratives that we live out', then 'the form of narrative is appropriate for understanding the actions of others' (MacIntyre, 2007: 211-212). First-person accounts of women's personal narratives articulate a certain self-understanding and provide potential peer narratives for readers. Life stories in women's magazines combine the stories of individuals who are unique within a narrative frame which is in many ways stereotypical. The stereotypes entail similarities in format, use of language and/or content. Forms of telling a life story draw on culturally specific rules and expectations, conventions, rhetorical strategies, and notions of what is interesting, important or significant (Maynes et al, 2008: 13). Analyzing women's personal narratives in women's magazines thus necessarily draws on understandings of what norms shape life story plots. Women's personal narratives emerge *inter alia* from their lived experiences, their social and cultural settings. Individual lives vary greatly

in detail. Life stories in this study are, thus, on one the hand, considered idiosyncratic because they happen to a particular individual and are therefore unique. At the same time, they tend to have recurrent themes and plotlines. As such they become exemplary. As I shall analyse in greater detail below, in my research certain narrative themes were recurrent. These can be categorized under four subheadings, based on the frequency with which they occurred: confidence-building; employment; romantic relationships and marriage; and family. As recurrent themes, these follow certain formulae. I shall discuss the latter further below.

Liz Stanley argues that women's narratives are viewed as underlining the relationship of women's selves to others (Stanley, 1992). Self, according to Atkinson et al (2003), is constructed through storytelling, mutual actions, and culturally particular resources. Somers (1994) argues that narratives form selves embedded within culture and selves 'must be analyzed in the context of relational and cultural matrixes because they do not exist outside of these complexities. Individualism, after all, is itself socially and relationally social constructed' (Somers, 1994: 662). Although the narratives that I analyze in my research may be described as real-life narratives based on actual experiences which the main character had, they are mediated by a reporter and the discourse the reporter uses, as well as by the narrative conventions which govern telling these particular stories. Real-life narratives in women's magazines are therefore selective, highlighting a particular story. These narratives are subject to topic selection and to editing. Not all aspects of real life are covered in the magazines; certain topics prevail and recur. Indeed, as I shall show, the way magazines elicit readers' stories defines what topics are covered. This also includes the way narratives are presented to readers. When one analyses the narratives, it becomes immediately clear that they follow certain patterns and are thus highly stylized. The narratives are constructed through a certain process:

1. The magazines I analyse encourage the readers to come forward with their stories by emailing them to the editors according to pre-given subjects such as health, family, food, diet, and sex and relationships. This process is web-based. The readers get into *Woman* for example by signing up to the 'good to know' community on the



website.<sup>17</sup> The website provides fixed rubrics organized by topics which the readers have to use to tell their stories. Thus they are asked to tell their stories around certain themes, for example, ‘weight loss’, ‘relationships’ or ‘friend for life’. This normalizes what stories readers can tell and allows the magazine to control the stories’ thematic range. The rubric acts as a filter to select which stories are considered desirable for the magazine. This is similar to the process for *Woman and Home*. Readers can participate by visiting the website as announced in the magazine: ‘if you would like to join the *Woman and Home* forums and meet women who are going through similar situations to you, visit the website [womanandhome.com/forums](http://womanandhome.com/forums) and sign up now; ‘Do you refuse to be pigeonholed? We want to hear from you – email [donttelleicant@ipcmedia.com](mailto:donttelleicant@ipcmedia.com)’ (*Woman*, 12 September 2011, p. 21).

2. Once a narrative is accepted for publication, columnists arrange the content and photographers take readers’ photos, then select and construct the order of narrative events which creates the meaning of the story. This construction is highlighted through the fact that both columnists’ and photographers’ names appear in each column in the magazine, for example, ‘Words: Helen Roberts, Photographs: Mike Alsford’ in ‘Unlikely Romance’ (*Woman*, 17 January 2011, p.12), or ‘Words: Kate Hilpern, Photograph: Getty Image’ in ‘Modern Dilemmas’ (*Woman and Home*, March 2011, p. 35). Here the by-lines indicate the processed dimension of the narratives.

3. The stories are published in narrative form, following a particular format which in *Woman*, *Woman and Home*, and *Poo Ying* is as follows: The text starts with an Introduction written by the columnist. The introduction may have approximately 4-5 sentences or 1 paragraph. It provides the story outline. The columnists indicate the reader’s full name to introduce her. For example, ‘Ariane Barnes tells Anna Moore how 18 years after having her son, Oliver, she donated a kidney to him’ (*Woman and*

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<sup>17</sup> See <http://www.goodtoknow.co.uk/chat/board/131/woman-magazine.html>, accessed 1/2/2011.

*Home*, March 2011, p. 35). Occasionally, ages and occupations are included to specify the readers. For example, ‘Denise Rabbetts, 49, a shop assistant, lives with her husband Wayne, 50, a chemical engineer, in Manchester. Her daughter Claire, 22, is a trainee solicitor’ (*Woman*, 16 May 2011, p. 25). These details of name, age, profession and location create the ‘reality effect’ (Barthes, 1986) of the narrative.

The overall content of a given narrative is arranged by combining the columnist’s narrative and the photos. Each story is approximately 1 – 4 pages in length. The main narrative itself is distinguished from the introduction by different forms of pronouns. The content section begins when the first person pronoun - ‘I’- is used to refer to the person telling her story. The text thus uses a 3<sup>rd</sup> person narrator to introduce a story but then switch to first-person narration for the main story. This conveys a sense of immediacy, giving the impression of the narrator talking directly to the reader. For example, ‘What I love most about garden design is the transformation. You can take a dull, ordinary space, and make it magical and exciting...’ (*Woman and Home*, May 2011, p. 54). The story may be embedded, for example, ‘Jenney Wright, 55, says: I met Phil when I was 17...’ (*Woman*, 10 January 2011, p. 36), or ‘Serena says: I never went to college or had a career as such...’ (*Woman*, 16 May 2011, p. 25). Occasionally, nicknames are used to refer to the story teller. For example, ‘Lisa<sup>[18]</sup> thinks that difficulty depends on what we talk about. If we know about that topic, it will be easy for us...’ (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, November 2010, p. 67). Less commonly, the reader is described using a common noun which represents her occupation instead of ‘I’ or her nickname. For example, ‘at that time /mOO/<sup>[19]</sup> worked under the authority of the Royal Thai Air Force...’ (*Woman and Home* Thai edition, November 2010, p. 67).

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<sup>18</sup> Thai people normally address each other by nicknames given by their parents in early childhood. These nicknames are typically one syllable. However, Thais tend to assume that western people cannot pronounce their names. Thus they tend to use English or western names which can be one or two syllables as their nicknames such as Ann, Lidia, Lisa, Rosie, Sarah, etc.

<sup>19</sup> /mOO/ here denotes doctors or physicians in the Thai language.

Altogether the narratives I analyse are representative of the women's real-life narratives that featured commonly in the women's magazines I examined. Due to their contents they can be grouped into two recurrent kinds of story: tragic and triumphal narratives. Tragic narratives centre on traumatic situations and life experiences. They solicit empathy from the reader for a life marred by difficulties, pain, sadness, sorrow, and depression, usually in connection with unexpected negative experiences in one's life. Tragic narratives are commonly found in stories centring on sexuality, family and marriage. For example, 'Relationships - My platonic affair wrecked my marriage' (*Woman*, 2 May 2011, p. 32), or 'A mother's loss – Did my son die just because he looked different?' (*Woman*, 18 April 2011, p. 18). Triumphal narratives, on the other hand, focus on positive experiences. These triumphal narratives are stories of overcoming or success. For example, 'New directions – we have made 500,000 pounds from teaching babies to swim' (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, March, 2011, p. 132), 'Weight loss wonder – Office humiliation helped me lose over 10st' (*Woman*, 24 January 2011, p. 15), or 'Real relationships – When I fell in love I never imagined I'd be living in a castle' (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, May 2011, p. 23). As I shall discuss, triumphal narratives, in contrast to tragic narratives, occurred in both UK and Thai women's magazines. Triumphal narratives in both the UK and in the Thai contexts cover all kinds of content: confidence-building, employment, romantic relationships, and family. Tragic narratives, however, did not cover the themes of employment in either the UK or Thai women's magazines I looked at. Only readers who succeeded in their careers were portrayed in the UK and Thai women's magazines. In the UK women's magazines tragic narratives were more likely to be displayed under the topics of romantic relationships, family, and confidence-building. Thai women's magazines, on the other hand, mostly presented triumphal narratives as I shall discuss in depth in my thematic analyses of the readers' narratives in the following chapters. Here we already begin to see some cultural differences in the kind of readers' narratives displayed in the two different contexts.

Classifying life-stories into tragic and triumphal can partly be done from the titles of the articles. 'Real-life slimming success', for example, clearly indicates a narrative

of overcoming. But the titles of the articles are not always indicators of the ‘turn’ the narrative will take, i.e. whether it will be one of overcoming or of succumbing. ‘Influential women in medicine’ for example is a triumphal narrative but the title does not particularly indicate this. Therefore the categorization of the stories which I undertook was a matter of content as much as of heading as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Examples of narrative contents in Women’s Magazines: *Woman*, *Woman and Home*, and *Poo Ying* 2010 – 2011.

Narrative Focus	Narratives Themes	
	Tragic Narratives	Triumphal Narratives
Confidence-building	‘My allergy meant that I couldn’t wear black clothes’ ( <i>Woman</i> , 3 October 2011, p. 46)	‘Diet confidential: our tips for success’ ( <i>Woman</i> , 17 January 2011, pp. 14-15)
Employment	-	‘Working women 2011’ ( <i>Poo Ying</i> , November 2011, pp. 244-265)
Romantic relationships and marriage	‘Relationships: ‘The day I discovered my husband was gay’ ( <i>Woman</i> , 1 November 2010, pp. 12-13)	‘The way we love now’ ( <i>Woman and Home</i> , UK edition, March 2011, pp. 62 - 65).
Family	‘True crime - my daughter’s killer dad’ ( <i>Woman</i> , 8 November 2010, pp. 14-15)	‘It’s a miracle - we’re a family at last’ ( <i>Woman</i> , 8 November 2010, pp. 26-27)

Table 3 shows the kind of triumphal and tragic narratives that were commonly displayed in the women’s magazines. It is worth noting that the stories about employment did not entail tragic versions in either the UK or Thai women’s magazines, even despite the global recession. This signals a shared characteristic in the portrayal of women – as being successful in work terms – in the UK and Thai women’s magazines.

I shall now move on to discuss my methodology. This will detail the process of data collection and the criteria I used to select the women’s magazines in my sample. I shall also describe my choice of research methods and the way in which I analysed my data.

## Methodology

The starting point for my research was feminism. The perception that women are misrepresented by the media, specifically in women's magazines in both the UK and Thailand (Glazer, 1980; Massé and Rosenblum, 1988; Beetham, 1998; Maison, 2001; Nirannoot, 2003) and the fact that women's magazines, although they play important roles in women's lives such as giving advice and support, have repeatedly reproduced women's images in relation to domesticity (Winship, 1987; Ballaster et al, 1991; McRobbie, 1991), motivated me to privilege women as a category of enquiry. Feminism is a term for which it is difficult to provide a single definition since there are interpretations covering a wide range of meanings, ideas, and practices (Greer, 1970; Daly, 1979; Banks, 1981; Joseph and Lewis, 1981; Jaggar, 1983; Offen, 1988; Curtin and Devere, 1993; hooks, 2000; Jeffreys, 2007). However, one of the most common founding ideas is the notion of the propagation of women's rights and the challenge to male domination. In my view, feminism is not about a battle between men and women; it is a way of creating gender equality. Part of this is analysing how women are represented in contemporary culture.

Feminist methodology has been explored and debated widely by feminists (Harding 1986, 1987; Christ, 1987; MacKimron, 1987; Alcoff, 1989; Scraton and Flintoff, 1992; Humphries and Truman, 1994; Ramazanglu and Holland, 2002; Bryman, 2008). My selection of methods was shaped by my research focus in that I used content analysis, discourse analysis, and visual methodologies to examine the women's magazines I discuss. As such these methods are not specifically feminist; however, I would consider that my research focus is.

I investigated a particular subset of UK and Thai women's magazines: two women's magazines from the UK (*Woman* and *Woman and Home*) and two from Thailand (*Poo Ying* and *Woman and Home*). These magazines were selected for three reasons: firstly, the women's magazines in my sample appealed to a particular readership since they aimed at women in their 30s and over. Secondly, these magazines have never been analysed in terms of readers' narratives and the representation of women. A comparative study thus brings a new understanding to the field of women's

magazines, and the construction of women across cultures. Thirdly, they were chosen because many women read magazines. Magazines therefore are important in their lives. Magazines construct women in particular ways. This includes their portrayal in readers' narratives. As already indicated, little is said about this in the existing research to date.

I decided to focus on the period November 2011 – November 2012, i.e. a period of one year, to collect issues from the magazines in question, and examined each issue published during this period. This provided a clear and manageable timeframe for my data collection. Based on the actual readers' narratives that those issues contained I identified four main themes that emerged: 1) confidence-building, 2) employment, 3) romantic relationships and marriage, and 4) family. These constituted the most common topics covered in the narratives. The four topics emerged from the narratives I analysed. A narrative would be classified under 'confidence-building' if it was linked to women's self-development to achieve particular goals such as weight loss, or a particular appearance. Employment narratives were about women in their occupations. Narratives which discussed women's love stories and marriage life would be classified accordingly. Family narratives - which were the least common topic - were about maternity, children, and childcare. In analysing all these narratives I also examined the relation between the content of the real-life narratives and their accompanying images.

The primary approaches I use in my study are content analysis, discourse analysis, and visual methodologies. Content analysis, according to Ole R. Holsti (1968), is a 'technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying special characteristics of messages' (Holsti, 1968: 608). From this point of view, the texts as well as the images and photos that accompanied the texts were receptive to content analysis. In content analysis, written texts are investigated through explicit rules (Harris, 2001). These rules are applied to 'classify the signs occurring in a communication into a set of appropriate categories' (Janis, 1965: 55). With respect to this viewpoint, determining the categories is an important part of the process of content analysis. Making use of a content analysis approach was useful in drawing out categories from my data. I made lists of stories and grouped them together under

meta-themes in order to do further thematic analysis. My theme selection was guided by my data and the dominant topics which emerged were the four already mentioned. I assigned narratives to these themes through scrutinizing their content. Some readers' narratives appeared under columns with specific headings. For example, stories in 'the new dating scam' and 'love stories' columns would be grouped under romantic relationships and marriage narratives. Stories in 'family tragedy' and 'family celebrations' columns, on the other hand, would be clustered together under family narratives. This set the scene for analysing the narrative themes in my research.

In my subsequent analyses, I applied discourse analysis focusing on mediated language as used in the readers' narratives (Van Dijk, 1985, 1997, 2008; Fairclough, 1995, 2003; Johnstone, 2007; Widdowson, 2007). According to Fairclough, 'Language is a material form of ideology, as language is invested by ideology' (Fairclough, 1995: 73). Analysing the language used by the editors and the women in the texts thus revealed a certain ideology embedded in the women's real-life narratives. I focused on the vocabularies which were used to convey ideas of womanhood in the narratives since such vocabularies are significant components in framing thought (Fowler, 1991). They can disclose users' ideas and beliefs, particularly when the same groups of words are repeatedly used.

The photos in the readers' narratives were considered as discourses since editors use images in particular ways. In order to analyse the photos as part of the real-life narratives, I employed visual methodologies, drawing on Jones (2003), Pink et al (2004), Evans et al (2010), Pink (2012), Rose (2012). Rose' (2012) *Visual Methodologies*, for instance, provides various analytical approaches to examine visual materials such as content analysis, discourse analysis, compositional interpretation, semiology, and psychoanalysis. More specifically, it focuses on the way to analyse such visual images in terms of audience in media studies. Rose proposes a 'critical visual methodology' which is 'an approach that thinks about the visual in terms of the cultural significance, social practices and power relations in which it [the visual] is embedded' (Rose, 2012: xix). Using photos as part of my analysis chapters, I also apply visual methodology to interpret the meanings of

readers' images regarding 'cultural significance', 'social practices', and 'power relations'. Jones' (2003) *Feminism and Visual Culture Reader* as well as Rose (2012) offer a wide range of different methods to decode visual images regarding issues of class, race, gender, identity, and sexuality. These sources directed my approach to reading the images in my sample. The visual figures examined in my study lead to explanations of the representation of the women in the narratives. A photograph's structure, according to Roland Barthes, has to be considered in association with the surrounding language and the text such as caption, headline and layout (Barthes, 1986). Photographic analysis thus was a tool for exploring the messages the stories were constructed to convey.

### Structure of the Thesis

Having discussed the context for my research, the absence of any work on readers' narratives, and briefly explained my methodology, I shall now, finally, outline the structure of the rest of my thesis. In the following five chapters I discuss my findings. The first chapter focuses on the construction of readers' narratives. The second chapter centres on the most common topic in the magazines: confidence-building. The third chapter will discuss how women's employment was constructed in UK and Thai women's magazines. The fourth one will explain the construction of relationships in the women's real-life narratives, and the fifth will explore the type of family presented and the way in which women in the family were displayed in the magazines. Finally, I shall draw conclusions based on these five core analysis chapters. Together, these five analysis chapters provide specific contexts for the notion of femininity that emerges in the selected readers' real-life narratives. The following chapter will discuss the construction of readers' narratives in women's magazines.



## **Chapter Two: The Construction of Readers' Narratives**

### Introduction

The notions of narrative and life story have become crucial in the field of social sciences since the mid-1950s (Özyıldırım, 2009). Telling stories is considered as the way of making sense of ourselves and the way we perceive the world (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990). As Johnstone (2001: 635) suggests: 'the essence of humanness, long characterized as the tendency to make sense of the world through rationality, has come increasingly to be described as the tendency to tell stories, to make sense of the world through narrative'. Narratives are thus significant to us since they are a means to make sense of our lives.

Researchers have studied narratives in various ways. In the field of linguistics, for instance, narrative studies range from the structure of narratives to the self-presentation in narratives (Özyıldırım, 2009). Although there are many questions about narratives, the two issues of what a narrative is and what the difference is between a narrative and its representation seem to be crucial (Nanay, 2009). My focal point in this chapter is to examine the construction of women's real-life narratives in selected UK and Thai women's magazines in terms of their thematic similarities and differences. Furthermore, this chapter investigates the portrayal of women in such narratives within two different cultural contexts in order to elucidate their construction of femininity.

### The Stylization of Readers' Narratives

Although there are wide arrays of meanings of narrative, qualitative researchers have recently confined its meaning to a particular form of discourse (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990). Narrative, according to Donald E. Polkinghorne, is 'the type of discourse composition that draws together diverse events, happenings, and actions of human lives into thematically unified goal-directed process' (Polkinghorne, 1995: 5). This is consistent with the features of readers' narratives in my sample in the sense that readers' narratives can be considered a particular type of discourse which

thematically unifies readers' experiences. In this readers' narratives are a kind of 'planned discourse' (Ochs, 1979: 71) since they are mediated by the editors and reporters of the magazines in which they appear.

Johnstone (2001, 2002) points out that much research on narratives focuses on the analysis of narrative structures in spoken language. Labov's influential work (1967, 1982), for example, concentrates on personal experience narratives in the spoken language in terms of semantics. But there are few studies on written personal-experience narratives (Stahl, 1979; Tannen, 1982). Furthermore, studies of narrative structures especially in non-western languages with regard to the cross-cultural differences and/or similarities in both oral and written forms are very limited (Özyıldırım, 2009).

Narrative structure, according to Webster and Mertova (2007), is the feature common to all stories, which gives them their aptitude for illuminating real-life situations. As they argue: 'It is not the mere material connection of happenings to an individual but the connected unfolding that we call plot which is important' (Webster and Mertova, 2007: 19). Focusing on plot and structure in narrative analysis is also emphasized by Catherine K. Riessman (2008). In her *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*, Riessman announces that personal narratives have definite structures that link them together. By examining the construction of readers' narratives in two different cultural contexts, the UK and Thailand, my thesis thus contributes new work in its discussion of readers' narratives.

These narratives form a specific genre through their stylization. However, genres depend on 'shared rules of interpretation: they are not explicable by form alone, even in written literature' (Tonkin, 1994: 50). In *Narrating Our Pasts* (1992) Elizabeth Tonkin draws attention to the importance of understanding 'genre' (including the cues which introduce it, and the codes which govern the speaker's use of and the audience's response to it) in interpreting oral narratives as follows:

The different conventions of discourse through which speakers tell history and listeners understand then can be called genres. A genre signals that a

certain kind of interpretation is called for... Genres provide a 'horizon of expectation' to a knowledgeable audience that cannot be derived from the semantic content of a discourse alone. Since genres are the level of discourse through which interpretation is organized, any analyst seeking to understand a verbal message must learn the genre (Tonkin, 1992: 2-3).

Although genre as discussed above by Tonkin refers to oral narratives, this discussion can also be applied to written narratives in the sense that genre involves the stylization of a particular discourse and that its audience understands that stylization. As I shall show, the construction of the readers' narratives follows particular conventions – they are stylized in certain ways. Genre analysis, according to Martha Shiro (2003), concentrates on 'conventions that arise from typical communication events in written or oral communication, constraining topic selection, rhetorical organization, and lexical and syntactic choices of text production' (Shiro, 2003: 167). In this respect, as a genre, I shall investigate the readers' narratives in terms of conventions concerning lexical pattern, rhetorical choices, topic selection, etc. Topic selection in readers' narratives, for instance, implies the meanings of self we make as individuals and as members of society. Topic selection is thus one of the significant features in the construction of readers' narratives, as discussed below.

#### The Content of Readers' Narratives in *Woman*

The content of *Woman* is regularly divided into 4 sections: 'Your Life', providing real-life stories; 'Your Looks', presenting fashion and beauty trends; 'Your time' consisting of cooking, travel, home and decoration, horoscope, books and puzzles; and 'News & Goss' consisting of celebrities' news. The most common topics in the readers' narratives also fell onto four categories (Table 4):

Table 4. Content of readers' narratives in *Woman*, 2010 – 2011.

Narrative Contents	Typical Headings
1. Confidence-building	'Inspiring stories', 'Fighting back', 'Giving back', 'Rebuilding our dreams', 'A new life', 'Inspiring real-life stories', 'Twist of fate', 'Facing your fear', 'Amazing survival', 'Amazing women', 'Significant others', 'Brave women', 'True spirit of Christmas', 'Extraordinary women', 'Wasting away', 'Women like you', 'Against all odds', 'Weight – loss breakthrough', 'Real-life slimming success', 'Real-life super-slimmer', 'Diet inspiration', 'Weight loss wonder', 'Slimming success', 'A whole new you', 'Super slimmer', 'Looking good', 'My life as a yo-yo dieter', 'Women's view', 'Friends for life', 'My health story'
2. Family	'Family celebrations', 'Family dilemmas', 'Family heartache', 'Family reunion', 'Family tragedy', 'Family betrayal', 'Modern families', 'A mother's loss', 'Family life', 'My precious gift', 'Mum doesn't always know best', 'Family secrets', 'A mother struggle', 'Little miracle', 'Happy ever after', 'Baby snatch drama', 'It happened to us', 'Britain's bravest family', 'Festive memories', 'Twist of fate', 'Modern life', 'It's a miracle', 'Amazing women', 'Shattered lives'
3. Romantic relationships and marriage	The new dating scam', 'True crime', 'Relationships', 'Love stories', 'Tough love', 'Forbidden love', 'Living a lie', 'Unlikely romance', 'Confessions', 'Crime file', 'Woman report', 'In my experience'
4. Employment	'Life today', 'Winning ways'

Narrative content in the issues of *Woman* I investigated was typically concerned with four aspects of women's lives: confidence-building, family, romantic relationships and marriage, and employment. *Woman* privileged confidence-building, and contained the most headings relating to typical confidence-building narratives. An example of this can be seen in stories about weight loss and beauty in particular. I based my choice of grouping women's appearance, particularly weight loss and beauty, under the heading 'confidence-building' because all stories about weight loss and beauty in my sample seemed to be a means to an end, a meta-aim, which was confidence-building. Weight loss and beauty were considered as a means by which women could build and gain self-confidence, as I shall discuss in depth in Chapter Three (Confidence-building in Readers' Narratives). One might argue that promoting

appearance concerns as a way for women to build confidence traps them in classic conventional feminine scenarios of being focused on potentially superficial issues, but the very emphasis in these narratives on how working on those aspects of the bodily self impacted on the women in question also had a positive dimension in that it recognized the importance of confidence for women.

Confidence-building narratives typically centred on the narrator's story of overcoming through personal strength. For example, 'Nikki Kerr explains how she survived years of bullying and finally beat her tormentors' ('A new life' – *Woman*, 1 November 2010, p. 26) and 'The year that changed my life' ('A new life' - *Woman*, 4 January 2011, p. 20) also typically focus on very particular themes, mostly on weight and diet issues, and provide inspiration to lose weight successfully despite obstacles. The contents place a strong emphasis on physical image. For example, 'Each time, I had good intentions, but I struggled with unrealistic diets that expected me to cut out all the foods I loved...Now I'm a slim size 6-8 and a shadow of my former self at 9st. I won the regional final of Slimming World's Woman of the Year competition and their Miss Slinky title too. I never dreamed that anyone would ever call me slinky' (*Woman*, 15 November, 2010, p. 33).

The narratives on family, on the other hand, present stories on topics such as motherhood and family members' death. For example, 'Scarlett never knew her dad, he died without even knowing I was pregnant. So the fact that Scarlett resembles him so closely is both a blessing and a painful reminder' ('Family tragedy' - *Woman*, 7 Mar 2011, p. 40), and 'Ultimately, I believe you get what you're given. Pregnancy is a lottery: girl or boy. And I, for one, hope it stays that way' ('Family life' - *Woman*, 18 April, 2011, p. 21).

Romantic relationships and marriage narratives predictably focus on love stories and relationship issues such as first love, divorce, infidelity. The endings of the stories may be tragic or triumphal. For example, 'It's made us stronger and we've learnt not to worry about the silly things. He says he still sees me as the 16-year-old he first married' ('Love stories' - *Woman*, 14 Mar 2011, p. 45), and 'I've told Pascal I want

to renegotiate, but I'm nearly 40 and time's running out – I just hope we can strike a new deal before it's too late' ('Relationship' - *Woman*, 8 November 2010, p. 16).

When it comes to employment, it is noticeable that there are only two typical stories. Their contents provide narratives about success in business and about dream jobs. At the end of the stories, two or three techniques for business success are presented under the title 'Make it work for you'. For example, 'Karen Darby, who sold her company "SimplySwitch" for £22 million, gives her advice: Be original - the key is finding a great idea and a niche market. Do your research and make sure your idea is viable. Keep costs down-look for a business with low overheads. It's much easier nowadays with the growth of the internet' ('Life today' - *Woman*, 16 May 2011, p. 18). Overall, *Woman* covers four main dimensions of readers' lives: confidence-building, family, romantic relationships and marriage, and employment. However, the magazine places much greater significance on confidence-building than on the other topics; employment is the least common theme.

#### The Content of Readers' Narratives in *Woman and Home* (UK and Thai edition)

Both the UK and the Thai editions of *Woman and Home* are supposed to be 'reflecting the way women live today'.<sup>20</sup> *Woman and Home* (UK edition) divides its general contents into 'Features', 'Fashion and Beauty', 'Wellbeing and Health', 'Food and Homes', 'Time for You', 'Travel', 'In Every Issue', and 'Offer and Competition'. The 'Features' section varies from week to week but normally includes articles about celebrities, real-life stories, tips for sex, love, marriage, family, and living. In the 'Fashion and Beauty' section, there are the latest fashion styles and the latest cosmetics to buy, as well as beauty tips. 'Wellbeing and Health' contains do-it-yourself information and health advice from experts. The 'Food and Homes' section supplies the latest food news, recipes, and step-by-step cooking guides. 'Time for You' features the month's new books to read, and entertainment news. The 'Travel' section has articles on domestic and overseas travel, tourist

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<sup>20</sup> See *IPC Media, Ltd.* [www.ipcmedia.com/brands/woman.html](http://www.ipcmedia.com/brands/woman.html), accessed 4/12/2010.

attractions and luxurious hotels. ‘In Every Issue’, there are horoscopes, and letters from the readers. Lastly, ‘Offers and Competition’ are about free gift cards and prizes for the readers.

*Woman and Home* (Thai edition) has a similar content as *Woman and Home* (UK edition). However, there is a ‘People’ section which does not appear in *Woman and Home* (UK edition). The articles in this section involve real-life stories and vary from week to week but normally include sub-columns such as ‘Real Me’, ‘Influential Women’, ‘Through My Eyes’, ‘Make a Difference’, ‘New Direction’, ‘Success Story’, and ‘People and Parties’. The topics of the readers’ narratives cover the same four core themes as *Woman* but to slightly different extents (Table 5).

Table 5. Typical headings in *Woman and Home* (UK and Thai editions), 2010 – 2011.

Narrative Contents	<i>Woman and Home</i> Magazines	
	The UK edition	The Thai edition
1. Confidence-building	‘Online lives’, ‘My secret passion’, ‘What defines me’, ‘One woman’s story’, ‘Through my eyes’, ‘It happened to me’, ‘In my words’,	‘Life changing experience’, ‘Life challenge’, ‘In our experience’, ‘Life pleasure’
2. Employment	‘New career’, ‘Celebration special’, ‘New directions’, ‘Influential women’, ‘New beginnings’, ‘In my experience’, ‘Woman on the front line’	‘New directions’, ‘My life @ work’, ‘New beginnings’, ‘My crossroad moment’, ‘Make a difference’
3. Romantic relationships and marriage	‘Modern relationships’, ‘Relationships’, ‘Real relationships’, ‘Love story’,	‘Our brand new attitude’, ‘Interview’, ‘In the mood for love’, ‘Modern relationships’
4. Family	‘Family ties’, ‘Like mother like daughter’, ‘Mothers and daughters’, ‘New way of living’, ‘Personal story’, ‘From the heart’, ‘Modern lives’, ‘Modern dilemmas’, ‘Life today’, ‘First person’	‘Love story’

The UK and Thai editions both have three similar sections: 'Influential women', 'New beginnings', and 'New directions'. Table 5 shows that under the theme 'Family' the *Woman and Home* UK edition had many more stories than the Thai edition. I shall discuss this further later.

#### The Content of Readers' Narratives in *Poo Ying*

*Woman* (Thai edition) or *Poo Ying* places great significance on female readers over 30. Its contents focus strongly on fashion and beauty articles with many sub-columns such as 'Fashion cover', 'Fashion inner I', 'Fashion inner II', 'New arrival', 'Dress up', 'Accessories', 'Beauty reportage', 'Beauty in focus', 'Beauty a la carte', 'Beauty secret', and 'Beauty new'. However, readers' narratives in *Poo Ying* magazine focus solely on employment. There are only four narrative sub-columns: 'Rising star', 'Working woman 2010', 'Exclusive interview', and 'Open mind'. These contents conform to its motto 'smart women succeed'. For example, 'the next important thing to do is to increase the number of tourists and extend new target groups because we hope to see the success of our resort' ('Exclusive interview'- *Poo Ying*, January 2011, p. 170). At the time of my research (2010) topics such as confidence-building and romantic relationships and marriage were not very present in *Poo Ying*. *Poo Ying* thus covers the least numbers of topics in its readers' narratives among the women's magazines in my sample. This indicates the low level of self-disclosure in Thai women's magazines. It is consistent with the fact that typical titles dealing with romantic relationships and marriage, which can be regarded as 'personal' life stories, compared with confidence-building and employment ones, were rarely displayed in Thai women's magazines.

It is interesting that both UK and Thai women's magazines displayed similar women's real-life topics which can be divided into the same four categories. Stories in these magazines were presented in two ways: section headings that recur and individual stories which appear under the section headings. The topic selection by women's magazines reflects their construction of women's experiences and lives. In other words, this topic selection offers a view of women's lives and social and cultural issues more broadly. The typical titles in Thai women's magazines reveal a



significant aspect regarding cultural values in the construction of women in readers' narratives as confident and competent since they are mainly about employment.

The readers' narratives have a certain conventional structure. They are commonly divided into introduction, content, and ending. The introduction is the first section in readers' narratives. It is composed of headings or the main titles of the stories, usually in colourful large letters designed to draw the actual readers' attention. This is evidenced by the large font size which dominates the introduction.

Interestingly, in the Thai magazines both Thai and English font styles were used. But whereas in *Poo Ying* (November 2010 – April 2011), there was only one narrative with English font styles and one narrative with English and Thai font styles out of 27 readers' narratives, in the Thai edition of *Woman and Home*, (November 2010 – April 2011), English font styles appeared in 12 out of 24 readers' narratives. Half the narratives in *Woman and Home* used English fonts. This is partly a function of the fact that *Woman and Home* (Thai edition) is licensed under the copyright of IPC media, 'the UK's leading consumer magazine and digital publisher'.<sup>21</sup> *Woman and Home* (Thai edition) compared to *Poo Ying* is thus more likely to be influenced by its English version in terms of its language and contents. Maybe there is also an appeal to a certain cosmopolitanism and internationalism in the Thai *Woman and Home*. At the same time, English is used mostly short sentences in both interrogative and affirmative forms, for example, 'We had a passion for fashion!' (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, November, 2010, p. 134), 'Can a psychic solve your problems?' (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, January, 2011, p. 71) as shown in Image 5 and 6.

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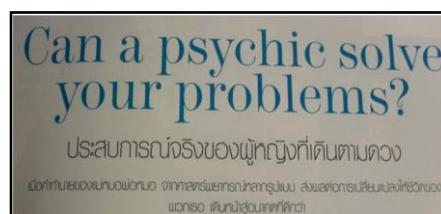
<sup>21</sup> See <http://www.ipcmedia.com/>, accessed 13/03/2014.

Image 5. English font styles in an affirmative headline in the introduction section (*Woman and Home*, November 2010, p. 134).



Source: author's photograph.

Image 6. English font styles in a headline question in the introduction section (*Woman and Home*, January 2011, p. 71).



Source: author's photograph.

English here figures as an official and global language. In the early 2000s around 1.5 billion people or about a quarter of the population in the world had some competency in English. There is no other language, even Chinese, which is known to that number of people (Crystal, 2003). The official language in Thailand is not English but Thai. Thailand is in fact the only country in Southeast Asia that has never been colonized by western countries. However, English is a second language and widely taught in many schools and universities in Thailand. Additionally, English is used extensively in several major mass media in Thailand such as newspapers (*Bangkok Post*, *The Nation*, etc.) and magazines (*BK Magazine*, *Essential Bangkok*, *Direct Magazine Thailand*, etc.). Many of these are online. Nonetheless the number of people who speak fluent English in Thailand remains very low and English is perceived as a symbol of being well-educated. As stated by the World Factbook, English is the ‘secondary language of the elite’ in Thailand.<sup>22</sup>

Unlike the Thai language, the English language usually appears first in the introduction section in Thai women's magazines. It normally occurs in just one sentence. English is used to present the main theme of the narrative. English, in contrast to Thai, is displayed in brighter colours such as red, orange, blue, etc. It is thus quite dominating and the expectation clearly is that readers will understand it.

<sup>22</sup> See [https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/print/country/countrypdf\\_th.pdf](https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/print/country/countrypdf_th.pdf), accessed 11/02/2014.

Bright colours have the potential to influence our perceptions and emotions (Valdez and Mehrabian, 1994). For example, blue and green are more positively stimulating than red and yellow (Jacobs and Hustmyer, 1974; Wilson, 1966). Colour is one of the powerful visual components that effects readers' information processing and attracts the readers' attention. There are 3 main groups of font colours which are used in both the introduction and the content sections of the magazines I analysed: one, two, and three colours respectively. Unlike the use of one or two font colours, fonts with three colours were found only in UK women's magazines. Two colours are generally found in both sections whereas black alone was hardly ever used in the introduction in either UK or Thai women's magazines. Black is used as the basic colour and mixed with both warm and cool colours such as red, orange, yellow, blue, green, etc. These colours have a symbolic function. For example, pink which symbolizes love and romance, caring and tenderness,<sup>23</sup> is mostly employed to present romantic relationship narratives while gold which indicates strength and wealth,<sup>24</sup> and red which signifies passion and intensesness<sup>25</sup> are applied in employment and career narratives in both UK and Thai women's magazines. Additionally, red which may indicate conflicting emotions is resorted to in family narratives in the introduction section in the UK magazines while it is put to use in romantic relationship and confidence-building narratives, and highlights the readers' names in the introduction in Thai women's magazines. This emphasizes the main characters in the narratives.

In Thai women's magazines, in contrast to the UK women's magazines, coloured fonts are less common. This may be a function of the associated production costs.

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<sup>23</sup> See <http://www.princetonol.com/groups/iad/lessons/middle/color2.htm>, accessed 13/03/2014.

<sup>24</sup> See <http://www.princetonol.com/groups/iad/lessons/middle/color2.htm>, accessed 20/6/2011.

<sup>25</sup> See <http://www.princetonol.com/groups/iad/lessons/middle/color2.htm>, accessed 20/6/2011.

Fonts in three colours appear only in the introduction in the UK magazines. Warm colours such as pink, red, and yellow, are more likely to be used than cool colours. This implies that colours are used as tools to capture the readers' attention in the UK women's magazines (*Woman* and *Woman and Home* UK edition) (see Image 7). It also indicates that the use of colours in magazines is influenced by culture and colour preferences. Colour preferences are culturally dependent (Noiwan and Norcio, 2006) and cultural contexts dominate the colour responses of people in different cultures and countries (Eiseman, 2000). According to Han Kreitler and Shulamith Kreitler (1972), nationality is one of several factors that is indicative of colour preferences. Not only colour preferences, but also narrative norms and themes in women's real-life narratives in both the UK and Thai women's magazines are shaped by cultural differences, as I shall discuss in subsequent chapters.

Image 7. Colour use in readers' narratives' titles (*Woman*, 24 January 2011, p. 31).



Source: author's photograph.

The main heading in Image 7 - 'Office humiliation helped me lose over 10st!' - was printed in large red letters. The red of the heading is directly linked to the woman through the use of the same colour for her dress. This emphasizes the importance of the main title as well as the woman herself. Additionally, the headline reveals the message constructed by the editor to the readers. By linking humiliation to weight loss, the editors suggest obesity is unattractive and undesirable. Thus, a particular idea of desirable femininity is conveyed, characterized by slimness. Slim women, according to women's magazines, are more likely to be accepted and admired by friends or co-workers as evidenced by the phrase 'office humiliation' which signifies the lack of acceptance from people who are working with the woman. The main title

thus does two things to readers: it attracts their attention and conveys a certain message which is part of the construction of the narrative.

Following on the introduction or the second part of readers' narratives is the main content section which details the woman's story. The content section is generally divided into two parts: a woman's short details written by editors and the woman's story narrated by the woman herself. The first paragraph of the content section usually gives details of the woman's personal circumstances in approximately 2-4 sentences. Names, ages, marital status, numbers of children, hometown, and occupations are often mentioned in UK women's magazines as an opening of the story. For example, 'Joanne Turnbull, 34, is married with two children. She lives near Durham and is an operations manager for Space On Tap' (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, November 2011, p. 151). In Thai women's magazines, on the other hand, personal information especially marital status (whether married and divorced) never appeared. An indicative example is 'Pink Achavanichakul, 32, was in love with ballet since she was young. She is now the owner of a ballet school named Pink Ballet School. She is a mother of 7-month-old baby - Mida' (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, August 2011, p. 38). The focus is much more on the woman herself and what is immediately connected to her – her partner does not figure. This suggests different levels of women's self-disclosure in British and Thai women's magazines.

Another different aspect of the content section between UK and Thai women's magazines is the use of font styles and colours. Unlike font styles in the introduction, font styles in the content section are smaller and have less variation. The content section in the UK women's magazines is similar to that in the Thai women's magazines. Black is generally used in this section and put together with both warm and cool colours. Occasionally, the content sections in both UK and Thai magazines are presented only in black, as shown in Image 7. Although black is usually used in the texts in this section, a woman's name is printed in bold in order to highlight and differentiate it from other parts of the contents. This is commonly found in UK women's magazines. An example occurs in Image 8 which shows the woman's name – Elizabeth Ward – more prominently than the rest of the text.

Image 8. A woman's name in bold font in a UK women's magazine (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, August 2011, p. 122).



Source: author's photograph.

If the woman's name in this part was not presented in bold and larger font, it was displayed in the identical font style and in the same colour as the woman's short details (Image 9).

Image 9. A woman's name and short details in pink font in a UK women's magazine (*Woman*, 25 July 2011, p. 23).



Source: author's photograph.

Image 9 illustrates that the content section was divided through two colours: pink and black. The pink part read 'Helen O'Donnell, 44, from Huddersfield works in a clothes shop. She's divorced and has two children, Amber, 20, and Mikey, 17'. It consists of the woman's name and brief details about her. The pink font colour not only works to separate the woman's details from the starting point of her own story but also tells readers where the real-life story of this woman is about to begin. Using pink which is bright instead of black as appeared in the rest of the story places great emphasis on the woman. Using bright colours for women's names also occurred in

Thai women's magazines. Women's names were often displayed in different colours in order to make their names more explicit as shown in Image 10.

Image 10. A woman's name in orange in a Thai women's magazine (*Poo Ying*, January 2011, p. 174).



Source: author's photograph.

It is noticeable that the woman's name (Khun Nee – Watcharaporn Rangrikulpipat) as was displayed in the same colour - orange as the main title ('Team' a short word that brings success). Although the use of font styles and colours in UK and Thai women's magazines were sometimes different, they aim to underline the significance of the individual women. The section after the women's short details sets out the woman's story, evidenced by the use of the first personal pronoun: I and we. The font styles in this part normally follow the same pattern as shown in the former section (women's personal short details). However, the colours may or may not be different from the introduction of the women's details.

The content of the women's stories are often either tragic or triumphal. Typically, the tragic theme was less likely to occur in readers' narratives, especially in the Thai women's magazines. It occasionally appeared in romantic relationship and marriage narratives under the topics of infidelity, divorce, and lovers' death in particular. A triumphal story, on the other hand, was typical for all four narrative categories across the UK and Thai women's magazines. I shall discuss the meaning of 'triumphal' and 'tragic' more thoroughly in the thematic analysis chapters.

Following on the content section is the ending. The endings of the readers' narratives varied depending on their themes. In contrast to Thai women's magazines, UK magazines are more likely to present different forms of ending to readers. There are five such common endings in the UK women's magazines: 1. tips and suggestions

from experts, 2. further information, 3. advertising women's works, 4. asking readers' opinions, and 5. invitation to readers to send their stories to the magazines. Tips and suggestions from experts guide readers how to conduct themselves in particular situations. At the end of the story about a woman who likes sunbathing topless, for example, the recommendation to readers read:

Yes you can but be sure to...  
Always use sunblock – your skin is very delicate around the décolletage area.  
Be sensitive when going topless – respect the local customs and culture, especially when you're aboard. If in doubt, don't bare.  
Cover up when you're walking on the beach or by the pool.  
Check when you're with friends that they are comfortable for you to be topless (*Woman*, 25 July 2011, p. 23).

The tips and suggestions above are simple and straightforward in the form of bullet points. Readers can follow and apply these to their daily lives. The advantage is that readers do not learn only from the women's stories but also from additional advice. Such endings, however, do not occur in Thai women's magazines. In these, the endings were usually women's suggestion to readers or a discussion of a woman's feeling about her experience instead. These endings were usually the last paragraph of each story. The ending, in this way, was directly linked to women's 'positive' attitudes towards their own stories or experiences. What they had learnt, how happy or how successful they were, and what they would like to tell readers - these were common endings. A typical example read: 'How to work happily is to remember that work is just work. It may be stressful and boring. Going out from your office zone, listening to the sound of birds, and looking at the trees can make you relax. Keep in mind that it is just work!' (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, June 2011, p. 69). This example, gives simple advice with a woman acting as expert since she is the one who conveys the advice.

