

REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN CONTEMPORARY BANGLADESHI PRINT MEDIA



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**REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN
CONTEMPORARY BANGLADESHI
PRINT MEDIA**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION.....	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.....	ii
PREFACE.....	iii
CHAPTER1: INTRODUCTION.....	1-4
1.1: The Problem Statement	03
1.2: Objective of the Study	03
1.3: Significance of the Study.....	3-4
CHAPTER 2: THEORIES USED FOR AD ANALYSIS	5-19
CHAPTER 3: PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN CONTEMPORARY BANGLADESHI MAGAZINES AND NEWSPAPERS.....	20-28
CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION.....	29-31
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	32-37

DECLARATION

I do hereby declare that this work has been written entirely by me except for the references and quotations which I have acknowledged duly.

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PREFACE

Media plays a vital role in our lives. We can hardly imagine life now without newspapers, television, radio, and magazines. But because media is an umbrella term and lots of things come under it, this paper will deal with only the Bangladeshi print media, especially newspapers and magazines. Fashion magazines such as *Mirror*, *Canvas* and *Splash* will be used here to analyze the portrayal of women in the media. Weekly sublets (*Lifestyle* and *Korcha*) that come out every Tuesday with *Daily Star* and *Ittefaq* will also be analyzed. Whenever we glance at a newspaper or a magazine we see how women are projected in these advertisements. Most women are viewed as sex objects and are used by the media for the consumption of products. This may seem to be a harmless way of promoting a certain product but these sexually provocative advertisements impact on society. The chapter, “Theories Used for Magazine and Newspaper Analysis” will discuss literary theories that can be used to analyze ads in the print media. The next chapter titled, “Content Analysis and Portrayal of Women in Contemporary Bangladeshi Magazines and Newspapers” will discuss in detail how women are being objectified and stereotyped. That chapter will also deal with readers’ reactions to these ads. Through the ads the print media sets standards for women and decide how a woman should look, dress or behave. Earlier women who possessed a good figure and were fleshy was considered beautiful but now we see that the slim women with ‘size-zero’ figure are considered hot and pretty, revealing how the definition of feminine beauty have changed over the years. However, the portrayal of women in the print media is quite degrading as they are being depicted as a commercial commodity in the process.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This paper will explore how the women of Bangladesh are being projected in the media and the impact this has on audiences and readers. When we talk about the media, a lot of things come to our mind, for example, television, newspaper, magazines, movie, music videos, radio, etc. But this paper will only analyze some Bangladeshi newspapers and magazines as they represent the print media. Some theories will be used to study these newspapers and magazines ads.

We are well aware of the fact that media plays an important role in our daily lives. To a certain extent it shapes our life and society. It is quite influential and has some responsibility towards people. But how responsible are they in carrying out their duties? To answer this question I have chosen three local and popular magazines *Splash*, *Mirror* and *Canvas* and two newspapers (*Daily Star* and *Ittefaq*).

Since these magazines and newspapers are fashion and beauty oriented they have lot to do with women. These fashion magazines will enable me to show how the media project women in our country. As far as newspapers are concerned, I will only take a look at the weekly sublets- *Lifestyle* (*Daily Star*) and *Korcha* (*Ittefaq*). These sublets basically highlight new fashion trends, city shops, brands and perfumes as well as home décor, recipes and, last but not the least, new, trendy fast food places and lounges. Whenever we talk about women, all the above things come into our mind— shopping malls, home furnitures, fashion, clothes, perfumes and food.

The people in the media inevitably stereotypes women and present them as sexual objects. The essay ‘The Media Portrayal of Women’ (2007), talks about Catherine Luther

research on how women are portrayed in the media and found that women tend to be sexualized in them. Luther says that, when we look at the ads portraying women, we only see their body in parts rather than their full figure. In “Making Sense out of Sex Stereotypes in Advertising: A Feminist Analysis of Assumptions.” Karlene Ferrante says that “rather than reflecting stereotypes which exists in society, ads actively promote them in order to sell more products” (“Ferrante, 1988). In the essay “Women’s Depiction by the Mass Media”, Gaye Tuchman says that “the media’s deleterious role models, when internalized, prevent and impede female accomplishments. They also encourage both women and men to define women in terms of men (as sex objects) or in the context of the family (as wives and mothers)” (Tuchman, 1979:531).

In fashion magazines women are mostly portrayed as slim, beautiful, seductive and with full make-up on, which suggests that only attractive women are allowed to survive in society while less fashion conscious women are to be rejected (David Buckingham and Sara Bragg:2004). Too much emphasis is given on their appearance; their exterior beauty gets priority over inner beauty. Luther talks about the emphasis on being slim. She says that the media portrayal of women has a certain influence on young girls. She points out that often young women and girls look at newspaper and magazines ads and they place more importance on their looks rather than on trying to develop themselves and be assertive and creative (The Media Portrayal of Women, 2007). The way girls and women in magazine and newspaper ads are depicted is quite the opposite from the way we expect to see them. We all know that Bangladeshi culture is quite conservative, though over the years a lot of things have changed. Earlier a woman’s place

was always inside the house but now things are quite different. Our culture is quite different from what we see on the surface. There is an element of 'fusion' in our culture for we have a bit of our own culture, a bit of the Indian one and a lot of western culture, and when we mix all of them we have a hybrid culture.

