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A Place to Resist: Reevaluating Women's Magazines

Because traditional history has centered around the lives of great men or exploits on the battlefield or boardroom, women absent from those arenas have been excluded from much of history, including history of mass media and journalism. Mass media historians today need to widen history's frame to embrace the private sphere in which women have lived out their lives. A wider frame brings into focus women's magazines, a form of mass media that have epitomized women's roles in the private sphere.

One particular puzzle in the history of women's magazines in the United States is that representatives of the women's movement in the 1960s and 1970s vehemently indicted these publications as contributors to women's oppression (Friedan 1963). This indictment is hardly a surprise given that women's magazines were full of images of women fulfilling their domestic destinies with unfailing good humor. Yet there were other images too, sometimes subtle undercurrents that told of less than total acceptance of the norms for women. What was going on in these magazines?

Although history can provide a context for the answer to this question, it cannot totally solve the puzzle. Theory relating to the construction of meaning, as well as tools to extract these meanings from texts, can help. Recent poststructuralist and feminist theory provide insight to questions of contradictions or breaks in the presentation of what seems to be a dominant ideology. This paper uses such theory in its case study of *Good Housekeeping* magazine in the 1950s. It looks at specific instances where women might have seen a message that did not follow the norms for women in that decade. The key to this historical look at women's magazines is the concept of excess, the idea that some alternative meaning is left over once the mainstream message has been delivered. In other words, audiences can find in media unintended meanings to suit their own purposes.

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Conceptual Framework

The concept of excess grows out of poststructuralist thought, which explains that thought and language are constructed—not natural—and open to interpretation.[1] Rather than reflecting social reality, language is a construction site on which reality and therefore meaning are built. This construction of language, or the privilege of representing the world to itself, comes about through a struggle for domination among different meanings. Because language emerges from this on-going conflict, it has no fixed or intrinsic meaning (Weedon 1987). Joan Wallach Scott has pointed out that even though one meaning triumphs the victory may not be total. Power represents not a seamless dominant ideology, but more Michel Foucault's concept of "dispersed constellations of unequal relationships" (Scott 1988, 42). Because social power is neither unified nor coherent, other interpretations of life and experience are possible. Human agency and conceptual language provide the possibility to negotiate resistance and to reinterpret life (Scott 1988).

Jacques Derrida's work on literary deconstruction, a branch of poststructuralism, advances the idea that texts lack an overarching cohesive structure; no matter what ideology is presented in a text, it is not without flaw. The aim of deconstructive criticism is to find places at which a text might contradict its own logical system. There are points in every text that offer inherent contradictions to the main theme. As Terry Eagleton (1983, 134) summarized, "All language for Derrida displays this 'surplus' over exact meaning, is always threatening to outrun and escape the sense which tries to contain it."

Because language cannot represent a flawless ideology, the contradictions or surplus of meaning in a dominant message can allow people to resist that message. Excess is a way to point out how a text might offer contradictions to its own main theme.

Several researchers have used this concept to examine different forms of mass media. Kristen Thompson (1986, 130) used excess in her film criticism to identify "aspects of the work not contained by its unifying forces." John Fiske (1986) called this concept "semiotic excess" and used it in his discussion of how television programs appeal to wide audiences.

> The theory of semiotic excess proposes that once the ideological, hegemonic work has been performed, there is still excess meaning that escapes the control of the dominant and is thus available for the culturally subordinate to use for their own cultural-political interests. (Fiske 1986, 403)

In the search for excess, Fiske suggests looking for contradictions or openness in the text rather than for unity or closure. Two such "fissures and excesses" are irony and metaphor, irony because it opposes meanings and metaphor because the relationship between meanings is open to negotiation (Fiske 1986, 392).

Excess, though, is especially powerful when applied to women's media because it adds another dimension to products that are already places of

strength and resistance for women within a patriarchal society. Women's advice columns, mother and toddler groups, magazine fiction, and soap operas help women negotiate the conflicting demands of their existence, vent their frustrations and share a "commonsense" wisdom (Gledhill 1984). Thus the concept of excess applied to women's magazines can show how a woman might find these outlets, or spaces, and negotiate the differences between her life as it is with what she wishes it to be. For instance, Tania Modelski (1982) suggests that soap operas have special appeal to women because their format mirrors the rhythm of a woman's day with its on-going problems and interruptions.[2]

Janice Radway (1986), although she did not use the concept of excess directly, studied women renegotiating a dominant patriarchal ideology through the reading of romance novels.[3] She found that a group of women in the Midwest took time out to read the novels, thus escaping the expectations that as wives and mothers they should be available to fulfill the demands of their husbands and families. The women used the book in an unintended way: they liberated themselves from the values of male-centered romantic love that were endorsed by the books. This unintended use is another aspect of alternative meaning available in a text.