Occasionally stories also ended with further information in the form of statistics and websites and/or contact numbers relevant to the women's stories. Providing statistics in the UK women's magazines was a way to normalize women's situations. The statistics were used to show that a woman's experience was not unusual. In the case



of living with parents instead of leaving home, for instance, statistics stating that ‘1.7 million UK 20-somethings now live with their parents’ (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, November 2010, p. 62) were given at the end of the story. Rather than telling readers that these women’s cases are common, websites and telephone numbers relevant to the women’s stories were provided to serve the purpose of normalization. These were often presented in women’s narratives concerning health problems. A typical example was ‘The Alzheimer’s Society offers advice and support for anyone affected by dementia. Call (020)7423 3500 or see the website [alzheimers.org.uk](http://alzheimers.org.uk) w&h’ (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, November 2011, p. 81). By providing this information in the narrative, readers get to know more about the Alzheimer’s Society where to get help. On the other hand, this suggests that there are groups of people facing this problem, not only the woman who told the story. Ending a story with further information or additional knowledge can thus be regarded as a way of normalizing the narrative.

Unlike further information, advertising women’s works highlights women’s individuality. This promotes women’s works such as books and artworks which are available to buy as shown in the following example: ‘Kate’s novel *The Winter Ghosts* (Orion, £7.99) is out in paperback on 28 October’ (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, November 2010, p. 63). Ending narratives in this way emphasizes individuality in the sense that writing a book and getting it published is a goal-directed action which may not happen to everyone. It thus partly promotes a woman’s competence as a writer by promoting her work. This kind of advertising was also found in Thai women’s magazines. It usually promotes women’s own businesses such as restaurants, companies, or schools. Examples included: ‘Let’s taste delicious noodles at *Gin Sen Ten Ram* restaurant, Sathorn branch, Narathiwad Road. Soi 7 Tel. 0-2677-5779’ (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, June 2011, p. 71) and ‘Health lovers who want to know the right ways to take care themselves, please do not hesitate to go to *Absolute yoga*’ (*Poo Ying*, December 2010, p. 213).

One of the most outstanding features of British narratives’ endings which never occurred in Thai women’s magazines was asking for readers’ opinion about the

stories. Readers in the UK women's magazines were invited to engage actively with the magazines. In other words, readers and British magazines were connected in the form of democratization of engagement. Equally, everyone was invited to send their opinion to the magazines regardless of hierarchical values or social status. Women's decisions on particular issues such as becoming young mothers, being housewives instead of working and so on could be challenged by other readers. A typical example was: 'What did you do? And did you make the right choice? We'd love to hear from you – email us at [w&hmail@ipcmedia.com](mailto:w&hmail@ipcmedia.com)' (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, November 2011, p. 89). Interestingly, urging readers to have an interaction with the UK women's magazines was not only presented in the form of asking for opinions, but also asking for them to send their stories to the magazines. This technique acts as an invitation to readers to send their stories to the magazines as shown in the following example: 'Do you refuse to be pigeonholed? We want to hear from you – email [donttellmeicant@ipcmedia.com](mailto:donttellmeicant@ipcmedia.com)' (*Woman*, 25 July 2011, p. 23). This is, however, again not the case in Thai women's magazines. It thus suggests that readers in Thai women's magazines are more likely to be constructed as passive consumers.

The real-life narratives in question almost always combined both written text and photographs. They were constructed as an amalgamation of the columnist's and the readers' words and different arrangements of photographs. More than that, photos held significant meaning in the stories since they were consistently presented in every story. With regard to visual images, Krippendorf (1980) emphasizes that content analysis leads to an understanding of symbolic texts which convey the cultural meanings of which they are a part. Furthermore, content analysis is suitable for dealing with large numbers of images since images which frequently occur are more significant than ones which rarely appear (Rose, 2012). In my sample, I draw attention to the most common and the least common images displayed in British and Thai readers' narratives, utilizing a semiological approach.

Semiology means 'the study of sign' (Rose, 2012: 106). As Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson point out: 'human culture is made up of signs, each of which stands for

something other than itself, and the people inhabiting culture busy themselves making sense of those signs' (Bal and Bryson, 1991: 174). Semiology, according to Gillian Rose, provides 'analytical tools for taking an image apart and tracing how it works in relation to broader systems of meaning' (Rose, 2012: 105). Semiology, in this sense, is appropriate to interpreting visual images within particular cultural contexts. I analyse the photos in the readers' narratives in my sample by means of semiological interpretation since these images contain signs which are constructed and selected by the editors in accordance with the norms of their cultures. These signs as well as the narrative content convey a certain meaning to the readers. One way to reveal the construction of women is to analyse the images presented with the readers' narratives. Since 'every photograph is a structure of "presences" (what is represented, in a definite way) and "absences" (what is unsaid, or unsayable, against which what is there "represents")' (Hall, 1991: 156), and the meanings of a text and an image depend on both (Rose, 2007), it is important to consider image and text since they jointly make up the story. In analysing women's images I found that Gillian Dyer (1982) provides a very practical checklist for interpreting the signs in order to understand their meanings. Dyer uses three main categories: appearance, manner, and activity. Appearance consists of age, gender, race, hair, body, size, and looks. Manner focuses on expression, eye contact, pose, and clothes. Activity, on the other hand, concentrates upon touch, body movement, positional communication, and props and settings (Dyer, 1982). By following these criteria, visual images may be interpreted. I shall now turn to discuss how the photos that accompany readers' narratives are arranged and how they make meanings in relation to the portrayal of women in these photos.

### Photos in Readers' Narratives

Readers' narratives in both UK and Thai women's magazines were not just literary but also pictorial. They told women's stories by combining a sequence of incidents and photos in a certain way. The complete image, according to Jonathan S. Marion and Jerome W. Crowder (2013), is composed of framing, composition, angle or perspective, and lighting. Framing is what emerges in the frame whereas composition is the placement of objects within a photo's framing. Angle or

perspective, on the other hand, refers to position of the camera in relation to the subject such as from the side or above the subject. In my study, I focus on framing – what picture appears or not in the narrative – since it can reveal implicit meanings. In the following section I shall examine photo features and the convention of photos in readers’ narratives in order to provide a better understanding of how photos make meanings in the narratives.

Photos customarily accompanied women’s real-life narratives. They were part of every introduction and/or content sections in different positions. Generally, they came in three different sizes: large, medium, and small. Large photos were roughly the same size as A4 while medium photos were as big as 4 x 6 inches (4R) postcards. Small photos were passport size. These sizes occurred in readers’ narratives in both UK and Thai women’s magazines. However, the number of the photos in the readers’ narratives varied from one to five photos with different sizes in each story. There was always at least one photo of the reader in the introduction or content sections. The photo arrangements in the readers’ narratives came in five major formats as shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Photo arrangements in readers’ narratives in *Woman*, *Woman and Home*, and *Poo Ying* 2010 – 2011.

<b>Format 1</b>	Reader’s photo (large)	Contents with photos (medium/ small)
	Introduction	
<b>Format 2</b>	Reader’s photo (large)	Contents without photo
	Introduction	
<b>Format 3</b>	Introduction	Contents with photos (medium/small)
	Reader’s photo (large/ medium)	
<b>Format 4</b>	Introduction	
	Contents with photos (medium /small)	
<b>Format 5</b>	Introduction	
	Contents without photo	

In Format 1 the reader’s photo and the introduction appeared on the same page. The introduction in this format had 2-4 sentences outlining the theme of the narrative and/or the reader’s details. A typical example is ‘Adventure trip to family time -

Nuchanart (moderator) & John Rattanaweroj (musician)' (*Woman and Home* Thai edition, November 2010, p. 66). On the following page, there were both the contents and the photos which related to the reader's story.

Unlike in Format 1, there is no photo in the content section in Format 2. In Format 3, the introduction comes before the reader's photo and both appear on the same page. Similar to Formats 1 and 2, Format 3 has only one photo of the reader which can be large or medium size, placed under the introduction section. The contents follow the readers' photos as in Format 1. In Format 4 there is only one page for each reader's narrative. After the introduction the content with smaller or medium sized photos follows. Unlike Format 1, 3 and 4, Format 2 was found *only* in certain Thai women's magazines because the real-life narratives in *Poo Ying* had approximately 1-2 pages, the shortest of all the ones I analysed. Additionally, Format 2 mostly occurred in narratives focusing on employment and career contents so the readers' photos were presented as large-sized portraits with the readers' faces looking directly at the reader in still positions, suggesting a staged portrait that underlines the importance of the readers who succeed in their businesses and careers. The readers' photo arrangements in Formats 1, 3 and 4 were commonly found in women's magazines in the UK edition. For Format 4 and 5 there is only one page for each reader's narrative. Unlike in Format 5, after the introduction the contents with small or medium sized photos follow in Format 4.

Format 3 was found commonly in both the UK (*Woman and Woman and Home*, UK edition) and Thai women's magazines (*Woman and Home* Thai edition and *Poo Ying*). In this format small and medium photos are used to illustrate the stories. For example, readers' large photos appear in the introduction section then the small and medium photos of the readers and/or their family members are displayed in the content section in order to present the readers' stories. Unlike the readers' photos in the large and medium sizes in the introduction section, the photos in the small and medium sizes in the content section feature details and specific people from the readers' lives such as family, lovers, their business, work, activities, and so on.

Each format may have different numbers of photos. More photos are found in the readers' narratives in the UK women's magazines (*Woman* and *Woman and Home* UK edition) than in the Thai ones (*Woman and Home* Thai edition and *Poo Ying*). Photos in the UK magazines were arranged in a certain way to represent at least two or more events. Photos in this sense were used to tell a story as well as to emphasize particular events. There was no case where only one photo of the woman appeared in the story as happened in the Thai magazines. Unlike photos in UK women's magazines, photos in the Thai ones usually represented an event or just the women. The number of photos depended on the length and content of the narratives in the readers' narratives in the Thai magazines. In the readers' narratives of two pages' length, there was only one large-size photo of the reader which, as already indicated, was generally found in employment and career narratives in certain Thai women's magazines. In British women's magazines, in contrast to the Thai ones, there were more photos per page. These photos were mostly presented in family narratives indicating both the readers and their family members.

Importantly readers' photos were always presented in both UK and Thai women's magazines. The sizes of the photos also related to the photo features. The largest photos generally were of the woman whose narrative was presented. In this way, the primary role of photos in relation to the women was to confirm the reality of the person. Besides women's personal details such as names, ages, and occupations, their photos were presented as portraits as part of story. The photos in this group illustrate the readers' faces and figures in different positions, e.g. standing or sitting. The larger photos are generally found in the introduction section while small-size photos are usually in the content section in both the UK and Thai women's magazines. The large photos are portraits, sometimes just facial, sometimes full-length or occasionally semi-portraits. However, readers' full-length portraits are typically found in the introduction section with employment and career content in *Poo Ying* magazine whilst portraits of the readers' heads only are usually presented in the content section in the UK women's magazines. Close-ups were thus more common in the UK magazines. Readers' semi-portraits were used commonly in the introduction and the content sections in both the UK and Thai women's magazines.

Occasionally, confirming the reality of the person was done in the form of censorship of images by blurring women's faces in particular. On one level, their actual identity was protected – it was integral to the confirmation of their reality and reinforced the narrative as real-life. Blurring the face was used in Thailand only to protect the identity of women who were raped and abused. Unlike the UK women's magazines, in Thai women's magazines sexual harassment stories did not turn up in the readers' narratives. Thus photos of readers with blurred faces were not shown in Thai women's magazines (*Woman and Home* Thai edition and *Poo Ying*), but they occurred in the UK women's magazines (*Woman* and *Woman and Home* UK edition). They were used in love stories with a negative content such as 'Why I married my brother' (*Woman*, 22 November 2010, p. 16) to cover the woman's and/or her partner's faces (see Image 11). Endogamous marriage is not lawful because the parties are related by blood. In spite of knowing that it was illegal, here a woman got married to her half-brother. They have got two children together and moved away from Ireland. In this story, there was the use of blurring in the photo of the endogamous couple. However, this use of blurring was also not found in the Thai women's magazines since no love stories with a problematic theme were presented. To put it another way, whilst portraits of women were used to confirm the reality of the women in triumphal stories, censorship of images was displayed in the tragic stories, particularly on unsuccessful love ones.

Image 11. A woman who married her brother (*Woman*, 22 November, 2010, p. 16).



Source: author's photograph.

More than that, such photos followed narrow conventions, highlighting particular women's roles or traits such as mothers, partners and/or wives, and working women. Photos of women as mothers accompanied stories on family such as new family members (first babies), family reunion, family tragedy, and family loss. These

photos illustrate the close relationship the women have with their families, especially with their husbands and children, and with family members they have lost. These photos in the UK and Thai women's magazines provided a view of women's domestic contentment.

The concept of family construction in the UK and Thai women's magazines was quite similar. This can be seen from the positions of the women and their children in the photos. The portrayal of touching (see Image 12), for example, designed to give an impression of intimacy and closeness, regularly appeared in family photos in UK and Thai women's magazines. Photos of women as partners and/or wives were similar to those with their families. They usually had a splendid setting and the couple smile at the camera, not at each other. Even if the narratives are about disruptive events such as divorce, the photos used are always of the period when they were supposedly happy. There are no photos which show people quarrelling or fighting either in the UK or in Thai women's magazines. This highlights the norms of domestic photography which circumscribe very precisely what can and cannot be photographed. The selection of these photos points to the dominance of the norm in domestic photography to present couples as happy (e.g. Image 13). This suggests that these photos represent women in very particular ways: women are pictured as happy and are usually framed within pleasant settings concerning particular stages in their lives: having children and getting married, for instance.

Image 12. A woman with her family  
(*Poo Ying*, August 2011, p.128).



Source: author's photograph.

Image 13. A woman with her husband  
(*Woman*, 24 January 2011, p. 28).



Source: author's photograph.

The representation of women's role as working woman was very similar to the way in which women as wives and mothers were portrayed. That is to say, the portrayals



of women in both UK and Thai women's magazines were out of the ordinary in that they were always depicted as happy, regardless of their types of occupations and circumstances. Although most had responsibility for unpaid domestic work (e.g. household chores and childbearing) and routine work, women were depicted as happy and smiling instead of bored, for example. Women's contentment was thus highlighted as the common convention of working women's photos in both UK and Thai magazines.

However, a slightly different way of presenting working women in UK and Thai women's magazines occurred in the use of uniforms. In UK magazines it was common to have photos of readers wearing their work uniforms such as nurses, paramedics and call handlers in employment narratives in order to highlight their occupations. In contrast, the clothes women wore in photos in Thai magazines were usually casual. Since the employment narratives in Thai women's magazines were of readers who were business women, that are self-employed rather than employed, wearing a uniform was less significant for them, and unlikely to be a feature of their jobs. This suggests that the employment status of the depicted women was somewhat different in the UK and Thai magazines. I shall discuss this difference of employment in greater depth later in Chapter Four.

The portrayal of women in connection with happiness was reinforced by photos of disabled women which highlighted their bodies but made any disability imperceptible. There are for example photos of women with a disability in romantic relationships and confidence-building narratives such as 'Losing everything helped me find true happiness' (*Woman*, 14 February 2011, p. 26) and 'You will never walk alone' (*Poo Ying*, November 2011, p. 219). Typical examples are Image 14 and 15 respectively.

Image 14. A disabled woman  
(*Woman*, 14 February 2011, p. 26).



Source: author's photograph.

Image 15. A disabled woman  
(*Poo Ying*, November 2011, p. 219).



Source: author's photograph.

A woman's portrait as disabled was an uncommon occurrence in Thai women's magazines. Only one out of 171 stories had a woman with a disability. That story, however, promoted the woman's strength in overcoming difficulties in her life. The woman in this narrative was framed as an ordinary woman with a smile on her face regardless of her disabilities. Unlike the disabled woman in the UK magazine (see Image 14), the woman in the Thai one was framed as a woman without disability. Without reading the story, one might not know that she had lost her both legs. Her impairment was implied by sitting on a wheelchair; however, it was played down (see Image 15). By contrast, in the UK photo the woman's artificial leg was clearly visible. Overall the photos in the narratives, though they were illustrative, were not always a reflection of the content of the story in a direct way.

This was also evident in symbolic photos portrayed in UK women's magazines. Although symbolic photos can express multiple meanings, depending on individuals' interpretation, they were used to convey notions of love and intimacy in romantic relationships and marriage contents in UK women's magazines. Unlike in the Thai magazines, symbolic photos were found only in the UK magazines, particularly around romantic relationships and marriage narratives. They were used at the beginning of the introduction section to imply narrative contents (*Woman* and *Woman and Home* UK edition). Two full glasses of wine held by a man and a woman and placed close to each other for example (see Image 16), suggest a romantic relationship. They can be found under the title of 'new dating' in real-life narrative in *Woman and Home* (UK edition). Meanwhile, in the Thai magazines (*Woman and Home* Thai edition and *Poo Ying*) the photos of the women tended to be

used more at the beginning of the introduction section. This suggests that certain illustrative details are less common in Thai women's magazines.

Image 16. The symbolic image of two glasses of wine  
(*Woman and Home*, UK edition, November 2010, p. 87).



Source: author's photograph.

Neither symbolic images nor photos of women in a state of distress were published in the Thai magazines. Women with drinking problems (see Image 17) or holding bottles of spirits (see Image 18) were only displayed in the UK magazines. Drinking alcoholic beverages such as beer and spirits in public is not acceptable for Thai women, but is viewed as 'normal' among bar girls. Thus photos of women holding bottles of spirits were not found in Thai women's magazines.

Image 17. A woman with drinking problems

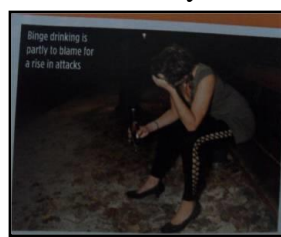
(*Woman*, 11 July 2011, p. 19).



Source: author's photograph.

Image 18. A woman holding a bottle of spirits

(*Woman*, 11 July 2011, p. 19).



Source: author's photograph.

Image 17 obviously reflects the suffering of a woman by highlighting her black eye. Image 18, too reinforces the woman's miserableness by framing her in a dark scene, her gaze averted. These photos thus invert the convention that women are constructed as happy. However, there were very few images that follow this particular convention in the readers' narratives. Indeed, these photos only occurred in the UK women's magazines under the title of 'Who's watching you?' regarding

the woman who was attacked while drunk (*Woman*, 11 July 2011, p. 19). One way to think about these photos is to suggest that UK women's magazines, compared with Thai ones, are more likely to present 'real-life' stories of women in both their positive and negative aspects.

Overall, the photos of the women in the UK and Thai women's magazines indicate both similar and different ideas of the construction of women. Women's images as mothers, partners or wives, housewives, and working women, as well as women's feminine attributes such as caring and kindness were displayed. However, problematic images of women as disabled or alcoholic for example were depicted only in the UK ones. This implies cultural differences in terms of the construction of women in readers' narratives between British and Thai women's magazines. Women in British magazines are not expected to be perfect. Positive and negative aspects of women's lives could be presented in real-life narratives. This was not the case in the Thai women's magazines since the construction of women was linked to a perfect life rather than a 'real' one.

### Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined the structures of the real-life narratives in certain contemporary British and Thai women's magazines and how photos were used to convey particular meanings in these narratives. I compared readers' narrative structures in both British and Thai women's magazines in order to obtain more insight into their key descriptive features. The discussion of the structures of the narratives focused on how stories were told and presented in a particular form of written text. There were three main components of the structure in both UK and Thai women's magazines: an introduction, the main content, and the ending. This structure showed how real-life narratives were constructed using similar norms of written narratives. However, there were significant differences among these elements in terms of the use of font styles and font colours as well as the topics discussed. Unlike the introduction section in the UK women's magazines, the introduction in the Thai magazines rarely included women's personal details regarding marital status in particular. This was also the case in the content section. With regard to endings,

the UK women's magazines were more likely to provide various styles of endings. Five different elements were identified: 1. tips and suggestions from experts, 2. further information, 3. advertising women's works, 4. asking readers' opinions, and 5. invitation to readers to send their stories to the magazines in the UK magazines. In contrast, only a discussion of women's feelings about their experience was presented at the end of the Thai narratives. Additionally, this chapter has shown that though women's magazines in this research are designed for female readers of the age of 30 and over, the kinds of readers' narratives which are presented in the UK and the Thai women's magazines are to some extent different. Confidence-building, employment, romantic relationships, and family contents appear in all the magazines (UK and Thai editions). However, romantic relationships are mostly presented in UK women's magazines, but they are hardly discussed in the readers' narratives in the Thai ones.

Another significant component in the narrative structure are the photos. As can be seen from this chapter, photos play an important but mainly illustrative role in the stories. The primary role of photos is to confirm the reality of the person. Although the photos are supposed to reflect women's real lives, they do not for the most part reflect the story they illustrate. That is to say, women were usually depicted as happy regardless of the tragic events in their lives. Photos in both UK and Thai women's magazines thus follow narrow conventions. This is consistent with the fact that photos in both British and Thai women's magazines – despite also depicting women as working women, extensively linked women's traits to the domestic sphere by representing them as happy wives, mothers, and carers. Furthermore, the images in the UK women's magazines were distinctly different from the Thai ones. Whilst UK women's magazines provided more diverse types of photos, including ones featuring difficulties, Thai women's magazines tended not to present this type of negative image. The construction of readers' narratives thus indicates that British women's magazines are more likely to reflect women's lives as ordinary. The following chapter will present the first thematic analysis of the readers' narratives, those on confidence-building which was the most common topic in both UK and Thai women's magazines.

## **Chapter Three: Confidence-Building in Readers' Narratives**

### Introduction

'Women are more likely than men to express low self-confidence in achievement situations' (Maccoby and Jacklin, 1974: 163). This statement conforms to the study of Paulette A. McCarty (1986) in feedback's roles in the self-confidence of men and women. McCarty (1986) remarks that women have less confidence than men in task potential and women's competence compared to men's in the working sphere is more limited. Research into women's characteristics, self-confidence, and careers adds that related to this women appear to be in lower-paying and less prestigious occupations (Stevens and DeNisi, 1980; Taylor and Ilgen, 1981). Research over the past three decades has revealed sex discrimination against women in employment due to psychological effects that have an influence on their performance levels such as stereotypical beliefs and lack of self-confidence. Self-confidence is one important element in relation to women's success.

Each of us has an inclination to put ourselves in the best possible light (Owens, 1993). However, not everyone can make this happen – some are successful, others not – though of course this is also a question of how we define success. Self-confidence is a key factor in facilitating accomplishments in our lives (Hollenbeck and Hall, 2004). Confidence is a psychological factor that helps us understand human behaviour in relation to achievement (Stankov et al, 2012). Efklides (2011) perceives confidence as an individual's ability to use specific knowledge to learn things or solve problems. According to Jan Carlzon (2002), 'people aren't born with self-confidence. Even the most self-confident people can be broken. Self-confidence comes from 'success, experience, and the organization's environment' (Heifetz and Laurie, 2002: 129). Self-confidence thus is not fixed but can be developed and changed, depending on our, and others', perception of ourselves and our abilities. To the extent that self-confidence is significant in women's lives, reading women's magazines, one could argue, is one way in which women learn how to develop themselves to become more confident. In this chapter, I am interested in the question of how confidence-building was constructed in the UK and Thai women's magazines

I analysed. The chapter is divided into three sections: 1) confidence-building themes; 2) the construction of women in confidence-building narratives; 3) the similarities and differences between the confidence-building topics in both UK and Thai women's magazines will be discussed in order to illuminate their portrayal of women. In this study, I am primarily interested in how certain women's magazines represent the connection between women and self-confidence in their real-life narratives because in the magazines I examined the issue of confidence-building was a major preoccupation. This suggests that confidence was constructed as an important attribute for women within the context of these women's magazines.

#### Confidence-building Themes in Women's Real-life Narratives

The confidence-building narratives in the women's magazines in my sample (*Woman*, *Woman and Home* UK and Thai editions, and *Poo Ying*) concentrated mostly on an association between women's life experiences and self-confidence. These narratives illustrated how the narrators went through hard times and solved problems that occurred in their lives. The narratives also discuss help from others that made these women become more confident and believe in their own potential. Before analysing this further, I shall provide a brief overview of the confidence-building narratives presented in the UK and Thai women's magazines under review. Table 7 shows the number of these narratives as they appeared in the magazines.

Table 7. Numbers of narratives focusing on confidence-building in *Woman*, *Woman and Home*, and *Poo Ying* 2010-2011.

<b>Magazines Titles</b>	<b>Number of Narratives</b>
<i>Woman</i>	139
<i>Woman and Home</i> (UK edition)	40
<i>Woman and Home</i> (Thai edition)	36
<i>Poo Ying</i>	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>219</b>

There were 219 narratives in total in my sample focusing on confidence-building. The number varied significantly between the UK and Thai women's magazines: altogether there were 179 narratives in the UK women's magazines but only 40 in the Thai ones. These were distributed differently in the different magazines. In the UK women's magazines, there were 139 confidence-building narratives in *Woman* and 40 in *Woman and Home* (UK edition). In the Thai women's magazines, on the other hand, only 36 and 4 stories appeared in *Woman and Home* (Thai edition) and *Poo Ying* respectively. It is thus evident that the portrayal of confidence-building was approximately four times more common in the UK women's magazines I analysed than in the Thai ones. Overall then, confidence-building was much more frequently discussed in the UK than in the Thai magazines.

Certain themes emerged recurrently in the confidence-building narratives. Table 8 indicates these topics:

Table 8. Topics covered in confidence-building narratives: *Woman*, *Woman and Home*, and *Poo Ying* 2010-2011.

Topics	Women's magazines					Total
	Woman	Woman and Home		Poo Ying		
		UK edition	Thai edition			
			Western women	Thai women		
1. Life crises	50	20	2	12	2	86
2. Beauty, appearance, and aging	50	4	-	10	2	66
3. Making friends and friendship	29	8	-	-	-	37
4. Travelling and activities	10	3	-	12	-	25
5. Community action	-	5	-	-	-	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>36</b>		<b>4</b>	<b>219</b>



Table 8 shows that in the UK women's magazines, in contrast to the Thai ones, topics about confidence-building in women's real-life narratives were more various. Five different topics emerged in the UK magazines: 1. life crises; 2. beauty, appearance, and aging; 3. making friends and friendship; 4. travelling and activities; 5. community action. Only three of these also occurred in the Thai magazines: 1. life crises; 2. beauty, appearance, and aging; and 3. travelling and activities. The majority of the narratives in both the UK and Thai women's magazines were thus about life crises. However, the number of narratives in the Thai women's magazines, in contrast to the UK ones, was fewer for each topic. Topics about life crises, for example, appeared in only 16 narratives in Thai women's magazines compared to 70 stories in the UK ones. This is also the case regarding beauty, appearance, and aging narratives where 12 narratives were displayed in Thai women's magazines compared to 54 stories on the same topic in the British ones. Moreover, topics about making friends and friendship and community action were not discussed at all in Thai women's magazines. To understand these differences I shall analyze some of the narratives that appeared under these five topics.

First, I shall outline the basic structure of the narratives as a whole, based upon the topics in Table 8. The underlying narrative structure will be examined in direct connection to its thematic content: confidence-building. The stories were told as first-person narratives reflecting personal experiences. They were a means for outlining women's experiences, in particular the way in which confidence-building is constructed.

These confidence-building narratives in both the UK and Thai women's magazines were presented in a triumphal way. Four elements were used in the stories: a contextualization of the reader's account; a description of how the woman became inspired then confident, and an articulation of specific attitudes. These four components were common to most confidence-building narratives; at least two features – contextualizing the reader's account and expressing attitudes – were found in every narrative in both the UK and the Thai women's magazines. The description of the situation provided details of the women's personal lives such as their names,

ages, and occupations, and the problems they faced. This section was introduced through the voice of the editors in the third person. The text moved to the first-person narrative in the remaining three sections: getting inspiration, becoming confident, and expressing attitudes. Getting inspiration in confidence-building narratives represents the support that women received from other people, friends and family in particular. The women in question managed to get through their hard times because of some inspirational dimension. In turn, the women themselves were constructed so as to inspire readers not to give up on life by describing their lives after the crisis and how they lived happily subsequently. Inspiration, in this sense, was directly connected to the notion of confidence. The stage of becoming confident described the process of moving from low confidence to becoming more confident. This is apparent in the women's abilities to know what they had to do to get through difficult times. The stage of change from low to high confidence resulted from certain turning points. The turning points across the women's cases were quite similar, usually caused by a change in their own attitudes. In this way, attitudes were connected to positive thinking. For instance, 'Part of me wondered how anyone could take me seriously when I couldn't even take myself seriously – but Jo helped me realise that the only thing stopping you from doing something or being someone is the way you think' (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, April 2011, p. 50) and 'In a strange kind of way, going grey has given me self-confidence. I think it makes me stand out from the crowd. I don't have any baggage about it, and I think my children feel it's rather cool too' (*Woman*, 18 July 2011, p. 23). What happened to the women was thus constructed as not as important as what they thought or how they felt toward their situations. Becoming confident, in this sense, was associated with the women's attitudes. Getting inspiration, becoming confident, and expressing attitudes did not necessarily happen together since different types of stories were narrated in different ways. These three elements will be discussed in depth along with concrete examples from specific narratives in the following section. As already indicated, the most common theme of confidence-building in both UK and Thai women's magazines was life crises. Therefore, this topic will be discussed in the first place.

## Life Crises: Facing and Dealing with Personal Problems

Laurence Barton (1993) defines a crisis as ‘a major, unpredictable event that has potentially negative results’ (Barton, 1993: 2). This definition shares similarities with the meaning of crisis in *The Oxford Dictionary* (2010), that it is ‘a time of severe difficulty or danger’ and ‘a time when a difficult or important decision must be made’ (Soanes, 2010: 172). Unplanned events and worrying outcomes appear to be common to both definitions. ‘Life crisis’ in women’s real-life narratives thus refers to stories about unexpected events that caused difficulties for the narrators in their lives. Typically, such stories had headings like ‘I thought I was indestructible, but now I’m simply grateful to wake up in the morning’ (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, January 2011, p. 68), and ‘Having had a chance to get up again, I’ll never forget that moment’ (*Poo Ying*, November 2011, p. 222). Both these stories focus on women’s health problems, a heart attack and leukaemia respectively. Narrated in a triumphal way, they are about overcoming. A connection is made between the women’s personal effort and recovery from disease. Although the women had severe health problems, they did not give up and fought their illness: ‘I was way beyond worrying about their problems with NHS equipment. I was on another planet, trying to get a grip on what was happening inside of me’ (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, January 2011, p. 68) and ‘I would like everyone to be optimistic and think positively. When I was ill, positive thinking helped me go through this’ (*Poo Ying*, November 2011, p. 225). At the end the women return to good health and live normal lives: ‘Most importantly, I’m no longer chasing my tail 24/7 and I’ve learnt, at times, to do absolutely nothing at all with great delight and no guilt whatsoever’ (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, January 2011, p. 68). Women’s positive thinking often resulted from help and support from family and friends. What women gained from them was the inspiration to live on: ‘Some sent me sweets, dolls, and books. They told me to carry on and don’t give up. Some told me about other patients and this helped me a lot. It made me realize that there were still many people who were suffering from cancer as well’ (*Poo Ying*, November 2011, p. 224). Given these examples of how narratives about life crises were constructed in UK and Thai women’s magazines, the structure of the life crises narratives will be discussed in the following section.

### Contextualizing the Readers' Accounts

Contextualizing the readers' accounts or contextualizing the narratives about life crises in both UK and Thai women's magazines was conducted by the editors as an opening of the stories to introduce the women. These sections were usually the shortest part of the narratives, containing approximately 2-4 sentences. An example of this is: 'Time columnist Melanie Reid, who was paralysed after breaking her neck and back in a riding accident, talks about inspiration and learning to live in the moment' (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, July 2011, p. 63). Similar to the introduction in other narratives, the situations in narratives about life crises were associated with a specific incident, in this case a riding accident. They were thus highly individualized. The emphasis was not, however, on the accident but on what happened afterwards. The phrase 'learning through inspiration and learning to live in the moment' suggests a positive process of overcoming that is the outcome of the central learning. This is what makes the narrative triumphal rather than tragic. Confidence-building is here the stage of development that the woman builds up as part of recovering from an injury.

The contextual element in the Thai women's magazines was similar to that one in the UK magazines in terms of summarizing the women's personal details and situations and giving accounts of the women that focused on their positive attitudes:

A 15-year-old girl, Thun-Nicharee Peneakchanasak, fell on the underground tracks in Singapore. She has lost both legs. What she has faced is dreadful but she is brave enough to accept the truth and fate. She never gives up and thinks positively. She started telling her story with a smile on her face and determined eyes (*Poo Ying*, November 2011, p. 218).

This description has two dimensions: details of the woman's crisis and the editor's comments on how she is dealing with this. The editor's introduction indicates the tone of the remaining content which is concerned with the process of overcoming disaster, told from a first-person perspective.

### Getting Inspiration

The narratives of the women themselves describe how they gained the inspiration they needed to overcome their problems. This is mostly in the form of other people helping them. The women were inspired by people around them, family and friends in particular. The support from others provided confidence. Getting inspiration and support from others was thus related to becoming confident (again). One of the narratives demonstrates this:

My greatest inspiration is love. My family. My husband, my son Douglas... I have to fight because of them. They are so resoundingly positive and cheerful. My sister, a skilled psychoanalyst, who told me mindset was all. Change my attitude and I could change my life. My niece, who told me fiercely that if anyone could do it, I could. Fellow patients, one dogged man called Andrew in particular, who I watched over eight months go from complete paralysis in a wheel chair to crutches. He helped me realize it was physically possible to improve far beyond any of the doctors' expectations. My physiotherapist Susan, who devoted hundreds of hours to me when she realized how determined I was. Letters from people who read my column, who told me of people with broken necks who three, five, ten years on were still regaining function. These are the things you never hear about... you hear 'broken neck' and you think 'death sentence', but, in fact, every spinal injury is different (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, July 2011, p. 63).

What is the most striking in this example is the range of help and support from others this woman received: family, husband, son, sister, niece, fellow patients, and physiotherapist. It becomes clear that these people helped the woman to recover emotionally and physically: 'My niece, who told me fiercely that if anyone could do it, I could' and 'He helped me realize it was physically possible to improve far beyond any of the doctors' expectations'. All these people either offer advice, set good examples, or provide reasons for carrying on. Confidence-building here is a social process that develops gradually through getting inspired through emotional support from family, friends and others.

This was also the case in the Thai women's magazines where help and support from others was constructed as primary in order to gain inspiration:

I met many people at the Sirindhorn National Medical Rehabilitation Centre (SNMRC). They encouraged me and I gave them support. We helped each other and shared our experiences. I said to a paralytic woman that she was lucky because she still has got her complete body but she told me that I actually was luckier than her. She had problems in body systems. However, she did not give up. She had spent several years recovering. Many people here - I sympathized with the first time I saw them – are actually very strong in mind (*Poo Ying*, November 2011, p. 221).

Again, inspiration from other people is primary. But there is also a strong sense of sharing among peers. The woman explains how sharing experiences, particularly with other patients, encouraged her. The most common ways in which the women gained moral support was through sharing their difficulties with others; this was prominent in both the UK and the Thai women's magazines.

The life crisis stories were slightly different, not in the way the stories were presented, but in how the women were constructed in the stories. On the topic of health issues for example, there was an intriguing intersection between reassurance and confidence. That is to say, the women were constructed as delicate and dependent. Seeking reassurance from others was the way that the women became confident. The women's identity connected to those who were around as helpers supporting them mentally and physically as shown in the quote below:

It had been a while before I could accept it. I was lucky to talk to my mother's friend who had cancer as well. I wrote letters to her. She replied and told me that it was ok. She had it before but now she has recovered from cancer. She is not bald anymore. This made me realize that I would get better. People around me also helped me and took very good care of me. I used to ask my sister whether I was ugly without hair. My sister said not at all. I just looked pale, not ugly. My father, mother, brother, relatives, and friends still love me. They don't mind at all so why do I have to think that I'm disgusting? (*Poo Ying*, December 2011, p. 224).

Family members and friends here functioned as helpers and supporters. As in the UK women's magazines, building confidence in the Thai women's magazines was extensively linked to other people's attitudes toward the women. That is to say, the women were presented as low in confidence and needing emotional support from family and friends: 'My father, mother, brother, relatives, and friends still love me.

They don't mind at all so why do I have to think that I'm disgusting'. This was also evident in the photos (see Image 19), where the women appeared with families and friends, as in the story of the woman who had cancer.

Image 19. A woman who had cancer (*Poo Ying*, December 2011, pp. 224 - 225).



Source: author's photograph.

That story featured seven photos. Four were devoted to the woman with her family and friends. One might argue that this also in a sense raises issues regarding women who did not have such support. But this was never raised in these magazines. Instead the importance of family members and friends in the women's life was underlined, implicitly and explicitly.

### Becoming Confident

Becoming confident in both UK and Thai women's magazines was directly linked to the notion of self-development. At this stage, the women discussed what they did to make themselves feel more confident. One woman, for instance, reported:

I'm not a religious person, but I do try to practise the Buddhist philosophy of living in the moment. When I went with other patients from the hospital to a session of sailing for the disabled, I met a former patient, who at first I thought was able-bodied because he seemed so well. In fact, he had been terribly injured. He told me he had got through it by not looking to the future, because your fears can become corrosive, but by concentrating intensely on what is happening at that moment and doing that to the best of your ability...I try to think, 'I'm not going to worry about tomorrow because today is going well. I'm not going to focus on whether this bone will ever bear my weight, I'm just going to focus on making this muscle work just a little bit'. It's very difficult to stay in the moment, but if you

open the door to hope, in comes all this fear and worry and loss and pain. You can torture yourself by looking too much ahead so you have to close your mind to the future (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, July 2011, p. 64).

This long quote details the self-development performed by the woman who developed a particular disposition, living in the moment. As the narrative continues, it no longer presents the woman as being supported by others. The use of ‘I’ suggests that the woman performs certain actions which start building her confidence. The woman works on her attitudes and sets rules for herself: ‘I do try to practise the Buddhist philosophy of living in the moment’, and ‘I try to think, “I’m not going to worry about tomorrow because today is going well”’. Such focusing on the here and now was a common ‘remedy’ advocated by the narratives.

In the Thai women’s magazines, the stage of becoming confident was constructed in similar ways. That is to say, instead of referring to family and friends as helpers and supporters, the women were described as doing activities or learning to help themselves live ‘normally’ as they had done before their crises. The key was self-development. Those women who learnt to live with specific health conditions for example learnt different kinds of self-management which could then boost their self-confidence. For instance, ‘I’ve learnt many things at Sirindhorn National Medical Rehabilitation Centre (SNMRC) – learning how to use a wheelchair and artificial legs with chips implanted in them. These legs help me balance myself and make me taller but I need to have physical therapy treatment for the rest of my life in order to stimulate my muscles’ (*Poo Ying*, November 2011, p. 221). The notion of the activity, both mental and physical, of self-management based on the women taking agency in their lives, here is constructed as key to becoming confident. These stories about life crises in both UK and Thai women’s magazines presented the women as confident in terms of solving problems.<sup>26</sup> Stephen S. Willoughby (1990) describes a

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<sup>26</sup> There were a number of stories covering this such as: ‘Make over your life we did! Forget midlife crisis, Think midlife makeover!’ (*Woman*, 21 November 2011, pp. 38-39), ‘My turning point: passed the crisis of life’ (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, January 2011, p. 71), and ‘You will never walk alone’ (*Poo Ying*, November 2011, p. 218).



problem as ‘a situation in which a person wants to reach a particular goal, is somehow blocked from reaching that goal, but has the necessary motivation, knowledge and other resources to make a serious effort (not necessarily successful) at reaching the goal’ (Willoughby, 1990: 5). Problem solving requires effort and a wide range of skills (Muir et al, 2008). Both UK and Thai women’s magazines showed how the women dealt with their problems and how they made important decisions. The overall tenor of the stories was that the women were successful in this and could get through hard times in their lives. Thus one narrative read:

I used to be a housewife. I was shy, timid, and never laughed. My duties were only to be the wife and the mother at home. When it came to the point that my family life changed, at that time I didn’t know what to do. I didn’t know how to carry on. I knew only I had to paddle my own canoe. After changing my life perspectives, I’ve become more active and lively. I’m more confident. Everything depends on your point of view. If you think it is easy then it really is (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, June 2011, p. 71).

Confidence in Thai women’s magazines was also constructed as a process of self-development. It takes time and turning points before one can become ‘confident’. However, being confident or self-reliant was most likely for a woman with a positive attitude, often changing ‘life perspectives’ as part of developing this. Confidence, in this sense, was directly linked to attitude: ‘Everything depends on your point of view. If you think it is easy then it really is’. The important point here is self-reliance and the notion that dealing with problems centres on the self. Thinking makes it so. There is no sense that problems might be structural or beyond the individual. This is of course problematic for any individual whose problems are not readily solved by thinking differently.

Interestingly, the construction of women as confident in both UK and Thai women’s magazines was associated with using ‘other resources’, apart from the women’s own efforts, in order to solve problems. However, the ways in which the women solved their problems were quite different. That is to say, the women in the UK women’s magazines talked about their problems to intimate friends instead of seeking help from outsiders. Unlike in the UK women’s magazines, the concept of problem solving in Thai women’s magazines was linked more strongly to personal beliefs

such as psychic powers and fortune tellers and connected to help from outsiders. An example of such a narrative is ‘Can a psychic solve your problems?’ (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, January 2011, pp. 71 - 72, see Image 20). Here the story presents four women having problems in their lives: health, work, and financial problems and solving their problems by consulting a psychic.

Image 20. Solving problems by a psychic (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, January 2011, pp. 71-72).



Source: author’s photograph.

Although the four women had problems in their lives, their images (Image 20) show them with smiles on their faces. They are presented as happy rather than sad, in a position where they look straight at the camera. Without reading the title of the story: ‘Can a psychic solve your problem?’, one would not know that these women were facing hard times. The photographs of these women, smiling, are in direct contrast to their real situation. In other words, a binary is formed between the portrayal of the women as happy, and the fact that they have problems. The photos of women are thus directly linked to ideas about attitude, and reinforce the notion of having positive ones.

The use of ‘other resources’ to solve problems in Thai women’s magazines indicates that the women’s problems are rather serious. Unlike other topics such as romantic relationships and marriage in particular, narratives about confidence-building displayed Thai women’s problems in public. Here the content was divided into three parts: ‘my problems’, ‘the consultation’, and ‘my result’. For example:

My problems:

I had a very severe accident when I was 19 years old and had to be in hospital several times. The doctors could not diagnose my symptoms. I was fatigued and easily exhausted. While I was driving, sometimes I lost consciousness and fainted. I have had eight operations in my life. I almost had my health insurance cancelled by a life insurance company (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, January 2011, p. 72).

What is striking about this example is the subtitle – ‘My problems’. This is used as the opening of the story. By pointing to a woman’s problems which is not the norm across readers’ narratives in Thai women’s magazines, problems as such are presented in Thai women’s magazines as unusual. At the same time they are simply the overture to a narrative of overcoming. In the UK women’s magazines, on the other hand, there was no separate section displaying the women’s problems. The problems in the UK women’s magazines were presented as a part of the stories along with other content without highlighting them in a separate section. They were thus embedded rather than profiled.

The consultation from the psychic was covered in the second part. In the photos the fortuneteller was broadly constructed in similar ways to the woman who sought help from her. By showing both the woman’s and the fortuneteller’s image, this narrative places importance on both of them. The interaction between narrator and fortuneteller is described as follows:

The consultation:

She advised me to change my name. Since this name (อุรวีร์-  
Aurawee) was given to me by the monk I respect, I did not want to change it at that time. However, she did not force me to change my old name to the one she suggested. She just told me to add another vowel into my name: ‘ะ’. Thus, I’ve changed my name from อุรวีร์ to อุระวีร์ by adding ‘ะ’ to my old name. It is pronounced exactly the same but has a different meaning. It means a smart and successful woman. After changing my name, I’m healthier. I’m not sick as often as I used to be (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, January 2011, pp. 72).