1.1 Problem Statement

The capitalists' use the media to represent women in a stereotypical manner and as sex objects. It sets standards for women which they feel compelled to follow. People reading newspapers and fashion magazines are often influenced by representation of models and this has an adverse effect on young women. Magazines such as *Splash*, *Canvas* and *Mirror* read by teenagers and young women make them keep up with the latest trends. The younger generation tries to imitate the skinny models they see though they are completely made-up. They go to any length to be slim and be like them and in the process they lose sight of their own identity and individuality.

1.2 Objective of the Study

This study will help me to find out how women often get exploited in the media. As I discussed earlier, the people in the media uses women and focuses on their bodies to sell commodities thereby victimizing women. Women reading magazines and newspaper ads are targeted. This study aims to show the extent to which women are becoming victims. It intends to demonstrate how young women, who are reading these magazine and newspaper ads, often unwillingly become victims.

1.3 Significance of the Study

It is hoped that the study will be of use to a lot of people. We will be able to find out how we get manipulated by the print media. We will also find out how the capitalists' uses the media to limit the role of women and to set standards for them, and how in trying to conform to those standards they end up losing their individuality. Through this study one will be able to find out how women are getting abused in the media. This research will help us to find out things that we did not know and will enlighten many and give them reasons to ponder upon certain things instead of blindly devouring fashion magazine and newspaper ads.

CHAPTER 2: THEORIES USED TO ANALYZE MAGAZINE AND NEWSPAPER ADS

In this chapter I will discuss some of the theories related to the media to analyze the depiction of women in the media. These theories will help us do an in-depth analysis of the way women are portrayed in the media and will also shed some light on other not-so-obvious issues. The theories that I am going to use here are discussed below.

Laura Mulvey's (1975) theory of 'male gaze' is one of the most useful theorization of the way women become objects of male desire in the cinema and how females are represented in this medium to give visual pleasure to men. To her, the male gaze is very much related to the concept of scopophilia. Scopophilia is sexual pleasure derived from looking at sexually stimulating scenes. This concept was used earlier by both Freud and Lacan. Mulvey cites Freud to note that scopophilia does not simply mean the pleasure of looking since it takes 'other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze' (Mulvey, 1975). According to Mulvey, women are looked at and displayed, and their appearance has a strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote 'to-be-looked-at-ness'. Mulvey applies her theory to an analysis of films. Though it was introduced as part of film theory, the term can and is often applied to other kinds of media. It is often used to analyze advertisements, television, and the fine arts. This concept of "gaze" has been applied in the framework of feminist theory, where it helps feminists deal with how men look at women. Mulvey's theory enables one to see how women in the print media become victims of the male gaze and objects of desire.

Women in magazine and newspaper ads are portrayed in a way that gives visual pleasure to men. It is almost always the females who are being gazed upon by the male for the male exhibits power over a woman. This form of the gaze can be the sexual gaze of a man directed at a woman (the so-called "making a pass"). The male gazing upon the female makes the female feel uncomfortable. However, this may not necessarily be the case; many societies have women who enjoy being gazed upon and models and beauty pageants are all being gazed upon. Women who are working in the media in particular want to get attention from people. For them it is not a problem if someone is gazing at them to obtain pleasure.

The magazines and newspapers that I worked on featured quite a few revealing pictures of women. Since these magazines are both fashion and lifestyle magazines, they are read by almost everyone. I have seen men flipping through the pages of these magazines to pass their time, especially when they are waiting somewhere. In waiting areas sometimes these types of lifestyle and fashion magazines and newspapers are kept so that people can take a look at them and spend their time. Therefore people "gaze" at the models in magazines and newspapers. Looking at these models wearing revealing clothes gives men a kind of visual pleasure.

The "gaze" that I am talking about is not always a negative thing because models and beauty pageants enjoy being gazed upon. But exclusively sensual and sexual portrayal of women sends negative messages to readers. They feel that they have to dress in a sexually appealing way in order to get attention and become objects of desire to the opposite sex.

Figure 1: *Lifestyle*-April 27, 2010 [Vol.9, Issue: 46, p. 4]



This picture shows clearly a woman sitting on top of some luggage. Most of her body parts are exposed. Her legs and hands are fully bare and here she has definitely been made into an object of 'desire' and also an object of the 'male gaze'

The depiction of women in lifestyle magazines can also be studied with the help of what is known as 'theory of objectification'. This theory is essential in feminist studies, as the sexual-objectification and self-objectification of women is believed to influence social gender roles and inequalities between sexes. It is based on the principle that girls and women develop their primary view of their physical selves from observations of others. These observations can take place in the media or through personal experience.

