

A Critique of *candy* Magazine

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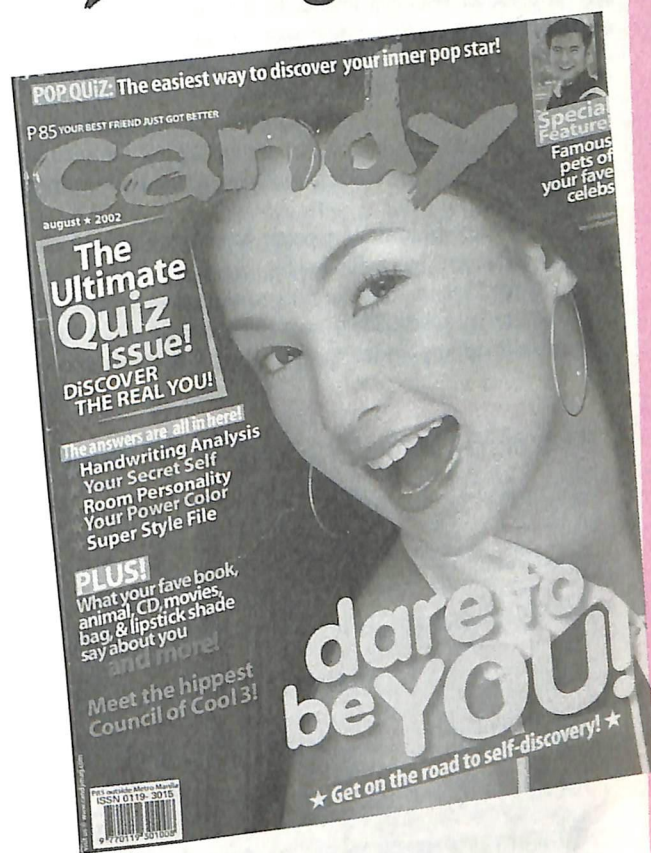
C*andy* magazine, a teen-consumer monthly publication published by the Summit Media Company, a member of the Gokongwei Group of Companies, is aimed at 13- to 16-year-old girls from the AB and upper C economic strata <<http://www.summitmedia.com.ph/magazines/candy.htm>>. It is available in bookshops, convenient stores, supermarkets, hotel lobby shops, and malls in Metro Manila, and key cities such as Baguio, Cebu, Davao, and San Fernando.

Dare to be you!

The August 2002 issue of *Candy* had the tagline “Dare to be you!” Inside the 96 pages (including the front and back covers) are 17 articles meant to help the reader identify and analyse her personality. All of these enjoin the reader to take pop quizzes to identify her colours, daily get-ups, make-up and hairstyles, role in the family, ice cream flavours, handwriting, decade, pop star and animal. The reader’s choices have corresponding interpretations intended to help her discover her real self.

In addition to the feature articles, *Candy* has the following regular sections also found in most women’s magazines:

1. note from the editor called *ed’s scrapbook*;
2. *caught on Candy*, which features the letters to the editor;
3. a *Candy store* gallery of products—T-shirts, bags, etc.—presented in a quiz format where the choice of T-shirt colour and bag style is supposed to correspond to a certain personality;
4. *beauty*, a column that is actually a quiz that encourages the reader to make a decision on whether or not she should go for a make over. The August 2002 issue asks the reader to choose a lipstick shade that has a corresponding personality profile. A side bar to this column is an article that provides advise on skin care;
5. *ask whatever*, the equivalent of an advise column;
6. *body buzz*, a combination pop quiz and health column;
7. *candy rap*, a personality analysis/advise column based on a quiz that inquires into one’s celebrity crush, favourite movie character, book or music CD;
8. *candy can*, another personality analysis/advise column which, for the August 2002 issue, employs favourite bedroom accessories;
9. *bond, girl!*, yet another personality analysis/advise col-



- umn, but focused on friendship;
10. *oops!*, embarrassing stories contributed by *Candy* readers;
11. *Candy candor*, the equivalent of a person-on-the-street poll. For the August 2002 issue, the question is: “What’s one thing you wish your parents would say?”;
12. *eye candy*, a matching quiz. In the August 2002 issue, it is the correspondence of celebrities with their favourite pets. *eye candy* also features photos of various prom parties;
13. horoscope column sponsored by “Hello Kitty,” a cartoon-character novelty shop;
14. *candyrectory*, a listing of all the shops from which items used or worn by the models featured were sourced. This section is similar to an advertising index in other magazines; and
15. *anything goes*, an extension of the regular “letters to the editor” section where readers ask and contribute their thoughts on what seems to be anything under the sun. In this issue, *anything goes* features trivia about Alicia Silverstone, anniversary greetings, tips in preparing for an exam, advise on where to purchase doggie stuffed toys, and a thank-you message for inviting someone’s crush to *Candy*’s anniversary party.

Critique

Media is a central issue in the women's movement. The second wave of Western feminism in the late 1960s to the early 1970s was a major political current that began addressing questions related to the media (Marris & Thornham, 1996, pp. 11-12). The intense lobby and advocacy work around the impact of media on women's status led to the identification of "Women and Media" as a critical issue in all four United Nations world conferences on women.