Here, the concept of problem solving is connected to an outsider's suggestion (a fortuneteller) and the woman's response to that. Although changing names in Thailand involves an official process and documents i.e. passport, bank account, and driving license, the fortuneteller's recommendation is powerful since the woman changes her name. The concept of changing names may seem, in terms of science or medical fields, irrelevant to curing a disease or having good health. The fortuneteller's suggestion can therefore be regarded as the way of helping to build confidence. One might describe what happened as a placebo effect whereby another's intervention resulted in a change in disposition that might then also create health benefits. On one level, it is testimony to that power of suggestion.

At the end of the story, the idea of using an outsider's suggestion to solve a problem is reinforced again in a separate section. It is presented in terms of the 'right' decision and an appropriate solution by claiming the positive result of following others' recommendation. The narrative states:

My result:

I gained more weight and became healthier. I am not sick as I was before. She told me that I'd be stronger if I changed my name after having an operation. After my forth operation, I changed my name and I was healthier. She also suggested that neurological hospitals might be useful. I still remember her words that '100 per cent in our lives, fate is determined by our names and surnames 50 per cent and the other 50 per cent is defined by astrological birth time which cannot be changed' (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, January 2011, pp. 72).

The outcome supports the woman's problem solving based on the fortuneteller's suggestion; by changing her name she has a better life, - 'I changed my name and I was healthier'. This is an interesting case since problem-solving in Thai women's magazines is not only connected to help from others but also personal belief.

In the UK women's magazine (*Woman*), there was only one story about a psychic healer - 'Spooky! Lucy Cavendish was keen to get in touch with her psychic side-but was she really ready to discover her past lives?' (*Woman*, 15 August 2011, p. 23). However, the concept of psychic power was not associated with problem

solving as in the Thai women's magazine. It was depicted as a new experience or an alternative way of viewing things: 'As I leave, I tell Yvonne I feel entirely different. I'm not really sure how, though. I think it's partly that I've become more aware of everyday things which could be described as being more in touch' (*Woman*, 15 August 2011, p. 23). Here the narrator makes no specific changes in her life but feels the benefit of suggestion. Suggestion from outsiders in the UK women's real-life narratives compared to the Thai ones was thus less likely to help women build confidence in terms of solving problems in their lives.

This is one distinct difference between the Thai and UK women's magazines. In the Thai women's magazines, readers, especially female ones, are meant to take the female narrators as authorities on how to deal with their issues, rather than depending on additional expert advice. Such advice appears at the end of the story by reinforcing the positive outcomes and the woman's personal belief: 'I've collected statistical data from relatives and friends who met her. Some of them don't change their names as she suggests. Then over 4-5 years, unexpected things happened to them. This makes me believe that changing names can change our lives' (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, January 2011, p. 72). Unlike in the Thai women's magazines, in the UK women's magazines, there was a comment at the end of the story that questioned the possibility of psychic power:

Before you see a psychic...

- Get a recommendation from a reliable source.
- Prepare five key questions and list them.
- Be prepared to be disappointed – there's no real proof psychics can predict the future or contact a dead relative, despite possible claims.
- Visit [aske-skeptics.org.uk](http://aske-skeptics.org.uk) before you go (*Woman*, 15 August 2011, p. 23).

In UK woman's magazine, in contrast to the Thai one, additional advice was usually provided as a part of the narratives to guide readers. The guidance above, for instance, is to help readers understand that psychic powers are not infallible: 'Be prepared to be disappointed – there's no real proof psychics can predict the future or contact a dead relative, despite possible claims'. Since 'before you see a psychic' is obviously directed at the readers, you, the implication is to urge the readers to think

about psychic power carefully instead of more readily promoting it as shown in the Thai women's magazines.

### Expressing Attitudes

The most common element in confidence-building narratives in both UK and Thai women's magazines was expressing changing attitudes toward life crises. The women's new attitude towards their hard time was most commonly presented at the bottom of the page as an ending. Ending on a positive note was presumably a way to inspire readers. The women not only expressed how they thought about their situation but also what they wanted to tell the readers. In one narrative about a life crisis, a woman said: 'Mine, I cannot stress enough, is not a miracle story. It is not meant to imply that spinal injuries, with enough hard work, will recover some function. But I do believe that what has happened to me means that no one should ever give up' (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, July 2011, p. 63). In the textual description of her feelings and attitudes the last thing that is mentioned is what she wants to tell readers by using her situation as an example: 'no one should ever give up'.

This was also the case in the Thai women's magazines. The narrative of the woman who had lost her legs for example highlighted this:

There is no need to look at the missing parts in your life but it is better to look at what is going to happen in your life in the future. If we think negative, life will be worse. If there is an end, there is always a beginning (*Poo Ying*, November, p. 221).

This woman was constructed as future oriented. Her attitudes were positively framed, in short sentences that constructed simple binaries, ending on the positive: 'If we think negative, life will be worse. If there is an end, there is always the beginning'.

Unlike in the Thai women's magazines, such dispositions were reinforced in the UK women's magazines through additional facts and further information about particular

concerns such as a given health issue. Readers were thus encouraged to learn not only from the story of other women's experience but also from specialists. For instance, one narrative ended with advice from an expert body:

Does stress cause heart attacks?

The British Heart Foundation says stress does play its part, but more research is needed into why. Responding to a study published last year, which indicated that high levels of cortisol, the hormone produced in response to stress, could raise the risk of heart attack, BHF senior cardiac nurse Ellen Mason, said: 'Stress is already associated with an increased risk of heart disease because it can impact on our lifestyle, so people may be more likely to smoke, drink or overeat. However, there are other chemicals in our body besides cortisol that play a part when we're stressed out, and we still have a lot to learn' (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, January 2011, p. 69).

In the UK women's magazines, in contrast to the Thai women's magazines, expert advice was commonly included in the narratives to suggest ways in which readers might deal with problems. The information above, for example, is to assist readers to understand the correlation between stress and the risk of heart attack. The effect is to depersonalize a given problem, to show that it affects more people than just the one woman whose story is told, that experts are alert to this, and that they have advice to offer. This produces a generalization effect which makes the woman's story exemplary rather than singular.

Across all the Thai women's magazines as well as the UK ones I examined, the depiction of confidence building in narratives about life crises was shown in terms of stages of development. These stages of confidence-building were developed in four processes: contextualizing the reader's account (what is the woman's problem?), getting inspiration (who helps and gives support to the woman?), becoming confident (what did the woman do to make herself feel more confident), and expressing attitudes (what did the woman learn from her crisis?). These stages together make up the narrative of overcoming. A similar pattern could also be observed in the case of the narratives about beauty, appearance, and aging that I shall discuss in the following section.

## Women's Magazines' Stereotypes: Beauty, Appearance, and Aging

Beauty plays an important role in many women's lives (Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz, 2003). The notion of the feminine beauty ideal, according to Lori Baker-Sperry and Liz Grauerholz (2003), focuses on the 'physical attractiveness that is one of women's most important assets' (Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz, 2003: 711). Although the beauty routines of women – makeup, clothes, and diet, for example - are time-consuming for women (Bordo, 1993), they engage with these since it may help them feel good about themselves (Currie, 1997). As pointed out by Dellinger and Williams (1997), unlike women who do not wear makeup in the workplace, women who wear makeup are more likely to be perceived as competent, healthier, and heterosexual. This conforms to the finding of Jeff E. Biddle and Daniel S. Haneremesh (1994) that physical attractiveness is economically valuable since physically good-looking workers, compared with physically unattractive workers, earn approximately 10 to 15 per cent more. Beauty thus is a significant factor in women's lives.

The beautification of women in women's real-life narratives entailed a wide range of topics such as weight-loss, dressing up, wearing make-up, looking young, having smooth hair, and skin refining. Commonly, these stories had titles such as, 'Diet confidential: our tips for success' (*Woman*, 17 January 2011, p. 14), 'The secret of confident women: style confidence' (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, July 2011, p. 58), and 'Beauty secret' (*Poo Ying*, November 2011, p. 174). These stories repeatedly represented women's beauty secrets and how successful women are as a consequence of having a 'better' look.

In the UK and Thai women's magazines I analysed, stories about beauty, appearance, and aging, centred particularly on women's confidence, exemplifying the representation of women in a particular way. The notion of self-confidence was directly linked to women's appearance by tying it to reproducing certain stereotypes of feminine attractiveness such as being slim and conventionally beautiful. For example, on 28<sup>th</sup> February 2011 *Woman* featured a narrative titled 'Half the size...twice as confident! For these three women slimming was about more than just



losing weight...’ (*Woman*, 28 February 2011, p. 30). The title makes the connection between confidence and weight – ‘Half the size...twice as confident!’. By putting the biggest letters in the brightest colour (orange) in the story to emphasize the title (see Image 21), the narrative establishes the association. It centres on the advantages of weight loss by stating that ‘for these three women slimming was about more than just losing weight’. This reinforces the link between slimness and confidence. The relation between confidence and weight loss is also reproduced in the women’s photos (see Image 21).

Image 21. Dieters (*Woman*, 28 February 2011, p. 30).



Source: author’s photograph.

The outfits of the ‘slim’ women after losing weight present a particular kind of femininity articulated through a specific way of posing (side on, one foot slightly forward), as well as high-heeled shoes, dresses, and bracelets that emphasize conventional femininity. Compared to the photos of the women before losing weight it is noticeable that afterwards they are displayed in confident whole-body poses. The difference in dress of the women before and after weight loss suggests the different levels of confidence. Although there are similarities between the smiles of these women before and after losing weight, the ways in which they are displayed are quite different. While the photos of the ‘fat’ women appear in smaller sizes showing only half of their bodies, mostly full frontally which makes them look fatter, the ‘slim’ women are portrayed in quasi-model poses showing their full bodies to readers to allow for the confident pose: one foot forward, hand on hip, slightly side on to heighten the ‘slim’ appeal.

Again, all narratives about beauty, appearance, and aging in both UK and Thai women's magazines were about success. The discussion of confidence-building in the narratives suggests that women who engage in weight loss confront different stages before their success. One of the narratives about weight loss indicates this:

‘My kids missed out on their mum!’

As my kids and my husband, Stuart, queue up for rides at a theme park in March 2009, I was upset because I knew I'd be too fat for the seats. I'd put on 2st with each of my five pregnancies and was now 19st.

I'd skip breakfast and snack on biscuits, crisps and chocolate bars. I'd cook family meals, but with the kids in bed I'd eat more junk.

But after that trip to the theme park, I had to take action and joined Slimming World and started going to weekly support meetings.

I was nervous at first but soon realised everyone was going through the same thing as me. For breakfast I opted for cereal with skimmed milk and banana, a jacket potato with tuna and salad for lunch. Dinner became a homemade turkey burger with salad.

Some days I wanted to eat like I used to – but I couldn't let my kids down.

After a month I'd lost 1<sup>st</sup> 6lb, and continued to lose about 7lb a month, reaching my goal of 9st 8lb in August 2010. I'm now 9st and have much more energy as a mum (*Woman*, 28 February 2011, p. 30).

This long quote begins with the reasons for attending the weight loss program. The woman focuses on her children by stating: ‘My kids missed out on their mum’. Weight loss, in this sense, is directly tied to a mother's love. To increase the focus on this connection, the narrative describes that ‘some days I wanted to eat like I used to – but I couldn't let my kids down’. Doing something for the sake of one's children rather than for one's vanity is considered desirable. But then the focus is primarily on her weight, with her role as mother coming last: ‘After a month I'd lost 1<sup>st</sup> 6lb, and continued to lose about 7lb a month, reaching my goal of 9st 8lb in August 2010. I'm now 9st and have much more energy as a mum’. This creates a continuing connection between weight loss and the mother's role. Weight loss is constructed as

crucial in terms of the fulfillment of a woman's role as mother whereas obesity is constructed as problematic in the woman's life.

According to Elayne A. Saltzberg and Joan C. Chrisler (1997), 'beauty cannot be quantified or objectively measured; it is the result of the judgements of others' (135). This also seems to be the case in women's real-life narratives in British and Thai women's magazines. The concept of beauty is directly linked to gender and power relations. For instance, 'In my experience: After losing 20 stone the first thing I thought about was men!' (*Woman*, 18 April 2011, p. 17) and 'Reinvention is the best revenge' (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, April 2011, p. 49). Here the judgements of others, especially men, have an influence on women's confidence in their appearance. Women thus work hard to accomplish and maintain a certain standard of beauty. Thus one narrative read:

I've never found a man who genuinely believes that personality is more important than appearance. Generally, men are too superficial to want to be in a relationship with me. Of course, I'd change my appearance if I could, but I'd be happy with my looks if only other people would treat me without prejudice (*Woman*, 24 Mar 2011, p. 19).

The woman's point of view toward beauty and the judgments of others – men and other people - are the key points in this example. The woman is the one who feels she has to make an effort to change herself in order to appear attractive to a man. The woman is thus subjected to being hegemonically determined as beautiful by a man. What should be valued as beauty, according to the woman, is inner beauty (personality), not outer beauty (appearance). However, what other people, especially men, think about her or her appearance is determining. Indeed, what men think has an effect on her life – love and relationships in particular: 'I've never found a man who genuinely believes that personality is more important than appearance'. This external standard of beauty based on others' judgment leads to the construction of women in these UK and Thai women's magazines as low in self-confidence and self-esteem. They seem to struggle to meet hegemonic beauty ideals.

Although the beauty ideal is considered a patriarchal imperative that tyrannizes and devalues women (Bartky, 1990; Wolf, 1991; Bordo, 1993), beauty, especially weight loss, in women's magazines is portrayed as empowering instead of oppressive. This empowerment in women's real-life narratives is individual empowerment since women's magazines represent women's narratives in terms of individual experiences. Individual empowerment, according to Elisheva Sadan (2004), concentrates on individual transition or development from 'a feeling of powerlessness and from a life in the shadow of this feeling to an active life of real ability' (Sadan, 2004: 133). Individual empowerment in women's real-life narratives focuses on the process by which the sense of women's selves as valueless changes into self-acceptance and self-confidence. This includes a sense of personal ability to control oneself in order to achieve one's goals. Weight loss in women's magazines is a clear example of the portrayal of individual empowerment and especially self-control since it shows the power of female dieters in the sense that they can follow the rules of the process of dieting. For instance, 'I was proud of my self-control and the sound of a rumbling stomach felt like a victory cry' (*Woman*, 28 March 2011, p. 33) and 'Doing exercise is very challenging for me. I've never ridden a bike as fast as I can for 20 minutes in my life. I cried. I have to do exercise as my routine in order to help my body get used to it but actually I'm not used to it at all' (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, May 2011, p. 63). Effort is key to the women becoming winners. The tone of the narratives suggests this notion through sentences such as 'the sound of a rumbling stomach felt like a victory cry' and 'Doing exercise is very challenging for me'. By re-writing the meaning of the sound - from feeling hungry to resisting eating - the woman articulates self-control.

The women are constructed as willing to get involved in this beauty ideal since it pays rewards. Beauty is a significant means for women to gain both self-esteem and social status (Backman and Adams, 1991; Sutor and Reavis, 1995). However, in the British and Thai women's magazines, what was considered as the rewards of beauty for these women was slightly different from Backman and Adams's (1991) and Sutor and Reavis's (1995) studies. The rewards of beauty that woman got were compliments from others which helped them have more self-esteem. To get the

rewards of beauty, in this depiction, never incorporated the idea of social status. This means that, as it shown in the narratives, women did not gain higher social status even when they reached a state of ideal beauty. Depicting beauty rewards in women's magazines was linked to compliments which subsequently elicited a high level of confidence in the women. Representing women as slim in order to gain self-confidence was a means to construct them in association with normative femininity. One narrative read: 'It only took me six months, from September 2010 to March 2011, to get to a size 10 – now I'm 9 stone 3lb, and I've lost nine inches off my stomach. I'm so much happier with myself, and I've got my old confidence back' (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, June 2011, p. 137). While pointing to happiness and confidence as rewards, the actual diet difficulties were obscured. 'I enjoyed the compliments people paid when they noticed my weight loss' (*Woman*, 28 March 2011, p. 32) reconnects women to other people: the notion of confidence is here tied directly to appearance and other people's attitudes toward the women. Transformation was outcome rather than process-focused.

The UK magazines reinforced beauty ideals in the form of physical attractiveness by also linking them to surgical intervention. Women were meant to follow specific beauty ideals publicized in the magazines: how they should look, what was desirable and what not.

Every time I look at myself in the mirror, I think: 'Wow!' Having been flat-chested all my life, I finally have breasts to be proud of. I love my new boobs so much that whenever I go into the bathroom, I can't resist the urge to whip off my top and admire them in the mirror! It's such a lovely surprise, like: 'Ooh, there they are!'... I was in hospital overnight and was quite sore for a few days afterwards. But when the bandages came off, it was worth it. My surgeon Dr. Roberto Viel did an amazing job and the results look incredibly natural (*Woman*, 13 June 2011, p. 21).

Surgery is presented as a method for women to pursue a particular appearance regardless of the pain and cost. In fact the latter two are minimized. Although surgical intervention causes pain, it is constructed as worthwhile and beneficial by linking it to individuals' confidence. The cost of surgery is mentioned at the end of the story: 'Debbie Lash's procedure cost £6,000 at the London Centre for Aesthetic

Surgery in Harley Street, 020 7636 4272, Icas.com' (*Woman*, 13 June 2011, p. 21). This can be expensive but credit/ wider availability of procedures has made it more easily affordable. However, the woman was supposedly pleased to pay in order to achieve her beauty ideals. There was no sense that these costs might be beyond many women.

One could argue that the idea of empowerment here is about being able to 'fit into' a certain beauty ideal, and that it is thus a form of oppression. Indeed, women are constructed as submissive, following dominant ideals of beauty or a typically feminine regime. According to Julia T. Wood (1994), 'appearance still counts. Women are still judged by their looks. They must be pretty, slim, and well-dressed to be desirable' (Wood, 1994: 83). Nothing has changed since 1994. In 2014 women are still encouraged to perform the same specific feminine beauty ideal: slim, young, good-looking, fashionable, and well-dressed as evidenced by the standards of beauty portrayed in the UK and Thai women's magazines.

In the Thai women's magazines too the embodiment of femininity such as being slim and fashionable was portrayed in association with confidence-building. For instance, a narrative titled 'The secret of confident women' from *Woman and Home* (Thai edition) very obviously highlights this. One way in which Thai women's magazines presented narratives about beauty, appearance, and aging was to set specific themes for a given magazine issue. *Woman and Home* (Thai edition, July 2011), for instance, engaged in this by showing three 'confident' women in relation to three different topics: style confidence, body confidence, and self-confidence. The most emphasized words in the title: 'The secret of confident women' were 'confident women' because these words were shown in the largest size and brightest colour (see Image 22).

Image 22. A confident Thai woman (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, July 2011, pp. 58 - 59).



Source: author's photograph.

Setting the subtitle 'My secret confidence tips' in the white circle, for example (see Image 22), directly points to the idea of confidence-building as the example shows:

My secret confidence:

- Confidence comes from experiences. The more we try and learn, the more we understand ourselves.
- Take very good care of yourself. Eat good food and do exercise.
- I like riding a horse. It makes your back straight and helps you have a good personality. I've ridden a horse for 10 years. Every time I ride a horse, it makes me feel great! (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, July 2011, p. 58)

This example displays how to build confidence by a 'confident' woman. Confidence-building is constructed as a learning experience: 'Confidence comes from experiences'. By representing the woman as an expert who knows how to build confidence, the magazine reaffirms the concept that confidence can be acquired. It is not necessary for women to be born with confidence. As in the case of this woman, she is constructed as having low confidence at the beginning. The narrative reads:

When I was young, I was not confident at all because of my height. I was 167 cm tall at that time. I was the tallest student in the class. I always sat in the back row. My close friends were all short. I felt inferior and different from them. This is the reason why I was not confident when I did anything in the past (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, July 2011, p. 58).

Set against this backdrop, the narrator then argues:

I believe that confidence can be built up. As I grow up, I learn and have more experiences, I then understand that everyone has his/her own good points and everyone is different. I don't compare myself to others. I may not be as beautiful as other women but I am beautiful as I am. Discover your own style. Be yourself and finally confidence will be with you (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, July 2011, p. 58).

The magazine represents confidence as deriving from experiences that anyone can gradually build up during her lifetime: 'I believe that confidence can be built up'. The narrative makes links to beauty; 'I may not be as beautiful as other women but I am beautiful as I am'. Accordingly, readers learn that physical appearance is one of the important attributes for a woman which may vary in degree.

Interestingly, the notion of self-confidence in both UK and Thai women's magazines is presented in two different and one might argue contradictory ways: confidence in having a 'good-looking' appearance (as discussed above) and confidence in disfigurements or imperfection. Bodies and appearance are constructed as normal and pleasant regardless of the reality (see Image 23). Image 23 shows an article about women who are disfigured facially as a result of acids attacks.

Image 23. Acid victims (*Woman*, 28 March 2011, p. 19).



Source: author's photograph.

The underlying assumption on one level appears to be that how these women look is less important than how they feel or think about themselves. Again, there is this emphasis on attitude. This is evident in a whole range of article headings such as 'Don't tell me I can't...have long hair at 54' (*Woman*, 20 June 2011, p. 35), 'The



secret of confident women: body confidence' (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, July 2011, p. 58), and 'It's attitude not age that matters' (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, November 2011, p. 85). The question therefore is, what kinds of strategies are constructed as enabling the women to manage their attitudes? One woman for example is quoted as saying, 'I never compare myself to younger women. Of course, when I'm on the beach I'm aware that there are more beautiful women around. But I am me, I have the experience of my years and I'm not going to feel bad just because my skin isn't quite as smooth as it used to be' (*Woman*, 25 July 2011, p. 23) and 'I've had this shape all of my life. It results from the yo-yo effect... It does not depend on your appearance but personality. There's no need to compare yourself with others. If you are not happy with yourself, no one is happy with you' (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, July 2011, p. 61). Here, positive attitudes are discussed – 'I'm not going to feel bad just because my skin isn't quite as smooth as it used to be' and 'There's no need to compare yourself with others. If you are not happy with yourself, no one is happy with you'. The idea of comparison is introduced, to then be dismissed. Self-reliance in cultivating a self-affirming identity is promoted. The women are presented smiling, with a can-do attitude. The implication of course is that since coping is a matter of personal disposition, any other woman can also act in the same way, cultivating a sense of feeling happy with herself. After all, it only depends on the woman herself. This is deeply problematic from a feminist perspective since it completely ignores the structural and contextual elements in a woman's life ones which she may have little influence.

When it comes to aging, both UK and Thai women's magazines represent growing older in a positive way. Studies of the images of old people have extended to covering the images of aging in the mass media (e.g. Kessler, Rakoczy, and Staudinger, 2004; Zhang et al, 2006; Lee, Carpenter and Meyers, 2007). Most research focuses on public images of aging that have an influence on social attitudes toward old people (Lumme-Sandt, 2011). One common view appears to be that aging is associated with negative issues and this is the primary theme for many studies about depictions of old age in different sources - popular media in particular. The stereotypes of elderly people are generally quite similar across cultures:

vulnerable and incapable (Cuddy et al, 2005). However, the images of older people in the women’s magazines I examined were presented in a positive light (see Image 24 and Image 25). The express purpose of many of these narratives was to counter negative stereotypes but the effect is, of course, simultaneously to draw readers’ attention to these stereotypes and then to disavow them.

Image 24. An old British woman  
(*Woman*, 16 May 2011, p. 35).



Source: author’s photograph.

Image 25. An old Thai woman  
(*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, May 2011, p. 101).



Source: author’s photograph.

The photos suggest a subtle attractiveness and do not highlight these women’s identity as old and incapable at all; instead the women are linked to confidence and youthfulness by a particular way of posing (one hand on hip pose) and feminine traits; blonde and black hair (instead of white or grey hair), make up, high-heeled shoes, etc. The focus of the photos is on how they look, not how old they are. Without reading their ages in the titles, one might not know that they are 63 and 50 years old respectively. The depiction of older women as confident and good-looking was a common occurrence in both the UK and Thai women’s magazines I examined. As in the examples of these women (Image 24 and Image 25), such representation was reinforced by headings like: ‘Don’t tell me I can’t...wear Topshop at 63 (and I will when I’m 75)’ (*Woman*, 16 May 2011, p. 35) and ‘Rules for dressing at every age’ (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, May 2011, p. 101). ‘Don’t tell me I can’t...’, the title of the narrative, implies social norms for older women – how they should behave and what they should not do. However, the portrayal of the woman in the

above example was linked to self-confidence in the sense that she did what she wanted to do regardless of the norms. One could argue that social norms, in this way, were constructed as less important than the woman's own desire.

Although the feminine attributes as young and beautiful were portrayed as essential and desirable in women's magazines, such features played insignificant roles in women's lives in terms of making friends. What was considered to be important for women to establish relationships with others - female friends in particular - was, again, confidence, as I shall now explain.

### Making Friends and Friendship: From the Closest Bond to Cold Relationships

UK women's magazines portray a wide range of friendships such as the age-gap friendship, long-term friends, and online friendships. These stories<sup>27</sup> share certain similarities - love, closeness, and help from friends. The magazines present both relationships between two individuals and among unrelated people such as a group or a local community. Friendship is often depicted in a positive way, free from conflict and disagreement. For example,

I know some friendships can be comparative, but we're not like that. We really support each other. She gave me the confidence to set up a holiday-let business – I couldn't have done it without her. Annette is as close to me as my family; she's like the sister I never had (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, November 2010, p. 82).

The concept of friendship, as expressed by this woman, implies two different sides to the relationship between friends - positive and negative: 'friendships can be comparative, but we're not like that'. However, only the positive aspect is shown in the story: supporting each other and giving support. Friendship depicted in UK women's magazines, in this way, is regarded as a quality, not a conflict dimension.

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<sup>27</sup> See, for example, 'The meaning of friendship - The closest bond' (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, November 2010, pp. 78-82), 'Our friendship will last forever' (*Woman*, 27 Dec 2011, pp. 16-17), and 'The most important relationship you'll ever have is with your best friend' (*Woman*, 9 May 2011, pp. 42-43), etc.

The quality of friendship also affects the woman's confidence in making the decision to run a business. The woman, in this way, is constructed as lacking confidence in the first place and friendship which supposedly promotes the woman's self-confidence has an influence on the ability of this woman to do business: 'She gave me the confidence to set up a holiday-let business – I couldn't have done it without her'. The focus of friendship here is thus associated with the woman's self-confidence.

UK women's magazines also describe female relationships in terms of establishing various kinds of clubs. This is not found at all in Thai women's magazines. Joining online *Woman and Home* Clubs is associated with specific interests, regardless of family background, age, and career among the individuals.<sup>28</sup> Women normally do not know each other before joining clubs and there is a wide range of ages from 30 – 60 years old. The focus on the network is more on shared interest. It works as an ideal way to get to know other women from different places, outside the office in particular. Intimacy and friendship are the effect: 'We're a diverse range in the group, from teachers to housewives, married ladies to recently divorced singletons, and the age range is from 35 to 60. Everyone gets on so well; we all have Manchester and *woman and home* in common and that's what we always come back to talking about' (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, May 2011, p. 67). Here friendship is constructed as being formed through like-minded readers reading the same UK magazines (*Woman and Woman and Home*).

In UK women's magazines, friendship was aligned with trust and self-disclosure in the sense that even women who did not know each other before joining a club, still talked about personal problems to each other. Friendship depicted in UK real-life narratives in this sense is associated with Giddens's (1990) definition of friendship as the process of self-disclosure to other people. It involves conversational

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<sup>28</sup> See for example, 'I started w&h forum's first lunch club!' (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, May 2011, p. 67), 'The new clubbing' (*Woman*, 20 June 2011, pp. 19-20), and 'I've finally met my best friends at our Forumfest' (*Woman*, 7 June 2011, p. 17).

interaction and conveying personal information to another person. Friendship is thus associated with confidence-building in terms of trust or ‘a feeling of trust that someone will keep secret information private’ (Soanes, 2010: 151). A story titled ‘The new clubbing’ which displayed self-disclosure in friendship to readers stated this:

You get the opportunity to meet people you’d never come across ordinarily, and new, unexpected friendships have been formed. We turn up for the courses, but personal problems get discussed and the support we get from one another is immense (*Woman*, June 20 2011, p. 20).

Here, being a member of a club is depicted as enabling supportive friendships concentrating on encouragement and emotional support which connect to self-disclosure: ‘personal problems get discussed and the support we get from one another is immense’. It suggests that discussing personal problems with others as portrayed in UK women’s magazines is common and worth doing since revealing one’s feelings by talking about personal problems is regarded as positive, affective exchange. This notion of being a club member was also reinforced to readers at the bottom of the page of each story by promoting channels to get to know other people: ‘If you would like to join the *Woman and Home* forums and meet other women who are going through similar situations to you, visit [womanandhome.com/forums](http://womanandhome.com/forums) and sign up today. It’s so easy!’ (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, May 2011, p. 67) and ‘Like to make new friends? Log on to [womanandhome.com/forums](http://womanandhome.com/forums) w & h’ (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, May 2011, p. 85). However, it is significant that in the first instance people needed to sign up through the internet. This reinforces the notion of friendship in relation to a like-minded readership but also ties this in with particular processes of consumption and data disclosure. Friendship on this basis was structured as a fixed network. The magazines set up the websites of forums that are disseminated to magazine readers only. Readers then choose to join the forums and the clubs. It could be argued that this is the way in which the magazines promote themselves and develop a relationship with readers since readers are responsive to the forums. These forums are relevant to women’s interest and the contents of the magazines, and thus joining a club is considered an integral part of the UK women’s magazines to connect and communicate with readers.

Stories about becoming club members or making friends were not presented in Thai women's magazines. Friendship in Thai women's magazines was portrayed in terms of running a business together, not sharing personal problems. The other form of friendship presented in Thai women's magazines was mother-and-daughter friendship as will be discussed in Chapter Six (Family in Readers' Narratives).

Interestingly, in UK women's magazines, which often present triumphal stories about friendships, friendships with problems were also mentioned. *Woman* published a narrative about friendships that go wrong. The narrative began, 'Siân Merrylees, 45, *Woman*'s acting features editor, and Natalia Eglin, 46, a teacher, were best friends at university, but as their lives changed their relationship cooled. Reunited this year, Siân found that true friendship survives' (*Woman*, 3 October 2011, p. 37). Although here a friendship gone cold is described, an explicit conclusion about positive friendship is made by the editors – 'true friendship survives'. The exemplification of positive friendship reads:

Natalia (or Nat) and I met during the cringe-fest that is Fresher's Week at university in the Eighties. We found a flat with my old schoolfriend, Pip, and for the next three years we were inseparable. We shared tutor nightmares, failed romance, highly inappropriate snogging – and way too much Chinese takeaway. When I moved to Japan in the Nineties, pre-email, her regular, hilarious letters kept me going as I struggled to carve out a role in a country where I didn't speak the language and knew no one apart from my live-in boyfriend who was working 14-hour days. Meanwhile, back in the UK, Nat was getting married, moving to the country and having babies.

I flew home every year, but trips back were a whirlwind of shopping and catching up with family and as many friends as I could. I don't remember who organised the annual reunions in London bars to ensure I caught up with my college friends, but for some reason Nat was often missed off the list. She assumed it was a deliberate slight; I remained oblivious. I was too wrapped up in my now very sociable life abroad. By this time we all had email addresses but Nat and I never really communicated online and gradually I only heard about her via other friends. To my shame, I can't remember even sending a card when she had her daughter and a son.

But this February we were reunited at a friend's housewarming party. The previous decade just fell away and it was as if we'd only seen each other the day before – the way it always is with truly great friends.

Our lives are at very different stages now: her eldest is now 16 years old while I'm pregnant for the first time with twins. But although we may be poles apart having our children, as friends we've never been closer. And I'm absolutely delighted to have Nat back in my life (*Woman*, 3 October 2011, p. 37).

This long quote indicates that a good friendship is linked to closeness and communication. The first paragraph describes an ideal friendship, and the idea of closeness between friends is explicit: 'we were inseparable'. In the second paragraph when the friendship goes wrong, the importance of communication is addressed in the sense that it keeps friendship alive: 'To my shame, I can't remember even sending a card when she had her daughter and a son'. It is noticeable that the use of 'we' as the subject pronoun rarely occurs in this paragraph. When the narrator talks about her friendship with Nat, her friend's name is used instead of 'we' as previously in the first paragraph. In fact, the one time that 'we' is mentioned the friend is not part of it: 'By this time we all had email addresses but Nat and I never really communicated online and gradually I only heard about her via other friends'. 'We' in this sentence refers to the woman and her classmates, not Natalia. In the third and fourth paragraphs where the revival of the friendship is presented, the subject pronoun 'we' is retrieved: 'The previous decade just fell away and it was as if we'd only seen each other the day before' and 'But although we may be poles apart having our children, as friends we've never been closer'. This suggests problems between friends in relation to lacking communication. Communication is constructed as the basis for friendships. Further, it has positive consequences for long-lasting closeness. By sharing and communicating, the relationships between friends remain over time.

Techniques on how to deal with 'good friends gone bad' are presented in a separate blue square at the end of the story (see Image 26).

Image 26. An example of a friendship-gone-cold story  
(*Woman*, 3 October 2011, p. 37).



Source: author's photograph.

The actual text reads:

#### Coping with good friends gone bad

**Workaholic:** She's working 12-hour days, puts you on hold and uses expressions like, 'I'll have to find a window to give that some headspace...'

**Tactic:** Accept the days of coffee and catch-ups are over. Suggest a 'meeting' via your electronic diary.

**Mumaholic:** You've just been dumped and are contemplating hiring a hitman; she just want to tell you how little Tarquin ate his fish pie with his fingers.

**Tactic:** Indulge her for a moment (nobody likes a one-track-minded, self-absorbed moaner). But if repeated attempts fail to get her attention, call up a childless mate instead...(Woman, 3 October 2011, p. 37).

The tactics suggested to the readers indicate both the existence of problems and conflicts in friendships but also that having problems with friends is common and solvable. In the UK women's magazines I examined friends are constructed as important and part of women's lives in terms of emotional and personal needs. In the Thai women's magazines, on the other hand, the stories about friendships, problems with friends or friendships that have gone cold in particular, did not occur at all. The most common way for women to talk about friends in my sample was linked to business. Through stories such as 'Business buddies' (*Woman and Home*, Thai



edition, March 2011, p. 133) and ‘New way with homework: Mo & friends’ (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, May 2011, p. 142), friends in Thai women’s magazines were portrayed as business partners instead of personal friends. Discussing how to build up friendships or how to cope with friends gone bad, for example, was not part of this. This suggests the different views of friendships portrayed in the Thai and British women’s magazines. Although friendships were constructed as significant in both UK and Thai women’s magazines, friends in the UK magazines were more likely to be portrayed as crucial in terms of sharing personal information and emotional support, in other words, being part of one’s private life, rather than one’s professional and public life.

Thai women’s magazines compared to UK ones, are more likely to promote relationships in the family or with friends who are familiar faces instead of making friends with unknown persons. There is little sense of openness to encounters with others in Thai magazines. The notion of friendship in Thai women’s magazines is thus quite different from in the UK ones. Different levels of friendship in particular were shown only in the UK women’s magazines. Unlike Thai women’s magazines, making new friends online or having problems with friends were common discussion points in the UK ones. By portraying only positive relationships between friends instead of troubles and difficulties in friendship, a very narrow image of friendship was promoted in the Thai women’s magazines. One way in which friends emerged as differentially important was in the context of discussing travelling in the UK and Thai magazines. I shall therefore now examine the portrayal of traveling with/without friends in these magazines.

#### Travelling and Activities: Building Confidence by Expanding One’s Life Experiences

Travel narratives in UK and in Thai women’s magazines focused on travelling abroad, both on one’s own and with family or friends. In the Thai magazines this took the form of focusing on exotic places such as the Kingdom of Bhutan, Nepal, Egypt, Brazil, and Europe, for example. International travel has aspirational status in

Thailand, and hence a wide range of international travel photos appear in Thai women's real-life narratives, partly to indicate the readers' social class and wealth. Although travelling abroad was discussed in both UK and Thai women's magazines, this was allied to the purpose of portraying lifestyles and social values connected to self-confidence in slightly different ways. Two types of travellers emerged: women as solo and as group travellers. These categories suggest relative independence and dependence respectively. In other words, how the women travel might be classed as dependent or independent. Travelling alone was discussed in both UK and Thai women's magazines. However, compared with the Thai women's magazines, the British ones displayed more stories about women travelling abroad alone. These stories occurred under titles such as 'Don't tell me I can't... have a holiday on my own' (*Woman*, 4 July 2011, p.21), and 'Time travelling' (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, August 2011, pp. 72-74). In Thai women's magazines, on the other hand, the titles of the stories already suggested a certain idea of dependence through constructing travel as social: 'Go with the girls' (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, October 2011, p. 67), and 'We signed up for adventure' (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, April 2011, pp. 64-71). The story titles in the UK women's magazines were more likely to show notions of independence and confidence by using 'I' and 'on my own' instead of 'girls' and 'we'.

British women's magazines focused on personal experience – how individuals spent time travelling and what happened to them during their holidays - instead of country-specific information. One narrative for example read:

So I booked a week at a small beach resort in Thailand. The 12-hour flight was tiring but the holiday itself was just what I needed – total relaxation. I met some other people by the pool, but mostly I just enjoyed spending time on my own. I returned home feeling properly chilled – and half a stone lighter!

Since then, I've been to Spain, Greece and to Sharm el-Sheikh in Egypt, all on my own. A lot of people are amazed that I travel so much alone, but there are lots of pluses.

You can be your own timekeeper, you don't have to take anyone else's preferences into account, you can go shopping whenever you like and buy

what you like. But I can't pretend it's always easy (*Woman*, 4 July 2011, p. 21).

The narrative here emphasizes the idea of the plus sides of travelling alone and to a range of countries. There is no focus on the countries – only their names are mentioned. Clearly, the point is not to offer any detail on them. The point is instead to convey the idea that a woman can have a good time by herself. This however may also be something that needs to be learnt:

My second trip, To Barcelona, at Easter 2007, was very difficult. I still hadn't got used to being on my own, so I felt like a bit of a 'Johnny no-mates' as I toured the Picasso museum and enjoyed my evening glass of sangria.

But then I was turned away from two restaurants because I was dining alone. That was really crushing, and left me feeling deflated. It's easy to keep busy during the days, with sightseeing, but the evening can sometimes be lonely. After a day spent on your own, it's nice to be able to chat with other friendly holidaymakers at the hotel bar.

But that doesn't always happen when I was in Egypt, the only other holidaymakers staying at my hotel were Russian. So I had no English-speaking company at all. But as long as I have a good book, I can survive.

Another downside of being alone is that you have to ask a stranger to take your picture for you. I never felt unsafe on any of my visits because I've never put myself in a dangerous position – and I call my daughter every other day to check in (*Woman*, 4 July 2011, p. 21).

In this narrative the central focus is not the places where the woman has been – Barcelona and Egypt – but on how she deals with navigating them, how she felt while she was travelling. On the one hand the downsides of travelling alone are made apparent. However, on the other hand, travel is constructed as a learning experience which has both advantages and disadvantages. Nevertheless, at the end of the story the idea of the plus sides is reinforced by the woman. Compared to the disadvantages of travelling alone, the positive sides are mentioned more prominently – both at the beginning and the end of the story, the key structural moments of the narrative. The text suggests:

It's also easier travelling on your own when you're older, because people don't think you're on the pull! Although I have been hit on in the past, mostly by local men and waiters, who simply can't understand why 'a beautiful woman like me' is on my own. But they mean no harm.

And while I've never had a holiday romance, I have stayed in touch with friends I've made all over the world.

Fellow travelers often tell me that they think I'm 'brave' for doing this. And really, I'd prefer to travel with others, but you have to make the most of what you've got.

And being able to live with your own company is a sign of being a grown-up, and I'm happy with that (*Woman*, 4 July 2011, p. 21).

Female tourists travelling alone or in small groups can have a tendency to get involved in sexual relationships with local people on their vocation (Meisch, 1995; Maticka-Tyndale and Herold, 1999; Maticka-Tyndale et al, 2003). Similarly, women who travel solo, according to Ragsdale et al (2009), compared with other female tourists tend to have at least one or more relationships during holidays. The idea of female solo travelling is here linked to social perceptions of single women as sexually available. The narrator is concerned whether she is perceived as a sex object when she travels alone. Travelling alone, in this sense, has negative associations especially for young women. This is counter-balanced by the notion that travelling on your own shows the ability to be self-reliant. Women who travel alone are thus more likely to be perceived as confident and mature. The article tries to portray a 'balanced' view but yet comes down in favour of social travelling. Travelling alone remains the second choice – made only if no one is available. In a sense, an opportunity is missed here since not only are many women single, both by choice and for other reasons, but it is also important that their lives are valued accordingly.

Unlike in the UK women's magazines, using tour guides and travelling as a group were much more commonly depicted in the Thai women's magazines. Indeed, using tour guides was associated with both solo traveling and group traveling. In the Thai texts, there was also much more emphasis on the places and countries than on the women's actual experience during travelling. For instance:

We love art. When we were in Egypt, we felt like we were in an ancient city. We learnt about Egypt from books before but here we were at the museum and saw it with our own eyes – ancient art. We saw it everywhere and all the time we were travelling. People’s lifestyle in Egypt is lovely. They still ride horses. We hired a local tour guide named Markmook. We searched on the internet. He is not a professional, just a student working as a part-time tour guide. We went to a local restaurant. We tried coffee in a golden pot and learnt Egypt facts and history from him (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, October 2011, p. 73).

The emphasis here is on travel as an educational experience about another country, Egypt. Readers not only know where this woman and her friends have been - Egypt - but also what to see or do there – museums, ancient art, and people’s lifestyle whereas in the UK women’s magazines only the names of the countries were mentioned. The holiday in the latter case was much more about the self than about the place travelled to.

This is also evident in the photos of the women in the narratives. The arrangement of the photos in the Thai women’s real-life narratives seemed to centre on places and people rather than the women who told the stories (see Image 27).

Image 27. A Thai woman in a travelling narrative (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, October 2011, p. 73).



Source: author’s photograph.

Here five photos, that is more than half, were dedicated to scenes in Egypt whereas the woman was displayed in only three photos – alone and with her friends. It is also noticeable that the one photo of this woman wearing a black dress is the smallest of all the photos and even smaller than the photo of the tour guide on this trip. The

other photo of her produced for this narrative shows a prominent sphinx instead of the woman, since what we can see on the photo is only the woman's back, not her face. The arrangement of photos in the UK women's magazines, on the other hand, represents the notion of a focus on the woman and on independence by showing her standing alone (see Image 28).

Image 28. A British woman in a travelling narrative (*Woman*, 4 July 2011, p. 21).



Source: author's photograph.

The photo of the woman does not identify the place where she is. Without reading the title of the story: 'Don't tell me I can't have a holiday on my own', we would not know that this narrative is about travelling since no signifiers of tourism such as tourist attractions appear. This implies a very different notion of travelling portrayed in the UK and Thai women's magazines. While travel in UK women's magazines was constructed as an affirmation of self, travel in Thai women's magazines was displayed as a structured learning experience.

When it comes to discussing the construction of women in Thai women's real-life travel narratives, women were presented as delicate: 'This trip was exhausting but fun. We had to do things by ourselves – carrying luggage, for example. If a guy had come with us, it would have been better' (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, October 2011, p.73). In British women's real-life narratives, on the other hand, women were presented as independent and confident as previously discussed.