Through a blend of expected and actual exposure, females are socialized to objectify their own physical characteristics from a third person perception. Women and girls develop an expected physical appearance for themselves, based on observations of others; and are aware that others are likely to observe them as well. In the book *Objectification Theory. Toward Understanding Women's Lived Experiences and Mental Health Risks* Barbara L. Fredrickson and Tomi-Ann Roberts talks about self-objectification. According to them, self-objectification make women evaluate themselves based on their physical appearance because they feel that people judge them by their outward appearance. Women thus become self-conscious and start monitoring their own appearance (Fredrickson and Roberts, 2007). Fredrickson and Roberts (2007) further point out that such appearance monitoring can increase shame and appearance anxiety and diminish awareness of internal bodily states. It may also contribute to the development of several mental health risks, including eating disorders and depression. Young women who read fashion magazines and newspaper ads try hard to live up to an unrealistic and artificial image. This theory can be utilized to analyze the effect of the print media on readers.

Jean Kilbourne (2002) points out that consumers are surrounded by an ideal of female beauty which is impossible to achieve because it is artificial. Firstly, the images themselves are created artificially, through extreme use of studio lighting, air brushing, and computer enhancement and secondly models have a pronounced body type (tall, long legged, narrow hiped) that is characteristic of only about 5 per cent of females, but often, their bodies are artificially constructed, most commonly with breast implants

(Kilbourne, 2002). But despite being so unrepresentative of the ordinary women, it is the only female body type displayed in the mass media. Women tend to be judged, and judge themselves, against this artificial standard; failure is inevitable, and the impact of it is “indicated by the fact that 75 percent felt too heavy , only 15 percent felt just right and nearly half of those who were actually underweight reported feeling too fat and wanting to diet”(Kilbourne, 2002). This idealized image of female beauty means women must transform themselves.

Women are expected to always look perfect and be abnormally thin because this is how models look. The people working in the media portray women as sexy beings vulnerable to men. Women listen to silent commands send through advertisements telling them to be thin, beautiful, and sexy and spend large sums of money to achieve the picture-perfect model look. Advertisements also affect the way society views women because they are portrayed as perfect-looking objects, although such perfection is rare in life. Women reading these magazines often feel that they are not perfect and therefore they need to starve themselves. They become dissatisfied with the way they look, therefore they often feel gloomy and depressed and go to great lengths to achieve the idealized figure and look depicted in magazines. Readers think that looking good is everything because this is the message that media conveys to them.

The piece named ‘Natural Diet and Immune Enhancer’ in the magazine *Splash* tells us how certain fruits can enhance our immune system and help us to remain healthy. The article also mentions the importance of daily exercise. In *Canvas* there is an ad using bold and capital letters that “SLIM IS BEAUTIFUL”— this influences readers mind and

injects the idea that being slim is important and by being slim one can achieve success. In other words, these magazines put lots of emphasis on being thin.

In *Korcha* (30th March, 2010) an article named “Poshake Jokhon Slim” discusses how to make one look slimmer. It tells us how by keeping short hair and by wearing tight-fitting clothes one can look slimmer. There is another article, “Med Jhoranor 7 tips” that tells us to avoid junk food and tell us to eat loads of salad.

Women’s magazines have more ads and articles promoting weight loss than men’s magazines do and the covers of women’s magazines include at least one message about how to change a woman’s bodily appearance by diet, exercise and even by cosmetic surgery. These magazines only use models that are beautiful and thin.

Self- objectification is another concept like sexual-objectification that comes under “the objectification theory”. “Feminist scholars say that the objectification of women involves the act of disregarding the personal and intellectual abilities and capabilities of a female; and reducing a woman's worth or role in society to that of an instrument for the sexual pleasure that she can produce in the mind of another. Feminists argue that women have historically been valued mainly for their physical attributes” (Wikipedia). Some feminists believe that such objectification leads to negative psychological effects, including depression and hopelessness, because of the belief that their intelligence and competence will not be acknowledged by society.

Sexual-objectification of women takes place in sexually-oriented depictions of women in advertising and media where women are portrayed as weak or submissive

