

**TEXTUAL/SEXUAL REPRESENTATION OF 'LANKA WOMAN' IN 'GUYS ONLY'
MAGAZINES: A GENDER RE-READING OF TWO GLOSSY GENDER-SPECIFIC
MONTHLY MAGAZINES OF SRI LANKA**

“Feminism is the radical notion that women are human beings.” - Cheri Kramerae
A Feminist Dictionary

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INTRODUCTION

Feminist researchers and scholars argue that the identity of the female has been conceptualized on the basis of male parameters. One of the primary domains where this conceptualization is nurtured and prolonged is in the written text. Written text could be used to transmit (pervasive?) ideology under the pretext of cultural practice. English literature is no exception. English literature – and for that matter western philosophy and psychology – provides ample examples where the feminine consciousness is imprisoned in carefully constructed texts that are created by males for audiences who have similar expectations. The researchers Gilbert and Guber (2000) argue in their classic *Madwoman in the Attic* that women are virtually trapped in mainstream written discourse that is male dominated. A woman they say is ‘penned up’ or ‘penned in’ by man... *As a sort of ‘sentence’ man has spoken, she has herself been ‘sentenced.’* This textual prison, which is a reflection of the socio-economic-political condition of women beyond the text, is a carefully guarded prison. An outright rejection of this given image of feminine consciousness only results in further aggravation of the issue for women. Chesler (2005) argues that the moment women partially or totally reject their patriarchal sex-role stereotype they are considered ‘mad’. Chesler suggests that women commit a blood sacrifice to perpetuate the species. This sacrifice is raised to the level of divinity in the mainstream cultural discourse whose ultimate arbitrator is male. Chesler thus goes on to argue that: “Women are impaled on the cross of self sacrifice. Unlike men, they are categorically denied the experience of cultural supremacy and individuality. In different ways, some women are driven mad by this,” (Chesler, 2005, p.91). Feminist researchers also agree that there is a tendency for women who do not have an acute awareness of their repression in texts to unconsciously live up to the ‘ideal womanhood’ as positioned by male discourse.

In the light of these arguments the representation of women in Sri Lankan texts is called into question. Sri Lanka has experienced a resurgence of locally produced literature in English and English media magazines over the past few years. How do these texts represent women? Is she an already ‘male governed’ image? Does her representation perpetuate existing cultural practices which tend to privilege the male sex? Is she unwittingly committing herself to this already “given” picture? On the other hand, how are males represented in texts written by and written for females? Are males represented as opposite to an already existing female representation? This research sets out to answer the above questions by undertaking a corpus analysis of the two of Sri Lanka’s popular glossy magazines ‘GO’ (Guys Only) and ‘LW’ (Lanka Woman).

METHODOLOGY

The methodology involves a textual re-reading of both GO and LW with the focus on both male and female gender representation. Both magazines would be read for gender representations of

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both male and female. All magazines that were released during the first half of 2011 would be utilized for this purpose. The following features of the magazines would be analyzed for gender representation:

- Editorials
- Cartoons or text-visual driven humor
- Photographs
- Fiction – short stories and serialized fiction
- Advertisements
- Magazine covers

All features of semiotics on the magazine cover, layout, photographs that would perpetuate gender specificity would be noted down as well.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the qualitative study demonstrated that there is a strong power relation in gender representation in GO and LW. While the male image was always presented as frontier-crossing, career-seeking and the privileged or the preferred sex, the female was represented as passive, home-bound mother figure. This representation would lead to the pertinent questions: Are these magazines (consciously or unconsciously) perpetuating a patriarchal cultural practice? Do they represent a reality that is existing, or are they creating a reality in line with existing norms of culture? This researcher will seek answers to these questions through personal interviews with the editors of the magazines?

CONCLUSIONS

The research reiterates the findings of the feminist scholars and researchers that feminine conscious is under a male dominated imperialism and that the feminist vision of disrupting and modifying such discourse needs practical concrete action.

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