Interestingly, both UK and Thai women's magazines provided tips and information for travelling on issues such as package tours, hotels, cultures etc. These included, for example: 'Special trick for fashionable girl: women here cover up their bodies. If

you wear shorts during the daytime, it is uncommon and you will be awfully stared at. There is a coach of a passenger train offered to men only. Women cannot enter this coach. You need to adapt yourself to this' (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, October 2011, p. 73), or 'Travel info: The Surf Camp Package, including Agadir airport transfers, accommodation, breakfast and lunch, transport and guiding to the best surf spots, is from £295, surfmaroc.co.uk' (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, August 2011, p. 73). However, there were some differences in the travel information in UK and Thai women's magazines in terms of providers. In Thai women's magazines, the travel information was narrated by the women themselves whereas in the UK magazines, this information was offered by the editors or travel specialists. In the UK women's magazines this also included specific advice for women who want to go traveling alone as shown in the following example:

Yes you can but do keep in mind...

- Fancy going solo? Avoid single supplements by booking your holidays through specialist travel companies catering to singles. Try Solos Holidays on 0844 815 0005, or visit solosholidays.co.uk.
- Join an online solo travel forum for advice from others, such as at lonelyplanet.com.
- Make friends with other travelers – you'll open yourself up to new experiences.
- When dining alone, choose a busy, lively place. Taking a book helps, as does learning the art of people watching (*Woman*, 4 July 2011, p. 21).

Here, we can see that solo female travel is constructed as possible in UK women's magazines. The key point is that it is seen as culturally acceptable for women to travel alone but there is also a strong sense that other cultures may have other gender regimes and that women need to be security-conscious.

Although both UK and Thai women's magazines present narratives about travelling, different notions of female travel emerge concerning, for example, the use of tour guides and travelling alone. However, the women's stories were clearly used as examples to inspire readers to go travelling abroad in both sets of magazines. In presenting stories about women travelling abroad and alone, women were

constructed as confident and self-reliant. Activities were frequently constructed as a source of women's self-confidence, as I shall go on to show.

### Activities

Although both UK and Thai women's magazines contained stories about women's activities or hobbies, as I shall show, the types of activities that were portrayed were quite different. UK women's magazines in contrast to the Thai ones discussed activities such as learning western languages, dancing, and photography, and these were linked to improving one's life: 'Trying something new put the pizzazz back into our lives!' (*Woman*, 19 September 2011, pp. 40 - 41). In the UK women's magazines women did activities in order to build their confidence, for example overcoming shyness:

I'm quite shy but when people see you with a camera they talk to you and taking up photography has really helped me come out of my shell...

Luckily Graham was very supportive. I was really interested in macrophotography – close-ups of insects and flowers – and learnt lots more about the technical side. It also gave me self-belief to experiment with my own style (*Woman*, 19 September 2011, p. 41).

In this instance, focusing on something outside the self that brought the narrator into contact with other people was constructed as confidence-building. Doing photography reaffirmed the woman's abilities and confidence, reinforced by success in a competition: 'I came third in a City & Guilds competition with a photograph I took of a bee hovering above a flower'. As in this example, activities in UK women's magazines were structured to show a narrative development of women's confidence from low to high. Activities thus were significant in terms of promoting women's self-confidence.

In the Thai magazines activities were an expression of confidence rather than a means to achieving confidence. Their purpose was to portray women as competent, not least in direct comparison to men. Discussing skydiving one narrator stated:



Sometimes there is unexpected airflow but we have to be able to control it. The hard thing is to read the wind. But I believe that women can do whatever men do if we want to do so. Take good care of yourself physically and mentally, it will help you succeed no matter what you do (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, May 2011, p. 67).

In a sense this text promotes women’s empowerment and equality: ‘But I believe that women can do whatever men do if we want to do so’. Women’s empowerment, according to Erin Murphy-Graham (2010), is conceptualized as ‘a process through which women come to recognize their inherent worth’ (Murphy-Graham, 2010: 321). Empowerment is linked to capability and gender equality (Murphy-Graham, 2010). By presenting women’s activities as expressions of empowerment, gender equality is gestured towards within this Thai women’s magazine. Showing women as very competent was typical in Thai women’s magazines, linked to the notion of gender equality but also to the notion of portraying success as an achieved state rather than as a process. Competence and confidence emerge as valued feminine traits in Thai women’s magazines, and these particular attributes were emphasized in the woman’s photos (Image 29).

Image 29. A woman who goes skydiving (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, May 2011, p. 67).



Source: author’s photograph.

Here too as in the travel narratives the pictures centre on the activity: three photos out of four represent the activity of this woman – skydiving. Two sections of the page, the circle and a long blue stripe, were devoted to the editor’s opinions: ‘Her challenging [*sic*]: while other Thai women are afraid of height, she is a tiny woman who goes skydiving and the first female balloon flight attendant who graduated from Flying Media Co. Ltd.’ and ‘Challenge point level: ★ ★ ★’ (*Woman and Home*, Thai

edition, May 2011, p. 67). This emphasis on the notion of challenge suggests both difficulty and overcoming since the woman graduated successfully in an all-male environment.

By highlighting travel and activity, positive images of women were created in the Thai women's magazines, since this was directly linked to women's empowerment and gender equality as discussed above. However, the focus of gender equality in UK women's magazines emerged in a different topic. Instead of presenting equality of the genders in the travel and activity context, it was explicitly portrayed in the narratives about community action as I shall now explain.

#### Community Action: Making a Difference

Community Action was the least common topic in the UK women's magazines. There were only five such stories. However, that kind of story did not occur at all in the Thai women's magazines. Why narratives about community action were not presented in Thai women's magazines is explicable. On one level, how women's stories were portrayed was part of Thai women's magazines promoting positive images of women. Thus stories in association with having problems in the places where they lived, for example, were excluded from the magazines. The Thai stories in this way did not engage much with difficulties in life. To put it another way, whilst UK women's magazines present narratives in relation to how to improve things for readers, Thai women's magazines are more likely to parade individuals' success and pleasant lives.

The contents of all the stories on community action in the UK magazines were connected directly to the women's identity. Women were presented as having initiative, being competent and dedicated in terms of inspiring and working with other people for community improvements. One such community action involved regenerating the local high street: 'It sounds simple, but brightening up empty shop windows has a positive effect for everyone – my business attracts other retailers to the area, which in turn gives the community a high street to be proud of. What's not

to love about that?’ (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, August 2011, p. 62). This woman established the first pop-up shop in an empty store to promote her fashion business and this then inspired other people to open their shops in the community as well. This led to a new local high street in the community where she lives. The initiative thus helped not only the woman but also people who live in the community to earn more income. In this sense, it was linked to the concept of confidence-building by portraying women as leaders who encourage others to follow their ideas.

Apart from initiative and competence, the most prominent women’s trait portrayed in community action was dedication. The significance of community action was emphasized by comparing it to a family task, with women having to choose between community and family. One narrative in the UK women’s magazine stated:

I got involved after hearing a local councillor had persuaded the council to establish a community association to tackle the problems. Realizing if nothing was done the estate would soon be impossible to save, I volunteered to be co-chair, a position I’ve held ever since. My husband was happy to look after our eldest daughter, who was ten months at the time, while I attended the monthly meetings, and we both felt it was important to make the estate a nicer and safe place for our family to live (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, August 2011, p. 63).

Dedication is constructed as crucial since the woman had to sacrifice her time to attend monthly meetings instead of taking care of her children. What the woman and her husband have in common is the sense of community: ‘we both felt it was important to make the estate a nicer and safe place for our family to live’. To dedicate herself to the community was thus worth doing in a sense that it produced positive effects for the family. This also implies the idea embedded in women’s magazines that the boundary of women’s sphere is not necessarily to remain in the traditional women’s sphere.

Narratives about community action represent the notion of empowerment of individuals and their communities. Empowerment, in this sense, is a process which is performed by the people living within a community. Community satisfaction is constructed as important since it has an effect on quality of life (Campbell et al,

1976; Sirgy and Cornwell, 2002). Dissatisfaction with community is associated with an increase in stress levels (Landale and Guest, 1985; Leventhal and Brook-Gunn, 2003) and the possibility of relocating (Landale and Guest, 1985; Lu, 1998; Speare, 1974). As Seongyeon Auh and Christine Cook (2009) state, ‘where people live and how they feel about the location is important to individuals and families’ (Auh and Cook, 2009: 378). Here the women are constructed as leaders of community empowerment, performing important roles by making something happen to change local life and empowering others in the communities to have better lives:

Trolleys, tyres and traffic cones – it never ceases to amaze me what rubbish you can pull out of a river over the course of a morning. Or how fun it can be!

I started the River Rhymney clean-ups seven years ago. I had dogs then, and loved walking them along the river twice a day. But over the years I’d noticed increasingly more rubbish littering the banks and it had become an eyesore. I heard of an initiative called Keep Wales Tidy that ran the Friends of River Rhymney, who encouraged volunteers to pick up litter along the whole of the river. I offered to take charge of the 1.7km section of river running around Lower Machen, with the help of some of my neighbours...

Since we started the clean-ups, the number of otters, kingfishers and graylings in the river has increased and everyone comments on how much better the area looks. I now take part in an annual roadside litter-picking day too, and I’m so lucky to be part of a community that cares about improving the area they live in.

Ten years ago, I nearly moved from Lower Machen because I didn’t feel like I belonged, but now I can honestly say I know everyone. I wouldn’t want it any other way (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, August 2011, p. 61).

This text centres on the action taken by the woman and her friends and its beneficial effects. The action is described in a fairly precise and factual way. Its three main benefits are a) the improvement of the wildlife; b) people’s sense of pride in the place; and c) the fostering of feeling that one is part of a community. By centring the last part of the text on these benefits the text encourages the readers to try something similar.

What these women gain by means of participation in the communities is a sense of community and self-esteem. For instance, ‘I was amazed when 18 people showed up. I didn’t know anyone there – although I’d been on a vague nodding acquaintance with a few of them – so it was a real moment for creating a sense of community’ (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, August 2011, p. 61), and ‘Our first meeting was held in the local school’s staff room and 14 residents, ranging from late twenties to fifties, turned up. I barely knew anyone, so it was a great introduction to my neighbours! Our sense of self-esteem is linked to the place we live in and, because everything had been neglected for so long, morale was low’ (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, August 2011, p. 63). The concept of community includes the notion of places and the image of the place where one lives is linked to both a sense of belonging to the community and one’s self-image (Mannarini and et al, 2006). But if community in the text emerges as a set of people within a given environment, in the photos accompanying the story – as in other stories in UK magazines – those people are absent so that the photos centre on the single, exemplary woman (see Images 30 and 31).

Image 30. A woman turning a community into a desirable place to live (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, August 2011, p. 63).



Source: author’s photograph.

Image 31. A woman cleaning up a river (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, August 2011, p. 60).



Source: author’s photograph.

The focus is strongly on the individual woman. This reinforces the notion of the sense of community being associated with women’s self-image. One could argue that this makes the individual woman more special – the visual space is dedicated to her and her image. Portrayed in a pleasant environment, presumably of her making, at

least to some extent, women are constructed as proud of their achievements which are (re-) individualized in these images.

In the Thai women's magazines, on the other hand, stories about community action were not present at all. Women in Thai women's magazines were shown in pleasant spaces where there was no need to take any action. Since women in Thai women's magazines were mostly not portrayed as going through a process of improvement, as opposed to being successful, improvement processes were less frequently displayed. The women in the Thai magazines were 'city' persons living in urban environments and with an urban lifestyle. Not only did this distinguish women in Thai women's magazines as 'town' people, their environment was also not constructed as in need of community building. Thai women's magazines thus tend to promote only positive images of women instead of any genuine difficulties in individuals' lives related to community.

In Thai women's magazines, there was only one story in association with a community. However, it centred on a woman's career as a reporter, not on the woman's dedication to the community. Thus the narrative read:

I used to think that I was proficient. When I first started working here I knew that there were lots of things that I still did not know. I talked to many people – teenage mothers, women who have abortions, repentant thieves, and even farmers. This has changed my life and my attitudes. I see other people's lives and the world in different ways. I did not believe that one person could make a difference in society. No one could do that. But the three years I've worked with local people made me realize that change begins with one person who dedicates himself to society regardless of money. When other people saw what he did, they followed and helped. It thus became a connection (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, October 2011, p. 61).

There is a difference between the narratives about community action in the UK and Thai women's magazines. While UK women's magazines focus on how women helped their own communities and how they fixed their own problems in relation to the communities, in this Thai women's magazine the woman's expressed thought

about community action is quite the opposite: 'I did not believe that one person could make a difference in society. No one could do that'. The focus is on what the woman learned from other people's problems in society: 'I talked to many people – teenage mothers, women who have abortions, repentant thieves, and even farmers. This has changed my life and my attitudes'. It is noticeable that while the woman in the Thai magazine talks about the problems of others such as abortions and unexpected pregnancy, her own difficulties are not mentioned at all.

Narratives about community action indicate that the depiction of women is interconnected with ideas of gender equality and confidence since this places women in the public sphere instead of domestic areas. Further, this mirrors women's confidence and abilities in terms of taking action and improving their local communities regardless of men's support.

### Conclusion

Confidence-building in both UK and Thai women's magazines was constructed as crucial for women since it related to success in their lives. The starting-point in the UK magazines was that women lacked confidence but could learn how to overcome this. In contrast in the Thai magazines, women were mainly portrayed as having achieved confidence so that it was constructed as a state rather than as a process. According to the magazines' representation, women in the Thai magazines compared to the UK ones were more likely to be presented as confident and successful. Women's lives were set along typical norms and they were presented to the readers in a positive way. In the UK women's magazines, on the contrary, women's stories revealed that both failure and difficulties due to a lack of confidence were common in one's life. Moreover, confidence was depicted as a process that one could learn and develop over time.

The confidence-building narratives in the UK and Thai women's magazines shared certain similarities. Confidence was constructed as a necessary and desirable characteristic for women. Building confidence was presented around and through a

wide range of issues in relation to women's lives such as life crises, beauty, appearance, and aging, making friends and friendship, travelling and activities, and community action. The concept of building confidence in Thai women's magazines was directly connected to personal experience rather than following specialist advice. Readers learn to become confident or the meaning of being confident from other women's experience since specialist advice was not provided in confidence-building narratives in the Thai women's magazines.

But beyond this, there were significant differences, most prominently in terms of the variety of issues and the construction of women. When facing a life crisis, women in UK women's magazines were constructed as more independent. This is linked to the concept of problem solving. Using outsiders' suggestions – fortunetellers, for example - as a means for problem solving was presented only in the Thai women's magazines whereas UK women were constructed as much more self-reliant. Individuals' confidence shown in stories about life crises in Thai women's magazines was associated with maturity which one gained from getting through problems. Seeking help from others as emotional support to build confidence in UK women's magazines was discussed in terms of becoming members of clubs or making new friends. This idea was tied directly to peer support and self-disclosure. Women in UK women's magazines compared with those in the Thai ones seemed to be more likely to talk about their personal problems to others. Personal issues were discussed and perceived as a means to get encouragement and emotional support.

Another way to build confidence for women in both UK and Thai women's magazines was through travelling and other activities. Although group travel was discussed in both UK and Thai women's magazines, solo-traveling was more likely to be promoted and linked to the concept of confidence in UK women's magazines. In Thai women's magazines, doing extreme sports instead of travelling alone was used as an indication of being a confident woman. Women in UK women's magazines were constructed as confident, full of initiative, competent, and dedicated in relation to helping other people develop community. This was not depicted in the Thai women's magazines at all. Women in the Thai magazines, on the other hand,



were portrayed as city persons living in pleasant metropolitan surroundings without the necessity of community building. By representing this, Thai women's magazines tended to eliminate real-life problems and any negative images of women, and to promote only positive ones instead.

Last but not least, although confidence-building narratives in UK and Thai women's magazines represent women in fairly different ways, when it comes to discussing beauty and appearance, women were portrayed similarly. Women were depicted as both confident and lacking confidence. That is to say, women with low confidence attempted to achieve certain beauty ideals. In this way, women were constructed as lacking confidence in the first place. By reading UK women's magazines, women learnt how to develop self-confidence. Women thus became confident because they could reach certain beauty ideals according to the UK magazines. Steps to become 'beautiful' were provided in the stories in relation to the problems that the women had, as examples and sources of knowledge for readers to learn. Conversely, in the Thai magazines, women were often constructed as beautiful and confident, especially in the narratives about beauty and appearance. However, both UK and Thai women's magazines strongly focused on attitudes and self-reliance. Positive thinking and good feelings about themselves were constructed as a necessity for women to build self-confidence. Overall, particularly in the UK magazines, a neoliberal notion of self-reliance and of the self as the source of confidence was strongly promoted, with no sense that the individual might not always be able to overcome difficulties simply by improving her attitude. In Thai magazines the process of becoming a success was eliminated in favour of portraying success as an achieved state. Here there was no space for showing life in any way as struggle.

In this chapter, I have presented how confidence-building narratives were depicted in the UK and Thai magazines I examined and how ideals of self-confidence in particular were constructed in these magazines. Women's images as confident and competent were strongly emphasized. In the following chapter, I shall investigate issues associated with employment and discuss how these figured in the narratives in question.

## **Chapter Four: Employment in Readers' Narratives**

### Introduction

‘Men were born to a lifetime of paid employment, whereas women were destined for a lifetime of household drudgery’ (Crompton, 2003: 105). This statement which suggests separate spheres for women and men no longer holds true in many countries, including in Thailand and the UK, where high proportions of women work in paid employment. The shift to more women than men working in the UK occurred between 1971 to 1991 as a result of de-industrialization and the expansion of the service sector (Office for National Statistics, 2013). Over the past 40 years, the percentage of 16 to 64-year-old employed women has gradually risen. It has increased from 53 per cent in 1971 to 67 per cent in 2013, whereas the percentage of men aged 16 to 64 in employment has decreased from 92 per cent in 1971 to only 76 per cent in 2013.<sup>29</sup> However, there remain inequalities in terms of wages within the labour market, both in the UK and in Thailand – full-time working women are paid approximately 15 per cent less per hour than men and they are more likely to be low-grade workers.<sup>30</sup> This is consistent with data from the ONS 2012 Annual Survey of Hourly Earnings (AHSE), which revealed that in the private sector women unchangingly get less paid than men.<sup>31</sup> The kinds of low-paid, part-time jobs that are usually performed by women in the UK are, for example, in hospitality, hairdressing, and cleaning (Low Pay Commission 2012).<sup>32</sup>

In Thailand too women have had more opportunities to work, including in professional jobs, over the last few decades; however, gender discrimination

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<sup>29</sup> See [http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776\\_328352.pdf](http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776_328352.pdf), accessed 5/08/2014.

<sup>30</sup> See <http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Fawcett-The-changing-labour-market.pdf>, accessed 5/08/2014.

<sup>31</sup> See <http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Fawcett-The-changing-labour-market.pdf>, accessed 5/08/2014.

<sup>32</sup> See [http://www.lowpay.gov.uk/lowpay/report/pdf/8990-BIS-Low%20Pay\\_Tagged.pdf](http://www.lowpay.gov.uk/lowpay/report/pdf/8990-BIS-Low%20Pay_Tagged.pdf), accessed 05/08/2014.

especially at the workplace is prevalent. Thai women occupied only 13 per cent of positions in the Thai Parliament in 2010 (World Bank, 2011).<sup>33</sup> The labour market in Thailand is highly gendered, as it is in the UK – women are supposed to carry out ‘feminine’ jobs such as nursing and teaching instead of working in construction, for example. Although gender differences across employment in agriculture, industry, and services in Thai society are less polarized, women are more likely to work in the service sector, whereas men tend to work in agriculture (Romanow, 2012), and gender discrimination remains in terms of positions and salary paid. Women from rural areas increasingly migrate to urban areas; however, not all of them are able to find employment. Therefore it is not surprising that being a prostitute is considered to be an easy way for Thai women to earn money, particularly from foreigners (Romanow, 2012), despite prostitution being unlawful under the new 2007 constitution.

Due to political crises and the global downturn, overall economic growth in Thailand fell dramatically in 2008 and 2009.<sup>34</sup> This had an effect on the employment rate in Thailand. The employment rate for women aged 16 to 64 in the UK, according to The Office for National Statistics (2012), was 65.4 per cent in 2011.<sup>35</sup> The labour force participation rate for women aged above 15 in Thailand, according to the World Bank (2012), slightly decreased from 65.2 per cent in 2008 to 63.8 per cent in 2010. This is consistent with that fact that the unemployment rate in Thailand is quite low. It has been less than two per cent for six consecutive years since 2007.<sup>36</sup> According to the Thai Statistics Office (2011), the unemployment rate in June 2011 was at 0.4 per cent. There were 1.63 hundred thousand unemployed people in Thailand. Due to the recession, by comparison to Thailand the unemployment rate in

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<sup>33</sup> See <http://data.worldbank.org/data-catalog/>, accessed 05/08/2014.

<sup>34</sup> See <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/thailand>, accessed 13/03/2014.

<sup>35</sup> See <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/lms/labour-market-statistics/march-2012/statistical-bulletin.html>, accessed 13/03/2014.

<sup>36</sup> See [http://www.apfhrm.com/docs/reports/thailand\\_country\\_report\\_march\\_2012.pdf](http://www.apfhrm.com/docs/reports/thailand_country_report_march_2012.pdf), accessed 13/03/2014.

the UK has increased.<sup>37</sup> The unemployment rate in the UK has been at 7.3 per cent on average from 1971 to 2010. The last reported unemployment rate for people aged 16 to 64 years old in the UK was 7.9 per cent in August 2012. Hence the unemployment rate in the UK is higher than in Thailand. Women's participation in the labour force has increased in many countries over the last decades (Euwals et al, 2007). This has been accompanied by an increase in numbers of childless women, the decline of overall birth rates, and the participation of women with young children in the labour force (Vlasblom and Schippers, 2004). This suggests changes in women's lives in relation to women's choices of career and family work in modern societies. One question is to what extent these shifts are demonstrated in the portrayal in readers' narratives in UK and Thai women's magazines.

In this chapter, I am interested in the question of how women's employment is constructed in British and Thai women's magazines. The remainder of the chapter is divided into three sections. Firstly, I shall discuss the employment themes that emerge and show which occupations are depicted in women's real-life narratives. Secondly, I shall discuss the construction of women in employment narratives by providing examples of these narratives in both UK and Thai women's magazines. Finally, I shall analyse the gap between the demographic realities of female employment in the UK and Thailand and the portrayal of women's employment in British and Thai women's magazines.

### Employment Themes in Women's Real-life Narratives

To comprehend the employment themes in women's real-life narratives, it is essential to understand the meaning of 'employment'. 'Employment', according to *The Oxford English Dictionary* (2010), means 'the state of having paid work' (Soanes, 2010: 243). Employment, in this sense, focuses on working people who get paid. 'Employment narratives' in my research thus refers to the stories that employed women tell about their occupations. As I shall show, the type of employment and career content in the women's magazines I examine (*Woman, Woman and Home* UK

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<sup>37</sup> See <http://www.tuc.org.uk/extras/womenconference.pdf>, accessed 13/03/2014.

and Thai editions, and *Poo Ying*) centres mostly on employment success. These narratives focus on how successful the women are and how to become successful in work, especially in business. Before discussing this further, I shall now provide a brief overview of the narratives presented in both UK and Thai women's magazines (Table 9).

Table 9. Numbers of narratives focusing on employment in selected women's magazines: *Woman*, *Woman and Home*, and *Poo Ying* 2010-2011.

<b>Magazines Titles</b>	<b>Number of Narratives</b>
<i>Woman</i>	24
<i>Woman and Home</i> (UK edition)	58
<i>Woman and Home</i> (Thai edition)	52
<i>Poo Ying</i>	40
<b>Total</b>	<b>174</b>

There were 174 narratives in total in my sample concentrating on employment. The distribution of the narratives in the UK and Thai magazines was different: 82 and 92 narratives in the UK and the Thai ones respectively. This implies that discussing employment and careers was somewhat more common in the Thai women's magazines I analysed than in the UK ones. These stories present women as economically active in various occupations. Table 10 indicates the types of occupations covered in the UK and Thai women's magazines.

Table 10. Occupations in employment narratives: *Woman*, *Woman and Home*, and *Poo Ying* 2010-2011.

Occupations	Women's magazines					Total
	Woman	Woman and Home			Poo Ying	
		UK edition	Thai edition			
			British women	Thai women		
1. Business owners	17	45	22	22	11	117
2. Managers	-	3	1	1	17	22
3. Homeworkers	4	4	2	-	2	11
4. Designers	1	-	1	3	2	7
5. Physicians	-	-	-	-	6	6
6. Writers	1	1	-	-	-	2
7. Artist	-	-	1	-	-	1
8. Call handler	-	1	-	-	-	1
9. Chauffeur	-	1	-	-	-	1
10. Comedian	1	-	-	-	-	1
11. Dentist	-	-	-	-	1	1
12. Nurse	-	1	-	-	-	1
13. Paramedic	-	1	-	-	-	1
14. Pharmacist	-	-	-	-	1	1
15. Wedding planner	-	1	-	-	-	1
<b>Total</b>	24	58	26	26	40	<b>174</b>

Table 10 shows that in UK women's magazines, in contrast to the Thai ones, occupations in women's real-life narratives were more varied. 12 different occupations were represented in the UK women's magazines: business owners, managers, homeworkers, designers, writers, artists, call handlers, chauffeurs, comedians, nurses, paramedics, and wedding planners. Only eight careers featured in the Thai ones: business owners, managers, homeworkers, designers, physicians, artists, dentists, and pharmacists. Although business owners and managers were commonly found in both UK and Thai women's magazines, physicians, dentists, and pharmacists were only portrayed in Thai women's magazines. Writers, artists,

chauffeurs, call handlers, comedians, nurses, paramedics, and wedding planners did not appear in Thai women's magazines at all. This implies that Thai women's magazines tended to portray only middle-class level jobs. The occupations portrayed in Thai women's magazines, in contrast to the UK ones, were limited – only certain jobs were presented: comedians and call handlers, for example, were not included. Considering the set of careers from nurses to chauffeurs in UK women's magazines, we can see a wide range of employment levels portrayed. Compared to men, women in the UK are more likely to be employed in a particular range of occupations, mainly in 'the five Cs – caring, catering, cashiering, cleaning and clerical work'.<sup>38</sup> However, of these service occupations only caring and catering jobs were presented in the UK women's magazines. Caring work was displayed in terms of nurses and paramedics working in the public sector while catering jobs were represented by owners of catering company, restaurants, bakery and coffee shops working in the private sector.<sup>39</sup> This suggests a significant focus on private-sector employment rather than on public-sector work.

To understand female employment in Thailand, it is essential to have a sense of the overall female employment rates within different sectors in the country. I shall continue to discuss employment and careers depicted in Thai women's magazines by outlining employment rates for women as shown in Table 11 in order to illustrate what the realities are in terms of female employment in Thailand. Next, I shall make a comparison between these facts and what was depicted in the Thai women's magazines.

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<sup>38</sup> See <http://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/tucfiles/womenspay.pdf>, accessed 13/03/2014.

<sup>39</sup> See for example, 'Cooking for Madonna made me realize I wanted to start a catering company' (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, June 2011, p. 148), 'I work harder than ever, but I love the community feel in my café' (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, May 2011, p. 149), and 'It was reading stories in w&h that inspired me to start a bakery' (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, August 2011, p. 122).

Table 11. Female employees by occupation in Thailand in 2012.

Occupation	2011				2012		
	Quarter 1 (Jan.-Mar)	Quarter 2 (Apr.-Jun)	Quarter 3 (Jul.-Sep.)	Quarter 4 (Oct.-Dec.)	Quarter 1 (Jan.-Mar.)	Quarter 2 (Apr.-Jun.)	Quarter 3 (Jul.-Sep.)
Female	17,166.7	17,359.0	18,168.7	17,907.2	17,299.0	17,546.0	18,211.8
1. Legislator, senior officials and managers	253.8	227.6	238.2	288.0	340.2	342.5	332.0
2. Professionals	1,106.1	1,070.7	1,097.2	1,173.8	1,137.6	1,080.2	1,093.7
3. Technicians and associate professionals	645.2	663.9	712.7	702.8	712.9	678.0	674.1
4. Clerks	945.0	938.6	913.9	938.8	984.0	967.5	994.4
5. Service workers and shop and market sales workers	4,515.7	4,413.6	4,386.9	4,389.4	4,301.4	4,109.0	4,145.6
6. Skilled agricultural and fishery workers	5,035.8	5,550.2	6,741.4	6,347.0	5,136.7	5,907.9	6,882.3
7. Craftsmen and related trades workers	1,338.7	1,269.4	1,142.5	1,147.2	1,232.7	1,245.3	1,160.3
8. Plant and machine operators and assemblers	961.8	1,002.8	918.2	885.7	970.6	981.0	975.8
9. Elementary occupations	2,309.9	2,191.2	2,005.0	2,005.7	2,403.9	2,143.4	1,938.2
10. Workers not classifiable by occupation	47.7	31.1	12.6	28.1	9.2	10.4	15.5

Source: National Statistic Office, Ministry of Information and Communication Technology, 2012.

Table 11 shows the number of employed women by occupation in Thailand in 2012. In 2012 most female employees in Thailand worked as skilled agricultural and



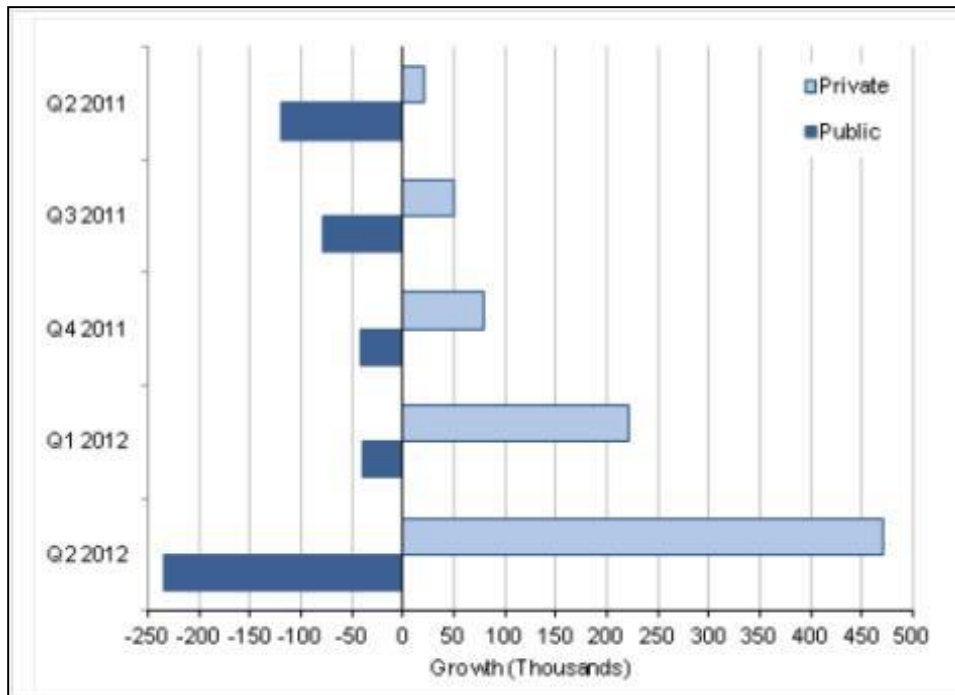
fishery workers and as service workers and shop and market sales workers. The number of female employees in the agricultural and fishery sectors increased from 6,741.4 thousand in quarter 3 of 2011 to 6,882.3 thousand in 2012. This increase is also shown with regard to other jobs such as legislator, senior officials and managers, clerks, craftsmen and related trade workers, plant and machine operators and assemblers. Female service workers and shop and market sales workers, on the other hand, had slightly decreased from 4,386.9 thousand to 4,145.6 thousand over the same period. This decrease was also found for professionals, technicians and associate professionals.

Considering the set of occupations displayed in Table 11, it is noticeable that in Thai women's magazines, women as technicians and associate professionals, clerks, service workers and shop and market sale workers, skilled agricultural and fishery workers, and plant and machine operators and assemblers did not feature. Only occupations in fields such as legislator, senior officials, managers, craftspersons and related trade workers were shown. It is interesting that even skilled agricultural and fishery workers – where the highest rate of female employment is in Thailand – were not displayed in the Thai magazines. This implies that the careers depicted in the employment narratives in Thai women's magazines aim to present only certain kinds of employment to readers, rather than representing the general reality of working women. The implications for the construction of women in these magazines will be discussed later.

It is noticeable that most of the occupations depicted in UK and Thai women's magazines were careers in the private sector. There were 10 jobs in the private sector compared with only two typical for the public sector in the British women's magazines – a nurse and a paramedic. This was also the case in the Thai magazines where no public sector careers were mentioned. Even the stories about physicians, for example, who might have worked in the public sector, were set in private clinics instead of public hospitals. This suggests very similar notions of career values in both UK and Thai women's magazines; working in the private sector was constructed as common and desirable for women. Table 12 shows the public and

private sector employment rates in the UK. Table 12 reflects a certain trend in women’s employment, away from the public sector and increasingly in the private sector.

Table 12. Public and private sector employment in the UK between 2011- 2012.



Source: The Office for National Statistics, 2012.

Table 12 shows quarter-on-quarter public and private sector employment growth by main sector in the UK from 2011 to 2012, though not in gender terms. Employment in the private sector in Q2 2012 had increased by 471,000 to 23.896 million. Public sector employment, on the other hand, had increased by 235,000 during the same period. Public sector employment in Q2 2012 constituted only 19.2 per cent of total employment in the UK. This suggests that employment in the private sector is becoming more common in the UK, not least because of government cuts in the public sector. At the same time women’s employment in the public sector remains significant and is proportionally higher than the UK women’s magazines’ readers’ narratives would suggest.

The statistics mentioned above and the occupations depicted in the Thai women's magazines indicate that the employment narratives in the Thai women's magazines represent women's stories in accordance with current employment facts – the majority of women work in the private sector. In 2012 (July – September), there were 5,745.8 thousand private female employees compared to 1,677.6 thousand government female employees.<sup>40</sup> In Thailand, women working in the private sector are thus approximately thrice as common as in the government sector.

The statistics of female employment in Thailand and in public and private sector employment in the UK mentioned above show that both Thai and UK women's magazines present women's work lives to a certain extent in conformity with the social facts. Jobs in the private sector are constructed as more common in both UK and Thai women's magazines. The most commonly portrayed occupation, that of the business owner, will be discussed in the following section in order to analyse the 'career values' depicted in women's magazines I examine which in turn reveals the meaning of employment and how it is constructed in readers' narratives as well as the construction of women in relation to career values which I shall now turn to discuss.

### The Construction of Women in Employment Narratives

The meaning of career success may vary and depend on cultural and other contexts (Nicholson and De Waal-Andrews, 2005). Career achievement, according to Gattiker and Larwood (1990), is also influenced by the perceptions and interpretation of circumstances in a particular social context. Therefore, career success in the UK may be conceptualized differently from in Thailand. Career success may be divided into two domains: objective and subjective. Objective career success is calculable and observable. It can be measured by factors such as promotion and income (Nicholson and De Waal-Andrews, 2005). Subjective career success, on the other hand, relates to individuals' appraisals of their career experiences (Judge et al, 1999). This

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<sup>40</sup> See [http://web.nso.go.th/en/survey/lfs/lfs2012\\_tab.htm](http://web.nso.go.th/en/survey/lfs/lfs2012_tab.htm), accessed 18/11/2012.

categorization raises questions about career success for women. One question is what criteria are constructed as relevant for women's career success in the context of women's real-life narratives in UK and Thai women's magazines. Understanding these will provide some insights into the 'career values' portrayed in the women's magazines. I shall consider typical stories about employment and career in UK and Thai women's magazines. I shall begin by discussing the most common career depicted in both UK and Thai women's magazines – business owners as shown in Table 10.

### Business owners

Traditionally, occupations such as managers and directors have been monopolized by men – middle-class white men in particular (Traves et al, 1997) since women tend to be perceived as less enterprising and less career-oriented (Lämsä and Sintonen, 2001). However, in both UK and Thai women's magazines, women were presented in positions that used to be occupied by men - as business owners and managers. They are therefore visible in a more equalized position since they occupy managerial roles like men within that career context. The gender structure underpinning the employment narratives has thus changed somewhat from traditional women's roles in terms of non-equivalent careers between men and women. However, a pattern of horizontal sex segregation was explicit. The ways in which these women were constructed in the women's magazines were mediated through particular occupations and a language which positioned the women and their identities in particular ways. Although women were displayed in male-dominated jobs – business owners and managers - these women were still placed into more 'feminine' specialities (e.g. clothing and accessories, beauty). This was evident in the types of business depicted in the employment narratives as shown in Table 13.

Table 13. Business types in employment and career narratives in *Woman*, *Woman and Home*, and *Poo Ying* 2010-2011.

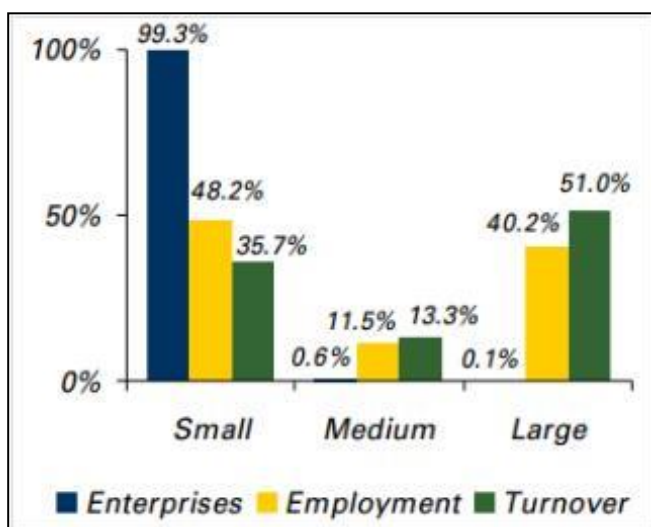
<b>Business Owner Types</b>	<b>UK women's magazines</b>	<b>Thai women's magazines</b>	<b>Total</b>
1. Clothing and accessories	12	16	28
2. Home and decoration	9	9	18
3. Beauty	7	10	17
4. Bakery and coffee shops	8	5	13
5. Child educational centre and child products	5	5	10
6. Food and restaurants	6	3	9
7. Flower business	2	2	4
8. Gift service	2	1	3
9. Online business	2	1	3
10. Pet shops and pet products	2	1	3
11. Shoes and socks	2	1	3
12. Book stores	2	-	2
13. Hotels and resorts	1	1	2
14. Dating agency	1	-	1
15. Stationery	1	-	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>117</b>

Table 13 shows that all together there were 15 types of business depicted in the women's magazines I examined. 12 out of 15 business types appeared in both UK and Thai magazines: clothing and accessories, home and decoration, beauty, bakery and coffee shops, children, food and restaurants, flower business, gift service, online business, pet, shoes and socks, and hotels and resorts. The distribution of the narratives about business owners in terms of types of business was thus quite similar. In the UK magazines there were 15 business types, slightly more than in the Thai ones. Businesses such as book stores, a dating agency, and stationery occurred only in UK women's magazines. Among the businesses, clothing and accessories were the most common in both the UK and Thai women's magazines. There were 12 and 16 stories about clothing and accessories business in UK and Thai women's magazines respectively. It is noticeable that most of the businesses depicted in women's real-life narratives such as clothing and accessories, beauty, bakery and

coffee shops, and flower business centre on female-dominated domains or those in which females are conventionally presumed to have an interest. These businesses reflect the notion of occupational sex segregation. That is to say, the magazines depict horizontal employment segregation meaning that prototypically ‘female’ businesses were shown. Occupational sex segregation is associated with gender inequality (Charles, 2003). In this way, the women’s magazines simultaneously display women as successful business owners and associated them with business commonly linked with female preoccupations. No women in male-dominated careers were depicted. The UK and Thai women’s magazines were more likely to depict female-dominated occupations. To deepen our understanding of these business types and clarify the notion of employment success in the UK and Thai magazines, I shall discuss some examples of these employment and career narratives.

In discussions around business owners, the British and Thai women’s magazines displayed women’s businesses as small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with employees. The number of employees depended on the size of the businesses. The number of employees in businesses in the UK and Thai magazines was quite similar. Typical examples included: ‘I employ three other part-time staff plus a Saturday girl’ (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, August 2011, p. 122) and ‘This April, I opened my second café – and I now have 14 staff working for me’ (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, November 2010, p. 152). One might argue that these businesses were household-size. At the same time this is also the usual size of most enterprises in the UK private sector as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Share of enterprises, employment and turnover by size of enterprise UK private sector, start of 2009.



Source: National Statistics, 2010.

Figure 1 shows enterprises, employment and turnover by size of enterprises – small, medium, and large – in the UK private sector at the start of 2009. A small enterprise consisted of 0 to 49 employees whereas the medium size had 50 to 249 employees. Large enterprises have 250 or more employees. 99.3 per cent of enterprises in the UK were small. There were only 0.6 per cent and 0.1 per cent of medium and large enterprises in the UK. Altogether small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) made up 59.7 per cent – more than half of employment - and 49 per cent of turnover in the UK. Small enterprises alone occupied 48.2 per cent of employees and produced 35.7 per cent of turnover.

The size of businesses portrayed in the Thai women’s magazines was also consistent with the fact that in Thailand in 2010, 13,496,173 people were employed by enterprises: 2,988,581 people by large enterprises and 10,507,507 people by SMEs respectively. Small enterprises were the highest number of all enterprises at 66.72 per cent and at 85.70 per cent of SMEs (The Office of SMEs Promotion, 2010). In employment by SMEs in 2010, the service sector had the highest number at 3,764,118 positions or 35.82 per cent of the total employment of SMEs followed by

the manufacturing, and the trade and maintenance sectors (The Office of SMEs Promotion, 2010).

Women with small businesses in women's magazines were occasionally displayed as lone employees of their businesses or self-employed. Self-employed persons, according to the European Commission (2011), are defined as 'persons who work in their own businesses, professional practice or farm for the purpose of earning a profit, and who employ no other persons' (European Commission, 2011: 26). These women ran their businesses on their own with no employees. However, the way the women described their businesses was in terms of profit figures which defined them as successful. One story, for example, read:

I wrote a business plan and after applying for a local business development grant, received £2,500, to which I added £10,000 from my savings. I used this to buy a camera to photograph properties, install a satellite dish - as we couldn't access broadband - and pay for the development of a website. I went to several web designers because I wanted my site to make the user feel their holiday had already started. Then all I needed was my kitchen table and the telephone line (*Woman and Home*, July 2011, p. 156).

The repetition of 'I' in each sentence emphasizes the woman's agency in setting up her business, focusing on her ability to do so: 'I wrote a business plan.', 'I used this to buy a camera to photograph properties.', and 'I went to several web designers because I wanted my site to make the user feel their holiday had already started.' This reinforces the notion of individual success since a single woman with no employees or assistants can run her own business effectively.

Women in UK and Thai women's magazines who employed staff for their businesses discussed their employees in a quite similar way. In the British women's magazines, the roles of the employees were connected to women's businesses and families. In this way, their particular roles as well as their importance were mentioned. For example, 'I have two full-time chefs, two kitchen assistants and four office staff' (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, June 2011, p. 150) and 'We have a nanny, without whom I couldn't do my job' (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, April 2011, p. 76). In Thai women's magazines, the roles of employees and relationships



between employers and employees were also articulated. Moreover, women not only referred to their members of staff as individuals but also in terms of teamwork. For instance, ‘I have one assistant helping me check emails, pack and deliver parcels’ (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, May 2011, p. 143), and ‘I’m lucky that I have a very good team of approximately 10 staff. We work together just like a family. Everyone is helpful. Sometimes they have to work until late at night but they don’t complain’ (*Woman and Home*, November 2010. p. 139). This suggests that a woman-owned business was constructed as a family business in the Thai women’s magazines. In this way, the notion of running a business was tied to traditional gender stereotypes – managing a household. Business was thus associated with family and household.

Women in the UK and Thai women’s magazines were displayed with the goal of encouraging a set of career values that focused on happiness in one’s work life. The narratives of the self-employed centred on two dimensions: working hard and feeling happy or fulfilled. Working hard especially at the beginning of starting a business, was one of the most striking attributes described by the women in both the UK and the Thai magazines. For instance, ‘I’m very happy though I work every day – no weekends. My business is getting into shape now... I try to work systematically. I used to get my clothes delivered to customers every day and this ruined my life. I’ve changed to do it only on Monday and Thursday’ (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, May 2011, p. 143), and ‘We run retreats every three weeks and are booked up until October. I paid myself a salary last summer – half of what I earned before, but my quality of life is much better’ (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, July 2011, p. 157). This meant that the women in both Thai and UK women’s magazines were all presented as happy working women with smiles on their faces (see Image 32 and Image 33).