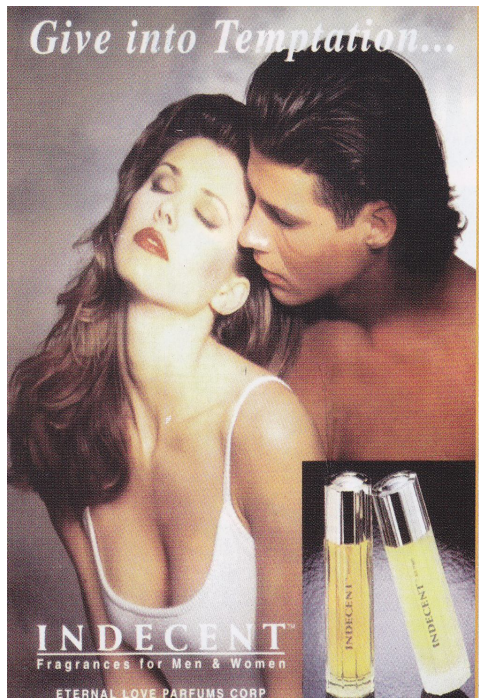
through different types of advertisements. In the essay “Beauty...and the Beast of Advertising” Jean Kilbourne discusses about the way women are turned into sex objects: a woman should have no lines or wrinkles, no scars or blemishes, no pores and she should be thin, tall, long-legged, and young (Kilbourne, 2002)

The people in the media portrays women as sex objects giving society the false impression that women are inferior to men. In advertisements, women are commonly seen half-naked, their stomachs and their cleavage bare. Sex is a part of life, but it is not necessary to have the act of sex visualized in the media. Women should not be portrayed as mere sex objects since such portrayal suggests they are inferior to men and consumable objects. Advertisements often show men controlling and being overbearing towards women.

Figure 2: *Mirror* [Vol.6, Issue: 62, p. 48]



This picture is a perfect example of how women are turned into sex objects. Here in this picture we have two young girls with lollies. These girls also seem to be not wearing any clothes. The way they are holding the lolly and the way they are looking is suggestive. This whole ad has sexual connotations. This is supposed to be just a make-up ad, but the advertisers have turned it into something else. By turning the models into sex objects the ad makers are trying to sell their products.

Figure 3: *Mirror* [Vol.6, Issue: 69, p. 160]

Perfume and cologne ads are constantly using female and male models to sell products. In this ad the man and woman are very close to one another. The man is apparently not wearing anything and while the woman is scantily dressed and half of her breasts are visible. This is obviously meant to be a very sensual ad, where both the man and the woman seems to have succumbed to temptation.

Advertisers use this type of sensuous ad to send the message that if a male uses this cologne the woman will not be able to stay away from him and vice versa. Such ads convert women into sex objects. They imply that all women want is sex although we all know that this is not the case. These types of ads portray women more or less in the same way— tall, thin, large breasted, incredibly beautiful, usually naked, sexual, submissive, and innocent.

Another concept that has played a major part in my analysis is Jean Kilbourne's concept of 'dismemberment'. Kilbourne is a feminist author, speaker and filmmaker who is recognized for her groundbreaking work on the image of women in advertising and her

critical studies of alcohol and tobacco advertising. Kilbourne talks about dismemberment in her essay “Beauty...and the Beast of Advertising” (Kilbourne, 2002).

Dismemberment ads mainly focus on one part of the female body, for example legs, lips, neck, etc, and ignore other parts. Dismemberment ads promote the idea of separate entities. These ads make women view their bodies as ‘many individual pieces rather than a whole’ (Greening: 2006). This theory has helped me to find out how media turns women into objects to sell different kinds of products.

Women are often presented in a dehumanized way; in the mass media such representations are distasteful. They are not only turned into things, but are broken down into parts, each of which also represents an ideal form. In effect, she is dismembered. Hence we get numerous images of lips, legs, breasts, butts, torsos, in short, female body parts. In such images the head is frequently missing, emphasizing that females are not valued for their intellect, but for their external features, especially their curves. Presenting women with fragmented and disconnected body parts detracts us from thinking about women as real people with intellects, feelings, dreams and desires.

Figure 4: *Canvas*-February 2010 [p. 57]



Figure 5 :*Canvas*-October 2010 [p. 56]



In Figure 4 and 5 we see how women are dismembered. In figure 13 we only see the top portion of the model. We get to see her face, neck and parts of her shoulder. This picture has been taken from an article “Kajole Ujjal Chokh”. From the title it’s obvious that this article is on eyeliners. We are told about different ways of applying eyeliners that will make girls look stylish. Just because this piece is on eyeliner the model’s face is given emphasis only. However, only highlighting certain parts of a woman’s body suggests that a woman is beautiful just because of those parts. Their body is thereby fragmented just to sell products.

In Figure 5 we see half of a woman’s face, shoulder and chest. In this picture the lady is dissected just from the middle, such presentation reduces the woman to the state of a vegetable or fruit that can be chopped-off from the middle. Like the previous picture here we too see how parts of a woman are used to advertise products or sell them. In both these pictures we do not see the whole body of these models. Putting inordinate emphasis on certain parts and completely ignoring others does not seem fair.

Figure 6: *Lifestyle*- February 2, 2010 [Vol. 9, Issue: 34, p. 3]



This picture is also an example of dismemberment. This picture has been taken from an ad for ladies’ sandals. Here the long, slender, and sexy leg of the model gets prominence. Apart from her legs we do not see anything else. Dismemberment makes us feel that women are appreciated only for certain parts of their body and not as a whole.