Radway (1986, 109-10) compared ideology to a patchwork quilt, a metaphor that captures the essence of excess. A quilt is pieced together by various seamstresses, none of whom have a vision of the overall pattern. In society, as in a quilt, there are "conflicts, slippages, and imperfect joinings" that can allow a reader to identify the seams and the artificiality of the construction.

Women's magazines also exhibit this pieced construction. In the 1950s, rather than calling upon a universal, "natural" definition of woman, *Good Housekeeping* created a 1950s version out of bits and pieces of available ideology, which differed greatly from a version of the 1980s or the Victorian age. This 1950s definition of woman did not leap full blown from the minds of the leaders of society to the pages of the magazine. The production of the magazine involved negotiation among its contributors: the editorial staff, writers, advertisers and readers. The end product was a magazine that defined women through the melding of all these different meanings.

Method

All of the researchers mentioned above, with the exception of Radway, have dealt with excess in visual media. But looking to the roots of excess in literary theory, a written text can contain excess as well. Magazines present an interesting case as they are really a combination of written and visual media. Along with fiction and articles come photographs and graphic illustrations. Also present are several distinct types of content: advertising, fiction, non-fiction, reader letters and material written by the editorial staff. Magazines, because they have so many contributors,

present a potentially less cohesive product than a film or novel. All these factors add up to opportunities for something to slip through the cracks. As in Radway's metaphor of the quilt, the more seams there are, the greater the chance that there will be one that doesn't line up with the others.

In *Good Housekeeping* the concept of excess also relies on the relationship between the magazine and its readers. Some researchers, such as Radway, have worked directly with audiences to find the gaps between the text and how it is read. Other authors, such as Fiske, have used an analysis of the text itself to yield locations of excess or places of resistance. Although a holistic approach is ideal (including both the text and the audience), the limitations of working with the 1950s is obvious. A researcher can easily consult the magazines of the 1950s, but not the audience that read them. True, there are women living today who subscribed to *Good Housekeeping*, but time and circumstance have intervened to cloud the perceptions they had 40 years ago.

However, setting excess in a background of history helps to overcome the lack of audience input. Context helps to balance the 1990s vantage point of the researcher. To explain each example of excess, I related the example to both the historical context of the 1950s and to an opposing image in the same issue. In some cases I was not able to find a corresponding example within the magazine, but I included an example from another issue. Most readers of *Good Housekeeping* had seen more than one issue in their lifetime and thus had experienced "normal" content for the magazine. In the search for excess I used the historian's method of "reading, sifting, weighing, comparing and analyzing the evidence," performing content assessment rather than the more quantitative technique of content analysis (Marzolf 1978, 15).

In *Good Housekeeping* excess for women might have been: challenges to traditional roles and expectations of women, women's unhappiness or dissatisfaction, discussion of working outside the home, acknowledgement of women's sexual needs, or questioning of the sexual double standard for men and women. (French 1978). *Good Housekeeping* could have presented excess through Fiske's (1986) devices: contradiction, either in the structure or the content of the magazines; irony, metaphor or humor; expression of alternative viewpoints, even if they were disparaged or discarded in the end.

Good Housekeeping is a good choice for a case study in women's magazines because by 1950 it had been arriving in women's homes for 65 years. First published in 1885 with the motto, "A Family Journal Conducted in the Interest of the Higher Life of the Household," the magazine also spawned the Good Housekeeping Institute in 1902, which operated a laboratory that tested products advertised by *Good Housekeeping*. These products carried the *Good Housekeeping* "seal of approval" which guaranteed satisfaction or "money back" (Mott 1965). In 1950, *Good Housekeeping* had a circulation of more than three million copies and

ranked as one of the top three U.S. women's magazines (N.W. Ayer and Sons 1950, 1960).

This study includes seven issues of *Good Housekeeping* during the decade 1950 to 1959: March 1950; April 1951; May 1953; January 1954; August 1955; September 1956 and November 1958. The choice of months began randomly with March 1950. Although not an exhaustive sample, these issues provided a start in establishing the phenomenon of excess.