Image 32. Women working, smiling  
(*Woman and Home*, UK edition,  
November 2011, p. 176).



Source: author's photograph.

Image 33. A woman at her ballet school  
(*Woman and Home*, Thai edition,  
August 2011, p. 138).



Source: author's photograph.

The images suggest that the women have a satisfying work life. This is very much confirmed by the narratives which also emphasize the satisfaction that comes from doing what one enjoys and being appreciated by one's customers. Thus the story linked to Image 32 states: 'We'd like to expand into bigger premises. We've had lots of requests to open in the evenings, and we'd also like some outside space. People thank us for opening the café. They bring us presents and cards. We feel so appreciated and loved' (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, November 2011, p. 176). The narrative related to Image 33 indicates a very similar idea of the woman's working life - satisfying and pleasant – to the readers: 'Ballet is everything in my life. It is like my breath. Art makes us alive. Doing what we love is the best thing. It inspires you and helps you enjoy doing it' (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, August 2011, p. 138). Implicit in these narratives is the suggestion that the readers might be able to achieve something similar. There is no sense that work might be drudgery, boring or repetitive, or not pay a living wage.

Unlike women who have their own businesses, women who work in the public sector such as nurses, paramedics, and call handlers who in fact only appeared in the UK magazines were shown in their uniforms in their workplaces (e.g. Image 34). In this way, their identities were tied directly to the uniforms – formal and responsible for the organization. However, these women were shown in unofficial poses instead of formal ones, with smiles on their faces. This suggests satisfaction at work regardless

of the burden of responsibility. What female business owners and women who work in the public sector had in common was thus the suggestion that one's working life is pleasant and satisfying.

Image 34. A paramedic (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, January 2011, p. 61).



Source: author's photograph.

Here too the notion of a happy working life was shown in the texts:

There are many rewarding moments too, of course, we recently managed to resuscitate a 27-year-old security guard who had had a heart attack at work. That's the ultimate aim and feels fantastic. Delivering babies is magical too. I've delivered over 25 now. Everyone hugs and kisses you afterwards – it's wonderful (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, January 2011, p. 62).

The vocabulary used here is invariably one of work that has 'rewarding moments', and is 'magical' and 'wonderful'. This implies that no matter how hard the woman works, she is satisfied with her job. It is interesting that what is considered as a 'reward' for her is not salary or income but 'hugs' and 'kisses': 'Everyone hugs and kisses you afterwards – it's wonderful'. This reinforces the notion of work as life fulfillment, rather than as economic necessity.

In the narratives there was only limited indication of the relationship between these women's working lives and their lives away from work. That context remained vague, but there was a sense that the home life also remained the primary responsibility of the women. This can be seen in the following example.

Our busiest night of the year is New Year's Eve, and I never mind working then, just as long as I have Christmas off. It's non-stop – mostly drunken revellers. You're often in the middle of a job as the clock strikes, so you barely notice. Over the years, I've developed a unique ability to switch off after work. After I finish my shift, I just go home, make tea and do the ironing, which is a way of unwinding. But I like the fact that work provides a break from the routine of family life and brings different challenges (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, January 2011, p. 62).

Here domestic labour is constructed as a form of relaxation – ‘unwinding’ – after paid work but it is also described as ‘routine’ which suggests boredom and the need to do something else. The text reflects a certain view of this woman's identity – working hard and being responsible. Despite having the double burden of work and family, she is constructed as happy.

In Thai women's magazines, in contrast to the UK ones, there were no photos of women wearing uniforms although there were a few occupations such as doctors and pharmacists where specialist clothing is common. The women's images were more formal in dress and posture. A dermatologist (Image 35), for example, was presented as an elegant woman in a luxurious dress sitting on sofa free of any cares of patients. Her work was effectively hidden since there were no visual indicators of it. The portrait of the woman was rather similar to that of a model instead of a working dermatologist. The identity of the woman was thus idealized within a certain frame of displayed decorative femininity.

Image 35. A dermatologist (*Poo Ying*, November 2010, p. 241).



Source: author's photograph.

Without reading her story, one would not know what her occupation was. She was portrayed as happy and well-to-do, not as working. Labour as toil is thus in a sense denied – all we see is its supposed effects, wealth and happiness. The notion of happiness in work life was also reinforced in the text.

Although I am a dermatologist, I had studied the medical curriculum as a general physician for 6 years including appendix surgery, childbirth, and autopsy...If you ask me whether I'm successful, I should say that it depends on your meaning of success. I think what I have done is enough for me. It represents me well. I go to work every day and want to do it every day. I feel happy every day. I think this is enough for me. If I had more money and more clinics but it would make me unhappy and feel bad when I go to work, I wouldn't say I was successful...If I could, I wouldn't turn back the time to adjust anything in my life. It is all perfect for me and I'm very happy with my life now (*Poo Ying*, November 2010, p. 240).

The idea of happiness connected with a certain meaning of success – which, as already indicated, is presented in all the narratives as the essence of one's working life – is repeatedly mentioned by the woman: 'I go to work every day and want to do it every day. I feel happy every day' and 'It is all perfect for me and I'm very happy with my life now'. There is a sense of routine, of everydayness, but linked to contentment.

This kind of image in Thai women's magazines suggests that employment and career are talked about in very particular ways. In the Thai magazines, in contrast to the UK ones, the narratives were very strongly tied to women's self-image as successful women regardless of the realities of their work lives. In the UK magazines, on the other hand, titles might suggest critical moments or processes such as 'How we're riding the recession' (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, October 2011, p. 156), 'You're fired so what next?' (*Woman*, 23 May 2011, p. 20), and 'We turned our passions into a biz!' (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, March 2011, p. 140). Thus one narrative read:

It's incredibly stressful being made redundant – and when it happens slap bang in the middle of a recession, doubly so. I was earning £32,000 plus bonuses, but suddenly had no idea when my next pay cheque would come. Even though I got a payout, it was scant comfort because I didn't know

how long the money would have to last. Suddenly life was thrown up into the air and I didn't know what to do. At evening classes I'd learnt how to make memo boards, which I gave to friends as gifts, so after a lot of thought I decided to turn my hobby into a business. The support network *mumpreneuruk.com* was an inspiration and helped motivate me... Setting up was tough, working 12 hours a day while Lewis was teething, but worth it – the month after I lost my job I made £1,200 selling my handmade gifts. I'm now making a profit, although it's nowhere near my old salary – yet! But I love the flexible hours. I work three days a week when Bella and Lewis are at nursery and their bedtime is my worktime (*Woman*, 23 May 2011, p. 21).

This story shows how the narrator turns her employment crisis – being made redundant - into a new career as a self-employed woman. That sort of crisis is simply not portrayed in Thai women's magazines. This particular story is one about coping with adversity and turning one's life around whilst at the same time fitting that working life in with one's family commitments. Employment narratives in UK women's narratives thus differed from Thai women's magazines in one crucial point – the notion of success in women's work lives. In Thai women's magazines women were presented as ideal and perfect – no failure before success. Readers of Thai women's magazines thus were presented only with the notion of being successful, not how one might become so. In the UK magazines, on the other hand, failure or a crisis was shown as the first stage – sometime initiating a woman starting her own business – so that the reader was shown how success at work might come out of a crisis.

This difference in Thai and British women's magazines went together with different levels of self-disclosure in the narratives. That is to say, the amount of personal information provided at the beginning of the stories in the Thai magazines, in contrast to the UK ones, for example, was much less. In the Thai magazines, only the names, ages, and occupations were presented in the introduction to the stories, as in 'Pantipa Putdee, Pan, 39, the owner of Deva Pantelar (a vintage furniture shop) on Prachanarumit Road – a famous road in Bangkok' (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, October 2011, p. 153). In the UK magazines, the names, ages, marital status (both married and divorced), hometowns, numbers of children, and occupations were all named. Examples include: 'Sally Hurst, 51, was a full-time mum when she noticed a

gap in the market for stylish reusable bags. She started The Old Bag Company in 2005 and within five years had a turnover of £400,000. She is married, has five children and lives in Devon' (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, October 2011, p. 159), and 'Zubeda Suleman, 53, is a freelance massage and beauty therapist. She's divorced with two children and lives in Cricklewood, London' (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, July 2011, p. 157). In the Thai women's magazines all family details were excluded at the beginning of each employment narrative – marital status in particular, but especially being divorced, are invisible. In the UK women's magazines, on the other hand, such details were always presented at the beginning of the stories as part of the introduction. This reinforces, as already suggested in the previous chapter, that Thai women's magazines are less likely to reveal personal information.

An ideology of male breadwinning has been prominent in Britain since the end of the nineteenth century and the UK is traditionally considered a 'strong male-breadwinner state' (Crompton, 2003: 101). This is also the case in Thailand where the cultural tradition of the male breadwinner is still prevalent. However, the construction of women in the UK and Thai women's magazines shows women as independent from male support. Although women's employment may involve family and friends, the photos importantly show only the women and their female friends. It was noticeable in the Thai women's magazines, in contrast to the UK ones, that when married women talked about their success in their careers, particularly in business, husbands were often mentioned as part of their stories. For instance, 'Last two months, I just opened a new class. My husband (Suriya Puengthongchai) has been working in a musical band for a long time. He helped me set up the class. Now we teach guitar, singing, drums, and ukulele classes' (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, August 2011, p. 138), and: 'My husband suggested to me not to expand my business because I might not have enough time to work creatively' (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, July 2011, p. 151). In Thai women's magazines, men seem to be important in terms of providing business ideas and giving emotional support. For instance,

My boyfriend told me to sell clothes on Facebook since it is widely used. So I followed his suggestion. It was amazing that after posting my clothes online, they were sold out in one week. After advertising my clothes on Facebook, the telephone rang all day. I didn't even have time to eat. I felt so great...I knew that I had made the right decision because of him (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, May 2011, p. 142).

However, despite this husbands and male business partners are rarely visually shown in the Thai women's magazines even though the boyfriends and husbands are mentioned in the stories. There was only one narrative out of the 92 in a Thai magazine which showed a male friend as a business partner in a photo helping the woman in a cooking school for kids (see Image 36).

Image 36. The male business partner (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, June 2011, p. 150).



Source: author's photograph.

Image 36 shows the content and photos of the woman's story about her cooking school for kids named 'A Little Something'. There are three significant people in the photo: the woman (the owner of the business), the man (the woman's business partner), and a girl (a pupil at the school). Although all of them are wearing the same kind of apron which signifies that they are all part of the school, the man is sitting, looking at camera, and not touching any kitchen utensils on the table. The woman and the girl, on the contrary, are holding a scoop and a tray of baked doughnuts respectively. This implies that the woman and the girl – both are female – are more likely to be active and involved in this business, a cooking school for kids. The man's role is less clear and does not seem to involve the actual activities of the



business. But, as stated, this was the only image showing a man in the Thai magazines.

Independence from men was also widely presented in the UK women's magazines. Again, men such as husbands were mentioned in the texts but they did not appear in any photos. The following example is the story of the woman who ran a business with her family:

Image 37. A woman doing business with her mother, sister, and daughter (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, October 2011, p. 176).



Source: author's photograph.

The narrative and the attendant image centred entirely on women. This was reinforced in the introduction.

Lizbeth Holstein, 41, runs [honeytreebespoke.com](http://honeytreebespoke.com), a personalized stationery business, with mother, Willemien, 65, sister Kate, 35, and daughter Lily, 14. She's married with two children and lived in Somerset (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, October 2011, p. 76).

This emphasis on female involvement in the business creates a sense that women can work effectively together – sisters are doing it for themselves, as the song goes. It provides a concept of success based on the compatibility between the woman and her female relatives or female friends. This can also be seen in family business narratives where the different roles between wives and husbands are emphasized in terms of personal involvement in the family business. Although both genders – men and women - are shown, particular roles in the business are not mentioned. For instance,

My husband Sebastian and I ran a tennis coaching business, but after some serious health problems, he decided to call it a day, which meant we both needed another source of income. My mother, sister, daughter, and I are all quite arty and creative. I'd had always handmade my own inventions, thank you letters and Christmas cards as a hobby, and friends would ask me to make theirs, so the family suggested I launch myself properly as a business.

We are now thriving and incredibly busy. Sebastian and I run the business full time, from studios at our home. I also employ my mother, sister and daughter part-time, who are all very arty. My mother does lots of gorgeous vintage-type designs and my daughter does cool collage designs that appeal to the teen market (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, October 2011, p.176).

I quote this at length since it shows a consistency of word usage: 'My husband Sebastian and I' and 'my mother, sister, daughter, and I'. The mother, sister, and daughter compared to the husband are mentioned twice as often. In addition, the words that the woman uses suggest the roles of the family members in the business. Although the woman's husband – Sebastian – runs the business 'full time' with her, his particular role is not further discussed in the narrative. Her mother, sister, and daughter are employed part-time. However, their actual roles: 'My mother does lots of gorgeous vintage-type designs and my daughter does cool collage designs that appeal to the teen market' are detailed. The husband is never mentioned except as a co-worker (Sebastian and I).

It is interesting that all of women's employment stories in both the UK and Thai women's magazines are success stories. Only women who succeed in their employment and earn money were presented in the magazines. Success, in this sense, was directly tied to income, as well as growing and expanding a business. For instance,

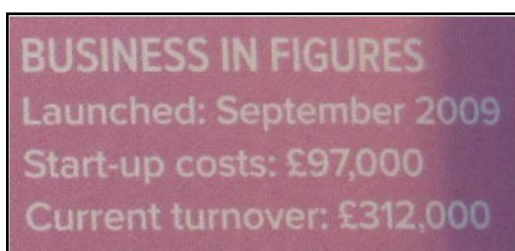
Although it was nerve-wracking, the buzz I got made me want to run a glam catering company. In 2006, I launched The Saffron House and rented a commercial kitchen in west London. I then created menus, had a website built and took on a kitchen assistant and a chef. Local-authority officials advised on regulations and I did a one-day health-and-safety course, all funded by the business... We're at the top end of the market, charging from £150 per head for small dinners. So many clients asked me to teach them to cook that, in 2008, I used profits to launch The Cooking Academy (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, June 2011, p. 150).

Like every other employment narrative, this story presents a successful woman – the owner of a catering company and a cooking academy. The emphasis is mainly on the positive dimensions of the process, entailing a can-do attitude that seems to guarantee success. Apart from doing business successfully, it highlights the women's success through her efforts. The daily grind of work is not much detailed. It is also the case that the women presented do not represent many working women who earn a minimum wage.

The focus is thus very much on success. Career success, according to Michael B. Arthur et al (2005), can be described as 'the accomplishment of desirable work-related outcomes at any point in a person's work experience over time' (Arthur et al, 2005: 179). Career success is also defined as 'the positive psychological or work related outcomes or achievements one has accumulated as a result of one's work experience' (Judge et al, 1995: 486). The notion of career success, in this sense, is here associated with subjective dispositions (e.g. satisfaction). A discussion of career satisfaction in both UK and Thai women's magazines shows that subjective domains as well as objective elements were used as indicators of career success. The subjective elements were displayed in terms of the women's feelings towards their work lives or women's work satisfaction. Women were presented as hard-working, and happy. Examples include: 'I still often work seven days a week, but it doesn't really feel like work. I love what I do' (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, May 2011, p. 147); 'I'm keeping profit for reinvestment. When I bake, I start at 4 a.m., but I've never been happier' (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, August 2011, p. 122), and 'To be honest, running business is more tiring than having routine work. I'm very tired but happy' (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, November 2010, p. 137). The objective aspects of career success, on the other hand, were described in terms of income or money. Examples include: 'New ways to make money' (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, November 2010, p. 150); 'We followed our instincts and made money!' (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, June 2011, p. 148); and 'Use your instinct to make money' (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, November 2011, p. 139). The amount of money earned was displayed in 'Business in figures' in the employment narratives. 'Business in figures' was shown in a small coloured square in each narrative in

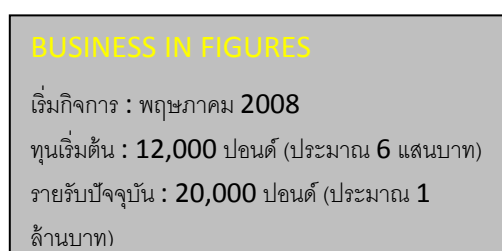
*Women and Home*, usually at the bottom of the page in both UK (see Image 38) and Thai women's magazines (see Image 39). It emphasized the amount of money needed to set up a business and its turnover.

Image 38. Business in figures in a British women's magazine (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, October 2011, p. 176).



Source: author's photograph.

Image 39. Business in figures in a Thai magazine (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, October 2011, p. 154).



Source: author's photograph.

This text box had similar content in both UK and Thai women's magazines. There were three main points: when the business was first launched, its start-up costs, and its projected turnover. These can be regarded as indicators of business success. This is also evident in the topics in the UK women's magazines such as 'top tip', 'what I've learnt', and also in the Thai *Women and Home*, such as 'make it work for you' and 'fact file' since their content was all about how to grow a business and make a profit from it. As it said in one *Woman and Home* issue:

Make it work for you - If you're thinking of buying a franchise, Tom Endean, from the British Franchise Association, says:

- Do your research. Before deciding on a franchise, work out what type of business fits with your expertise.
- Know your franchisor. How long have they been in the industry, how many franchises do they have, and do they have resources to support them all?
- Check your agreement. It will be weighted in favour of the franchisor to protect the network, which is what you want. But if you're not happy with any areas, negotiate. Enlist the help of a qualified franchise solicitor. For more franchising information, see thebfa.org.
- Talk to fellow franchisees. Ask them about the support they have received and the profits they've made (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, November 2010, p. 150).

In the UK women's magazines, in contrast to the Thai ones, expert advice was usually offered as part of the employment narrative to suggest how to run a business successfully. The suggestions above, for example, are to help readers make a decision about buying a franchise. Since 'making it work for you' is clearly directed at the reader, you, and is often presented alongside the 'business in figures', the implication is to encourage readers to be inspired by concrete examples of success. Readers are invited to contemplate how it is done.

In addition, employment narratives in UK women's magazines often feature statistical information such as: '40% of new business start-ups by women have grown by 40 per cent in the past five years' (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, September 2011, p.49), and '51% of over fifties find work in a completely new sector after redundancy' (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, September 2011, p. 49). In this way, there is an attempt to link the women's stories to certain socio-economic statistics. Quasi-factual reporting combines with personal narratives to suggest to readers how they too might engage with the business world. This is in line with the recognition that many new businesses set up today are small and medium-sized enterprises or SMEs, but also with encouraging women to work.

As already suggested unlike in the UK women's magazines, in the Thai ones, when it comes to discussing career success, the notion of expert advice rarely appears. Only one out of 92 narratives had expert advice at the bottom of the page as part of the narrative. It was a translated excerpt from *How to Get a Job You'll Love* by John Less (McGraw-Hill Professional). The kind of quasi-factual reporting that you get in UK magazines does not occur in the Thai magazines. What the readers can learn from is only other women's stories – the successful ones in particular. Expert advice in the Thai magazines in contrast to the UK ones was not considered part of the stories. In Thai women's magazines, women's suggestions instead of the expert advice were provided but only in one out of 92 stories. That advice centred on the essence of business techniques:

Considerations when doing business online:

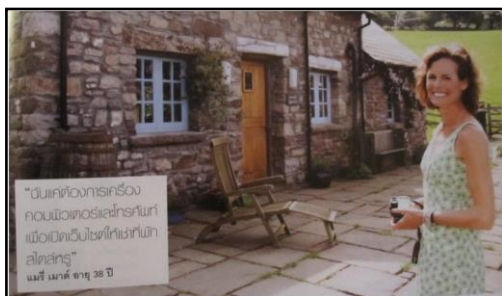
- Should use colourful and attractive advertisement that can catch the eye.

- Photography is very important because customers cannot see the real product. They make a decision from what they see.
- Keep up to date with internet applications in order to improve your own webpage (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, May 2011, p. 143).

The goal of this woman's suggestions was to guide readers to do online business successfully. Her advice is similar to the expert how-to advice in the UK magazines. However, the notion of becoming successful in business in this Thai magazine is linked to personal experience rather than following independent expert advice. Readers in Thai women's magazines learn business techniques from the women's stories. The readers of the UK women's magazines, on the other hand, can learn from both the portrayed women's experiences and expert advice based on a wide range of methods that represent business success in general. The expert how-to advice in the UK magazines suggests processes for career success within the context of the women's real-life narratives. That is to say in the UK magazines the *process* of becoming successful is in focus whereas in the Thai ones the status of *being successful* in business is in focus, not how to become so. This is also evident in the fact that only women's positive images – successful and prosperous - were promoted to readers.

Interestingly, in the Thai magazines, there were stories about British women's employment. The stories of British women in Thai women's magazines were translated from the original. This creates a particular focus for readers in the Thai magazines, presenting them with images of western women. The distribution of British women's narratives in Thai women's magazines in terms of the numbers of stories was significant since they were depicted equally in each Thai magazine issue: 2 stories of British women and 2 stories of Thai ones. The stories of the British women in the Thai magazines such as in the October issue of *Woman and Home* (Thai edition, see Image 40), for example, were directly translated from the July issue of *Woman and Home* (UK edition, see Image 41). The women, content, and photographs were identical to those in the UK women's magazines.

Image 40. A British woman in a Thai magazine  
(*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, October 2011, p. 151).



Source: author's photograph.

Image 41. A British woman in a UK magazine.  
(*Woman and Home*, UK edition July 2011, p. 155).



Source: author's photograph.

When scanning these two photos which can be identified as mirror images, there was very little difference between the one for the UK magazine and that for the Thai one. In the Thai magazine, in contrast to the UK one, the sentence -‘I just need my computer and phone to run my luxury rentals website, Marie Mount, 38’ (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, July 2011, p. 155) - was shown at the bottom of the photo instead of at the top. However, this can be considered as an insignificant difference since the whole sentence and even the woman’s name and age were directly translated into Thai. This creates a western presence in Thai women’s magazines. In the Thai women’s magazines, there was a consistent attempt to link British women’s stories with Thai ones. This connection was created by having stories on the same theme such as luxury businesses, small businesses, and personal businesses. The October issue of *Woman and Home* (Thai edition), for example, featured ‘The little luxuries business’ followed by the introduction: ‘Time and good health has become a new way of treatment. These four women are successful in their businesses by helping people feel good’ (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, October 2011, p. 150). After this the women’s statements – two British women and two Thai women - appear in small white squares (see Image 42).

Image 42. A business theme: ‘The little luxuries business’ in a Thai magazine (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, October 2011, p. 150).



Source: author’s photograph.

The sizes of the white squares and British and Thai women’s photos are similar. The stories actually centred on different businesses: a spa salon, a furniture shop, a hotel rental website, and a flower garden. The messages in the white squares identify the different businesses. What do Thai readers gain by this presentation of British women’s employment and career narratives? In part, it shows the working life experiences of western women, but it also represents ideas of the similarity of career success in both British and Thai society within the context of women’s real-life narratives. That is to say career success depicted in British and Thai women’s magazines is displayed as a global experience. In particular, the similarity of career success as attitude is depicted as identical for British and Thai women. Based on the statements by the British and Thai women in the white squares: ‘Seeing customers look more beautiful after having treatment makes me feel happy’ (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, October 2011, p. 150) and ‘Though flowers have got short shelf life and people think that they are luxury goods, they have mental value’ (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, October 2011, p. 151), what is valued in terms of career success is here constructed as the subjective element – happiness in one’s work life. In this way, the similarity of a successful career as a global experience consists in doing a job as a result of one’s desire regardless of the amount one earns as evidenced by the income of these women shown in the ‘business in figures’ section in the magazines: £20,000 and £65,000 (British women) and £40,000 and £254,000



(Thai women). The different amounts of salary among these women are prominent: interestingly, Thai women earn more. Nonetheless, the emphasis on contentment in one's career is similar in these women's employment narratives in the Thai and UK women's magazines.

There is a similarity in the British and Thai women's employment stories depicted in the Thai women's magazines. The narrative structure in both follows the same pattern. The topics 'the idea', 'what happened next', 'where I am now', 'the future', 'biggest challenge', 'greatest achievement', 'boost your earnings', and 'business in figures' occur in both sets of magazines. Although the remaining content of the employment narratives might be different depending on the individuals' business, the basic sense is that women's employment experience is the same across the globe: it is happy, it requires work, it is fulfilling.

### Conclusion

Employment narratives in the UK and Thai women's magazines I analysed share certain similarities. All the narratives about employment are positive. The stories focused mostly on women who work in the private sector which corresponds to contemporary socio – economic reality. Only women who are successful in their work life are presented. These successful women had various occupations. However, UK women's magazines displayed a greater range of occupations than Thai women's magazines. In Thai women's magazines, the occupations portrayed focus on urban careers. The vast majority of jobs is never depicted. But beyond this there are significant differences, most importantly in the range of issues and options in relation to employment that the magazines display. British women's magazines provided general statistics, suggestions and expert advice focusing on how to become successful. The Thai women's magazines gave little advice, and not by experts. Critical moments and failure in business were excluded from the stories. Being successful in work, especially in business, was more likely to be concerned with being successful, not with how to become so. Readers learnt about employment

and career success from other women's experiences alone since suggestions and expert advice were mostly not provided.

Despite the fact that business owners were the most common employment category in both the UK and Thai readers' narratives, the notions of running a business were portrayed very differently. The strategy of most women depicted in both the UK and Thai women's magazines was to earn money by running their own businesses in a fairly traditional way – a family business. The size of businesses in the women's magazines was shown as a household-size business. In this way, women remained in domestic-sized contexts. Both British and Thai women's magazines portrayed career success as a global experience but the Thai ones reinforced this through printing stories about British women whilst this was not the case for the UK magazines. The notions of career success were displayed in both subjective and objective terms: feeling content and making money. Passion and money were the common career values depicted in the UK and the Thai magazines. Although passion was supposedly a common reason for women to start their own businesses in both the UK and Thai women's magazines, facing difficult times such as the recession or being fired before starting a business were discussed only in the UK magazines. Readers in Thai women's magazines, in contrast to the UK ones, thus had less chance to learn how to overcome employment obstacles since only successful stories were presented. Women in British and Thai women's magazines were constructed as economically independent from male support and autonomous agents in their work as evidenced by the absence of men in the narratives. Although the ways the women were displayed shared some features, their dissimilarities point to different notions of womanhood. While women in the UK women's magazines sometimes wore uniforms and/or looked more casual, women in Thai women's magazines were never presented in a work outfit and all posed in a fairly formal way, showing the *effects* of career success rather than the work as such.

In this chapter, I have shown how employment and career narratives figure in the UK and Thai women's magazines I analysed and how ideas of career success in particular are constructed in contemporary women's magazines. Womanhood as

independent and autonomous was strongly emphasized in both UK and Thai women's magazines. In that sense the narratives were quite emancipatory. However, the types of business presented relegated women into the quasi-domestic and feminine service domain. British magazines were readier to portray the downsides of employment but in general the narratives were constructed to inspire – they were triumphal, depicting success, and obliterating the negative, routine aspects of work. In some ways, this was not dissimilar to how romantic relationships and marriage were portrayed, as I shall discuss in the next chapter.

## **Chapter Five: Romantic Relationships and Marriage in Readers'**

### **Narratives**

#### **Introduction**

'Successful romantic relationships have significance both for individuals and society' (Cui et al, 2005: 1169). Romantic relationships in this way have an effect not only on one's life but on society at large. Similarly, marriage is important to an individual and the society since it is often perceived to be 'the foundation of family and the building block of a society' (Esere et al, 2014: 585). Romantic relationships and marriage can thus be considered as essential aspects of understanding individuals' lives in every society. Hence, there are many studies regarding the significance of romantic relationships and marriage conducted by family scholars. Most of them focus on forms of interaction between couples and their perceptions of successful and failed relationships (Huston and Houts, 1998; Gottman et al, 1998). The notion of marriage in most eastern countries such as China, Japan, and India is immensely traditional and conventional (Friedberg, 1998). This is also the case in Thailand. One question for me was the extent to which this was replicated in the depictions of women's lives in the readers' narratives.

Traditionally, marriage in both the UK and Thailand was crucial for women's economic survival since women were dependent on their husbands who were regarded as the breadwinners. Nevertheless, this has changed in the UK since the 1960s with the growth of women's labour market participation, the increase in middle-class occupations, the rise in equal opportunities, and the birth control revolution (Finch, 2003). This is evident in the increase of female participation in the labour market as previously discussed in Chapter Four (Employment in Readers' Narratives). As a consequence, the number of marriages in the UK, according to The Office for National Statistics (2013), went into long-term decline between 1972 and 2009 due to socio-behavioural changes: women, financially increasingly independent, could delay marriage, decide not to marry, and cohabit (Wilson and Smallwood, 2007). This is also the case in Thailand where the median age at

marriage has been rising (Wayachut, 1993). The increase in age at marriage in Asian countries, including Thailand, is a result of modernization, education, and employment (Choe et al, 2002). Modernization has led to changes in the labour market structure - women have more chances to enter a wider range of jobs that place them in the public sphere instead of remaining housewives (Choe et al, 2002). It appears that female age at first marriage in both the UK and Thailand has been increasing. This might be a result of women's status and women's economic independence, since they do not have to depend on men's support as in the past.

The number of marriages, according to The Office for National Statistics (2012), in England and Wales has decreased since the early 1970s from 404,734 in 1971, to only 232,443 in 2009. This decline is also reflected in the numbers of the married people. According to the Office for National Statistics (2012), there were only 19.8 married women in every 1000 of the eligible population in 2010, compared to 48.1 women in 1980 in England and Wales. For men, the proportion decreased from 60.4 men in every 1000 of the eligible population in 1980, to only 21.8 men in 2010.<sup>41</sup> The number of marriages in England and Wales has thus been reducing. People in England and Wales tend to get married at older ages. According to the Office for National Statistics (2011), the average age of women getting married has risen from 22.0 in 1970 to 30.8 by 2009. This is also the case in Thailand where the average age at first marriage of Thai women has increased from 22.1 in 1960, to 24.6 in 2010 (Prasartkul and Vapattanawong, 2012). This is also reflected in the rise in the proportion of unmarried Thai women among 30 – 49 year olds from 4.5 per cent in 1960 to 13.8 per cent in 2010 (Prasartkul and Vapattanawong, 2012). These figures reveal that women in both the UK and Thailand tend to get married later than in the past.

There has also been a rise in divorce rates in the UK and in Thailand. Even recently, between 2011 and 2012, the number of divorces in England and Wales has increased

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<sup>41</sup> See [http://www.oneplusone.org.uk/content\\_topic/committed-relationships/key-data/](http://www.oneplusone.org.uk/content_topic/committed-relationships/key-data/), accessed 09/08/2014.

from 117,558 to a total of 118,140 divorces – an increase of 0.5 per cent (Office for National Statistics, 2012). In Thailand the number of divorces, according to the National Statistical Office of Thailand (2014) are also on the rise, by approximately 27 per cent over the past nine years. There were more than 310,000 marriage registrations in 2011 but 110,000 divorces in the same year.<sup>42</sup> The high divorce rates in Thailand might be a result of stress in families. The change of family structure from the extended families to the nuclear ones, consisting of parents and children only, leads to the lack of support from relatives, especially around childcare. This can cause domestic stress and financial problems. Women's rising earning capacity and the emergence of the dual-earner household is another factor in the rise in divorces. On the one hand, this could be regarded as an achievement for women since they are becoming economically independent and do not have to depend on men. On the other hand, it causes less tolerance between couples and leads to divorce since spouses, especially wives, may feel that they do not have to financially depend on their husbands. It could be said that the causes of divorces in Thailand are similar to those for delayed marriage, resulting from the shift of women's status and roles in Thai society.

As indicated in the introductory chapter to this thesis, the women's real-life narratives in women's magazines I investigated tend to focus on romantic relationships and marriage as one key aspect of their concerns. There are patterns both of readers' telling and narrators' arranging women's real-life stories in terms of a particular point in women's lives. Through this process of selection, these women's narratives reveal the meanings they attach to being a woman at different stages of life. Due to the fact that the patterns of romantic relationships and marriage are the primary concern in this chapter, I shall now discuss how romantic relationships and marriage figure in the women's narratives in the UK and Thai women's magazines. As the second noun, marriage, already indicates, these themes were discussed in fairly conventional, heteronormative ways.

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<sup>42</sup> See <http://englishnews.thaipbs.or.th/divorce-rate-rising-april-14-family-day/>, accessed 09/08/2014.

### Romantic Relationships Themes

In this analysis, I divide the depiction of romantic relationship and marriage themes in readers' narratives into two groups according to the women's marital status. On the whole romantic relationship narratives were part of unmarried women's stories while marriage narratives were told by married women. A romantic relationship, according to Ming-Hui and Shihti Huang (2000: 180), is 'an ongoing and enduring partnership of two people that may last over an extended period of time, including a lifetime'. I use the phrase 'romantic relationships' in my research to refer to heterosexual love relationships of unmarried women as these were discussed in the women's real-life narratives in the selected women's magazines. This already sets up the dominance of the heteronormative paradigm of these relationships since none of the magazines I examined included readers' narratives centring on lesbian relationships, for example. The distribution of narratives focusing on romantic relationships and marriage in the UK and Thai women's magazines I looked at is shown in Table 14.

Table 14. Number of narratives focusing on romantic relationships and marriage in *Woman*, *Woman and Home*, and *Poo Ying* 2010 - 2011.

<b>Magazines Titles</b>	<b>Romantic relationships</b>	<b>Marriage</b>
<i>Woman</i>	20	56
<i>Woman and Home</i> (UK edition)	8	31
<i>Woman and Home</i> (Thai edition)	14	6
<i>Poo Ying</i>	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>93</b>

Table 14 shows that altogether there were 135 narratives focusing on romantic relationship and marriage in the magazines I examined. 93 of these centred on marriage narratives whereas only 42 dealt with romantic relationship narratives. This possibly suggests that the magazines aimed at married women, or that marriage was viewed as the social goal for the women readers. It is also indicative of the age group

the magazines were aimed at, since the assumption seemed to be that women in their 30s and older would be married.

Beyond this, there were significant differences in the distribution of the narratives. Romantic relationship narratives were less common than marriage narratives in the UK women's magazines. There were 28 romantic relationship and 87 marriage narratives respectively. Romantic relationship narratives, in contrast to marriage ones, were approximately three times less common in the UK women's magazines. Marriage was therefore constructed as the key relationship for the women and readers in the UK women's magazines.

Table 14 makes immediately evident that the depiction of both marital and romantic relationships was significantly less common in the Thai than in the UK magazines. In the Thai magazines there were only six narratives related to marriage compared to the 87 in the UK magazines. Moreover, whereas such narratives figured in both UK magazines, only one of the Thai magazines contained such narratives. It is also noticeable that whereas the UK magazines had significantly more narratives that focused on marriage than on romance, the exact opposite is true for the Thai magazines: romantic relationship narratives, in contrast to the marriage ones, were more than twice as common in the Thai women's magazines. There were 14 romantic relationship and six marriage narratives. None of these narratives was presented in *Poo Ying*. This suggests that Thai women's magazines do not focus on women's personal relationships in quite the same way or to the same extent that UK ones do.

The apportionment of these narratives in both the UK and Thai women's magazines shows a major difference in the notion of the private between the UK and Thailand. Sharing personal information with others, especially on the topics of love and married life, was limited by cultural privacy norms in Thailand. The rule is that one should not discuss family issues in the public domain. This is evident in the Thai proverb - 'do not bring inner fire out, do not bring external fire in'. 'Inner fire' in the first sentence refers to family problems whereas 'external fire' in the second one means issues outside family. This Thai proverb is one of the most famous sayings



told to a bride on the wedding day as a practice for her to be a ‘good’ wife and make family life happy by not disclosing family problems to others who are not family members and not bringing any issues from others that can cause discomfort and irritation into the family. Privacy here relates to the personal notion that problematic issues should not be discussed outside the family. What is considered private regarding the sharing of personal information between British and Thai women is thus very different as indicated in the different number of narratives on romantic relationships and marriages in the two sets of magazines. In Thai culture it is especially uncommon to divulge what is deemed to be negative or taboo as discussed above, and this impacts, as I shall analyse below, on the kind of narratives readers produce about romantic relationships and marriage.

Narratives focusing on romantic relationships and marriage in the UK and Thai women’s magazines emphasized particular periods in women’s lives and experiences. Romantic relationship narratives focus on single or unmarried women’s love stories and relationship issues. These stories centre more on the development of intimacy and passion between prospective partners (Giddens, 1992), whilst marriage narratives centre more on questions of responsibilities. Although the concepts of romantic relationships and marriage in the British and Thai women’s magazines were similar, there were some differences in the ways in which the stories were presented, particularly in their contents as I shall discuss in the following section.

When depicting romantic relationships and marriage, stories were portrayed as either: tragic or triumphal. Tragic narratives dealt with painful experiences in women’s lives such as separation, divorce, infidelity, secret affairs, losing husbands and homosexual husbands.<sup>43</sup> Triumphal narratives, on the other hand, usually focused on positive or successful love experiences such as dating, finding love, and

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<sup>43</sup> See for example, ‘Love ending: Why I finally ended my 10-year affair’ (*Woman*, 28 February 2011, pp. 32-33), ‘The worst time was after the marriage’ (*Woman*, 25 July 2011, pp. 19 - 25), and ‘My “platonic affair” wrecked my marriage’ (*Woman*, 2 May 2011, pp. 46 - 47).

wedding anniversary celebrations.<sup>44</sup> Unlike tragic narratives, triumphal narratives in romantic relationships and marriage occurred in both UK and Thai women's magazines as shown in Table 15.

Table 15. Tragic and triumphal narratives about romantic relationships and marriage in *Woman*, *Woman and Home*, and *Poo Ying* 2010 – 2011.

Magazines Titles	Romantic Relationships Themes		Marriage Themes	
	Tragic	Triumphal	Tragic	Triumphal
<i>Woman</i>	3	17	10	46
<i>Woman and Home</i> (UK edition)	-	8	-	31
<i>Woman and Home</i> (Thai edition)	-	14	-	6
<i>Poo Ying</i>	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	3	39	10	83
	<b>42</b>		<b>93</b>	

Table 15 shows that triumphal narratives, in contrast to tragic ones, in romantic relationships and marriage were more common in both UK and Thai women's magazines. There were 122 triumphal narratives in all whereas there were only 13 tragic narratives about romantic relationships and marriage in the magazines I examined. In the UK women's magazines triumphal narratives were approximately eight times more common than tragic narratives. Additionally, in *Woman and Home* (UK edition) there was no tragic narrative. Only *Woman* (UK edition) had tragic stories. In the Thai magazines, on the other hand, all the narratives about romantic relationships and marriage were presented in a triumphal way. The ratio of tragic to

<sup>44</sup> See for example, 'When I fell in love I never imagined I'd be living in a castle' (*Woman and Home* UK edition, May 2011, p. 93), 'Mr. Cool was actually asking me out!' (*Woman*, 29 September 2011, p. 31 - 32), and 'I remarried my childhood sweetheart' (*Woman*, 14 March 2011, p. 45).

triumphal narratives was thus quite different in the UK and Thai magazines. There were 102 triumphal narratives in the UK women’s magazines compared to 20 in the Thai ones. Tragic narratives, in contrast to the triumphal ones, were less common in both UK and Thai women’s magazines. The lack of tragic narratives in the Thai magazines means that only positive love stories were considered appropriate. In the UK magazines, on the other hand, both tragic and triumphal love stories were acceptable, but tragic ones significantly less so. Both the UK and Thai women’s magazines seemed to want to produce a ‘feel-good’ factor by focusing on narratives with a positive outcome.

There were both similar and different kinds of romantic relationship narratives in the UK and Thai women’s magazines and these can be divided into seven topics as shown in Table 16.

Table 16. Topics of romantic relationship narratives in *Woman*, *Woman and Home*, and *Poo Ying* 2010 - 2011.

Romantic Relationships Themes			Women’s Magazines				Total
Topics	Triumphal	Tragic	Woman	Woman and Home		Poo Ying	
				UK edition	Thai edition		
1. Dating	✓	✓	9	4	1	-	14
2. First meeting	✓	-	1	3	4	-	8
3. Love celebration	✓	-	1	-	5	-	6
4. Cheating boyfriends	-	✓	4	-	-	-	4
5. Ex-boyfriends	✓	-	3	1	-	-	4
6. Sex	✓	-	2	-	2	-	4
7. Long distance love	✓	-	-	-	2	-	2
<b>Total</b>			20	8	14	0	<b>42</b>

Table 16 indicates that in the UK women’s magazines, in contrast to the Thai ones, the topics under which romantic relationship real-life narratives were treated were

more various. There were seven types of topic: dating, first meeting, love celebration, cheating boyfriends, ex-boyfriends, sex, and long distance love. Five of these topics: dating, first meeting, love celebration, sex, and long distance love also appeared in Thai women's magazines. Dating, first meeting and love celebration in romantic relationships were commonly found in both sets of magazines whereas cheating boyfriends and ex-boyfriends were not discussed in the Thai ones. Positive narratives were more common in romantic relationship stories in both UK and Thai women's magazines. Tragic themes occurred only in the context of dating and cheating boyfriends.

Both UK and Thai women's magazines contained narratives on dating. Dating stories appeared both as triumphal and as tragic. However, tragic romantic relationship narratives were less common in UK women's magazines. In the UK magazines, there were thirteen such stories whereas there was only one such story in a Thai women's magazine. The kinds of dating presented in the women's real-life narratives in the UK women's magazines were more diverse, depicting for example stories of dating after divorce, dating younger men and online dating such as 'Date younger men' (*Woman*, 5 September 2011, p. 22) and 'On line life - I found my soul mate on the w&h dating site' (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, February 2011, p. 62). Online dating or Internet dating was depicted in both the UK and the Thai women's magazines. In contrast to the UK women's magazines, however, in the Thai magazines there was only one online dating story: 'Go the distance' (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, February 2011, p. 74).

Although online dating in the UK women's magazines focused on relationships for specific groups such as divorced and unmarried women, it did not always offer ideal men, or help women reach their goals. For example, 'My previous experience of online dating had generally been positive, but after several years of trying it out, I'd be the first to admit I was very choosy' (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, October 2011, p. 74). Dating was related to the notion of age which is relevant to the chance of finding a man as can be seen from the following example, 'I knew that the rules of attraction were different from when I was young because, for a start, I wasn't

looking for a beautiful bad boy to tame' (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, November 2011, p. 63).

There were differences across my sample: the real-life narratives in the UK women's magazines showed that British parents seemed not to get involved with their daughters' affairs as much as Thai parents do. English women have more freedom to go on a date and they make their decisions independently. Thai parents have more restrictive views concerning their daughters' dating because most traditional Thai families do not accept sex as a part of their daughters' growing-up process. This is evident in a Thai proverb: 'Do not hasten to ripen before being nearly ripe'. It aims to teach young women that they should not have sex or lose their virginity before they get married. Girls are expected to let their parents know about their boyfriends at the beginning of any relationship. For example, 'Our first trip was to London and Paris. When he came back to Thailand for the second time, I brought him to my house and introduced him to my parents' (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, February 2011, p. 74). Bringing someone home in Thai culture not only shows a strong intention to get married but also affirms that sex is not part of the relationship. In contrast, in the UK context, 'bringing someone home' in the past meant that one was intending to marry them, but in 2014 carries no such meaning. It also does not imply any comment on one's sexual relations or otherwise with that person. This suggests a different notion of dating portrayed in the British and Thai women's magazines. Female teenagers in the UK magazines were more likely to experience freedom in dating than Thai ones since parents in British women's magazines were constructed as less involved with their daughters' dating.