Another way of deconstructing ads is to see them as outcomes of consumerism. This 21st century trend of consumption is disturbing as it drives more and more people to buy endlessly, and doesn't let them enjoy the pleasures of a life that comes naturally. Thorsten Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, discusses conspicuous consumption, conspicuous leisure, conspicuous waste, pecuniary emulation, and dress as an expression of the pecuniary culture. Here his term "conspicuous consumption" will be relevant as he talks about excessive expenditure on lavish goods and services to show wealth and status.

Veblen coined the phrase "conspicuous consumption" in his book *The Theory of the Leisure Class* to refer to the practice of acquiring goods beyond what one needs for sustenance. He referred to the acquisition of goods for purposes of show and status, a practice that was, at the time, affordable only by the people whom he dubbed "the leisure class." Conspicuous consumption in the articles we buy is the most effective way of displaying our predatory abilities. Our automobiles, our housing, and especially our clothes give a clear indication of our social status. Veblen's perspective on consumption enables us to see how magazine and newspaper ads influence people to buy things that they do not need to display their social status.

Excessive consumption of goods makes people materialistic. Bidisha Mukherjee says materialism can be defined as a dominating sense of desire to pursue wealth and other tangible things that can provide physical comforts that ignore the importance of spiritual values. The characteristics of materialistic people are greed and desire to become rich quickly and live in posh houses, to wear highly expensive clothes and jewelry, and drive flashy cars. In short, these people have the urge to lead extravagant lives

(“Materialism in Society”). Fashion and lifestyle magazines help them become materialistic. The numerous articles on interior decoration, new shops, trendy and designer clothes, make readers desire those things even though they can very well do without it.

Women in particular, are affected by what they see in the media. These fashion magazines are read by thousands of women. Mostly upper-middle and middle class people in their twenties, they believe that they must starve themselves to fit into the designer clothes, which they must wear to fit the image the media has created. Superficial, shallow women who only care about how they look are the main targets of advertisers. These women spend an incredible amount of money in order to revise social status. Expensive designer clothes and accessories are advertised to persuade women to spend an inordinate amount of money on frivolous things in order to look like the models seen in ads. Upper-middle and middle class women who read these magazines and newspapers are thereby shaped into materialistic and superficial people.

Figure 7: *Lifestyle*-February 23, 2010 [Vol. 9, Issue: 37, p. 4-7]



In this picture we have two young girls happily shopping. This sort of image of women gives the idea that shopping is the key to happiness. It makes the readers of *Lifestyle* think that spending money and buying new stuff constitute happiness. They make the readers materialistic.

Louis Althusser concept of 'interpellation' proved to be quite helpful in analyzing the magazine ads. The French philosopher, Louis Althusser, first popularized the word 'interpellation' in his influential essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" and this concept helped me to analyze how language is used in magazines to play with the minds of the readers and turn them into subjects. Interpellation "is the constitutive process where individuals acknowledge and respond to ideologies, thereby recognizing themselves as subjects" (Nguyen, "Interpellation"). Interpellation was described by Althusser in his reinterpretation of Marxism and the position of the subject. He explains how Ideological State Apparatuses interpellated the subjects into ideological positions. Althusser gives example of a police officer shouting out "Hey, you there!" in public. Upon hearing this exclamation, an individual turns around, and "by this mere one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion, he becomes a *subject*" (Althusser, 1972).

He explains that interpellation works primarily through language and occurs when we are hailed by a message ("Althusserian Ideology: Main Concepts"). This concept is used by Marxist media theorists to explain the ideological function of mass media texts. According to this view, the subject (viewer, listener, reader) is constituted by the text, and the power of the mass media resides in its ability to 'position' the subject (Semiotics Glossary I).

In the essay "Althusser's Contributions to Critical Theory" it is said that "because all forms of media are composed of language, and because language is a cultural system, media thus constructs the subject or reproduces ideology in people by interpellating or

hailing them”. Certain texts are directed toward certain people, for instance, an shampoo advertisement being directed toward a woman. If the woman viewing the advertisement responds by paying even slightest attention to the message of the text, she is responding to that message indirectly. Therefore she is subjected by the advertisement.

In the essay “Althusser - A Critique:Competing Interpellations and the Third Text” Sam Vaknin says that the ideology of consumption uses advertising to transform individuals to subjects (to consumers) and advertising is one of the chosen means of interpellating them. According to Vaknin, advertisements attract attention, force people to introduce meaning to them and, as a result, to consume goods created by capitalist society. He says that the most famous example is the use of "People like you (buy this or do that)" in ads. “The reader / viewer is interpellated both as an individual ("you") and as a member of a group ("people like). This is ideological "misrecognition". First, many others misrecognize themselves as that "you". Secondly, the misrecognized "you" exists only in the ad because it was created by it, it has no real world correlate” (Vaknin).