Historical Context

By 1950 the home had been the special province of women for more than 100 years. The idea of the home as women's sphere appeared in the 1820s as men left home for the jobs created by industrialization (Strasser 1982, 181). After World War II Frederick Crawford, head of the National Association of Manufacturers, reinforced this outlook by declaring "too many women should not stay in the labor force. The home is the basic American institution" (Chafe 1972, 176). Public opinion in *Fortune* polls after the war agreed with Crawford. Both men and women favored a wife working only if her husband could not support her (*Fortune*, August 1946). Albert Ellis (1962, 232) wrote, "There seems to be no principle of the American folklore of sex more firmly entrenched and more widely accepted than the principle that women's place is in the home."

An influential work from the late 1940s helped to popularize the equation between women and home, setting boundaries for women. *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex* (1947) by Marynia Farnham, a psychiatrist, and Frederick Lundberg, a journalist, attacked feminism and set rigid limits to female and male behavior based on the Freudian idea of anatomy as destiny.

A pair of articles from *American Mercury* in 1949 drew the battle lines of the debate in the mass media about women's place. "Women are Household Slaves" (Stern 1949) squared off against "Women Have Nothing to Kick About" (Root 1949). Meanwhile, during the late 1940s and early 1950s, the location of homes and of women's place changed as well; American life (at least white, middle-class life) began to relocate to the suburbs. During the 1950s, 83 percent of the population growth occurred in the suburbs so that by 1960, almost a third of the total population lived in suburban areas (Oakley 1986). The years between 1945 and 1965 represented an era of "unprecedented growth and prosperity" (Rubin 1982). More than 11 million new homes appeared in the urban fringes and 4,000 families a day were leaving the cities for the new ranch and split-level subdivisions (Rubin 1982).

Consumer spending after World War II centered on goods for the home. From 1945 to 1950, consumer spending increased 60 percent, but spending on household furnishings and appliances rose 240 percent. Almost the entire increase in the gross national product in the 1950s came

from spending on consumer durables and residential construction (May 1988).

Several factors contributed to the suburban explosion. One was the general growth in population. The baby boom that began in the late 1940s and continued into the 1950s meant that families needed more living space. The federal government helped to make home buying possible with loans available through the Veterans Administration and the Federal Housing Authority. Both federal and state governments constructed roads and highways that made commuting from workplace to the suburbs possible. The automobile industry offered affordable transportation by turning out millions of cars. William J. Levitt perfected inexpensive, mass-produced houses that alleviated the post-war housing shortage and allowed millions of people to buy homes for the first time (Oakley 1986). The number of home owners increased by nine million in the 1950s to a total of 32.8 million in 1960 (Kaledian 1984).

The suburbs provided a different environment than the urban or rural areas of previous decades. The population was generally homogeneous, consisting of couples between the ages of 25 and 35 with one or two small children. Very few minorities, elderly, single or childless people inhabited the major housing developments (Oakley 1986). The nuclear family became a discrete unit separated from family or old neighborhood ties, which often led to the isolation of women who did not work outside the home (Rupp and Taylor 1987).

This lack of traditional ties led suburban dwellers to take action. According to a 1956 book on the new corporate culture of "belonginess" in America, "organization man" was trying to develop new roots in the suburbs to replace those left behind (Whyte 1956). People joined and organized churches, PTAs, swimming pool clubs, bridge clubs, political organizations, civic clubs, writing clubs, ceramic clubs and baby-sitting clubs (Oakley 1986). Interest in organized religion reached a high mark in the late 1950s with 63 percent of the population belonging to institutionalized religions compared with less than 50 percent in 1940 (Miller and Nowak 1977).

The emphasis on the home as women's proper realm left women who worked outside the home in a precarious position. Working wives and mothers ignored warnings by such experts as anthropologist Ashley Montagu (1958), who endorsed the axiom that a woman with a husband and small children could not hold a full-time job and be a good homemaker. Talcott Parsons (1949, 223), a respected sociologist, concurred. A man derived his status from his occupation, but "The woman's fundamental status is that of her husband's wife, the mother of his children." This clear-cut assertion was small consolation to the growing number of working women. By 1960, 32 percent of married women were working outside the home (Oakley 1986).