Additionally, the narratives in the UK magazines showed that unmarried British women, in contrast to Thai women, believe that romantic relationships between different age groups are acceptable. For instance, 'But I have to confess that against my better judgement, I fell deeply in love with my son's friend Theo. Even though I'm 45 and he's 27, and in spite of some of the difficulty we've had, we're the happiest couple in the world' (*Woman*, 17 January 2011, p. 24). These stories are not found in Thai women's magazines. This suggests that love between older women

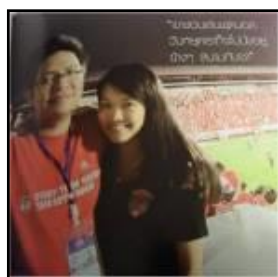
and younger men, in contrast to love between older men and younger women, is constructed as uncommon in Thai women's magazines.

First-meeting stories as well as dating stories occurred in both UK and Thai women's magazines. There were eight stories about first meetings: four in the UK and four in the Thai magazines. First-meeting stories were always presented in a triumphal mode. These stories showed how women met their boyfriends and their first impressions. They had titles such as 'How we met: on the W3 bus to Crouch End, dialing a wrong number, and in the A&E department' (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, May 2011, pp. 88-90). First-meeting stories indicated different notions of courtship in Thailand and in the UK. Courtship in Thai women's magazines, in contrast to the UK ones was a highly conventional and gendered, namely it was the man's role to court the woman. Although women fell in love at first sight, courtship should be actively started by the man. This kind of conventional idea did not dominate in the UK magazines; it was acceptable for women to start relationships. Examples include: 'On New Year's Eve, I asked if he was ready for a relationship, but was mortified when he said no. As he was leaving, I kissed him. Luckily, he kissed me back and told me he'd made a mistake; he was ready' (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, May 2011, p. 90) and 'I must have been in a very impetuous mood because I had a strong desire to call him back. I thought, I'm young, I'm single, what have I got to lose? So I did' (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, May 2011, p. 89). These two examples are related to women's views of courtship and traditional roles for women and men in courtship in the sense that courtship is supposed to be activated by men. However, in the UK certain women were depicted as proactive and agentic, defying such traditional gender norms. This indicates that UK women's magazines present women's stories in relation to gender norm but such norm can be violated.

Unlike first-meeting stories, love celebration stories tended to occur more commonly in the Thai magazines than in the UK ones. Five of these stories were displayed in Thai women's magazines whereas only one such story was shown in the UK ones. Women normally talked about how lucky they were to have such wonderful love and

boyfriends. In the UK and Thai women's magazines, the women usually mentioned their boyfriends in positive ways. British women were likely to tell a story about their boyfriends' romantic behaviours: 'Every woman wants a man who knows how to make her feel special and loved. Erwin tells me he loves me 20 times a day. I've never felt more certain about anything in my life' (*Woman*, 21 February 2011, p. 17). Women also refer to their romantic love in terms of special moments such as the holidays with boyfriends to celebrate their love.<sup>45</sup> Although happy moments in love celebration were extensively mentioned, the representation of closeness between women and their lovers or partners in Thai women's magazines was restricted. Thus, photos of the women with their partners were displayed in the UK and the Thai magazines; however, the expression of love in the photos was different. Closeness between partners in the Thai magazines was only indicated through embracing or hugging, whereas in the UK ones kissing couples were often displayed (e.g. Image 43 and 44). This implies that in Thai women's magazines, in contrast to the UK ones, expressions of physical intimacy were considered acceptable only within marriage and in private. Both UK and Thai women's magazines focused on happy moments. The selection of these photos points to the notion of love as bliss. The attendant visual presentation of romantic relationships and marriage follows a narrow formula.

Image 43. A woman with her lover (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, November 2010, p. 71).



Source: author's photograph.

Image 44. A woman with her lover (*Woman*, 14 February 2011, p. 29).



Source: author's photograph.

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<sup>45</sup> See for example, 'This time around, we cherish every moment' (*Woman*, 14 March 2011, p. 45) and 'Holiday you & him' (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, November 2010, pp. 68 - 69).

In an account of intimacy, Barry Moss and Andrew Schwebel (1993) propose the following definition:

Intimacy in enduring romantic relationships is determined by the level of commitment and positive affective, cognitive, and physical closeness one experiences with a partner in a reciprocal (although not necessarily symmetrical) relationship (Moss and Schwebel, 1993: 33).

In the UK women's magazines, couples displayed physical closeness fairly obviously. However, the photo features in both the UK and the Thai women's magazines indicate the construction of women as compliant and submissive. Their partners commonly embrace the women's higher body parts such as shoulders and necks whereas the women only touch the lower parts of their partners' bodies such as the waist and abdomen. This encodes men's power over women and status differential. It suggests that the women's lovers are in a position that is literally more elevated and hence more powerful.

Not only love celebration stories but long-distance love stories were discussed more in the Thai magazines than in the UK ones. There were two of these stories in Thai magazines whereas none was found in the UK ones. Single Thai women in women's real-life narratives discuss how they make a long-distance relationship work and keep love alive.<sup>46</sup> For instance,

We first met on Hi5 a few years ago. I was working in Bangkok while he was working in New York. We had talked through the internet for a few months then he told me that he wanted to see me and came to Thailand...We've known each other for 2 years. Technology helps us a lot especially when we miss each other. (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, February 2011, p. 74).

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<sup>46</sup> See for example, 'Go the distance' (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, February 2011, p. 74) and 'Love & time in the bottle' (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, February 2011, p. 72).



Having a relationship over the internet and sending emails seemed to be common ways to maintain an emotional connection and make romantic relationships survive the distance in Thai women's magazines.

Stories about cheating boyfriends and ex-boyfriends in my sample emerged only in the UK magazines. Stories of cheating boyfriends were constructed to warn readers that dating websites have become a site for swindlers.<sup>47</sup> The narratives provide evidence of cheating including the men's names and photos. Cheating-boyfriend stories not only reflect women's unpleasant love experiences but also warned readers to beware of deceit. Stories of ex-boyfriends, on the other hand, show how women manage to salvage a friendship with their former boyfriends:<sup>48</sup>

We no longer share any romantic feelings for each other, probably because, first and foremost, we are friends and that's always been the strongest part of our relationship... We keep working at our friendship and respect each other's privacy completely (*Woman*, 18 July 2011, p. 38).

In Thai women's magazines, ex-boyfriends are not mentioned at all. Here, virginity is still viewed as one of the significant expectations for an ideal wife (Knodel et al, 1997). Although virginity is not the most important factor in choosing wives, it is a significant expectation for an ideal wife (Knodel et al, 1997). Unlike in the UK, in Thailand talking about relationships with ex-boyfriends may imply personal sex experiences, and it is therefore not considered desirable.

The importance of virginity was reinforced in the display of wedding dresses. Even though photos of the women in wedding dresses were shown in both the UK and the Thai magazines, the colours of the wedding dresses in the photos were rather different. Wedding dresses in marriage narratives in the UK magazines, in contrast to

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<sup>47</sup> See for example, 'Sounds like the man for you?' (*Woman*, 15 November 2010, pp. 26-27), 'I facebooked my boyfriend and found more than I'd bargained for' (*Woman*, 17 October 2011, pp. 40-41), and 'William spun a web of lies to four women' (*Woman*, 17 October 2011, p. 40).

<sup>48</sup> See for example, 'Christmas with the ex...' (*Woman*, 13 December 2010, pp. 44-45) and 'Can you really be friends with your EX?' (*Woman*, 18 July 2011, pp. 38-39).

the Thai ones, were various and more colourful. Some might be white as in the Thai images, but red and even black in remarriage narratives occurred though only in the UK magazines. White in Thai culture signifies purity and virginity. Wearing a white wedding dress thus implies the bride's virginity. Young Thai women are expected to remain virgins until their marriage. Thai men, on the other hand, view their virginity as stigmatizing and seek to lose it in order to be praised as 'manly'.

Sex stories in Thai women's magazines, in contrast to UK women's narratives, focus on women's attitudes towards sex rather than the discussion of direct sex experiences.<sup>49</sup> Single women in Thailand mention sex in terms of expressing their opinion towards sex but not indicating actual physical relations that they have had. For instance,

Sex for me is to make love. Having good sex makes you fresh, healthy, and look younger. I would like Thai women to enjoy having sex more than in the past because good sex is powerful. Many married women I've known are having less sex with their husbands because of tiredness (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, March 2011, p. 74).

The Global Better Sex Survey (GBSS) explored sexual behaviour among 12,563 men and women aged 25-74 in twenty-seven countries. This survey began in October 2005 and was completed in March 2006. It shows that on average men and women have sex 6.48 times per month. People in Brazil have sex up to 7.9 times per month, followed by French people 7.7 times. Thai couples have sex only 4.2 times per month which is the lowest average while British couples have sex 6.4 times per month. Thai couples, according to the Global Better Sex Survey (GBSS), thus have less sex. This survey also reveals that 75% of Thai women are not satisfied with their sex life.<sup>50</sup> In Thailand, women are usually viewed as having less sexual desire than

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<sup>49</sup> See for example, 'Love Sex & Relationship' (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, March 2011, pp. 73-77).

<sup>50</sup> See


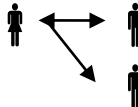
[http://www.repositoryeffetti.it/2010/agoraDisfunzioneErettile/download/letteratura/efficaciaClinica/Mulhall\\_JSM\\_2008\\_GBSS.pdf](http://www.repositoryeffetti.it/2010/agoraDisfunzioneErettile/download/letteratura/efficaciaClinica/Mulhall_JSM_2008_GBSS.pdf), accessed 13/03/2014.

men. It is typically thought that sexual desires are natural for men (Knodel et al, 1997). Also, men relish more social license in terms of sexual affairs whereas women are ideally socialized to confine their sexual desire and behaviours to one intimate romantic relationship (Diamond, 2004). This concept links to a conventional idea in Thailand that it is inappropriate to talk about personal sexual experiences in public. Single women in Thailand thus express only their opinions about sex in a general, non-specific way. Unmarried or single women in the UK, on the other hand, talk about sex openly: ‘We usually had sex in the woods or fields. I was under his spell and I was heartbroken when he ended it’ (*Woman*, 9 May 2011, p. 19).

The 1960s when the so-called sexual revolution occurred in western countries changed women’s sex expectations and behaviour (George, 1993). British women express their desire and can criticize their partners directly if they are not satisfied with their sex life (George, 1993). However, sex in romantic relationship narratives in both UK and Thai women’s magazines does not necessarily lead to marriage. Pierre L. van den Berghe concludes that ‘sex is culturally defined as a necessary but not sufficient condition for marriage, for marriage is explicitly, or at least implicitly, conceived as legally recognized kin selection and reciprocity’ (Van den Berghe, 1979: 47).

The romantic relationship narratives about love, sex and boyfriends point to the cultural differences between British and Thai cultures. There are significant dissimilarities in the romantic relationship models for readers in British and Thai women’s magazines as shown in Table 17.

Table 17. Romantic relationship models in women’s real-life narratives in *Woman*, *Woman and Home*, and *Poo Ying* 2010 – 2011.

Romantic relationship models		Women’s magazines	
		UK editions	Thai editions
1. One-to-One		✓	✓
2. One-to-Many		✓	-

The common romantic relationship model for women in real-life narratives in both UK and Thai women’s magazines was the One-to-One relationship. That is, one woman is supposed to be in a relationship with one man at a time. One-to-One relationships are commonly presented in Thai women’s magazines due to the fact that Thai women never mention their previous relationships or ex-boyfriends. This is in contrast to the One-to-Many relationship where one woman has a relationship with several men, mostly successively. This sequential One-to-Many relationship model occurred in stories about dating, cheating boyfriends, and ex-boyfriends, but only in the UK narratives.

Overall, there were both similarities and differences in the depiction of romantic relationships in British and Thai culture. There was a greater variety of dating practices such as dating among older people, dating after divorce, dating younger men and online dating in the UK magazines than in the Thai ones. The notion of courtship in both UK and Thai women’s magazines was similar in that it was the man’s role to court the woman and courtship was mostly expected to be actively started by the man. Although boyfriends were referred to in romantic relationship narratives in both UK and Thai women’s magazines, Thai women tended to discuss only positive aspects of their boyfriends whereas both negative and positive aspects of British women’s boyfriends were mentioned. Stories of cheating boyfriends in romantic relationship narratives only appeared in UK women’s magazines. Sex as experience and practice was openly talked about in the British magazines but not in

the Thai ones where only opinions about sex were expressed. It is considered inappropriate to talk about personal sexual experiences in public. These differences were not only found in romantic relationship narratives but also in the narratives about marriage.

### Marriage Themes

*The Oxford English Dictionary* defines marriage as ‘the formal union of a man and a woman, by which they are or become husband and wife’ (Soanes, 2010: 461) while *The Dictionary of Feminist Theory* defines marriage as ‘the institution which traditionally provides women with a social identity’ (Humm, 1995: 159). Although marriage is a universal institution, there is no single internationally approved definition of it since marriage features differently across cultures (Blankenhorn, 2007). In my research I will use ‘marriage’ to refer to ‘heterosexual formally sanctioned relationships between men and women’. The narratives concentrating on marriage in the UK and Thai women’s magazines I examined came under a variety of headings (Table 18).

Table 18. Topics of marriage narratives in *Woman*, *Woman and Home*, and *Poo Ying* 2010 – 2011.

Marriage Themes			Women's Magazines				Total
Topics	Triumphal	Tragic	Woman	Woman and Home		Poo - Ying	
				UK edition	Thai edition		
1. Finding husbands	✓	-	5	10	1	-	16
2. Marriage refreshers	✓	-	5	8	2	-	15
3. Marriage deal	✓	-	4	5	-	-	9
4. Remarriage	✓	-	7	-	-	-	7
5. Marriage crisis	✓	✓	6	-	-	-	6
6. Husbands' personality	✓	✓	4	-	-	-	4
7. Husbands' support	✓	-	4	-	-	-	4
8. Breadwinners	✓	-	-	3	-	-	3
9. Divorce	-	✓	2	1	-	-	3
10. Husbands' death	✓	✓	2	-	1	-	3
11. Infidelity	-	✓	4	-	-	-	4
12. Love lessons	✓	-	3	-	-	-	3
13. Marriage celebration	✓	-		3	-	-	3
14. The wedding ceremony	✓	-	2	-	1	-	3
15. Homosexual husbands	✓	✓	2	-	-	-	2
16. Marriage conditions	✓	✓	2	-	-	-	2
17. Motherhood	✓	-	1	1	-	-	2
18. Foreigners marrying	✓	-	1	-	1	-	2
19. Endogamous marriage	-	✓	1	-	-	-	1
20. The wedding ring	✓	-	1	-	-	-	1
<b>Total</b>			56	31	6	0	<b>93</b>

Table 18 shows that marriage narratives were much more common in the UK than in the Thai magazines. There were 87 marriage narratives in UK magazines but only 6 in the Thai ones. They covered 20 and 5 topics respectively. Finding boyfriends, marriage refreshers, husbands' death, the wedding ceremony, and marrying foreigners were discussed in both the UK and Thai magazines. Tragic and triumphal marriage narratives appeared differently in the magazines I perused. Although there

were triumphal and tragic marriage narratives in both sets, triumphal narratives, in contrast to tragic ones, were more than twice as common in the UK magazines.

Women's real-life narratives about marriage mainly had three foci: 1. married life, 2. husbands, and 3. wives' roles. Married life was discussed under headings such as marriage refreshers, remarriage, marriage crisis, divorce, and infidelity. Husbands were discussed under five headings: 1. finding husbands 2. husbands' personality, 3. husbands' support, 4. husbands' death, and 5. homosexual husbands. Wives' roles, on the other hand, were discussed in terms of two topics: breadwinners and motherhood. I shall now turn to discuss these three.

### 1. Married Life

The discussion of married life focused on different aspects of happiness, problems and responsibilities that couples experienced. Both successful and unpleasant marriage stories were presented. Marriage refreshers, marriage deals, and stories of remarriage were the three most common topics. There were 15, 9, and 7 such stories in the UK magazines respectively. Endogamous marriage and wedding ring stories, on the other hand, were the least common. There was only one of each. Married life in Thai women's magazines, in contrast to the UK ones, was covered only in terms of three topics: marriage refreshers, the wedding ceremony, and marrying foreigners.

Stories about marriage refreshers appeared in both UK and Thai magazines. These stories focused on how to strengthen the relationship between husband and wife and how women handle their marriage problems before these problems lead to divorce. However, the types of marriage refreshers discussed in the UK and Thai magazines were different. In the UK ones, British women were likely to do things such as taking part in massage workshops, exercising, ballroom dancing, trial separation, going to marriage counselors, and going out together with their husbands without children in order to refresh their relationships and produce change,<sup>51</sup> as in 'We tried... something different: massage, getting fit and dancing' (*Woman and Home*

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<sup>51</sup> See for example, 'Separate lives keep us together' (*Woman*, 1 August 2011, pp. 16-17) and 'Love: saving, keeping' (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, January 2011, p. 41).

UK edition, February 2011, p. 50) and: ‘Now, we have a date night every Tuesday, where we go out without the kids. And we go for a walk together every evening, just to catch up’ (*Woman*, 21 February 2011, p. 45). In Thai women’s magazines, on the contrary, women were more inclined to go out with both husbands and their children as shown in the following example, ‘Since my son was born, I’ve never left him alone at home. No matter where we go, we bring him together with us’ (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, November 2010, p. 68).

Although relationship enrichment programmes, according to Greenberg and Johnson (1986), help couples improve the level of intimacy in their relationship, Thai married couples were not portrayed as seeking marriage counselling. This is because sharing personal problems with outsiders is uncommon for Thai women and outside assistance may not relieve marriage problems. Thai women tend to do activities such as watch movies, play sports, and travel with their husbands instead: ‘We work hard in order to save money and travel abroad together every year. Spending time with my husband makes me really happy’ (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, November 2010, p. 69). Marriage refreshers in both the UK and Thai magazines suggest that reviving and strengthening relationships is necessary for married life and the success of long-term relationships. Marriage is a relationship that has to be worked at and couples can make it work. Husbands and wives put effort into building and keeping their marriage in order to avoid divorce. They view marriage refreshers as the solution to marital difficulties.

Although on the surface narratives about marriage refreshers seemed to focus on the solution of marriage difficulties, interestingly, the way in which these problems were discussed in the UK and Thai women’s magazines was rather different. In the examples of marriage refresher stories in the UK magazines, particular marriage difficulties were mentioned. In ‘We tried ballroom dancing’ (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, February 2011, p. 53) for example, the reader stated:

Every Friday night, we hire a babysitter and just the two of us go to the pub, but often, if we’re not talking about the kids or work, we’re sitting in silence because we’ve just had a row! I was keen



for us to do something together that we could share that might bring us closer – and give us something else to talk about (53).

Here the woman explains why ballroom dancing was necessary for her marital life. By stating that ‘but often, if we’re not talking about the kids or work, we’re sitting in silence’ she addressed silence as her marriage difficulty. Although this woman spent time in the pub with her husband alone without their children every Friday night which could be considered as a marriage refresher, the lack of verbal intimacy still existed. Silence here was thus the cause that made the woman keen on searching for a new activity in order to solve the absence of conversational intimacy in her marriage.

In the Thai magazines, on the other hand, marriage problems were not directly addressed. The narratives typically began by focusing on couples’ love and happiness. Marriage refreshers in this way were discussed as reviving marital life instead of solving marriage problems. One story in a Thai magazine for example read:

We have been together for 15 years. People usually ask how we can survive such a long relationship. We are like friends and relatives. He could be like my brother and my father. It is necessary to fulfill marriage life. If not, it would be like friendship instead of a romantic one. Therefore, we normally do new activities together (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, November 2010, p. 70).

Here the woman’s marriage was presented as successful by mentioning long-term relationships at the beginning of the story. Mentioning other people asking her how to keep 15 years of marriage alive was an indirect way to represent this woman as experienced and competent. The close relationship between her husband and her was described in different ways as friend, relative, brother, and father. These were designed to suggest closeness and familiarity. This thus reinforces love and intimacy in her marriage. What is clear from this example, as emerged in narratives about confidence-building and employment in the previous chapters, is that the Thai magazine tends to articulate a woman’s successful and pleasant life regarding

marriage. More specifically, Thai magazines do not engage in a discussion about women's problems.

Another significant different feature in marriage refresher narratives between British and Thai women's magazines, as previously discussed in Chapter Two (The Construction of Readers' Narratives), was the provision of further information. One of the ways in which this occurred was through the advertisement of marriage refresher courses at the bottom of stories in the UK magazines. A typical example included: 'Think it's for you? Browse over 10,000 classes in everything from ballet to ballroom and find your nearest at [danceweb.co.uk](http://danceweb.co.uk)' (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, February 2011, p. 53). To provide the information about dancing as a marriage refresher, the magazine gave the website: 'danceweb.co.uk' to readers. Using the word 'you' in the sentence 'think it's for you?' was a direct way for the magazine to communicate with its readers. The Thai women's magazines presented only what the women did with their husbands as marriage refreshers. Women in the Thai magazines, in contrast to the UK ones, were less likely to be given knowledge from other sources, apart from the narrated women's experiences. But the UK magazines presented a wider range of marital issues and of sources for solutions of these.

The notion of a marriage deal occurred only in UK magazines. The stories about marriage deals were about the negotiations between spouses to make a marriage work, as illustrated below.<sup>52</sup>

When it comes to the deals we've made in our 23 years of marriage, it's generally a case of who cares, wins. Take our home, for example. Where and how we live is very important to me. Ken is happy anywhere as long as the roof doesn't leak and the TV works (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, November 2010, p. 68).

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<sup>52</sup> See for example, 'Our marriage deal' (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, November 2010, pp. 68-70) and 'Let's make a deal' (*Woman*, 8 November 2010, pp. 16-17).

Stories about marriage deals in the UK magazines indicate women's and men's roles within marriage. Women are expected to fulfill the homemaker role and be responsible for taking care of the home and family. Men, on the other hand, are supposed to do DIY. The notion of marriage deals suggests that British couples have the ability to make an agreement in terms of dividing the work within marriage. However, this kind of negotiation was not found at all in the women's real-life narratives in the Thai women's magazines. When Thai women come to deal with their husbands in order to reach an agreement, they tend to do it with the intent of asking and compromising instead of negotiation. In the case of a marriage deal, negotiation might happen through face-to-face interactions but it would not be shown in public.

The idea of remarriage was repeatedly displayed in UK women's magazines but only there. There were two main themes in stories of remarriage: remarrying at an older age and remarrying ex-boyfriends.<sup>53</sup> Remarriage is one version of a divorced woman's narrative. Women's real-life narratives in UK women's magazines show that it is acceptable to have more than one husband and to remarry in the UK. This is evident in the photos depicted in the narratives about remarriage. Photos of former and later marriage, particularly with former husbands, were included only in the UK women's magazines (see Image 45). This suggests that remarriage is less commonly discussed in Thai women's magazines.

Image 45. A woman remarrying her former husband (*Woman*, 24 January 2011, p. 29).



Source: author's photograph.

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<sup>53</sup> See for example, 'Get married at 70!' (*Woman*, 10 October 2011, p. 43) and 'I remarried my childhood sweetheart' (*Woman*, 14 March 2011, p. 45).

In the UK, approximately 40 per cent of all weddings in 2009 were remarriages. Men, in contrast to women, were more than twice as common to remarry.<sup>54</sup> Remarriage in the UK is thus considered acceptable. In Thailand, on the contrary, only marital and divorce rates are published while statistics of remarriage are not displayed by The National Statistical Office Thailand at all.<sup>55</sup> In case of marriage in Thailand, remarriage is a significant risk to the woman's reputation since monogamous marriage, driven by traditional belief, still centres on a single relationship between couples.

Divorce rates in England and Wales as displayed by The Office for National Statistics rose from 10.5 per cent in 2009 to 11.1 per cent in 2010 per 1,000 married couples in the UK. The divorce rates were highest among married couples aged 40 – 44.<sup>56</sup> Divorce rates in Thailand too are increasing as shown by statistics from the Thai department of provincial administration. The ratio of divorce to marriage in Thailand was 34.2 per cent in 2008 and 36.3 per cent in 2009. Divorce rates in Thailand increased in 2009 to 8.8 per thousand married population from 8.6 in 2008.<sup>57</sup> These figures confirm an increase in divorce rates across the board, with a higher rate among English couples. That is, the proportion of divorces in England is higher than in Thailand. This suggests that British women are more likely to have a chance to remarry than Thai women.

Unlike marriage refreshers, marriage deals, and remarriage stories, endogamous marriage and wedding ring stories were the least common. One story of endogamous marriage occurred in a UK magazine.<sup>58</sup> In spite of knowing that an endogamous marriage was illegal because the parties were related by blood, the woman got married to her half-brother and moved to Ireland. This sort of story is not found in

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<sup>54</sup> See <http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2009/jan/31/remarriage-family.html>, accessed 13/03/2014.

<sup>55</sup> See <http://web.nso.go.th/index.htm>, accessed 8/4/2012.

<sup>56</sup> See <http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2010/jan/28/divorce-rates-marriage-ons#data.html>, accessed 13/03/2014.

<sup>57</sup> See <http://www.dopa.go.th>, accessed 1/2/2012.

<sup>58</sup> See for example, 'Why I married my brother' (*Woman*, 22 November 2010, pp. 16-17).

Thai women's magazines at all. The story about a wedding ring, in contrast to the story about endogamous marriage, shows conflicts between traditional values and a woman's belief. The married woman in the story 'I love my husband...but I won't wear a wedding ring' (*Woman*, 25 April 2011, p. 21) explained why she did not wear her wedding ring: 'But the truth is, I don't need to wear a ring to make me feel married. Carl doesn't wear one either, but that's for practical reasons as he works with his hands a lot. He and I have been together now for 21 years' (*Woman*, 25 April 2011, p. 21). Wearing wedding rings after marriage has become customary for both husbands and wives in the UK whereas wedding rings are normally only worn by wives in Thailand. However, wearing wedding rings is not compulsory for married couples in Thailand. Married women and men may not wear wedding rings to symbolize that they are married.

## 2. Husbands

In women's real-life narratives women discuss their husbands in terms of topics such as their personality or support. Stories of husbands' personality in British women's magazines represent both husbands' good and bad sides.<sup>59</sup> In Thai women's magazines, on the contrary, when Thai women talk about their husbands' unpleasant habits, they always refer to their positive aspects in the end such as '...We have known each other for 9 years. He is a very good man except that he likes to make a mess in the bathroom. Thinking of his good sides makes me forgive him' (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, February 2011, p. 72).

There were some stories about finding husbands in UK women's magazines, but only one in a Thai magazine. Such stories show how women find their husbands, for example with help from others through international online agency.<sup>60</sup> The depiction

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<sup>59</sup> See for example, 'Living with a doormat or are you a total control freak?' (*Woman*, 28 November 2011, pp. 44-45), and 'What's making your man grumpy?' (*Woman*, 4 July 2011, pp. 38-39).

<sup>60</sup> See for example, 'My cabbie found me a husband!' (*Woman*, 21 March 2011, pp. 28-29) and 'Love: finding it' (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, January 2011, p. 44).

of finding husbands in both UK and Thai women's magazines indicates that married life is considered preferable to being single for women. Husbands' support stories, on the other hand, show different aspects of the disease and health problems women have which they overcome because of their husbands' support.<sup>61</sup> For instance, 'Byron came to every appointment and when the chemo left me so worn out that I was hospitalized, he stayed overnight next to me. I don't know how I would have got through everything without him' (*Woman*, 10 October 2011, p. 18).

Husbands' death stories focus on women who have found new husbands after their husbands passed away such as 'After losing my husband, I didn't think I'd be blessed again' (*Woman*, 14 March 2011, p. 44). However, there was only one such story in a Thai magazine. A woman who has lost her husband in Thai women's magazines is not expected to remarry. She lives alone and maintains the memory of her husband.

There were some stories about homosexual husbands in UK magazines when women found out that their husbands were gay or had homosexual affairs such as in 'The day I discovered my husband was gay' (*Woman*, 1 November 2010, pp. 12-13). This was not constructed as problematic according to the following example.

When people learn my husband Karl is gay and that we are not only together but still have a physical relationship, their mouths fall open. I can see the questions forming in their minds as they wonder how our marriage works, but the answer is simple. We love each other (*Woman*, 25 April 2011, p. 15).

However, homosexual husbands are not presented in Thai women's magazines at all. These marriage narratives about married life and husbands indicate that there are significant dissimilarities in marriage models in the magazines (Table 19).

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<sup>61</sup> 'What we didn't know about breast cancer' (*Woman*, 10 October 2011, p. 18) and 'My husband could get it' (*Woman*, 10 October 2011, p. 19).

Table 19. Marriage relationship models in women’s real-life narratives in *Woman*, *Woman and Home*, and *Poo Ying* 2010 – 2011.

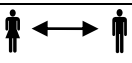
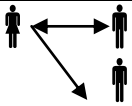
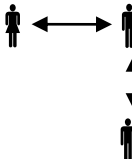
Marriage models		Women’s magazines	
		UK editions	Thai editions
1. Monogamous/ Heterosexual marriage		✓	✓
2. Remarriage		✓	-
3. Marriage with gays		✓	-

Table 19 indicates that monogamous marriage is the common model for UK and Thai magazines. More divergent forms of marriage were only depicted in the UK magazines. Sexual relations between monogamous and heterosexual couples, according to Kaye Wellings, are globally accepted in every culture (Wellings, 1994) and this is evidenced by the dominant marriage model in the women’s real-life narratives in the UK and Thai magazines. However, the more divergent narratives in the UK magazines show that these relationships can be more challenging than expected.

Finding out that my husband was sleeping with men behind my back made me question everything I’d ever known about my husband, my marriage and myself. I suffered terribly to begin with, but somehow I’ve come through the hurt and found happiness again (*Woman*, 1 November 2010, p.13).

This shows that an unsuccessful marriage is viewed as an unexpected situation which one has to confront and manage to get through. The woman is depicted as strong: ‘I suffered terribly to begin with, but somehow I’ve come through hurt and found happiness again’. As in other narratives, the arrival in a state of happiness is emphasized. Here UK women’s magazines depicted a story which was fairly uncommon. This woman was one of a few who had had this kind of problem in their

marriage. On the one hand, this suggests that UK women's magazines compared with the Thai ones are more likely to present a wider range of topics in marriage covering both positive and negative issues. On the other hand, it indicates that marriage portrayed in British women's magazines is not restricted to heterosexuality. Moreover, unsuccessful marriage is a common thing that is seen as potentially happening in any woman's life.

### 3. Wives' Roles

Stories about wives' roles illustrate women's family duties and responsibilities in marriage instead of focusing on women's love lives. The two roles wives were portrayed as having in women's real-life narratives in the UK magazines were about being breadwinners and about motherhood. Stories about breadwinners point to the shift in gender roles for women.<sup>62</sup> Marriage arrangements in the past placed middle-class women in the home. A wife's role was primarily to support her husband and take care of her children to the exclusion of a career. However, the role of the wife has radically changed. The portrayal of marriage relationships in UK women's magazines shows that women participate in employment whilst men take part in domestic and parenting work as shown by the following sample.

I didn't expect or set out to be the sole breadwinner, but if you are, I think you have to be prepared to let go of traditional territory. The kitchen is Peter's domain - I don't interfere with how he wants to run things and, anyway, he used to run a restaurant...Being the sole breadwinner means you have to take responsibility – the weight is on your shoulders and I accept that (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, November 2010, p. 54).

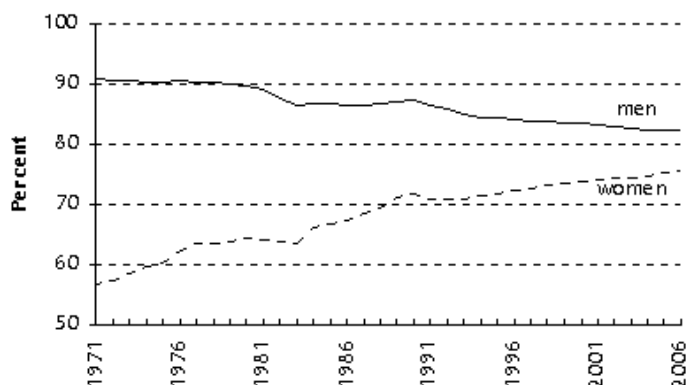
Women's roles as breadwinners and men's roles as homemakers in the UK women's magazines indicate a trend in shifting gender roles. This relationship model is relevant to the economic reality and the growth in the percentage of women working outside the home as shown in Figure 2.

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<sup>62</sup> See for example, 'We didn't expect to be the breadwinners' (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, 3 June 2011, pp. 52-54).



Figure 2: Economic activity rates by gender: Great Britain 1971- 2006.



Source: Employment Gazette, 1994.

Figure 2 shows that the economic activity rate for women increased to 75 per cent by 2006. The number of working women has risen over the past 20 years whilst the proportion of men who are economically active has decreased. In modern societies, women work more than in the past, especially middle-class women (Giddens, 1992). Although on average women's economic activity rates are less than those of men, the participation in paid work and the labour market are more available to women than before (Court, 1995). In Thailand, women of the upper classes brought the western concepts of women's roles into society; challenging male-dominated society became much stronger in the 1990s (Anmai, 2010). The traditional belief of a good woman as weak and domesticated is thus old-fashioned (Anmai, 2010). Thai women believe that they have the same abilities as men do and in this sense they are equal to men and do not have to depend on men (Anmai, 2010). Working outside the home in addition to managing household duties has become a social norm for women in Thailand (Anmai, 2010).

The other role of wives portrayed in women's real-life narratives was as mothers. The construction of women as mothers in British women's magazines is linked to having babies in the sense that this can strengthen the bond of their relationships and it can be the catalyst for better relationships. Additionally, motherhood is perceived as the fulfilment of marriage. Couples try to achieve this goal no matter how hard it is as evidenced by the following example.

We'd been trying for a baby for 18 months when I found I needed IVF<sup>[63]</sup>. I'd taken being a mum for granted, so it was a huge blow. But Scott never stopped telling me that everything would be all right. I realised I was lucky to be with a man who would stand by me, no matter what. Thankfully, I fell pregnant with our first treatment, and Ava's now four (*Woman*, 21 February 2011, p. 45).

However, having babies as discussed in UK women's magazines is depicted as essential to a wife but not always to a husband: 'After some discussion, he admitted the prospect of parenthood made him apprehensive, although he agreed that he might change his mind in the future. So at least I had something to cling to' (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, November 2010, p. 69). In Thai women's magazines, in contrast to UK women's magazines, the idea of motherhood is not directly presented in marriage narratives but shown in family narratives as will be discussed in the next chapter.

Overall, narratives about marriage in UK and Thai women's magazines point to certain similarities and differences between these two cultures in terms of married life, husbands, and wives' role. Family members were constructed as having an influence on women's lives in getting married in both the UK and Thai women's magazines. Having a baby in British and Thai women's magazines was regarded as the way to strengthen the bond of their relationships and as a catalyst for better relationships. Additionally, motherhood was perceived as the fulfilment of marriage. However, having babies in the UK women's magazines was presented as essential to a wife but not always to a husband. Another different aspect between the UK and the Thai magazines was that women in British magazines openly talked about their marriage problems and how they solved them whereas in the Thai magazines, women did not refer directly to marriage problems.

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<sup>63</sup> IVF stands for in vitro fertilization.

## Conclusion

My findings indicate some clear differences between how romantic relationship and marriage are constructed in the narratives I looked at. As can be seen in this chapter, the number of romantic relationship narratives was considerably less than the marriage ones: 42 and 93 respectively. Despite the fact that romantic relationships and marriage are significant topics in the women's magazines I examined, one of the Thai magazine samples (*Poo Ying*) never displayed narratives about romantic relationships and marriage at all. This signifies, on the one hand, that love and marriage are personal topics in the Thai magazines, private rather than public. On the other hand, it reveals different levels of self-disclosure between women in the British and Thai magazines I investigated, particularly in terms of what is acceptable for women to talk about in public.

Romantic relationships were discussed in the UK magazines I examined in both triumphal and tragic ways regarding seven topics: 1. dating, 2. first meeting, 3. love celebration, 4. cheating boyfriends, 5. ex-boyfriends, 6. sex, and 7. long-distance love. In the Thai ones, problematic narratives such as cheating boyfriends and ex-boyfriends were not portrayed at all. More specifically, the depiction of women in romantic relationship narratives in the Thai magazines seemed to connect women with virginity since there was consistency in the magazines under investigation regarding the lack of discussion about sexual relationships. In spite of the fact that virginity loss is regarded as the process for teenagers to become adults (Gagnon and Simon, 1973; Long Laws and Schwartz, 1977; Solin, 1996), Thai magazines hinted at virginity in romantic relationships, perhaps reinforcing the positive image of women as virgin. In this respect, a narrow construction of women and romantic relationship narratives was promoted in the Thai magazines. Although there were stories concerning sexual topics in *Woman and Home* (Thai edition), Thai women mentioned sex in terms of their attitude towards it rather than their specific sexual experiences. This again reinforces the concept of love stories as personal in the Thai magazines and the different notion of self-disclosure depicted in the UK and Thai women's magazines in my sample.

The issue of self-disclosure was also prominent in narratives about marriage. My analysis showed that there was a significant difference in the UK and Thai magazines under examination concerning the number of narratives. While the UK magazines displayed 87 marriage narratives, there were only 6 in the Thai ones. Marriage narratives were thus approximately 15 times more common in the UK magazines than in the Thai ones. These narratives could be divided into three main themes: 1. married life, 2. husbands, and 3. wives' roles. Married life focused on both happiness and problems that couples faced. However, only successful stories of marital life were presented in the Thai magazines. This is again an indirect way of indicating what is acceptable to reveal in public. In British magazines, on the other hand, marriage deals, divorce and remarriage topics reflected that women were portrayed as independent women in a certain way. However, through tragic narratives such as cheating boyfriends, infidelity and homosexual husbands, women's desire for conventional love stories emerged. Although a successful marriage depends on many factors, tolerance in tragic situations was presented as the key element that can strengthen marriage relationships. Accepting their partners' negative behaviours and infidelity, for example, signalled that it was the women who made efforts to sustain the marriage.

Barlow et al (2005) suggest that marriage has shifted in terms of partnership expectations, childbearing and relationships within marriage. Partnership expectations as portrayed in both UK and Thai women's magazines were relative to women's ages. That is to say the older women had less expectation of finding good men to marry than the younger ones. The notion of not having kids appeared only in the UK magazines and this occasionally related to the idea of being a stepmother. With respect to remarriage, it was acceptable to have more than one husband and remarry in the UK while remarriage is less common in Thailand because monogamous women are still viewed as ideal.

Thai culture focuses on formality and privacy; sharing personal information in public is not common. Women in the UK are constructed as more open about their desires in relationships and marriage problems in public. They also discuss starting new relationships in old age. Thai women, on the contrary, tend to keep their problems

quiet and choose to mention only positive aspects in romantic relationships and marriage in the public sphere. UK women's magazines portray a greater range of different kinds of relationships and issues than Thai women's magazines. These stories concentrate on women's personal love lives. Some general keys to an effective marriage are provided by a relationship psychologist at the bottom of UK stories. British women's magazines offer readers ways of thinking and learning about relationships as well as ways of managing failure in their love life. These guides to marriage also point to a complex mix of women as lacking and improving themselves. Thai readers are meant to admire the relationships shown in the magazines. All the stories in the Thai women's magazines are about successful love and happy marriage. This can lead to readers' erroneous perception that this is the norm. The focus is thus less on the range of experiences women might have and more on the celebration of one particular kind of relationship – a successful one. This reinforces cultural norms of silence around problems and does not facilitate learning how to negotiate diverse experiences.

In this chapter, I have shown contemporary ideas of womanhood and how romantic relationship and marriage narratives figure in the UK and Thai women's magazines. In some ways, there were similar ideas of womanhood as wives and mothers embedded in both the UK and Thai magazines. In the following chapter, I will examine issues associated with family and discuss how these figure in the narratives.

## **Chapter Six: Family in Readers' Narratives**

### Introduction

Family, according to Charles Murray (1995), is a basic and important social institution throughout the world. The traditional nuclear family in many cultures consists of married heterosexual couples and their children, with the father as breadwinner and the mother as homemaker. This form of family was initially a bourgeois phenomenon in western societies in the nineteenth century and became prevalent only among the labouring classes after the Second World War (Stacey, 1996). The 'traditional' family in this sense is directly linked to the nuclear family consisting of man, woman, and children; it excludes other forms of family life such as extended ones or lesbian and gay relationships. This form of traditional family, criticized by second-wave feminists as 'a key site of women's subordination' (Jackson, 2008: 126), was considered as a 'normal' type of family by sociologists in the mid-twentieth century (Jackson, 2008). However, many households do not comply with the traditional nuclear family today since we have a rise in single-person households and in cohabitation, for example.

To understand the construction of the family in readers' narratives, it is useful to have a sense of the demographic realities of families in Thailand and the UK. Therefore I shall begin this chapter by outlining what these realities are. The family forms in Thailand, according to the National Statistical Office (2010), have changed from extended families to nuclear families. In 2010, there were 20.3 million households in Thailand; 52.3 per cent and 34.5 per cent of the total were nuclear families and extended families respectively.<sup>64</sup> In Thailand, nuclear families are almost twice as common as extended families. The extended family, meaning the bride's parents, the bride and her husband, any siblings of the bride and their spouses, was traditional in Thailand and is still prevalent in rural areas. The nuclear family is a phenomenon that became more common especially in Bangkok from the 1980s due to industrialization and rural-urban migration (Richter, 1996).

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<sup>64</sup> See <http://popcensus.nso.go.th/upload/census-report-6-4-54-en.pdf>, accessed 13/03/2014.

Additionally, the population policy launched by the Thai government in 1970, aimed at reducing the annual population growth rate from 3 per cent in 1976 to 1.2 per cent in 1996 (Wongboonsin, 1995) had an effect on the number of members in a family, particularly the children. The total fertility rate (TFR) shows that the number of children has decreased from six children per family in 1960 to only two children in 2000 (Swangdee et al, 2007). The nuclear family with two children can thus be considered as a family norm in Thailand. Such small household sizes are also the case in the UK. The average size of household in Britain, according to the Social Trends 40 report (2010), has declined from 3.1 persons per household in 1961 to 2.4 persons in 2009.

In recent years family forms have become more complicated and different from traditional families (Steel and Kidd, 2001). In the UK, for example, traditional nuclear families are in regression. According to the Social Trends 40 report (2009), 29 per cent of British nuclear family households are childless couples while 28 per cent are single person households.<sup>65</sup> Single parents and (the rise in) divorce (rates) are common in British households, especially after the 1960s (González and Viitanen, 2008). UK divorce rates have risen from 10.5 divorcing people per thousand married couples in 2009 to 11.1 in 2010 (Hughes, 2010). This is also the case in Thailand where the divorce rates, in contrast to the marriage rates, have dramatically increased. According to the Thai Health Promotion Foundation (2010), the divorce rates in Thailand have increased from 9.7 per 1,000 population in 2003 to 36.3 per 1,000 population in 2009.<sup>66</sup> Consistent with this fact, the Office of Women's Affairs and Family (2014) points out that 108,000 out of 285,000 married couples divorced in 2010.<sup>67</sup> This is more than 30 per cent of couples who got married in 2010.

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<sup>65</sup> See <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/socialtrends>, accessed 14/08/2012.

<sup>66</sup> See <http://en.thaihealth.or.th>, accessed 14/08/2012.

<sup>67</sup> See <http://bangkokcoop.com/2012/09/1-in-3-thai-married-couples-ended-up-with-divorce-in-recent-years/>, accessed 13/03/2014.