The article “The Perfect Bridal Beauty Guide” that appears in the magazine *Splash* is a perfect example of how consumers/readers get hailed. The writer here addresses readers directly by saying “you”. He says “you were certain you planned for everything— from the flowers on the tables to the songs the band would play” (*Splash*, 2010). Many readers take themselves as that “you”. And whenever they assume themselves as that “you” they become “subjects”. The moment they will start doing everything according to what the article says, they will be hailed/interpellated by the article.

We increasingly see the power of media to shape messages to influence the life and people's minds. Unfortunately individuals do not understand their subjugation by the messages conveyed by the media. As Renee Jarre observes-

“The mass media message calls out, hails, to the viewer and as attention is gathered and solidified, subjectifies the viewer through their total acceptance of the ideological proposition, and in doing so interpolates them into the ideological system. Ultimately, successfully interpolated subjects do not realize their subjection, only that they have freely chosen to become part and parcel of the dominant ideology” (Louis Althusser: Hailing, Interpellation, and the Subject of Mass Media, 2007).

Therefore in this chapter we basically get to see how certain theories and concepts proved to be quite helpful in analyzing the magazines and newspapers ads and also helped us to understand how women are being portrayed in the media.

CHAPTER 3: PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN CONTEMPORARY BANGLADESHI MAGAZINES AND NEWSPAPERS

Kajalie S. Islam (2007) says that the media sells not only values, ideas, ideals and idols but also images of good and bad, success and failure. She adds that apart from setting fashion trends, it plays a major role in almost everything we do. It certainly influences the minds of youngsters and adults. Moreover, our media is a male-dominated place where things are viewed almost certainly from a male's perspective. Therefore, most of the time the media represents women in traditional and stereotypical ways. For example they are depicted almost exclusively as homemakers and mothers. Women's pages of newspapers and fashion magazines focus on fashion, beauty tips, home decor and recipes.

The fashion magazines studied only exhibits models wearing tight-fitting clothes, transparent saris, sleeveless blouses and halter tops, sometimes wearing low cut blouses and short salwar suits that expose parts of their bodies and reveal their body shapes. The models pose in ways that bring out the curves in their body and make them look sensuous. It seems that women are represented in this way just to give visual pleasure to men. As Laura Mulvey observes, women are looked at and displayed so that their appearances have a strong visual and erotic impact (Mulvey, 1975).

Images of female bodies are everywhere. Women and their body parts sell everything from food, clothes, accessories, and perfumes to electronic products. Samiul

Haque in the essay “Women in a Make-Believe World” (2007) says “Women are often used even where they are not needed, for example in ads for men's products. But that's because everyone likes to see a pretty face. There's nothing wrong with that, it's natural”. “Women's sexuality and physical attributes are used as baits through which products are advertised” says Dr. Nasreen in “Women in a Make-Believe World”(2007).

Women are represented in a stereotypical way in most lifestyle magazines and newspapers. It is almost always women who do ads for “home products” such as foodstuffs, body care, household items, and medication. In contrast men can mostly be seen in car ads, bank related ads or cell phone ads. Taken cumulatively, these ads suggest that a women’s place is in the home and that women do not take important decisions or do important things. They seem to be saying that women are dependent and need men's protection, and men regard women primarily as sexual objects. In other words, Advertisements consistently confine women to traditional mother, home, or beauty/sex-oriented roles that do not represent contemporary women’s diversity.

Figure 8: *Lifestyle*- February 2, 2010 [Vol. 9, Issue: 34, p. 3]

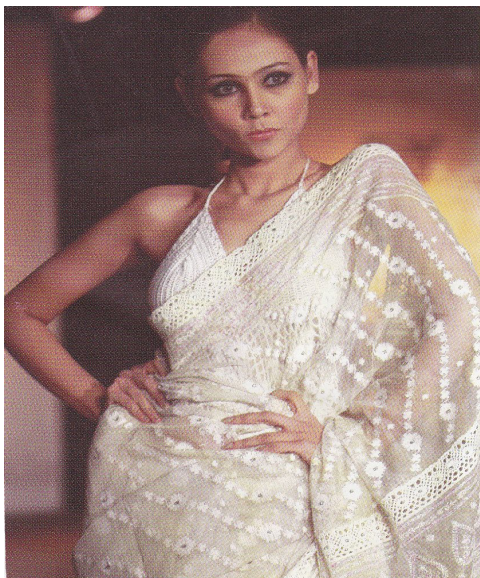


Figure 95: *Mirror*-June-July 2009 [Vol. 5, Issue: 58, p. 103]



This picture shows clearly how media portrays women in a stereotypical way. It is designed to suggest that what women do is shopping. It is as if to them the only things that matters are shoes, bags, jewellery and clothes. This surely is a negative way of portraying women.