Once in the job market, women found a sexual division between labor and pay. Typical "female" occupations included teacher, nurse, social

worker, secretary, telephone operator, or assembly-line worker rather than high-paying or high-prestige occupations such as medicine, business management, law or higher education (Oakley 1986). Women were also earning about two-thirds the salaries of their male counterparts (Landis 1955).

Working or not, women were supposed to marry. This goal became more difficult during the 1950s because females now outnumbered males for the first time in U.S. history. Also, women who put off marriage for education or a career were severely handicapped in the race to the altar. A 30-year-old woman had little more than a 50 percent chance of getting married, a 45-year-old, less than 10 percent (Landis 1955, 206-07). The message was clear: women who waited were left waiting.

Higher education had another effect. A mother of a Barnard student warned her daughter that too much education might make her so intellectual that no man would be good enough for her (Chafe 1972, 213). A popular book about marriage reported a common reaction to the problem; "Research on college dating shows that the bright co-ed will often deliberately 'act dumb' to keep from outdoing her less brilliant date" (Landis 1955, 45).

However, women needed to do more than "act dumb" to catch a man. A guide book entitled *Win Your Man and Keep Him* recommended good looks, personality and cheerful deference (May 1988). Youth and beauty were important for women to achieve romantic love culminating in marriage. In 1956, women spent $1.3 billion on cosmetics, $660 million at beauty parlors, $400 million on soaps and electric beauty aids, and $65 million on losing weight (Oakley 1986).

FINDINGS

Challenge to Women's Place

Magazines in the 1950s offered women the advice of "experts." Women could count on someone (usually male) in a magazine to tell them what to do in the private sphere, as well as to articulate why this was their territory in the first place. For instance, Leonard Wallace Robinson (1962, 162) told women that they were "womb-centered," which meant they were "husband-centered and family-centered as well." But women often realized that the advice didn't correspond to their personal reality. There were some bugs in the system.

A sterling example was a column that advised women on their relationships with their husbands. Samuel Grafton, a journalist, offered the first installment of "Man Talk: An Intelligent Woman's Monthly Guide to a Reasonably Happy Marriage" in the October 1952 issue of *Good Housekeeping*. His monthly column gave women ingenious solutions to trivial yet aggravating pitfalls of married life. Grafton's ostensible claim to ex-

pertise was that he was a man and could offer a man's point of view. His column offered some possibilities for excess.

Grafton advised with humor, often portraying a well-intentioned but inept husband and a patient and problem-solving wife. In January 1954 Grafton presented the woeful case of a man who didn't do "little" repairs around the house. Although he tried to be "masterful," proposing a whole plan for the garden, the poor dear never got around to ordering the bulbs in time for spring planting. Grafton, of course, came to the rescue. He told the wife, "The trouble is, you haven't figured out your proper role in relation to such a man. A businessman would know at once what to do." The wife should become the executive, organizing the work, keeping the jobs separate and small. Praise was also important. This experience would give the wife an appreciation of why executives earned so much money (Grafton 1954, 42).

"Man Talk"'s portrayal of men as not all-knowing and masterful opened up the possibility for women to claim some expertise themselves. Grafton broadened women's roles when he told his readers to act as executives. Even more provocative was his statement that women would be able to understand why executives were highly paid. If a woman could successfully organize work and direct a man who had a poor performance record, why couldn't she transfer that ability to other spheres?

Grafton's column ran unchallenged for a year and a half until *Good Housekeeping* began to run a response written by Felicia Quist, titled "Back Talk" (January 1954). The title was interesting in that it implied the flaunting of authority, as in a child "talking back" to a parent. Quist offered comments on Grafton's methods; she also used humor to make her point. Quist began her first column with an endorsement of Grafton, but as the reader soon found out, "Man Talk" wasn't infallible. Quist decided to take her reluctant handyman of a husband in hand, and laid out various projects every night for a week. "By Thursday night, when Andy came home and saw the nice new coils of clothesline for the back yard, he blew his top." Weary of home repair Andy ordered his wife to call the local handyman. Quist said, "It's been heaven ever since" (44). Quist undercut Grafton's credibility as an "expert"; his advice worked, but for the wrong reason.

Women also expressed exasperation over their relationships with men in "You Are Not Alone," by Edith Kingstone (1956). The author solicited readers' letters about their experiences. For instance, a woman frantically looking for her check book had this exchange with her husband:

> "Well"—he says, in the relaxed way of one who has the answer at his fingertips. You wait for his next words. He smiles pleasantly. "Where" he asks, "did you put it?" You'll notice that he is operating on the theory that you really do know the answer but are too simple-minded to realize it without assistance. If this is your problem, you are not alone. It happens to everybody. (Kingstone 1956, 158)

Men were expected to have the answers, but women had to face the fact that men were not all-knowing fonts of wisdom just by virtue of being male. Women might be better off thinking for themselves.