In traditional Thai society, divorce was shameful and in a gendered way. It was unacceptable and shameful for a woman, not a man, to get a divorce - the woman who got divorced was blamed and gossiped about (Suparp, 1980). This seems no longer to be quite the case as evidenced by the increase of divorce rates mentioned above. Divorce in Thailand is tied directly to several factors – modernization effects such as educational opportunities and educational differences between couples, social and economic factors regarding the couples’ occupation and incomes, and psychological factors including satisfaction in marriage (Chotprayoon, 2002). Changes in social structure, particularly in women’s social and financial status, have had a massive impact on the divorce rates in Thai society (Chotprayoon, 2002). Due to the attempt to modernize Thailand during the reign of King Rama VI (1910 -1925) – the first king of Thailand who graduated from England and was inspired by the western world – a campaign to win rights for Thai women, particularly among aristocrats, was launched. Thai women’s status regarding education opportunities, social participation and political rights was gradually improved. Instead of depending on men, being a housewife, and doing household chores, Thai women go out to work and earn money like men do. I have already discussed this in relation to the depiction of woman’s employment in Chapter Four. Employment provides women with greater social and economic independence. Women with an actual income are more likely to divorce (Booth et al, 1984 and Hiedemann et al, 1998) since they may be more dissatisfied with traditional marital expectations in terms of the balance of power between couples and the division of the household labour – a husband’s power and his contribution to the household chores remains inequitable (Rogers, 2004). With the increasing economic independence of women and greater social acceptance of divorce, divorce has increased in Thailand (Chotprayoon, 2002).

The stereotypical image of traditional nuclear families consisting of husbands, wives and children has gradually changed to families with only one parent living with the children. That is to say traditional nuclear families have decreased dramatically while one-parent families, headed by women, have become more common (Drew et al, 1998). This is the case both in Great Britain and in Thailand. Lone parents with dependent and/or non-dependent children in the UK, according to the Social Trends



40 (2010), have increased from 3 per cent of household in 1961 to 12 per cent in 2009, and in Thailand, likewise, 7.6 per cent of household, according to the National Statistical Office (2010), contain single parents. Similarly, one-parent families have become more common in both countries. This variation in family structures suggests changes in women's roles in the family (Ebrey, 2003).

There have been major changes in Thai families, both in terms of the rise of the nuclear family and an attendant decrease in the number of children per household from an average of approximately six in the 1960s, to only one in urban families in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These changes have an impact on children in terms of their socialization (de los Angeles-Bautista, 2004). The traditional family compared with the nuclear one is less likely to have childcare problems because of help from relatives living nearby or even in the same house. However, the Thai government in association with UNICEF and other organizations founded the Family Development Programme (FDP) in 1996 in order to assist working parents in looking after their children by setting up childcare centres for children aged up to three years old in almost all provinces in Thailand (de los Angeles-Bautista, 2004). Childcare centres in Thailand are organized by both public and private institutions, and extend from urban slum communities to hill-tribe villages. They are considered solutions for full-time working mothers who lack help from the extended family/relatives and cannot afford to hire personal baby sitters. The high cost of childcare is also problematic in the UK. According to The Family and Childcare Trust's annual report (2014), childcare costs in England, Wales, and Scotland have risen dramatically, by 27 per cent since 2009 – it costs approximately £11,700 a year for family with two and five year old children, which is higher than the average annual UK mortgage payment (£7,207 in 2012).<sup>68</sup> The cost issue suggests that childcare is one of the major problems in both the UK and Thailand. It is compounded by the difficulties of not necessarily being able to rely on relatives, even in extended families, to help with childcare.

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<sup>68</sup> See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-26373725>, accessed 2/08/2014.

Migration to urban areas for better chances of employment is one of the significant causes of the change in Thai family structure and their accompanying childcare problems. Due to the fact that it is not always feasible for every family member to relocate to the cities, children are sometimes left behind with relatives in the rural areas when parents migrate to work. This tends to be mothers in particular, since women are in demand in many urban-based industries in Thailand (de los Angeles-Bautista, 2004). One question is to what extent these changes are reflected in the depiction of women in readers' narratives in UK and Thai women's magazines. In this chapter I shall analyse the construction of the family in these magazines to understand the social arrangements they indicate and their associated ideology of the family. This chapter therefore focuses on the kind of family portrayed and the ways in which women in the family are presented within the context of women's real-life narratives in UK and Thai women's magazines.

#### Family Themes in Women's Real-life Narratives

'Family themes' in my research refers to the stories that the readers tell about themselves, their family, and relatives in real-life narratives in the selected women's magazines. As with the other narratives, in the context of family, too, the narratives were either tragic or triumphal. Tragic narratives centred on painful experiences in women's and family members' lives such as loss, family crises, family members' health problems, and problems with children.<sup>69</sup> Triumphal narratives, on the other hand, usually focus on positive experiences and events such as maternity or

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<sup>69</sup> See for example, 'I still hear my dad's voice in my head... and in my heart' (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, July 2011, p. 66), 'My daughter's killer dad' (*Woman*, 8 November 2011, pp. 14-15), 'Ignorance killed my child' (*Woman*, 20 June 2011, pp. 62-63), 'I feared I'd lost the man I loved when OCD changed my husband' (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, February 2011, pp. 100- 101), and 'Every day I feel guilty that I prefer one of my children to the others' (*Woman*, 17 January 2011, p. 31).

overcoming problems such as childcare.<sup>70</sup> And, as before, while triumphal narratives occurred in both the UK and Thai women’s magazines as shown in Table 20, tragic narratives noticeably only occurred in the UK ones.

Table 20. Numbers of narratives focusing on family in *Woman*, *Woman and Home*, and *Poo Ying* 2010-2011.

Magazines Titles	Family Themes		Number of Narratives
	Tragic	Triumphal	
<i>Woman</i>	26	61	87
<i>Woman and Home</i> (UK edition)	6	14	20
<i>Woman and Home</i> (Thai edition)	0	11	11
<i>Poo Ying</i>	0	8	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>126</b>

Table 20 shows that there were 126 narratives in total in my sample concentrating on the family. Although family narratives occurred in both UK and Thai women’s magazines, the distribution of the narratives was significantly different. In the UK magazines there were 107 narratives related to family compared with only 19 in the Thai magazines. Family narratives in the UK women’s magazines were thus about five times more common than in the Thai ones. This implies that discussing family is much more common for female readers in UK women’s magazines. This replicates my findings regarding the display of relationships.

Triumphal narratives, in contrast to tragic ones, were also much more common in both the UK and Thai magazines. There were a total of 94 triumphal narratives compared to only 32 tragic narratives about family in the magazines I explored. In

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<sup>70</sup> See for example, ‘Meet my incredible twins’ (*Woman*, 10 October 2011, pp. 16-17), ‘Two kids, a strategic gap and a career’ (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, November 2011, p. 87), ‘Bring on the grandchildren’ (*Woman*, 11 July 2011, pp. 16-17), and ‘Like mother, like daughter’ (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, August 2011, p. 69).

the UK magazines triumphal narratives were approximately twice as common as tragic ones. However, in the Thai magazines, there were no tragic narratives about family at all. All the narratives about family were positive. The proportion of triumphal to tragic narratives was thus significantly different in the UK and Thai women's magazines. It suggests very different ideas of what might be portrayed about family in the public context of women's magazines in Thailand compared to the UK. To understand this, I shall therefore now turn to analysing the narrative content in greater detail.

My criteria for categorizing narratives as triumphal or tragic were based on both story content and the depicted women's attitudes towards their own stories. That is to say that in Thai women's magazines, although the story content might be tragic – centring on family members' health problems, for example - the woman usually narrated it in a triumphal way by expressing only optimistic views and positive feelings about that story. This can be clearly seen in a title such as 'When life's not perfect, I'm still happy' (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, August 2011, p. 69). This woman's narrative was about her child born with a severe disease who had been in a Newborn Intensive Care Unit for more than one year. However, at the end of this story, the woman still manifested a positive attitude by stating that 'Someone asked me whether I would let him die because he was in a serious condition, I said No. Since I knew that both of us had to get through this critical time and get back home together' (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, August 2011, p. 69). Thus even if a narrative has distressing context, Thai women's magazines depict women's attitudes towards family life as positive, optimistic, and satisfied.

The continual repetition of these attitudes is accompanied by the idea of putting children first and the woman sacrificing herself for her children. For instance, 'during the first year, I went to work in the morning, came to visit my child at the hospital at noon and in the evening after work. Although it was hopeless, I encouraged myself that I could take care of him and he would get better soon' (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, August 2011, p. 69). Women in Thai culture are

expected to be upbeat, especially in public. This also means that the stories can seem quite similar since little variation in emotion is allowed.

Family stories in UK magazines are, in contrast, more varied than in the Thai ones since there are both triumphal and tragic stories. The stories also cover a much broader range of family situations than in the Thai magazines. Losing a daughter or a son, catching a son shoplifting, killing a father, stealing another woman's baby, trying to get pregnant, bringing up grandchildren, adopting children, and a mother's struggle are all topics that occurred in the UK sample but were simply not present in the Thai one. As before, the range of narratives was more restricted. One might therefore argue that UK women's magazines in some ways approximate reality more closely in terms of the range of family situations they discuss than Thai ones. Table 21 indicates the kinds of topic related to family covered in the UK and Thai women's magazines.

Table 21. Topics of family narratives in *Woman*, *Woman and Home*, and *Poo Ying* 2010-2011.

Family Themes			Women's Magazines				Total
Topics	Triumphal	Tragic	Woman	Woman and Home		Poo Ying	
				UK edition	Thai edition		
1. Childcare	33	2	18	2	7	6	35
2. Maternity	22	-	14	5	2	1	22
3. Family loss	-	17	15	2	-	-	17
4. Family members' health problem	11	3	9	4	-	1	14
5. Moving house	9	-	7	2	-	-	9
6. Family crises	-	8	8	-	-	-	8
7. Long-lost family	8	-	5	3	-	-	8
8. Problem children	7	2	5	2	2	-	9
9. Adoption	4	-	4	-	-	-	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>32</b>	87	20	11	8	<b>126</b>

Table 21 shows that in the UK women's magazines I analysed, in contrast to the Thai ones, the topics about family in women's real-life narratives were more diverse. Nine main topics dominated in the UK women's magazines: childcare, maternity, family loss, family members' health problems, moving house, family crises, long-lost family, problem children, and adoption. Only four topics featured in the Thai ones: childcare, maternity, family members' health problems, and problem children. Childcare and maternity were commonly found in both UK and Thai women's magazines but tragic topics such as family loss and family crises did not occur in the Thai ones. Adoption was the least common topic and displayed only in the UK magazines. The most and least common stories which were about childcare and adoption will be discussed in detail in the following section in order to analyse the 'family values' they depict.

The childcare narratives have to be considered in a context where women tend to work. In the UK, according to The Office for National Statistics, the numbers of full-time working mothers has risen from 1.7 to 2.2 million in 2010. This includes mothers who have children as young as six months.<sup>71</sup> Since having children and performing childcare are one of major issues in women's lives, the topic of childcare is thus made important in women's real-life narratives by the very fact that so many narratives featuring this were selected by the editors. A certain kind of 'family' thus emerges as the dominant one, namely one where the mother works but also has to take care of children. This constitutes the conventional double burden of women that feminists have traditionally railed against. It suggests that the construction of family in readers' narratives conforms to the idea of the norm of households in Britain which has changed from men as breadwinners to both men and women as earners since the 1980s (Irwin, 1999; Castells, 2004).

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<sup>71</sup> See <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-1341293/Record-2-2million-mothers-working-time-families-afloat.html>, accessed 13/03/2014.

## 1. Childcare

Family narratives in both UK and Thai women's magazines mainly focused on childcare. Childcare in women's real-life narratives was a broad topic covering daycare, child education, and work-family balance. The depiction of childcare in both the UK and the Thai women's magazines presented certain images of women, focusing on marriage, maternity, and upbringing that seem still to support conventional expectations of women. Women in these narratives were portrayed in a traditional nuclear family consisting of husband, wife, and a child or children (see Image 46 and Image 47). But they did not necessarily stay at home with their children. Lesbian households or other more divergent ones were never depicted in these magazines.

Image 46. A woman with her daughters (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, September 2011, p. 55).



Source: author's photograph.

Image 47. A woman with her daughters (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, June 2011, p. 70).



Source: author's photograph.

According to the National Statistics (2012), there were 17.9 million families in the UK in 2011. Of these 2.0 million consisted of one-parent families with dependent children. This figure shows that single-parent families are quite common in the UK. Single-parent families in UK women's magazines were displayed in terms of closeness and love between mothers and children (see Image 48). In Thai women's magazines, such families were not depicted at all. Again, we see restrictions around diversity that operate more strongly in the Thai than in the UK context.

Image 48. A single mother with her daughter and son  
(*Woman*, 15 August 2011, p. 19).



Source: author's photograph.

In discussions around childcare, UK women's magazines showed women as breadwinners, working full-time, facing circumstances such as home-working and childcare obligations, especially for their dependent children. However, women tended to continue to work after having children. Examples include: 'I hadn't been in my job long enough to qualify for maternity leave, so I went back full-time when Summer was six weeks old' (*Woman*, 15 August 2011, p. 20), and 'It was a right decision for my family, but I do feel bitter that I worked so hard all those years' (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, October 2011, p. 64). In the second example, the woman stated that she made the 'right decision' for her 'family' to continue to work instead of focusing on childcare at home. The word 'right' in this context might imply that if the woman had made a different choice – being a housewife instead of working - it would have been the 'wrong' decision. However, when she expressed her feeling about this, she described it as 'bitter'. The phrase suggests that working hard without having time for her own family made this woman unhappy. The narratives show that the women are agents in their lives and have to make decisions, even if these are compromises. Both indicating that something is 'right for me' (which implies it may not be right for someone else) and articulating specific negative feelings about one's situation heighten the sense of the individuality of the narrative. These narratives, by implication, allow for diversity of experience but map it in terms of individual experience rather than structural issues.

When it comes to talking about women's problems with childcare, the childcare solution portrayed in the UK magazines is family daycare support from



grandparents. Noticeably, in these childcare narratives, family members are depicted as having special relationships with particular members. Families, even in these situations, are not extended. For instance, photos of grandparents and grandchildren are displayed, not photos of grandparents, parents, and children together (see Image 49). These photos reinforce the notion of small, intimate families.

Image 49. Grandparents and grandchildren (*Woman*, 15 August 2011, p. 19).



Source: author's photograph.

The photos of family members in the childcare narratives in the UK magazines imply the significance of both fathers' and mothers' roles in childcare as the parents are sometimes shown together. However, the conventional idea of family in the texts is that women, not men, are responsible for childcare. This notion of childcare is evident in the editor's introduction to the narratives and at the end of the narrative as illustrated in the following example (see Image 50).

Image 50. An example of a narrative about childcare in a UK women's magazine (*Woman*, 15 August 2011, p. 19).



Source: author's photograph.

The narrative, as in the example above, was made up of different parts: the story by the woman, a highlighted quote, and photos with captions. The story had two parts: the editor's and the woman's. The editor's section as opposed to the woman's was

composed of a title, the introduction, and the ending of the story. The woman's segment, on the other hand, appeared as the body of the story – the details of her story. Both messages from the editor and the woman are evident in the story. The title of this childcare story: 'Granny DAYCARE...' (*Woman*, 15 August 2011, p. 19), implies the notion that daycare is crucial since 'DAYCARE' - the largest word - was displayed in capital letters at the beginning. 'Granny' genders the narrative in particular ways since it links daycare to a female. This is augmented by the reader's narrative, a woman describing how she asked her mother to help with looking after her children, her mother's grandchildren. The narrative is one of an exchange between two women, suggesting that childcare provision is a matter for women. On the one hand, this can be considered as a gendered narrative. On the other hand, it seems to represent individualized childcare in women's magazines.

Interestingly, both photos of the grandmother and the grandfather with the child appear in this narrative and they are similar in size. That seems to suggest that both grandparents are involved in the care provision. However, the relations between the title and photos which were used by the editor in this story – 'granny' instead of 'grandparents', underlines the implication that women compared with men are more likely to be responsible for and to get involved in childcare. It is noticeable that the biggest photo in this narrative – a grandmother, not a grandfather or grandparents, holding the child – also reinforces the role of woman as caregiver in childcare. In this sense, the photos are used to emphasize the responsibility of women connected with childcare, and the text reinforces this, too.

The title and the introduction of the story flow together. The idea of woman as caregiver is emphasized in the editor's introduction which offers a brief description of the woman and the editor's attitudes. The woman is described as 'Kelly Gadd, 37, from Swansea, is married to Dean and works for the children's disability charity Cerebra ([cerebra.org.uk](http://cerebra.org.uk)). She has two sons, Benjamin, three, and Daniel, one'. These factual details of her age, hometown, marital status, caring job, and children place the woman geographically and socioeconomically, and set the sense for the narrative. Intimacy is created through using first names. However, 'Dean' as a

husband is only mentioned in the introduction and he is not referred to again at all in terms of taking part in childcare. A different world of children on the woman is evident in this short introduction: ‘More than a third of parents now rely on grandparents for free childcare. Is it a fair deal – or are grandparents being left holding the baby? Three mothers talk about the ups and downs of using home help’ (*Woman*, 15 August 2011, p. 19). Here an easy slippage is effected from ‘parents’ and ‘grandparents’ to ‘mothers’. Thus, it seems more likely that a woman rather than a man organizes childcare. This implies that the woman is the one who has this task. The phrase ‘fair deal’, which according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2010) means ‘treating people equally’ or ‘just and reasonable in the circumstances’ (Soanes, 2010: 268), suggests that childcare is a win-lose situation - it is a win for the mother but a loss for grandparents. In other words, childcare can be considered as a reasonable (and/or unreasonable) circumstance with a beneficiary who is the mother and grandparents who are taken advantage of. The idiom ‘being left holding the baby’ or ‘to leave someone holding the baby’ which according to *Collins Cobuild Idioms Dictionary* (2007) means ‘to be made responsible for a problem that nobody else wants to deal with’ (Seaton and Macaulay, 2007: 10) indicates that childcare is an issue and a chore. This is important because no equivalent sentiment was expressed in the Thai magazines. The British ones clearly gave a sense that childcare was problematic and required solutions.

At the end of the story, the editor references the fact that women should take responsibility for childcare by referring to an expert: a relationship counselor. Here we have the notion of expert advice, often as previously discussed present as part of these narratives, to suggest how to deal with the dilemma. In this instance the text reads:

Making it work for you...

Christine Northam, a relationship counselor with *Relate*, says:

- Childcare can be tiring. Let grandparents know they can back out without losing contact with their grandchild.
- Chat to your parents about what the children have been doing to help you feel involved.
- Have confidence in yourself as a mother. Don’t overcompensate for your absence by spoiling them (*Woman*, 15 August 2011, p. 19).

The relationship counselor's suggestions emphasize the woman's role as mother and that of the 'grandparents'. Although the word grandparents implies that both men and women take part in childcare, at the end only the 'mother' as a sexed person is explicitly referred to. The male is thus excluded from the 'tiring' task - as the counselor suggests - of childcare. When it comes to talk about gender roles, the relationship counselor focuses on how women negotiate with parents to do childcare and how women cope with not getting involved with their children. It is noticeable that only the mother or 'you' as a woman are addressed. This highlights the fact that the magazine envisages women as its readers but also that the position of men in childcare is constructed as not having changed much from the traditional gender roles. Men remain edited out.

Alternative solutions, however, depend on the readers' decisions. Although childcare in women's magazines is discussed differently by editors and women, what they have in common is the notion that childcare is women's responsibilities as shown in the following example.

I'm an only child, so my parents were delighted when I had Benjamin. I always knew I'd be going back to work full-time because we need two incomes. So when my parents who are in their mid-60s and live just 10 or so miles from us, offered to look after him, I jumped at the chance. Of course I trust them completely and knew they'd raise him as I would. I went back to work when Benjamin was nine months and my mum and dad looked after him from 8 am until 6 pm, Monday to Friday.

After I had Daniel, asking them to help with a second one was a little trickier. Mum's face fell and she said, 'Dear God, another one!' I wasn't sure how they'd cope but we had a month's trial and it worked pretty well. Mum does sometimes look worn out by the end of the week, and occasionally she's snappy so I do understand how exhausted she can get.

But I can talk honestly to my parents about any problems they're having, they assure me that the down times are outweighed by the good. I know they would let me know if it was getting too much for them. I sometimes feel sad that I'm missing out on the fun they have with the boys, but Mum takes photos of everything for me.

I'm unbelievably grateful to my parents. They had expected to spend their retirement travelling so hopefully once the boys are in school they can go on more holidays – they're already planning them (*Woman*, 15 August 2011, p. 19).

I quote this at length because we can see from the first, third, and fourth paragraphs that there is a consistency of word usage: 'parents', 'they', and 'mum and dad' – each phrase indicates the woman's parents as a couple who look after the children. That is to say both sexes: male and female, play seemingly an equal role in the childcare. There is an implication of equivalent roles between a grandmother and a grandfather in childcare. By contrast, the second paragraph reveals the burden on the grandmothers. There are explicit markers: 'mum', and 'she' – these two words occur five times. Here only the woman, not the man, is the subject who engages and suffers from childcare. For instance, 'Mum's face fell...', 'Mum does sometimes look worn out...', and '...how exhausted she can get' (*Woman*, 15 August 2011, p. 19). The second paragraph thus shows that childcare is significantly more associated with the grandmother than the grandfather.

The focus in dealing with childcare is in terms of immediate family, the grandparents, rather than kindergartens or other state provision. According to the Department for Work and Pensions (2012), free childcare is available for all children aged three and four in England for 15 hours a week. In addition, single parents can claim Income Support until their youngest child is five years old.<sup>72</sup> But the narrative provides no sense of this. The family instead functions as a private enterprise of supportive females. This underlines the conservatism inherent in the solutions proposed. Instead of state support, the caring industry website ([nanayshare.co.uk](http://nanayshare.co.uk)) is promoted as part of women's real-life narratives. For instance, 'Once Max was born, I had to find cheaper options. After careful research, I found [nanayshare.co.uk](http://nanayshare.co.uk), a site that helps you find a family to nanny-share with and split the cost of childcare' (*Woman*, 7 November 2011, p. 19). The website is depicted as indicating a reasonable, reliable company, and suitable for women who know how to spend

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<sup>72</sup> See <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/policy/welfare-reform/lone-parents/>, accessed 17/08/2012.

money wisely because a woman who did ‘careful research’ used this service before. Therefore, it may offer a good solution for female readers who want to save childcare costs. But they also unashamedly promote care as private enterprise as opposed to state benefit.

Such childcare websites are not promoted in Thai women’s magazines since daycare problems are not discussed by Thai women in women’s real-life narratives. Women in Thai women’s magazines focus on how successful they are at raising their children instead of childcare problems. What is provided at the bottom of the page are thus parenting techniques. These are listed as follows:

1. Love everyone, everything in your life and try to understand your husband and your children as much as you can. Do not use violence with your children. For example, don’t teach your children by hitting them, especially when you are angry because it doesn’t help. If you teach them with love, it will be more effective.
2. Set rules at home for your children and follow the rules strictly. Do not let them do whatever they want regardless of the rules. For instance, my children are not allowed to watch television during weekdays. If they do, they will be punished and not allowed to watch it again on weekends. Following the rules makes us more self-disciplined and successful in our lives (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, July, p. 85).

This example shows that childcare in Thai women’s magazines concentrates on the parenting of the mother, implying the lack of childcare by grandparents and paternal involvement. The mother is highly involved in childcare and the children’s lives. In terms of parenting styles such as setting the rules for children and allowing or not allowing them to do things, childcare in Thai women’s magazines reflects the greater intensity of control and strictness in order to enhance children’s success. Childcare, in this sense, is constructed as an arduous duty, and one attributed solely to the mother.

Though childcare options, according to Powell (2002), come in four groups: ‘centre, sitter, relative, and husband’ (Powell, 2002: 107), only relation childcare or sitters/nanny, not public provision or other childcare options, are the solutions in the

UK magazines. According to the National Childcare Campaign by Daycare Trust (2012), 36 per cent of families in the UK use childcare by grandparents. That is to say, approximately four million grandparents provide nearly ten hours of childcare every week.<sup>73</sup> The use of childcare by relatives is reinforced in the UK magazines by repeated examples of grandparent childcare: ‘I went back to work when Benjamin was nine months and my mum and dad looked after him from 8 am until 6 pm, Monday to Friday’ (*Woman*, 15 August 2011, p. 19), and ‘As a single mum, I had to go back to work after I had Jasmine. My mum lived over 100 miles away, but helped enormously by having Jasmine to stay with her during the holidays’ (*Woman*, 15 August 2011, p. 20). Living 100 miles away and expecting to spend one’s retirement travelling in these examples signifies that grandparents do not anticipate being part of childcare in the first place. Grandparents express their view that it is not their responsibility. However, they are pleased to help:<sup>74</sup> ‘It’s not unusual for me to babysit three times a week, depending what Kate and Ian have on. I do find it tiring, but I think of myself as Supergran!’ (*Woman*, 31 January 2011, p. 26) and ‘My mother offered to help with childcare, but I put Summer in the University crèche so that I could see and even breastfeed her during my working day. Also, as my parents are in their mid-70s, I thought it would be too much for them on their own’ (*Woman*, 15 August 2011, p. 20).

Economic need appears to be a key determinant of a woman’s decision to use grandparent childcare. When the woman faces high childcare costs, the common strategy used to solve this problem is constructed as grandparent daycare. The average yearly cost of childcare for a child under two, according to a childcare costs survey (2012), is £5,103 and the average cost of part-time childcare in many parts of the UK now surpasses £100 per week for 25 hours.<sup>75</sup> This high cost was caused by

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<sup>73</sup> See <http://www.daycaretrust.org.uk/pages/parent-information.html>, accessed 27/08/2012.

<sup>74</sup> See for example, ‘Caring for my family is a 40-hour-a-week job’ (*Woman*, 31 January 2011, pp. 26-27), ‘Bring on the grandchildren!’ (*Woman*, 11 July 2011, pp. 16-17), and ‘Granny daycare’ (*Woman*, 15 August 2011, p. 19).

<sup>75</sup> See <http://www.daycaretrust.org.uk/pages/childcare-costs-survey-2012.html>, accessed 13/03/2014.

the Government's cut of financial support in April 2011.<sup>76</sup> Since the cost of childcare is very high, support for childcare from relatives is generally considered a solution for these women as shown below. 'I couldn't afford childminders full-time and it felt natural leaving her with family. I made a contribution towards the bills and would take Mum flowers or out for dinner to say Thank you' (*Woman*, 15 August 2011, p. 20). Though this woman (Suzy Rigg) works in marketing and communications, she still cannot pay for childcare: 'I couldn't afford childminders full-time'. However, she does not mention anything about welfare or blame the government for what the state should provide. In addition, from the woman's viewpoint, grandparent daycare is constructed as a good choice because it helps her child build relationships with the grandparents: 'Involving your parents in childcare can be complicated and emotional. But there are huge rewards. My two children have such a close bond with their grandma, which is fantastic' (*Woman*, 15 August 2011, p. 20). The phrase 'huge rewards' suggest that grandparent daycare is beneficial – the question is for whom. Here it is phrased in terms of benefits for the children.

The narrative here focuses on certain positive aspects towards childcare by relatives by explaining how hard the situation is in which women have to choose between employment and childcare. While these women's points of view indicate, in general, that using grandparent childcare is beneficial, the attitudes of these women do not always correlate with the expressed attitudes of the editors. In particular, the editors urge readers to think whether the childcare discussed by these women is superior to the choice of taking care of their own children since at the end grandparents may suffer from being left 'holding the baby'. This is evident in the following example: 'Ever felt like you're the meat in the sandwich? Far from taking it easier as you get older, are you busier than ever? With so many relatives to look after, Marilyn Inglis, wonders if she'll ever find time for herself...' (*Woman*, 31 January 2011, p. 26).

The ideas of childcare in UK women's magazines and Thai women's magazines are similar in terms of traditional gender roles. That is to say women's magazines

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<sup>76</sup> See <http://www.daycaretrust.org.uk/pages/childcare-costs-survey-2012.html>, accessed 13/03/2014.



reinforce the roles of women as mothers and caregivers. Both UK and Thai women's magazines show that childcare is not the *parents'* responsibility but only the mothers'. Men, on the contrary, are excluded from or not present in the narratives about childcare. This notion of childcare was also repeatedly presented in the Thai women's magazines as shown in the following example.

I have a clear timetable for my work. I work five days a week – three days for the Pro Five Development Company, one day for the Mathnasium School, and one day for the Fairy Tale. I focus on one job at a time. On Saturday and Sunday, I spend time with my family: husband and daughters. My husband and I agree that childcare comes first no matter what happens... There are not many techniques for raising my children. Mostly, I give them freedom. I don't put pressure on them but I observe what they like and support them. My elder daughter – Aung Ing, for example, she's not mature enough so she likes to try everything new – she wants to learn what she wants. So I pay and let her enroll in every course she'd love to do but only one course at a time (*Poo Ying*, December 2010, p. 215).

The focus of this article is entirely on the woman's role in childcare. Childcare is an agreement between the couple: 'My husband and I agree that childcare comes first no matter what happens' (*Poo Ying*, December 2010, p. 215). However, it is noticeable that in the rest of the story, from the point of view of parenting techniques, the husband is not mentioned at all. This immediately suggests that childcare in Thai women's magazines as well as in the UK ones is constructed as mainly performed by women. Additionally, childcare in this sense is in association with the construction of women as competent since they can manage multiple tasks in both childcare and routine jobs: 'I have a clear timetable for my work. I work five days a week' (*Poo Ying*, December 2010, p. 215) without complaining.

Although childcare in the Thai magazines covers a wide range of ages: babies (see Image 51), children (see Image 52), and adults (see Image 53), the discussion of childcare in the Thai magazines was in some points fairly different from the UK ones. Unlike in the UK magazines, in the Thai ones, there was no story about childcare supported by relatives or a story about a single mother. Women were presented as mothers, wives, and caregivers with a dual role (in the home and in the workplace) instead of breadwinners in 'happy' families.

Image 51. A woman with her baby  
(*Woman and Home*, August 2011, p. 69).



Source: author's photograph.

Image 52. A woman with her children  
(*Woman and Home*, July 2011, p. 84).



Source: author's photograph.

Image 53. A woman with her daughter ( *Woman and Home*, August 2011, p. 179).



Source: author's photograph.

Since in Thailand men are still expected to be breadwinners, a woman who works in the family is not perceived as a breadwinner but as a wife who performs a dual role in the family. The rate of female breadwinners, according to the National Statistical Office (Thailand) has increased from 31 per cent in 2007 to 45.57 per cent in 2011.<sup>77</sup> This means that real-life narratives in Thai women's magazines connect to social facts, in the sense that female labour market participation compared with the UK remains low. Women in Thailand are more likely to remain at home to care for their child. However, the phenomenon of childcare by relatives, particularly when young children are sent to grandparents in rural areas by working mothers who cannot afford nanny services, has been reported in many parts of Thailand (Richter, 1996). This is the result of the increasing levels of female labour and rural-urban migration in Thai society (Richter, 1996). Cynthia B. Lloyd and Sonalde Desai (1992) investigated the percentage ranges of children in separate residences from mothers in 18 countries including Thailand. They vary from less than 1 per cent to as high as 20 per cent of respondents' children. The proportion of children under 6 not living with

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<sup>77</sup> See <http://www.nso.go.th/index-1.html>, accessed 2/05/2012.

mothers in Thailand was higher than in Latin America: 3 per cent of the girls and 5 per cent of the boys respectively (Lloyd and Desai, 1992). In this case, living separately from children and using childcare by relatives can be considered as a childcare strategy also caused by working women in Thailand. This is evidenced by types of caregivers for children living separately from mothers in Table 22. Notwithstanding this, none of these childcare solutions were discussed in the Thai women's magazines.

Table 22. Caregivers for children living separately from mothers by location (percentages) in 1996.

	Bangkok	Outside of Bangkok	Total
<b>Total</b>	30	70	100
<b>Caregiver</b>			
Father	2	1	1
Maternal grandparents	40	60	54
Paternal grandparents	24	28	27
Other relatives	12	9	10
Nonrelatives	11	1	4
Nursery	11	1	4
<b>Total</b>	100	100	100
<b>(n)</b>	(112)	(256)	(368)

Source: *Journal of Marriage and the Family* (Richter, 1996).

Table 22 shows that childcare by relatives, particularly by grandparents, is prevalent where mothers do not live with their children: 64 per cent of children living in Bangkok and 88 per cent of those living outside Bangkok. Both maternal grandparents living inside and outside of Bangkok, in contrast to paternal grandparents, took more responsibility for childcare. This is twice as common in Bangkok and rural areas. It is noticeable that childcare from fathers compared with other types of caregivers was the least common.

Unlike in the UK women's magazines, in the Thai ones, women were constructed and portrayed in terms of the goal of promoting individual success in life regarding the family. The practicalities of childcare were not discussed. Rather, as in other

narratives, the focus was on outcomes. The effective or successful performance of children as well as employment was asserted and celebrated: ‘It is not easy to balance work and home life as you want. But for this working woman – Khun Inthira, she can make it. The most important thing is that she works and lives her life happily. Isn’t that what we want in our lives?’ (*Poo Ying*, December 2010, p. 215). The question sets the woman up as a role model ‘Isn’t that what we want in our lives?’ (*Poo Ying*, December 2010, p. 215). The word ‘we’ instead of ‘you’ is used by the editor to include the readers by creating identification. It suggests a shared aspirational goal and is thus quite normative. It also implies a gap between what ‘we’ might strive towards and what ‘our’ realities look like since in reality many women struggle both in their work and in their family. The woman is constructed as a role model but unlike in British magazines this is not in terms of how to overcome obstacles – such hindrances as previously discussed do not appear.

When it comes to the discussion of childcare, unlike in the UK magazines, family narratives in the Thai magazines mainly focused on parenting techniques and styles that women use to bring up their children.<sup>78</sup> Below is an example of such parenting techniques:

I try to talk with her openly and teach her how to survive in this society. It is more dangerous than she thought. I also teach her what to beware of with things such as computers and games. I let her play. Technology is close to us – it’s in our daily lives. I don’t control her but tell her how she should play instead. However, I’m always with her whenever she plays games (*Poo Ying*, August 2011, p. 135).

It is not clear how this woman who also works manages to be present whenever her daughter plays computer games. This is one small example of where the practicalities of parenting are not fully engaged with. Although this woman allows her child a certain freedom, she still plays an important role in controlling the child

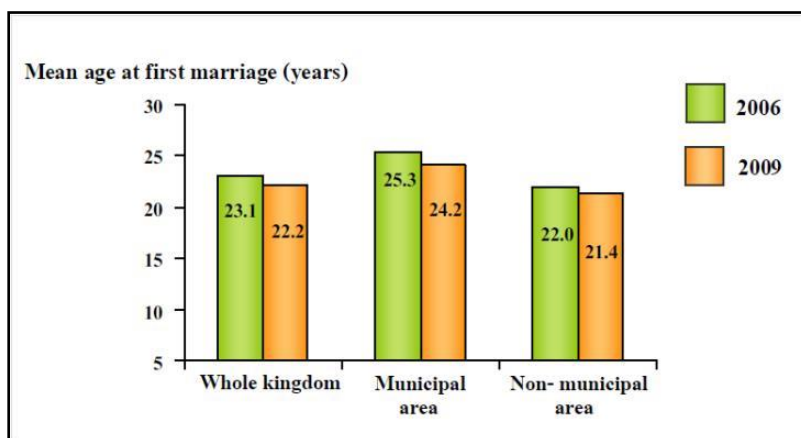
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<sup>78</sup> See for example, ‘Challenges that changed my life’ (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, May 2011, pp. 16-21), ‘We can choose to be a good person’ (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, July 2011, pp. 82-85), and ‘Perfect mom’ (*Poo Ying*, August 2011, pp. 134-145).

and not exactly treating her as an independent daughter. This links to the notion of cross-cultural differences in childcare; children in the UK women's magazines are constructed as more independent. Thai parents in Thai women's magazines, on the other hand, are constructed as very protective of their children. One Thai title, for example, read: 'My children can be compared to crystal glass which is fragile because they are innocent. This is the reason why I have to take very good care of them' (*Poo Ying*, August 2011, p. 135). The metaphor of the 'crystal glass' that the woman uses implies that her children are very precious, fragile, and in need of protection.

In the UK magazines, on the contrary, children are expected to become independent especially when they grow up as illustrated in the following example. 'Charlotte's the baby of the family, the last one to fly the nest. We'd done the university moves twice before, with Sara and Andrew' (*Woman*, 19 September 2011, p. 19). Here, children are compared to birds that can fly the nest. This metaphor signifies freedom and individuality. It reflects a notion of raising children which is different from that found in the Thai women's magazines. British children, compared with Thai children, are more independent. They are supposed to have their own lives when they are grown enough to leave home or to 'fly the nest'. In Thailand leaving home, particularly for women, is mainly linked to marriage, not to individuality or freedom. Thai women usually leave their parents' home when they enter marriage. According to the National Statistical Office of Thailand (2010), the average age of Thai women entering their first marriage has declined from 23.1 in 2006 to 22.2 years in 2009. However, women living in urban areas, in contrast to women living in rural areas, tend to get married at an older age as shown in Figure 3. Nonetheless in both contexts, women exchange one protective environment for another – the parental home for the marital one. In this way, marriage indicates maturity in terms of being responsible for taking care of the household and a new family, but not independence.

Figure 3. Mean age at first marriage of Thai women by area in 2006 and 2009.



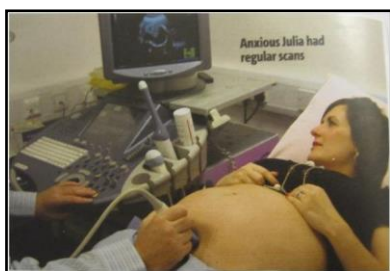
Source: National Statistical Office Thailand, 2010.

Women's roles in Thai women's magazines as well as in the UK magazines centre on working women as mothers and caregivers. In part, there is a connection between maternity and childcare in terms of the notion of fulfillment in women's lives. For instance, there are stories titled 'What I like most in womanhood is maternity. I had a dream to be a mother all my life. It is not my goal in life but I feel like my life cannot be completed without being a mother. Knowing that I become a mother makes me really happy though it is a hard work' (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, July 2011, p. 83). Maternity is constructed as precious and desirable. Women are expected to sacrifice themselves for their family: 'It's not hard but tough and tiring work. Though I don't have free time for myself, I think it is ok because I'm happy to do it' (*Poo Ying*, August 2011, p. 140). Childcare though it is hard and exhausting in the woman's views is worth doing since it brings her happiness. This emphasis on emotional well-being is often repeated: 'No matter how hard she works, she still can take very good care of three children perfectly as a "good" mother. All that she has done is just for her children's future and happiness' (*Poo Ying*, August 2011, p. 138). There is a persistent assumption in Thai women's magazines that putting children first leads to women's happiness.

Unlike in the UK magazines, in the Thai ones there is no suggestion that women might experience dilemmas, might need advice, or might not be able to cope. Thai magazines thus present women in aspirational terms, with no indication that they

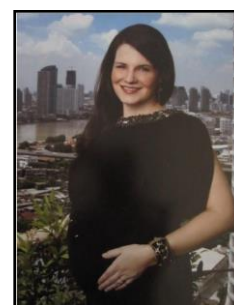
might need support. This makes it quite difficult for women readers who experience problems or do not have unproblematic lives since certainly these magazines offer no suggestions as to how one might deal with conflicts. The lack of openness in Thai women's magazines regarding potential issues in women's lives and the strong preservation of privacy is also evident in, for example, photos of pregnant women which are quite different in the UK and Thai magazines. The women's images produced in the British women's magazines tended to be constructed as more ordinary and more intimate, as readers can see, for example, in the construction of pregnancy, a photo of a pregnant woman showing her naked belly while having ultrasound scans in hospital (see Image 54). In Thai women's magazines, women's images always remain more formal in dress and posture. Thus the portrait of the pregnant woman in a Thai women's magazine (see Image 55) is rather similar to the Mona Lisa. Both Image 54 and Image 55 present women as happy future mothers. The implication of these two images is that becoming a mother is desirable and a happy event.

Image 54. A pregnant woman in a UK women's magazine (*Woman*, 2 May 2011, p. 32).



Source: author's photograph.

Image 55. A pregnant woman in a Thai women's magazine (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition July 2011, p. 83).



Source: author's photograph.

Since 'the portrait is a sign whose purpose is both the description of an individual and the inscription of social identity' (Tagg, 1988: 37), this portrait signifies the importance of woman as icon rather than as individual. This difference between the photos of the British and Thai women implies an idea of a private, individualized and a formal prototypical public image. The photos of the women in the UK and

Thai women's magazines suggest different types of identity. The identity portrayed in the Thai women's magazines is iconic and strongly staged. In this image, the hand on the belly discretely points to the woman's pregnancy, otherwise not readily evident, whilst in the UK image the woman's pregnant exposed belly is at the centre of the image. In British women's magazines, the identity displayed is more realist, especially in the construction of pregnancy as discussed above, showing for example a woman intent on her activity rather than posing overtly for the camera.

Caregiving was considered normative for women (Pruchno and Resch, 1989) as is evident from photos of the women with their children widely presented in both the UK and Thai magazines. Such photos in the UK women's magazines were four times more common than in the Thai ones: there were 96 and 24 photos in the UK and Thai women's magazines respectively. It is noteworthy that the portrayal of women as caregivers in the UK women's magazines, in contrast to the Thai ones, included caregiving for elderly parents. This is shown in the stories about family members' health problem. There were 18 photos of women with their elderly parents in the UK sample. Here, the women were presented as tender, kind-hearted, and grateful to their parents as shown in the photos of the women with their mothers or fathers who have health problems such as Alzheimer's disease (see Image 56 and Image 57). However, no such photos were shown in the Thai magazines since there was no story about parents' health problems.

Image 56. A woman with her mother  
(*Woman and Home*, UK edition,  
November 2011, p. 82).



Source: author's photograph.

Image 57. A woman with her mother  
(*Woman and Home*, UK edition  
November 2011, p. 81).



Source: author's photograph.



Image 56 and Image 57 show that parents' health problems were not constructed as a potential burden for these women. Their facial expressions show only positive feelings – smiling at the readers. The photos suggest a certain level of happiness and contentment; we cannot see any sadness in either the women's and their mothers' faces, but shining eyes and delighted faces. This suggests a limit to the problematic issues that can be portrayed in these magazines. Where childcare problems may feature, problems with care of parents may not.

Caring for parents was not discussed at all in Thai women's magazines. This is in keeping with the general tendency in these magazines not to focus on issues but only on achievements. This does not mean that Thai women do not look after their parents. On the contrary, taking care of one's parents and being respectful to them are regarded as the norms and the principles of conduct in Thai society (Jongudomkarn and Camfield, 2006). Nonetheless, women in Thai women's magazines are only shown as responsible for their children. The women in the British women's magazines, on the other hand, seem to take care of elderly parents in addition to caring for their own children. However, in general, both the UK and the Thai women's magazines defined women as wives, mothers, and caregivers for children. Women also depicted in work as employees and employers, especially in Thai magazines.

## 2. Adoption

Stories about adoption were the least common in both the UK and Thai magazines: there were only four stories about this in the UK magazines and none in the Thai ones. The UK stories were narrated by both the women who adopted children<sup>79</sup> and

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<sup>79</sup> See for example, 'Our adopted children bring us so much joy' (*Woman*, 7 November 2011, p. 40), 'I was thrilled when she called me "Mum"' (*Woman*, 7 November 2011, p. 40), and 'It's not about my age, it's about loving two little girls' (*Woman*, 18 July 2011, pp. 16-17).

the women who were adopted.<sup>80</sup> Although ‘adoption is most commonly viewed through the lens of loss – the child’s loss of his or her first set of parents and biological heritage, the birthmother’s loss of her child for whom she continues to grieve, and the adoptive parents’ loss of their wanted biological offspring’ (Leon, 2002: 652), women in the UK women’s magazines were constructed as viewing adoption as a source of happiness, fulfillment, and the right decision. In this way, adoption was considered as charitable rather than shameful as shown in the following examples:

So when we read in our local newspaper about two brothers and a sister needing a family, we realized adoption could be the answer. And the idea of keeping siblings together just felt right to us... For now I can’t imagine our life without them. They’ve brought us so much joy, like life has a purpose (*Woman*, 7 November 2011, p. 40).