Figure 10: *Canvas*-May 2009 (p.47)



Fashion magazines and the newspaper sublets that I have been analyzing for this dissertation includes *Mirror*, *Splash*, *Canvas*, *Lifestyle* and *Korcha*, these depict only fair and slim models. These models not only starve themselves in order to be shown in the media but also influence readers to be like them. Most

women want to be represented as thin, fair, and as beautiful and as successful as the

model or actress depicted in newspapers, magazines or on huge billboards. Starbella in the article ‘Women and Societies Views on Weight’ (2007) says that “Perceptions about body images are shaped from a variety of experiences and begin to develop in early childhood. It has been shown that children learn to favor thin body shapes by the time they enter school”. They are taught to focus on the external aspects of themselves, thus learning to do their hair, polish their nails and paint their faces accordingly.

Figure 11: *Mirror*-June-July 2009 [Vol. 5, Issue: 58, p. 27]



These magazines use beautiful models. But if the models selected later turn out to be unattractive they are turned into goddesses or beauty queens with the help of heavy make-up. The advertisements of extremely beautiful and skinny models are altered through computer technologies or photographic techniques such as “airbrushing, soft-focus cameras, composite figures, and editing” (Brown, Steele & Walsh-Childers, 2002).

Nowadays, people have become very conscious about their figures or the way they look primarily because of the images created by the people in the media. It bombards people with messages that say that to look beautiful one needs to remain young. “Advertisements create an illusion in the real world that women are all white and under 40, that women’s body needs to be improved constantly, and that most importantly, they should look beautiful and young for good” (Kilbourne, 1987). In magazines and newspapers we only see young models since older models are not used in them. The media should also use older models to suggest that even older people can look fabulous and to indicate that it’s not always the case that “young is beautiful, old is ugly”. People go to great lengths to be young and beautiful but what they tend to forget is that ageing is a natural thing and nothing can stop someone from ageing. The essay “How are Women Portrayed in the Media?” says—

The media places emphasis on age and beauty, “ads portraying women...only [show] body parts” this puts across the idea that women are meat or objects to be looked at not individual people.Women are portrayed in sexualized ways for male attention and they are mere objects. Females in television are expected to be either young or still look as if they are young; age, which is a part of life, is portrayed as a demon. The media portrays that youth is the only form of beauty. (“How are Women Portrayed in the Media?” 2010)

All the magazines that I have been citing have numerous articles on how one can look pretty and glamorous. These articles mainly give people tips about hair dos and make-up. In *Canvas* there is an article titled “Face Powder” that basically talks about different types of face powder and their functions and benefits. They try to convince women that by only applying cosmetics and spending money for manicure and pedicure in beauty salons, they can make themselves look good. Dr. Gitiara Nasreen says in the article “Women in a Make-Believe World” (2007) that “if women continue to see that their only work is to beautify themselves, decorate their homes and cook, it becomes difficult to see themselves in roles other than these”.

These magazines and newspapers also contain articles that often solve other problems that women have for example- hair loss, discolored teeth, hair color and make-up mistakes, acne, pimple, etc. In the *Mirror* article “How to Prevent Acne Naturally” different causes of acne are identified and readers are told how they can get rid of acne. In the *Splash* article “Help for Winter Hair” we learn how we can take care of our dry and damaged hair. In *Korcha* and *Lifestyle* there are numerous articles on hair care, skin care, beauty care, etc. Sometimes these articles tell us how to make face packs with herbal ingredients.

Inevitably the latest styles of clothing are advertised in women’s magazines. When we flip through the pages of these magazines we see the new stylish clothes that are made available to us in different stores. Sometimes the prices of these clothes are also mentioned. After seeing these latest styles of clothes readers often rush to the store to get them. Such ads induce people to spend money on unnecessary clothes. Since the

capitalists' uses the print media to create artificial need in people some of them often exceed their budget in trying to achieve the standard of living set by the media. Many people actually spend much of their valuable time and money on these magazines so that they can "pretend that with a few flicks of the page (they) can find the secrets to a perfect wardrobe, glowing clear skin and shiny hair."(O'Neill, 2009).

Figure 12: *Canvas*-August 2010 [p. 32]



As we flip through the pages of these magazines and newspapers, the one thing that strikes us is the influence of western culture on Bangladeshi youth. But it is not only western culture but also the Indian one that has become influential in this country. We regularly see models wearing trendy sleeveless and halter-neck tops with low-cut

jeans. Sometimes they even wear gowns and short dresses that expose parts of their body. Cumulatively such ads have a negative effect on readers because they look at these models and feel that they also need to dress like them.

Figure 13: *Canvas*-May 2009 [p. 23]



For example, an article named “Trendy Tops” in *Canvas* talks about different types of international tops such as tank tops, lace top, Maggie tops, etc. This article basically tells us that when it comes to fashion Bangladesh is progressing and catching up with the latest trends in the fashion world. The article indicates that nowadays our designers are trying hard to follow the latest Hollywood styles; and that designers are mixing western trends with traditional styles. They suggest that, they are creating fusion. These designers even try to give a western touch to our salwar-kameez. It even gives the names of stores, where one can find trendy western tops, and mentions the price of these tops.