More typical advice to women had to do with keeping their thoughts to themselves. The value of silence was presented to readers of *Good Housekeeping* "Memo on Manners," a poem directed at young women in relationships with young men. Illustrated with a photograph showing two young women listening raptly to a young man, the poem congratulated young women for their restraint in not interrupting a man waxing eloquently:

> The joke we told
> May be a bore,
> Because you've heard
> It all before;
> So thanks, sweet lass,
> For playing dumb
> And letting us
> Sound humorsome. (Le Barre 1953, 8)

Coming to grips with the Korean War, however, required women to do more than play dumb. *Good Housekeeping* presented a woman's point of view in "Women and the New War" (Drury 1951). Articles appeared under this title each month written by women who were affected by the war in some way. One article featured a wife who was determined to "grow," (take French lessons, learn how to play the piano) while her husband was away: "And so I will live now in ways that are open to me. I will give something out of my store by service and I will add to it by study" (Zahn 1951, 67). Another wife was just as determined to stick to her husband's side. The author of "I Followed My Husband to an Army Post" (Faust 1951) remembered how her parents' marriage was jeopardized by her mother's attachment to civic activities that kept her from her husband's side. These viewpoints appeared side-by-side in the magazine, one of a woman who was willing to make the most of life without her husband and the other who considered that she had no life without her spouse.

Even the food section of *Good Housekeeping* offered encouragement for a woman without a man. Nora Holland (April 1951, 294) declared that she was her own favorite dinner guest. "And why, I asked myself, should it depress me to dine with me?" The short story, "Girl With a Briefcase," represented a more typical reaction (Lyons 1956, 87). "Rhonda Templeton, unmarried, had a dear and constant companion, her lover, her better half, her briefcase," introduced 34-year-old Rhonda who lost her man to a woman both younger and more endowed with "feminine" virtues. Rhonda inspired pity because she had to settle for a briefcase rather than a man. Yet the food columnist was a woman who was willing to consider the possibility of the pleasure of her own company. Food for thought again.

Contradiction in Careers

Examples of women working outside the home appeared every month in *Good Housekeeping* because many of the staff members were women. A long-running feature titled "Who's Who Cooks," for example, often spotlighted magazine staff and their favorite recipes. April 1951 featured associate art editor Gloria Griffin who "leads a doubly energetic life: She holds an enormously responsible job—and keeps a charming house for her husband and ten-month-old son" (10). On the one hand, female staff members editing content intended for women made eminent sense. Who else would understand the concerns and problems of women? The irony, of course, was that *Good Housekeeping* was a magazine dedicated to the domestication of women, to the celebration of what went on in the home, not the office. Here were women in business telling women at home how to make the most of their lives—at home.

A visual representation of this situation occurred in the April 1951 issue within two opposing pages (26-27). On the first page was an advertisement for cake mix with a "Springtime hint for brides (new and old)" that men love Swans Down cakes and the "girls" who bake them. A very "feminine" woman, complete with cleavage and flowers in her hair, clasped her hands beneath her chin, while two birds hovered over her head a la Disney. In contrast to this image was a serious-looking woman in a white coat on the opposite page (Bien 1951). She was, the reader was led to believe, a technician at the *Good Housekeeping* Bureau, performing an analysis on packaged food (perhaps even the cake mix advertised on the previous page). The magazine presented two opposing roles to women: making a cake or analyzing it.

In April 1951, *Good Housekeeping* began the series "American Career Girls," which featured a working woman every month. April's "girl" was Carolyn Workman, a reporter for the *Times-Star* in Cincinnati, Ohio. Workman was one of the highest paid reporters on the staff, earning $100 a week, and was independent enough to move into her own apartment (at age 25!) even though her parents were afraid of what the neighbors would think. Workman said that if she moved to another town no one would think it strange for her to live on her own. "I see no reason why I should leave the city and career I like in order to acquire the independence I want" (Candiz 1951, 56). Workman represented an unusual case of a woman not only successful on her job, but also able to live independently and happily without a man.