Disclosing adoption to the child is a difficult task for adoptive parents since it can cause painful emotions in long-term relationships (Nickman et al, 2005). As Nickman et al (2005) have pointed out, almost all adopted children experience at least one of three types of loss after learning the truth: ‘overt loss of relationships and familiar environments, covert loss of self-esteem because they had been relinquished or removed, and status loss arising from feelings of stigmatization within the family or society at large’ (Nickman et al, 2005: 989). Nonetheless, family narratives in British women’s magazines show that adoption is disclosed to the child. Examples include: ‘I’ve always been open with Grace about her adoption, even though she’s too young to fully understand. I tell her we were chosen for each other’ (*Woman*, 7 November 2011, p. 41), and ‘My parents had always been open about me being adopted, telling me I was “chosen” and special’ (*Woman and Home*, UK edition, January 2011, p. 54). Adoption is thus celebrated and constructed as positive. Women who adopt are not stigmatized – the concern is with the children, not with the process of having them. In this context disclosure of adoption to the children is also encouraged through the presentation of narratives where this is the case.

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<sup>80</sup> See for example, ‘If I find my mother, will she go to jail?’ (*Woman*, 5 September 2011, pp. 16-17).

These stories go together with further information about adoption that is provided at the bottom of the page in order to help readers make decisions about adoption:

Could you do it?

- Foreign adoptions can take between one to three years and are more complex than adopting from the UK, but upper age limits are often more flexible.
- You have to be approved by a UK Adoption Agency and undergo a home study to become an approved adopter, which costs up to £6,500. Adoption agency fees or payments to an orphanage can add another £5,000, with legal fees and flights bringing costs up to £20,000 per adoption.
- It's against the law to bring a child who is not a resident of this country to the UK for adoption if you have not been legally approved. For more see [icacentre.org.uk](http://icacentre.org.uk) or [bemyparent.org.uk](http://bemyparent.org.uk) (*Woman*, 18 July 2011, p. 17).

The text above focuses on adoption regulations and adoption costs. Though adoption is expensive and highly regulated, UK women's magazines encourage women to think about it – 'Could you do it?'. In part, the content fits with the story: 'It's not about my age, it's about loving two little girls' (*Woman*, 18 July 2011, pp. 16-17), but as well, it pursues what the magazines imply – the norm of the nuclear families. That is to say it moves towards the traditional nuclear families to include adoptive families consisting of fathers, mothers, and, most importantly, adopted children. Noticeably, there is an attempt to think through foreign adoption at the end of the story. In the specific context, one might argue that the advice is designed to inject economic realism and awareness of the process into the question of adoption. It is also mildly discouraging in relation to foreign adoption by highlighting the complexities. Importantly, as with the narratives on childcare, factual advice is provided. This advice is not without bias but it serves to draw the focus away from the individual family narrative to the basic issue it centres on – here adoption. British women's magazines can thus be regarded as sources of knowledge for their female readers.

In the Thai women's magazines, on the other hand, there were no family narratives about adoption. This suggests that adoption is rarely disclosed to the public in the

Thai cultural context. Adoption in Thailand is associated with issues around bloodline and inheritance. In the north of Thailand, for instance, childless couples tend to raise a niece and expect her to take care of them in their old age. If the couples die, she will then become their heir (Yoddumnern, 1985). According to The Department of Provincial Administration of Thailand, only 9,184 married couples adopted children out of a total of 318,496 married couples overall in 2007. The figures show that there were approximately 2.8 per cent of adopted children by spouses in 2007 compared with 3 per cent in 2006. It indicates that adoption in Thailand is relatively limited since the belief that one should not raise a non-biological child is still prevalent in Thai society. This is evident in an example of Thai proverbs indicating the act of bringing up other's people children as 'disgusting': 'To raise another's child is like keeping other's food wrapped in leaves in your mouth' (ao luk khao ma liang ao miang khao ma om). Adoption, in this sense, is regarded as a stigma, instead of a source of happiness as shown in UK women's magazines.

In part, these stories about adopted children reflect the boundaries around self-disclosure to the general public. That is to say in the Thai magazines only positive aspects of women's lives are presented to the readers. Stories that relate to problematic aspects of one's life are not published, or are censored in certain ways. A good example of this are two stories, one in a UK, the other in a Thai magazine, of women who have a child with Down's syndrome. Both texts had accompanying photos but only in the UK one was the child in question actually shown. According to the woman in the Thai magazine, 'having a Down's syndrome child is not shameful, and finally you will know how lucky you are' (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, October 2011, p. 76). However, there was no photo of the child. Symbolic photos - toys placed in front of her, for example - were used instead of a photo of the child (see Image 58). This was different in the UK context where a photo of a daughter born with Down's syndrome taken at a wedding reception, for example, was shown (see Image 59).

Image 58. A woman who has a Down's syndrome child  
(*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, October 2011, p. 76).



Source: author's photograph.

Image 59. A woman with her daughter born with Down's syndrome  
(*Woman and Home*, UK edition, August 2011, p. 59).



Source: author's photograph.

In the Thai context, despite what the text said, the issue of having a child with Down's syndrome on one level thus remained in the private domain. The mother was photographed at home and without her child. But in the UK context, the photo not only showed the child but also that the child was participating in a social occasion so that the child was included in family events. Here different notions of stigma and privacy emerge which suggest that in these magazines it is easier for UK women to be portrayed in different contexts and situations than in the Thai ones, where potential problems are expected to be kept private.

### Conclusion

The family portrayed in the Thai and UK magazines shares certain similarities: it is nuclear: it puts women into traditional roles as mothers and caregivers, even if they work which is mostly the case; and it exempts men from being involved with childcare. But beyond this there are significant differences, most importantly in the range of issues and options in relation to family that the magazines portray. Despite the fact that childcare was the most common issue in both UK and Thai readers' narratives, the notions of childcare were portrayed very differently. Women in childcare narratives in both UK and Thai women's magazines were portrayed as wives, mothers and caregivers in traditional nuclear families consisting of fathers, mothers and children. However, women as breadwinners in single-parent families and child rearing by extended families only occurred in the UK magazines. In addition, the ideas about raising children in UK and Thai women's magazines seem

fairly different. In the Thai magazines, women were constructed as solely responsible for the care of their children whereas in the UK magazines, women were constructed as getting childcare support from grandparents. Moreover, though the ways in which the women were portrayed shared certain features, their dissimilarities indicate different notions of womanhood. The women in the Thai women's magazines all posed in a fairly formal way. In the UK magazines, on the other hand, the women looked more casual. Last but not least, UK women's magazines display a greater range of family issues than Thai ones. These stories focus on both women's and family members' lives. British women's magazines urge readers to think and learn about family life as well as providing general statistics, suggestions, expert advice and asking readers' opinion. This was the case regarding all the issues covered. Thai women's magazines, on the other hand, display family stories only as success stories: only positive dispositions are presented, problems do not appear. Thai readers are thus presented with a very limited range of women's real-life narratives which are selectively constructed as norms. These narratives do not reflect ordinary women's lives. In general, family narratives in UK and Thai women's magazines indicate cross-cultural differences in the portrayal of childcare; childcare in British magazines is presented as a problem that usually the woman needs to solve whereas the question of how to deal with childcare while the woman works is not even mentioned in Thai magazines. The latter magazines portray an aspirational version of family life that is somewhat at odds with what women may experience in real life.

In this last analysis chapter, I have shown how readers' narratives about families figure in UK and Thai women's magazines and how ideas of womanhood are constructed. Womanhood as being wives, mothers, and caregivers is strongly emphasized in both the UK and Thai women's magazines. In the following chapter, I shall summarize my findings on the portrayal of confidence-building, employment, romantic relationships and marriage, and family in the readers' narratives in UK and Thai women's magazines and discuss how these are relevant to the construction of women in the narratives in question.

## **Chapter Seven: Conclusion**

My study of *Readers' Real-Life Narratives in Selected Contemporary Thai and UK Women's Magazines* was designed to answer my primary research question, about how women are represented in these narratives. It aimed to analyze and compare the portrayal of women in female readers' real-life narratives in selected women's magazines from the UK and Thailand. More specifically, it sought to provide some insights into the social construction of a gendered self-identity, the prevailing gender norms and cultural models of femininity in two different contexts by analysing women's personal narratives in these magazines. I focused on two magazines from the UK and two from Thailand: *Woman*, *Woman and Home* (UK edition), *Poo Ying*, and *Woman and Home* (Thai edition) covering the period November 2010 – November 2011. The magazines in my sample thus represent a particular subset of British and Thai women's magazines: two are similar (*Woman and Home*) and the other two are different (*Woman* and *Poo Ying*). *Woman and Home* is published under that title in both the UK and Thailand, and I therefore effectively looked at the Thai and the British edition of the same magazine. *Woman* and *Poo Ying*, on the other hand, are only published in the UK and Thailand respectively and so are different magazines. All the magazines are for women in their 30s and over. I selected them because they all focused on women's lifestyles and seemed to address similar kinds of audience as shown in their bi-lines as mentioned in introductory chapter. In general, these magazines had particular foci on women's lives in present society and focused on specific desirable female characteristics – being smart and successful. I used this cross-national women's magazines sample to examine both similar and different ways of women's representation in the two countries. By using magazines from two countries that are not usually compared in this context this investigation extends our understanding of women in the media as a progressively global phenomenon across cultures. These magazines have never before been analysed in a comparative study and research on readers' narratives itself remains very limited. Therefore, my work produces new knowledge in the fields of women's and media studies, specifically in relation to readers' narratives in women's

magazines, and I consider this way main contribution to original knowledge in the field.

I analysed these narratives in terms of their storylines, and the vocabularies and images they utilize to examine the ways in which they construct women. Women's magazines reach a large audience (Del-Teso-Craviotto, 2006). Moreover, women's magazines shape and influence their audience in daily life (Winship, 1987) from personal appearance to life style through stories such as 'weight-loss wonders: half the size...twice as confident!' (*Woman*, 28 February 2011, p. 30) and 'rules for dressing at every age' (*Woman and Home*, Thai edition, May 2011, p. 96). In reading women's magazines, the audience is told what to do, how to behave, what to expect, and what sense to make of their feminine identity. In the following I shall summarize my findings on readers' narratives, emphasizing my contributions to the study of women's magazines. I shall end with suggestions for further research in this field.

### British and Thai Readers' Narratives in Women's Magazines: Similarities and Differences

The similarities and differences between the readers' narratives in UK and Thai women's magazines may be dealt with on two levels: narrative content and the representation of women in the narratives specifically. Altogether, there were 654 narratives in my sample: 483 stories in the UK women's magazines but only 171 stories in the Thai ones. Readers' narratives were thus approximately three times more common in the British women's magazines. These different numbers suggest a significant dissimilarity of reader portrayal in UK and Thai women's magazines: readers talking about themselves in a public context are much more common in the UK magazines than in the Thai ones. This indicates a different media culture in the UK and Thailand in terms of presenting ordinary women's real-life stories. Readers in British women's magazines were much more encouraged to participate in sharing their own stories and experiences, including online via 'Your Lives' forum,<sup>81</sup> for

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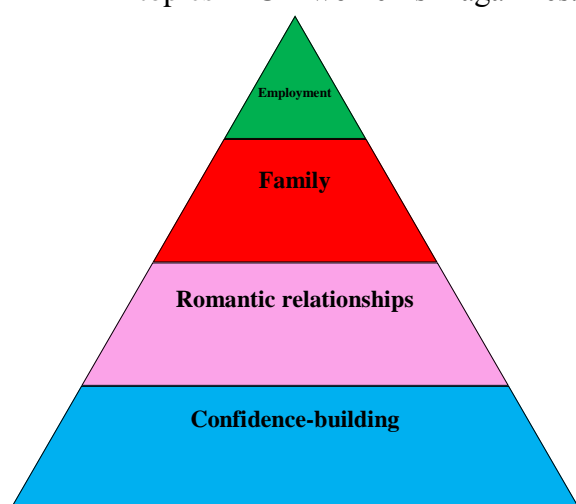
<sup>81</sup> See <http://www.womanandhome.com/forums/forums/27-Your-Lives.html>, accessed 13/03/2014.



example. Readers in Thai women’s magazines, on the other hand, were not urged to tell their stories online. Such fora did not appear on Thai women’s magazines websites at all. Their stories were displayed only in the magazines. Overall, this suggests that public spaces such as media platforms (magazines, online fora) are not yet as common for sharing personal narratives in Thailand as in the UK. It indicates a greater division between the public and the private, and fewer spaces in which to display the self.

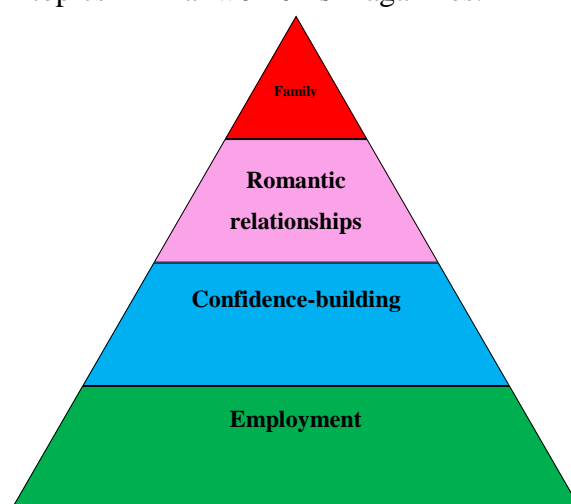
In terms of the content of the narratives, both British and Thai women’s magazines could be grouped into four topics: 1) confidence-building, 2) employment, 3) romantic relationships and marriage, and 4) family. All readers’ narratives were highly structured and identically divided into three parts: an introduction, a main story, and the ending. This alone already indicated their mediated form which turned the individual narratives into a replicable commodity. The number of narratives under each of these topics was very different in the UK and Thai women’s magazines as indicated in the following Images (60 and 61):

Image 60. Prevalence of narrative topics in UK women’s magazines.



Source: the author.

Image 61. Prevalence of narrative topics in Thai women’s magazines.



Source: the author.

The most common topic in the UK women’s magazines was confidence-building. Narratives on that topic amounted to 179 out of 483 stories. By contrast, the least

common topic in the UK women's magazines was employment, featuring in just 82 out of 483 narratives. In the Thai women's magazines, on the other hand, the key focus of the narratives was employment: 92 out of 171 stories centred on this. Narratives about family, compared to other topics, were the least common in the Thai ones. This implies the notion that talking about personal stories, family issues in particular, in a public context is not very common in Thai women's magazines. That is to say in magazines Thai women are less likely to reveal their personal stories.

The readers' narratives in both the UK and Thai women's magazines depicted the same patterns (Image 60 and 61) in terms of topics they covered. This similarity in topic is, of course, in part a function of editorial selection. It also points to the globalization of magazine culture reinforced by the fact that *Woman and Home* is published as that title in both countries though the countries lie at very different ends of the globe. This similar structure in terms of editorial selection did not appear only in having the same magazine titles: *Woman and Home*, but also in the rest of women's magazines in my sample: *Woman* and *Poo Ying*. Similar topics were depicted in both British and Thai women's magazines. This suggests that confidence, work, and love were constructed as universal and important in women's lives in both countries' magazines. This in turn affects the way in which women are portrayed.

The relative dominance of confidence-building and employment narratives in the UK and Thai women's magazines respectively reveals the different focal points between the two countries' magazines. UK women's magazines focused on the self-promotion of individuals or on how to improve one's confidence. Thai women's magazines, on the other hand, centred on the celebration of employment as an achieved state. To be more specific, employment in Thai women's magazines was directly linked to the depiction of highly-skilled middle-class women who were successful rather than, for example, unskilled or low-educated women. This finding is interesting in that it ignores women who are not working or even unemployed in Thai society. Female labour force participation rate in Thailand, according to The World Bank (2013), was 64 per cent. The male labour force participation rate, on the

other hand, is much higher at 80 per cent.<sup>82</sup> This is in accordance with the economic expectations in Thailand where a division between family and work as private and public spheres grounded in masculine and feminine values is the norm. Due to this economic structuring, women in Thailand are expected to be economically dependent and subordinate to men (Thorbek, 1987; Thomson and Bhongsvej, 1995). In other words, in Thailand men are constructed as responsible for the public economic sphere whereas women are in charge of the domestic domain (Kuasirikun, 2011). Without regard to the actual employment figures, Thai women's magazines portrayed only women who were employed. They thus promoted women's employment as desirable in contra-distinction to the cultural norms that construct woman as economically dependent. As such, they were progressive, even if in a mainly aspirational fashion.

When it comes to the representation of women in both UK and Thai women's magazines, the most significant difference was the kind of femininity promoted in association with the content of the narratives. In the UK women's magazines, women were constructed as imperfect but improvable. Self-improvement and how to build confidence were a major concern and regarded as important for women. Confidence, according to Stankov et al (2012), is a significant psychological factor that strongly links to success. This was evident in the depiction of the women in the confidence-building narratives in the UK women's magazines in the sense that it was connected to women's success in certain ways. Confidence-building in the UK women's magazines was not just described as an achieved state but as a process, with success as the outcome. Confidence-building was thus part of viewing the self as a project in process that could be worked on to achieve the desired results. This was evident in the tips and suggestions provided by the experts at the end of each narrative. UK women's magazines thus focused on the process of how to become an 'ideal' woman or on how to manage in adversity instead of just presenting 'perfect' women to readers. By contrast, women in the Thai women's magazines were normally constructed as 'ideal' in terms of already having achieved success. The

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<sup>82</sup> See <http://wdi.worldbank.org/table/2.2.html>, accessed 13/03/2014.

readers were thus meant to admire the women whose stories were narrated since the women's stories were presented as examples of an already achieved 'ideal' life. In the UK magazines, in contrast, womanhood was constructed as a process in which women - with the help of others, advice, and various ploys - could learn how to deal with life's crises. In the Thai magazines the process by which the woman had achieved their success was largely obscured so that success emerged, not out of a series of experiences, but as a state – one was, rather than became, successful.

The four most common topics in UK and Thai women's magazines suggest that women's magazines construct women's lives as centred on confidence, career, love, and family respectively. Readers' narratives in both the UK and Thai women's magazines displayed images of women in a way that framed women in particular ways. To provide a better understanding of how women were constructed in relation to femininity, I shall briefly summarize my findings related to each topic.

### Confidence-building

In the first analysis chapter, I focused on the construction of confidence-building in women's real-life narratives. I found that confidence was constructed as a crucial feminine trait for women in both the UK and the Thai women's magazines.

However, the way in which the magazines presented women in association with confidence was slightly different. In the UK one's confidence was constructed as achieved through a process that one could develop and practise. This included both failure and success as part of the process. Confidence in Thai women's magazines, on the other hand, was portrayed as a state of being instead of a process. It was thus more common to see portrayals of women lacking in confidence in UK women's magazines than in the Thai ones. Women in Thai women's magazines were displayed with higher levels of self-confidence and success. Women with low confidence were rarely seen, indeed excluded from these narratives. This implies that confident working women were constructed as the 'ideal' in Thai women's magazines. The presentation of such women required only positive images of women in order to conform to these female attributes. One might argue that these notions of how to disclose the self in a public space such as a magazine are linked to preserving

face and rejecting any imperfection in Thai women's magazines. Thai culture does not encourage the disclosure of failure or problems. One's public face must always be positively inflected. This was evident in the narratives.

Beyond this, the most significant differences between UK and Thai women's magazines in terms of confidence-building were the range of topics. There were 179 narratives in the UK women's magazines but only 40 in the Thai ones. These narratives were four times more common in the UK than in the Thai women's magazines. Confidence in the UK women's magazines was presented in conjunction with five topics: 1) life crises, 2) beauty, appearance, and aging, 3) making friends and friendship, 4) travelling and activities, and 5) community action. Only three of these topics: 1) life crises, 2) beauty, appearance, and aging, and 3) travelling and activities were covered in the Thai magazines. Considering the issues depicted in the Thai women's magazines, they seem to conform to a specific idea of the individual self. The narratives focused on the women themselves, not other people around them. Sedikides et al (2013) explain the individual self as follows:

Individual self reflects a person's subjective uniqueness. This representation comprises characteristics – such as traits and behaviours, hobbies and interests, aspirations and goals – that differentiate the person from others. Also, this type of self is relatively independent of dyadic relationships or group memberships (Sedikides et al, 2013: 237).

Similar to this definition of the individual self, the topics depicted in the readers' narratives in the Thai magazines were directly linked to women's 'uniqueness', focusing on an individual woman and her story. Thai women tended not to be depicted – except in the context of travel – as part of groups or communities. They were not depicted with groups of friends, for example. Rather, they were presented as singular individuals. This was reinforced by the fact that Thai magazines rarely provided expert guidance. The presence of the latter suggests that an issue or problem is common, that it is not unique, but may be experienced by other readers. The absence of such advice thus reinforces the notion of the uniqueness of a story. This uniqueness in Thai readers' narratives links to the notion of the ideal woman and to women's images as role models for readers to admire.

Unlike in the Thai women's magazines, the narrative structure of the confidence-building narratives in the UK women's magazines tended to provide a sense of how one can manage and improve the self. Whereas Thai magazines generally portrayed self as a state, British magazines depicted self as a process, a project that could be worked on to achieve specific ends. This was evident in the narratives about life crises and the use of specialist advice which commonly occurred in the UK women's magazines. Women in UK women's magazines were often constructed as having low confidence at the start of their stories and then becoming confident at the end. The process of becoming confident was emphasized through a focus on coping mechanisms during times of crises. This was augmented by the suggestions and advice provided by the experts or psychologists at the end of the stories. Readers could thus learn from the women's real-life experiences and these specialists' guidance. To put it another way, UK women's magazines might be considered as 'handbooks for life' since there was advice and guidance designed to show how one could change things.

Unlike in the UK women's magazines, women in the Thai magazines were displayed as impeccable, full of confidence. This was obvious regarding the topic of beauty, appearance, and aging. Whilst in the UK women's magazines women living with a disfigurement were depicted, for example, this did not occur at all in the Thai magazines. Only beautiful women were displayed here. The Thai magazines reinforced the portrayal of women's positive images, in a sense always focusing on the extraordinary ordinary woman, the woman who has it all. In the UK magazines, instead, 'ordinary' women were depicted as having to work at or for what they achieved. This allowed women to act as role models for other 'ordinary' women, to be learnt from rather than simply admired.

Despite the fact that there were dissimilarities between the UK and Thai women's magazines in terms of the representation of women in relation to confidence-building, it is interesting that positive thinking was constructed as a solution for women who faced crises in both countries' magazines. Apart from presenting positive images of women, the use of positive thinking in both UK and Thai

women's magazines implies an assumption in both countries that attitude is key. Attitude takes one back to the individual whose disposition is constructed as determining the outcome. Structural factors impacting on women's lives such as prevailing labour market conditions are thus by implication denied, leaving the individual woman as her own main resource. This is, of course, what makes confidence so important.

### Employment

In my second analysis chapter I explored the question of how women's employment was constructed in the readers' narratives. I demonstrated that employment and women within the context of careers in UK and Thai women's magazines were portrayed differently in terms of the types of occupations and women's images depicted. Employment narratives, compared to narratives focused on family, romantic relationships and marriage and confidence-building, were much more common in the Thai women's magazines. In fact, employment was the most common topic here. This was also the only topic which was found more often in the Thai than in the UK magazines. This highlights the significance of employment in relation to the representation of women in the Thai magazines. At the heart of the readers' narratives in the Thai magazines was the portrayal of women as successful working women. This might be related to the fact that middle-class women's employment is still more of a novelty in Thailand than in the UK.

However, employment did not automatically equal success. This depended on both subjective and objective factors: happiness and money. Apart from showing explicit income in figures to readers, women often mentioned how happy they were at work regardless of occupation. Being happy at work and affluent was thus regarded as a measure of success in employment in both the UK and the Thai women's magazines. Problems at, or boredom with, work were rarely mentioned in either set of magazines and if they occurred they were portrayed in a certain way as having happened in the past before the woman's success, not in the present. Stories of women who were facing crises in their work were not presented at all in either UK or Thai women's magazines. The impacts of the 2008 global recession were mostly not,

for instance, evident in the magazines. Obstacles at work, always in the past, were thus depicted as part of the process of becoming successful in employment. Being successful was constructed as an important attribute in women's lives in both UK and Thai women's magazines. This was part of their more general promotion of positive images of women as independent and self-reliant.

Unlike Thai women's magazines, UK women's magazines displayed more various occupations: 13 and 8 occupations respectively. Although business owners and managers were commonly found in both UK and Thai women's magazines, professional careers such as physicians, dentists, and pharmacists were only depicted in the Thai women's magazines. The occupations illustrated in the Thai magazines, in contrast to the UK ones, were limited – only certain jobs were presented, not lower middle-classed jobs in particular; comedians and call handlers as appeared in the UK ones, for example, were excluded. The UK women's magazines promoted a wider range of employment and employment levels.

Women in Thai women's magazines were constructed as middle-class employers whilst women in UK women's magazines were displayed in both middle-class and lower middle-class employment. Both British and Thai women's magazines presented women's businesses as small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with employees. These occupations were within the private sector. Considering the wider range of occupations in the UK women's magazines, they were more likely to represent women's work in line with social reality. They were broadly consistent with the UK public and private sector employment rates between 2011- 2012 as shown by The Office for National Statistics. The Thai women's magazines operated within a narrow range of middle-class female employment. The magazines were thus largely aspirational in content and did not reflect the more common distribution of employment patterns among Thai women.

In the Thai magazines, success was constructed as crucial and was thus the norm according to which women and their careers were portrayed. This legitimizes a particular form of successful femininity. Portraying only such successful readers and, further, portraying success as a state rather than a process to be achieved, suggests



that readers of Thai women's magazines were meant to admire the women in the magazines rather than learn from their working lives. In contrast, success in careers in UK women's magazines was depicted as a process of development. Readers in the UK women's magazines, in contrast to the Thai ones, thus had more opportunities to learn about women's working lives and the diversity of jobs there are. Here the emphasis was less on affluence and much more on competence. Success was partly depicted in terms of women's professional competence.

If women had businesses, the kinds of businesses they had were similar in both the UK and Thai women's magazines. Clothing and accessories businesses were the most commonly depicted. They indicated the gendered world of work, as the magazines linked women's occupations to beauty and appearance. Thus beauty was constructed as important and as part of women's lives. Apart from making women become more confident as previously discussed, the use of beauty and appearance as part of women's careers - clothing and accessories businesses – reinforced the significant role of beauty and appearance since they did not only help women to become confident but also provided economic support – money and a career.

Overall, British women's magazines, in contrast to the Thai ones, displayed more general statistics, suggestions and expert advice. However, critical situations and business failure were not included in the stories in either the UK or the Thai magazines. This may be associated with the entertainment and escapism functions of these magazines which promote a feel-good factor as part of their association with leisure activity.

### Romantic Relationships and Marriage

In my fourth analysis chapter, 'Romantic Relationships and Marriage in Readers' Narratives', it was obvious that there were significant differences in the content of the narratives displayed in the British and Thai women's magazines. A wider range of romantic relationships and marriage issues, both triumphal and tragic, including cheating boyfriends, infidelity, divorce, and homosexual husbands were discussed in the British ones. In the Thai magazines, on the other hand, doomed love stories were

not told at all. Thai women's magazines as with the other themes, tended to present only positive images and happy love and marriage stories.

These differences exemplify the different constructions of women in terms of self-disclosure in the two cultures. In the Thai magazines, failing relationships did not occur – such narratives were implicitly constructed as inappropriate for the magazines. This depiction of romantic relationship narratives in Thai women's magazines omitted the reality of social problems in terms of divorce and domestic violence in Thailand. The rate of divorce in Thailand, according to Wimontip Musikaphan (2013), tripled from 10.8 percent in 2009 to 33 per cent in 2012 due to infidelity and domestic violence.<sup>83</sup> The representation of women through real-life narratives focusing on romantic relationships and marriage in Thai magazines is thus particularly intent on preserving positive images of women instead of revealing problems in one's life. One might say that the opposite was the case in the British magazines. Here problems and difficulties in relationships and marriage were often discussed. Additionally, expert advice and guidance were separately provided at the end of each narrative in order to help readers who might have similar relationship problems. This suggests that problems in romantic relationships and marriage narratives were regarded as ordinary and could be discussed as well as effectively dealt with. This was not the case in the Thai magazines. Talking about personal problems in love and marriage in particular was much more common in the UK women's magazines.

The UK women's magazines also revealed a particular discourse about issues of inequality between men and women. This was evidenced by tragic romantic relationships and marriage stories – infidelity, for example. Women were at times portrayed as marriage-desperate victims who were suffering from their relationships and men's betrayal. However, many women in the UK magazines were also depicted as finding the confidence to choose their own lives after facing crises – divorce

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<sup>83</sup> See <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/national/Divorce-domestic-abuse-on-the-rise-in-Thailand-30208767.html>, accessed 13/03/2014.

instead of enduring unfaithful husbands, for example. There was thus a division between the seemingly unexpected relationship issues the women faced and how they responded to these. Readers' narratives in UK women's magazines produced the notion of oppression 'accessorizing' women's positive characteristics such as independence and self-determination by leading to confidence in making decisions.

### Family

In my last analysis chapter I investigated the kind of family portrayed in the magazines and the ways in which women in the family were presented. I found that the meaning of 'family', according to the readers' narratives in the UK and Thai women's magazines, was largely heteronormative, conventional, and nuclear, consisting of fathers, mothers and a child or children. The most common theme in both British and Thai women's magazines was childcare, but notions of childcare were portrayed very differently. In the Thai women's magazines, women seemed solely responsible for the care of the children whereas in the UK magazines, women were constructed as getting childcare support from grandparents. Moreover, the depiction of women as breadwinners in single-mother families and child-rearing in extended families only appeared in the UK magazines.

Already in 1975 John Platt (1975: 425) argued that family is 'an area where men and women both must contribute, but it is an area which is absolutely central for the straightening out of women's personal problems, their daily lives, and the equality of their roles'. The problems in a sense remain. By representing particular mediated images of women as wives, mothers, and caregivers whilst excluding men from the role of caregiver, the readers' narratives reinforced traditional women's roles within the domestic sphere. In other words, women were constructed as centrally responsible for the family and specifically for childcare. Furthermore, these roles were constructed as pleasant and satisfying instead of a double burden. Women were portrayed as happy to take on these responsibilities, regardless of how tired they were or what other commitments they had.

This particular presentation of women's images as wives, mothers, and caregivers in readers' narratives in both UK and Thai women's magazines is problematic in that it suggests to female readers that the idea of the 'perfect' family depends on women's dedication instead of men's. By reinforcing the primacy of having a family and being a mother, especially in the Thai women's magazines, such stories legitimize married women as 'ideal' and implicitly preferable. This then implies that getting married is preferable to being single. It ignores the high divorce rates in both countries and the increasing number of non-standard families.

The images accompanying the narratives in many ways serve to reinforce the representation of women as 'idealized'. Although in both the Thai and the UK magazines the primary role of these images is to confirm the fact that the story is dealing with a 'real', ordinary person, the visual representations of women are of course highly stylized and as such indicate slightly different meanings of womanhood in the two settings. The Thai magazines are more likely to depict women as role models, always 'representing' a particular version of idealized femininity. Their construction of femininity through the depicted female bodies suggests that women should be slim, beautiful, nicely dressed, and have an 'ideal' look. This may impact on female readers in terms of their perception of their appearances and what they are/are not. Visual images, in this sense, can be regarded as one method women's magazines employ to convey particular notions of femininity to readers. Visual images in the UK magazines, on the other hand, tended to portray both positive and problematic images of women as was evident in the photos of alcoholic and overweight women which were never shown in the Thai magazines. One might therefore argue that the UK magazines offered a more 'realistic' portrait of ordinary women than the Thai ones. The Thai magazines operated through the presentation of 'ideals' to be aspired to by the readers, whereas the UK magazines operated more strongly with emphasizing the 'ordinariness' of the women portrayed.

I found that the real-life narratives in both the UK and Thai women's magazines may be read as in many ways antithetical to feminism. The construction of women as wives, mothers, and caregivers, for example, clearly reinforced the traditional roles

of women. Such roles also 'excluded' men from the private sphere, emphasizing the gendered division of roles. With regard to the representation of women, particular feminine traits were promoted as 'appropriate' for women. This was reflected in the visual images, especially in the Thai magazines. For instance, women's lives in both triumphal and tragic aspects were connected with happiness. Women were always shown smiling, regardless of the content of the stories. This suggests that even in the 'unpleasant' parts of their lives, women had to perform happiness and accept their fates. Despite the fact that these narratives are presented as 'real-life', there continue to be contradictions surrounding feminine attributes for women. The construction of women as invariably ideal and beautiful in the Thai magazines is obvious. By depicting women as housewives, for example, wearing makeup and high heels whilst they are at home or even while doing domestic labour, the magazines imply that women are supposed to be good-looking, stylish, and confident at all times. Considering the construction of women and the accompanying visual images in readers' narratives, it is clear that the magazines are therefore antithetical in certain ways to feminism since they indicate conventional social norms for women.

However, there is a way of reading these real-life narratives as feminist. The stories present not only conventional femininity as previously discussed but also urge women to strive for better, and, especially in the UK magazines, attempt to show them how this can be done. This is reflected in narrative content in the UK women's magazines that seek to empower women to change their lives instead of just accepting these, for instance by providing suggestions from experts at the end of the stories. This indicates that readers can improve their lives and learn from other women's experiences/mistakes. One could therefore argue that particularly in the case of the UK magazines, the stories have a feminist intent in terms of empowering women per se, and secondly that the nature of this empowerment is towards enabling women to take better control of their lives and make the most of themselves. These are classic feminist aims. In the Thai magazines this is reinforced by the fact that although culturally the expectation is still that women depend on men, in the Thai magazines (as in the UK ones) the men are completely marginalized, and changes in women's lives are not constructed as dependent on men. On one level, this is an attempt to promote women's abilities but on another level male dominance is also

edited out. The conventional gender hierarchy is thus sidelined in the context of the women's magazines. In this respect, it could be said that narratives in the UK and in the Thai magazines can be read as feminist, although portrayals of conventional femininity also persist in these magazines.

Comparing the representations of women in Thai women's magazines with those of the UK ones, it is obvious that women in the Thai magazines have only positive images in the family and the workplace – economically independent and successful. With a particular depiction of women as successful in maintaining 'ideal' lifestyles, women are considered to be more able than in the past to live their lives independently regardless of men's support – being a business owner instead of being a housewife, for example. Thai women in the magazines in this sense are not placed under male dominance but empower and widen possibilities for other female readers to change the path for their lives and the perception of what women are capable of. Although the Thai magazines do not ignore mediated images of the feminine attributes such as slim and beautiful, the magazines allow an understanding that women are not subordinate and inferior to men – men are not in control of their lives. With this respect, real-life narratives in Thai magazines can thus be regarded as feminist because of women's position in the society – they can be successful at the same level as men. Having summarized my principal findings I shall now discuss how my findings make a contribution to the field of analysing women's magazines.

#### My Contribution to the Field of Analysing Women's Magazines

My research is original in four key aspects. First, I investigate readers' narratives in women's magazines which themselves have rarely been studied. The literature on women's magazines is immense; however, its focus is usually on aspects of advertisements (Barr, 1989; Hickman et al, 1993; Krugman, 2000; Napoli et al, 2003; Stevens et al, 2003; Tiggemann et al, 2013), body depictions (Korinis et al, 1998; Utter et al, 2003; Sypeck et al, 2006; Dawson-Andoh et al, 2011; Thompson-Brenner et al, 2011), beauty and fashion (Polonijo and Carpiano, 2008), women's health (Handfield and Bell, 1996; Hill and Radimer, 1996), ageing (Lewis et al, 2011; Lumme-Sandt, 2011), sex (Cavalcanti, 1995), gender and hegemony (Massé

and Rosenblum, 1988; Crane, 1999), and feminism (Budgeon and Currie, 1995). In this, readers' narratives never figure. My work produces new knowledge by analyzing readers' narratives in selected women's magazines and showing how women were constructed in this context. Even The Personal Narratives Group's (1989) *Interpreting Women's Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives* that discusses personal narratives does not discuss such narratives in women's magazines. Its focus is oral narratives. This is just one indicator of the lack of research on readers' narratives. I analysed 654 narratives thematically: 483 narratives from UK women's magazines and 171 narratives from Thai women's magazines respectively covering the period from November 2010 – November 2011. This constitutes a large sample over an expanded period of time, and is thus more comprehensive than preceding research in terms of a comparative study of magazines between two different cultures.

My second original contribution to the field of readers' narratives is the very comparison of how UK and Thai women's magazines represent women in particular ways within specific contexts. This makes my research distinctive because such a comparative study between women's magazines in the UK and Thailand has not been conducted before. I used two sets of women's magazines: 1) *Woman and Home* (UK and Thai editions) and 2) *Woman* (UK women's magazines) and *Poo Ying* (Thai women's magazines). One point I would like to make here that I have not previously discussed is that I specifically examined the first set of magazines to clarify the differences in real-life narratives in *Woman and Home* between the UK and Thai editions. The Thai version was supposedly directly translated from the English one. However, the content of *Woman and Home* (Thai edition) was not exactly as shown in the UK version since it was adjusted to suit the Thai cultural context, eliminating for example narratives that centred on relationship problems. The second set of magazines (*Woman* and *Poo Ying*), which did not have equivalents in the other culture, were investigated to analyse the similarities and differences across the magazines. These magazines focused on readers of the same age group. Research on women's magazines commonly focuses on magazines from just one country. Winship's (1980) *Advertising in Women's Magazines 1956 -74* and

Winship's (1987) *Inside Women's Magazines*, for example, two of the best-known studies in the field of women's magazines though dated, focus on magazines in the UK such as *Cosmopolitan*, *Woman*, *Woman's Weekly*, *Woman's Own*, and *Spare Rib*. My research thus contributes new knowledge to Women's, Cultural, and Media Studies, by analysing the similarities and differences in the construction of women in readers' narratives in particular western and eastern contexts.

Thirdly, my study presents women as wives, mothers, caregivers, and white-collar workers in the construction of women in the UK and Thai women's magazines. I showed that these constructions centre on certain traits that are routinely attributed to the readers portrayed: dedication, success, happiness, independence, and confidence. The impact of these portrayals is the fortification of positive images of women. And although the readers' narratives I examined reinforced women's conventional roles within the domestic sphere as wives, mothers and caregivers, they also promoted women's images in the public sphere as workers. The depiction of women's roles, as already indicated, was conventional in many ways. It tended to involve happy endings and especially in the Thai magazines, success. The portrayal of success was significantly different in the UK and Thai magazines. In the UK ones it was depicted as a process whereas it was portrayed as a state in the Thai ones. One of my important contributions to knowledge is thus that whereas readers' narratives in UK magazines were constructed to enable other readers to 'learn' from the narratives by gaining insight into the processes behind the stories and by being given expert advice, such 'learning' was not implied in the Thai magazines where readers instead were meant to admire rather than to emulate. The process of becoming successful, for instance, remained a mystery in the Thai magazines. This means that whilst the self was constructed as a project and process in the UK magazines, it was depicted as a state in the Thai ones.

One might think of this in terms of the contrast of the construction of the concept of self in UK and Thai magazines. Women in both UK and Thai magazines are constructed in terms of the self which is considered core to women's lives. At the heart of the magazines lies the notion of women's care for their self. But the kind of self projected is quite different in many respects: the self is presented as a project in



the UK magazines, in line with contemporary theorizing on the self (e.g. Giddens, 1991, 1992) in the west, and the self as achieved ideal state in the Thai magazines. One might argue that the ‘processual self’ – as I would call it – has not (yet) arrived in Thailand. The self as a project or process in the UK magazines reveals women’s identities as capable of change through various processes that make women into agents of their lives. One of the most common ways in which this is achieved is by presenting women who construct their narrative of self through describing hard times and obstacles in their lives, and how they overcame these. This is extremely prominent in the narratives in the UK magazines. The narratives thus explain change as a process that gradually develops the self through the agency of that self. However, this kind of narrative is not found in the Thai magazines. Self in Thai women’s magazines, in contrast, is constructed as ideal and already achieved, with the process leading to this achievement being completely obscured. Thai magazines never portray women who are unsuccessful. Instead they tend to depict only successful women. This offers the readers opportunities for admiration but not for emulation. The self does not emerge as process depending on the agency of the women – quite how that successful self is achieved is never clear. Nonetheless, the ideal self can be regarded as the way in which Thai women’s magazines tell readers what and how they should be – successful.

Finally, my thematic analysis of the readers’ narratives produced a typology of dominant themes in these narratives – something not done before. This was coupled with the finding that the narratives broadly fall into two categories: tragic and triumphal. The content of the readers’ narratives provided triumphal and tragic stories based on real-life situations. Triumphal narratives presented women’s success in overcoming life crises around various issues such as health problems and businesses. Tragic stories, on the other hand, revealed women’s difficult real-life stories such as tough love and family tragedy. However, the UK magazines were more likely to feature tragic content than the Thai ones. This implies a different notion of self-disclosure depicted in UK and Thai women’s magazines. This is a particularly remarkable finding since self-disclosure has not been discussed in previous research in this way.

These four components establish the original dimensions of my research. In the next section, I shall turn to provide some suggestions based on my main findings for future research.

### Further Research

This chapter has focused on my major findings of how women are depicted in real-life narratives in selected contemporary UK and Thai women's magazines. My period of study 2010-2011, the amount of data collected, the particular sample of women's magazines, and the comparative themes of confidence-building, employment, romantic relationships and marriage, and family were all original findings and research in the context of this research field.

One of the most striking areas in the study of the representation of women is the mediated construction of female stereotypes across countries and cultures. Women in the third world, according to Chandra Mohanty (1991), have been seen as victims instead of actors in their own lives (Mohanty, 1991). Mohanty (1991) also claims that being third world includes negative characteristics such as being uneducated, poor, and sexually constrained. This 'third world victimization construct' (Mohanty, 1991) also 'applies to women in international settings beyond third world countries' (Charrad, 2010: 519). However, my main finding regarding how women in Thailand - a country which may be viewed as developing or even third world by western scholars - presented themselves reveals a different picture. My data from the Thai women's magazines indicate only a positive portrayal of women as successful and confident, for example. This reinforces the fact that women's real-life narratives in the Thai women's magazines produce a particular discourse - a mediated one which aims, not to present a wide variety of women's characteristics and situations, but to promote specific positive images of women in society. Here women do not appear as victims but as agents of their lives. These lives were, however, in many ways conventional and also possibly at odds with the experience of many women whose portrayal was excluded. I propose that by comparing actual readers' opinions towards these images and the construction of women by editors in the readers'

narratives, one might discover interesting ‘differences’ between women’s actual lives and these media representation.

Women’s magazines were viewed as expressive of women’s oppression by mid-1970s feminist scholars (McRobbie, 1991). One question one might want to ask is to what extent this is still the case and if it is, what the nature of that oppression now is. My research, implicitly, suggests that it might be tied to the individualization of women’s experiences, where structural issues are ignored in favour of constructing women as solitary agents in their own lives. It might also be tied to the image of women in conventional feminine roles. Further research is needed to engage with this point more fully.

My work engaged with a particular sub-set of women’s magazines. It would be useful to do a similar comparative study of a wider variety of women’s magazines to understand whether or not different magazines produce different images of women in their readers’ narratives. Moreover, it would also be possible to re-do this study over a different time period. This might or might not lead to different findings of the portrayal of women in women’s magazines since the magazines themselves to some extent adapt their content over time. It would also be possible finally to make comparisons between other cultures than the ones I used.

The readers’ narratives I analysed were of course editorially filtered. Their representation of women was thus a mediated notion of women within the particular cultures I examined. By using other research methods such as interviewing women in person on different topics based on the content of the women’s magazines such as confidence-building, employment, romantic relationships and marriage, and family, one might change one’s view of women and their portrayal in the magazines. A study is needed to investigate how actual readers relate to readers’ narratives in women’s magazines. But that, as they say, is another piece of research.

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