Youth nowadays have become quite westernized but we can blame both the print and electronic media for this phenomenon. Nowadays when we go outside we see young

girls wearing revealing clothes. They not only put on sleeveless t-shirts but also wear tights and three-quarter pants which expose their body parts. They don't wear salwar kameez in a properly, while the length of the kameezes are becoming shorter and shorter by the day. Sometimes it's hard to understand whether they are wearing kameez or something else. In the media we see the models wearing western outfit and as a result the audience gets influenced by these models.

Women feel they need to buy to buy magazines so that they can appear more beautiful to the opposite sex, and be more sexually appealing to them. Ads giving beauty and style tips in magazines make readers believe that if they follow them they will become beautiful and more appealing to the opposite sex. It appears that these ads are telling readers/consumers that they are not good enough as they are now and need to redo themselves and their outward appearance, taking the magazine's tips to modify their physical selves. We use fashion magazines as our guides to these standards.

The mass media is a powerful agent for transmitting attitudes, perceptions, images and beliefs. But while it plays a vital role in making people think the way they do and changing the way they think, people in the media must accept the responsibility of transmitting the right messages. It is only their vigilance in blocking the negative aspects of ads and adoptions of positive images that will prevent the stereotyped images of women from undermining women.

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

In this dissertation I tried to show how newspaper and magazine ads influence readers to be more like the models depicted in these ads. I also tried to reveal how women are being represented and exploited by the media to sell commodities. Media has this powerful role: to depict women not necessarily how they actually behave, but rather, how we think women behave. The magazines and newspapers that have been analyzed are fashion and lifestyle magazines and therefore it includes things like- recipes, beauty tips, perfume launches, new boutique houses, etc. These magazines and newspapers have everything connected with women and therefore they were quite useful for my dissertation.

Danielle Willer is surely right when he says in his research that “On the surface, one would think that fashion magazines are simply unique clothing designs and expensive labels being advertised on the glossy pages” (Subjugation and Sexualization: The Portrayal of Women in Fashion Magazines, 2008). But after doing a detailed analysis of these magazines and newspapers we see a different picture of how women are being stereotyped and turned into sex objects. If the people associated with the media continues to portray women in traditional and stereotypical ways, then there is a very slight chance that we are going to achieve gender equality.

Through the help of certain theories like that of the male gaze by Laura Mulvey, interpellation by Althusser, and dismemberment by Kilbourn, the analysis of magazines and newspapers ads became quite easy. These theories have proved quite helpful in analyzing the way women are being objectified and sexualized by the media. These

theories came in handy in showing how readers are converted into subjects and ultimately victimized by the media people.

Mulvey's theory showed how women in magazine and newspaper ads are portrayed to give visual pleasure to men. She originally applied her "male-gaze" theory in films but in this dissertation her theory has been used to analyze magazines and newspapers ads. Her theory makes us see how in certain fashion magazines and newspapers ads models are used to provide visual pleasure to men. Even Kilbourn's dismemberment theory proved to be quite relevant for this dissertation. His theory makes us see how women are not only turned into things, but also broken into body parts. Often in ads we see that the whole body of a model is not shown. Therefore giving priority to some parts of the body and ignoring the other parts is not fair. Althusser's interpellation theory proved to be quite effective for this dissertation as well. It helps in exposing the way people reading these magazines and newspapers are turned into subjects. Apart from these theories I have also used some other in chapter-2.

Media through magazines and newspapers ads create artificial standards for the people to follow. If we take a good look around ourselves we will see how people are blindly trying to meet standards set by the media. People only see the made up women in these ads and try to compare those women with themselves. They do not see beyond these ads. The stereotypical and sensual portrayal of women by the media is not recognized by readers and that is why they themselves are caught up in the traditional role imposed upon them by patriarchal society.

The people in the media have for decades portrayed women in more or less the same way, that is, as sex objects and thoughtless beings. Even now they are being portrayed in the same way. Shubhapradan says in her essay “women in ads represent what the society holds as an ideal image of her. Women are continued to be predominantly portrayed as sexual beings, unthinking, dependent, and preoccupied with beauty” (“Portrayal of Women in Advertisements”, 2006).

Media is a powerful agent for transmitting attitudes, perceptions, images and beliefs. But while media plays such a vital role in making people think the way they do and changing the way they think, the people in the media must accept the responsibility of transmitting the right message.

This work is a small contribution from my part to show how women are often victimized by the people working in the media and to raise awareness in people, obsessed with magazines and newspapers ads, about how they manipulates them. I would like to conclude with this hope that in the near future people in the media will try to empower women instead of undermining them. What I mean to say is that people in the media should show women in positive roles rather than traditional and stereotypical roles. Women’s achievements and works should be highlighted instead of their bodies. And once the media starts re-presenting women in a new light then gender inequalities may lessen.

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