Another career woman who appeared in the pages of *Good Housekeeping* in November 1958 was Maria Callas, the opera singer (Jessup 1958). She hardly conformed to the 1950s ideal of the sweet, compliant woman, but she did have redeeming qualities. "Tempestuous, unreliable, selfish, and savage she may be, but she has another quality, guts—brassy, brutal, gorgeous guts" (78). Her marriage was also unusual because her husband sold his business and became Callas' manager. What a contrast to Talcott

Parson's vision of woman who derived her status from her husband, or the young woman who played dumb to impress a date.

Young women made an appearance as career women in the August 1955 magazine, a departure from their usual role in the publication as the target of advice on how to be lady-like or get along with parents. *Good Housekeeping* used little girls to address careers for females in "Future Women of the Year," a back-to-school fashion spread that predicted future careers for girls ages four to 14. Photographs of little girls wearing crisp school dresses carried captions such as, "She's a journalist—She was the first writer to win five Pulitzer Prizes in a row, the first reporter to cover a trip to the moon both ways . . . " (*Good Housekeeping*, August 1955, 196)—pretty heady stuff for the sex that was supposed to stay home and have babies. Occupations featured in the spread included: executive, designer, violinist, world traveler, nature photographer, dog breeder and stunt pilot. The device of endorsing careers for little girls, who of course were not yet capable of carrying out these plans, provided a safe fantasy of what a woman might have been or might still want to be, as well as a wish for a daughter's future. This wishful quality evoked a Gallup Poll where women said they were happy, yet wanted more for their daughters (O'Neill 1986, 41).

Beyond Youth and Beauty

The September 1956 issue of *Good Housekeeping* had some twists on the theme of youth and beauty. On page four was a picture of a woman who looked as though she could be someone's grandmother (Weston 1956). But no, she was Ella Parker, assistant fashion editor. A short profile revealed that she enjoyed the theater and weekends in the country. Parker was a woman who had a career in a glamour profession and an interesting life even though she was neither young nor glamorous. Much more typical was the advertisement for Primrose House cosmetics, "preferred by the blonde and beautiful Anita Ekberg co-starring in RKO's 'Back from Eternity'" (*Good Housekeeping*, September 1956, 220).

Avon cosmetics advertised almost monthly in *Good Housekeeping*, usually endorsed by a glamorous film star such as Claudette Colbert or Loretta Young. In September 1956 (156-57), the "celebrity" was Mrs. Georgia Neese Clark Gray, treasurer of the United States from 1949 to 1953 and in 1956, president of the Richland State Bank near Topeka, Kansas. Even though a younger, more conventional model occupied the whole page opposite Gray, the fact remained that a bank president was offered as a possible role model. Another more subtle element is that the Avon representative posing with Gray was also pursuing a career.

In spite of the millions of dollars spent on weight reduction in the United States, Katherine Hillyer (1955) denounced diets in "The Whole World is Going to Love Fat Old Me." With tongue in cheek, Hillyer said:

> I am assuming that the adage "All the world loves a fat man" applies with equal distinction to women (We vote don't we?), but actually I am less concerned with

> global admiration than I am with certain physiological improvements of my own. I want to stop this cowardly quivering when passing a bakery. I want to enjoy a movie again, untortured and undistracted by the heady odors of forbidden popcorn. I'm going to cease staring at a mashed potato with indecent yearning. It's degrading. (1955, 58)

Using humor, Hillyer brought up several points. She referred to equal rights, but as a question not as a statement of fact. Appearance was not the only area of double standard in the United States in the 1950s. Different criteria applied for men and women in sexual behavior and in employment as well. Hillyer also said that dieting was degrading just as any kind of slavish conformity would be. She was able to reject the current beauty standards because she used humor, a device that a woman in the 1950s would have had to seen through to get the point. Of course, not all women could follow Hillyer's anti-diet, and an advertisement (*Good Housekeeping*, August 1955, 149) in this issue showed a slim and smiling consumer of Diet Delight dietetic foods.

Concern with beauty found itself face to face one month with the realities of the Korean War. The placement of "Women and the New War" with "Magic Make-up and Personal Color Chart" on two opposite pages could have created an opportunity for excess (*Good Housekeeping*, April 1951, 68-69). The women whose lives had been changed by the conflict in Korea had other things to think about than the most flattering shades of make-up. The magic they hoped for would stop the clash between countries, not colors. Here women could compare the reality of their own situation with the idealized glamour and easy solutions offered in the beauty section of *Good Housekeeping*.

Discussion

Good Housekeeping offered its readers the accepted roles of wives and mothers in dozens of articles and advertisements. But in opposition to these images, women were also offered some small spaces for resistance and alternative readings of their lives through moments of excess. The examples that I have found suggest that *Good Housekeeping* did not offer a homogeneous presentation of women's roles and thoughts. The magazine provided some contradictions, irony, and humor that provided moments of relief when women didn't have to be perfect housekeepers and mothers. These moments came out of a recognition that this posture was ludicrous and unobtainable, just as Felicia Quist repeatedly demonstrated that Grafton's ideally reasonable conversations between spouses never happened as planned at her house.

These moments of resistance were fragile and tentative in contrast to the active challenges and protests that followed in the women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s. And after taking these few faltering steps in the 1950s, women's magazines failed to use their status as women's media to advocate women's rights during the following decades. Researchers of the

women's movement, in fact, have indicted women's magazines for making the fight for women's rights more difficult (Rupp and Taylor 1987).

But these flickers of discontent in *Good Housekeeping* in some ways foreshadowed consciousness raising, an educational and organizing program of the women's movement. During the late 1960s and 1970s, women met in groups to examine their own lives and to use this knowledge to challenge and resist old ideas about women (Sarachild 1975). Consciousness raising increased women's awareness about a constructed reality that had little to do with their own experience. It allowed women to acknowledge issues, such as denying their intelligence in male company, and make them part of the agenda for change. Realizing and questioning the source of oppression was a first step. *Good Housekeeping* during the 1950s did raise some questions about accepted norms and provided a forum, although a narrow one, for women to share their experiences. Hillyer questioned the tyranny of diets and Quist "talked back" to a male expert. Edith Kingstone's assertion, "You are not alone. It happens to everyone," was an embryonic recognition that women could gain strength through sharing of their daily lives.

But as much as Felicia Quist, Carolyn Workman, and Georgia Gray offered a different way to define "woman," readers might have hoped for more. Too bad that Georgia Gray didn't occupy a full page in the Avon advertisement instead of the younger, more "beautiful" model. And how more effective would have been a fashion spread featuring real women who held the fantasy jobs that the little girls played at. But the fact that there was a bank president in a cosmetics advertisement brings up Gledhill's (1984) point that it was possible for women to negotiate within and derive meaning from an existing, oppressive structure. Featuring Gray and little career models was just one way in which women in the 1950s were able to get around some of the restrictions of the system.

Not surprisingly, several possibilities for excess were missing from the magazines that I examined. I found no discussion of sexuality, either of women's sexual needs or any indication of escape from a sexual double standard. Such an omission is not surprising given *Good Housekeeping's* reaction to Alfred Kinsey's report on female sexuality in 1953, which was to ignore it. The only sexual material was an article on endometriosis, which discussed the condition in relation to childbearing (Davis 1950).

These seven issues also contained little content dealing with women's unhappiness or discontent. *Good Housekeeping* was an optimistic publication. Its role in a woman's life was as a problem-solver. Very little escaped unresolved within the pages of *Good Housekeeping*. Thus, the story of the woman determined to make the most of the separation from her husband during the Korean War was typical in its matter-of-fact approach to a serious problem. Also absent was any direct acknowledgement or reference to women's rights or equality. Humor and satire seemed to be the way these topics were presented as in "Back Talk" and "You Are Not Alone."

By looking toward the future I was able to answer a question that underscored my research for this project. Why is excess or the fact that women resisted the patriarchal culture of the 1950s important? Several writers I encountered, including Janice Radway and Linda Williams, suggested an answer in the possibility of transforming the moments of

contradiction into active resistance. Now that we know that excess existed in the 1950s, how can we use that knowledge to change the processes that define gender today? Answering this question will take more study, including attention to ways in which women read and produce magazines today. But that's another story.

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NOTES

1. Poststructuralism is a general term for a body of literary theory and criticism that took shape in the 1970s. Poststructuralism draws on work in several disciplines: the linguistics of Ferdinand Saussure and Emile Benviste, the theory of ideology of Louis Althusser, the psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida's theory of difference and deconstruction, and Michel Foucault's theory of discourse and power.

2. Other research on women's media and resistance includes Linda Williams (1984) and Mary Ellen Brown (1989).

3. Radway defines ideology as "a system for coding reality" (1986, 106).

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