From its beginnings, feminism has regarded ideas, language and images as crucial in shaping women's (and men's) lives. In the U.S. in 1968, feminists staged a demonstration against the Miss America beauty pageant to protest its projection of an image of ideal womanhood that was impossible

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and complicit in the idea that all women—not only participants in beauty contests—are reducible to a set of bodily attributes (Marris & Thornham, 1996, p. 63). In the Philippines, the Malayang Kilusan ng Bagong Kababaihan (MAKIBAKA) led a similar protest against the staging of Bb. Pilipinas in the early part of the 1970s.

Then followed critiques of stereotypical representations of women in advertisements and in films, and studies of the way in which language—both vocabulary and linguistic usage—defines and confines women. The women's movement has always been interested in images, meanings, and representations—and especially in challenging representations which, while questionable or offensive from a feminist standpoint, are perfectly acceptable from other points of view, if they are noticed at all (Marris & Thornham, 1996, p. 12).

Magazines have been described as a reflection of a nation's political, social and cultural life. Our magazines tell us about ourselves. The articles and artwork of a magazine, the launch of a new magazine, the demise of an established title are all windows to the lives of a reading—and buying—public (Daly, Henry, and Ryder, 1996, p. 2).

A magazine can be classified as either a consumer or a specialised business or trade title. Within the consumer classification, hundreds of publishing categories and niches exist. Consumer magazines appeal directly to an audience of readers targeted by virtue of where they live, their interest in a specific topic, or their demographics—age, sex, profession, income level, race, religion, or nationality (Daly et al., 1996, pp. 4-5).

There are different types of magazines but one type, women's magazines, under which magazines for teenage girls may be subclassified, are associated specifically with femininity and women's culture. It seems impossible to talk about femininity without mentioning motherhood, family life, beauty, cosmetics, fashion, love, romance, crafts, hobbies, cooking, housekeeping, all of which constitute the text in most women's magazines. The same concept of femininity is heavily underscored in *Candy* magazine.

In *Patriarchal Universe of Discourse*, Julia Penelope submits that language conventions reflect a particular definition of reality, and that those who accept these language conventions essentially accept the categories of truth these represent, and without question (Littlejohn, 1999, p. 241). Until today, the prevailing universe of discourse is patriarchal, reflecting the assumption that women should assume primary role in taking care of the home and family even if they also participate in the same socio-economic and political activities as the men (Wood, 1997, p. 315). Consequently, a patriarchal universe of discourse is a set of language conventions that reflect a bias toward masculine perspectives and interests.

In the August 2002 issue of *Candy* magazine, the main idea communicated is the need for teenage girls and young women to look good, to be fashionable, to be part of the in-crowd. Some examples:

"The right color [of T-shirt] can power up your personalitee";

"Seven items, seven looks, mix and match dressing for your daily grind; do you need a make-over?"

"What lip shade suits you? A new way to touchably oil-free skin."

The texts also suggest that if a girl satisfies all these requirements, boys will be attracted to her. In contrast, the male voices (what the young men say) and images in the issue are those of a young male actor who talks about his hobbies, career and preferences in girls; back-to-back interviews with the boy bands Greyhoundz and Wolfgang that focus on their latest songs and MTVs; a male model for the fashion section; a male model as one of the interviewees for the person-on-the street poll; six male celebrities in the "Vote for your cutie" contest; another six male celebrities in the *eye candy* column; and eight young men escorts in the girls' prom parties. None of the male voices talk about the need for boys to constantly look good, stylish, and fashionable. In fact, the band members look scruffy and plain, by average standards. While there are photographs of men who are either in expensive-looking suits or the latest in fashion, there is no written text that says teenage boys and young men need to have white and clear complexion. The ones whose voices are heard, such as the actor and the band members, talk about themselves, careers, and dreams and aspirations. The young actor talks about girls, but about what he wants in a girl, as opposed to the teenage girls and young women who speak of how they could catch boys' attention.

In addition, *Candy* is laced with much *sexual dimorphism*, or the definition of particular attitudes, actions, and objects as feminine or masculine. The text is all about feminine notions—beauty, fashion, cosmetics, shopping, and never about cars, money, adventure, careers, dreams and aspirations, objects and concepts commonly identified as masculine.

Theoretical Analysis

There are different feminist communication theories by which *Candy* magazine's portrayal of young women may be examined. Two such theories are the Muted Group Theory and Genderlect Styles.

The *Muted Group Theory* first developed by Shirley and Edwin Ardener from 1975 to 1978, and expounded by Cherris Kramarae in early 1980s, focuses on how language names experiences and determines what is socially recognised to call attention to the way that a dominant discourse silences or mutes groups that are not in the social mainstream (Wood, 1997, p. 321). The masculine bias in language, which is primarily shaped by men and the male experience, aids in defining, depreciating and excluding women. Women therefore become a muted group.

Shirley Ardener, however, cautions that the muted group is not always silent. The issue is if people can say what they want to say, when and where they want to say it, or if they have to "re-encode their thoughts to make them understood in the public domain" (Griffin, 2000, p. 460). In the case of *Candy* (August 2002), the teenage girls are muted because the publication does not allow them to talk of anything other than beauty, fashion, gimmicks, pop music, and Hollywood celebrities. In addition, teenage girls who are not heterosexual, who do not belong to the A, B, and upper C income-brackets and who do not read or speak English have no voice and representation.

Genderlect Styles by Deborah Tannen views the masculine and feminine styles of discourse as two distinct cultural dialects, rather than as inferior or superior ways of speaking (Griffin, 2000, p. 436). According to Tannen, there is a stylistic difference in male and female conversation, and this is true among children and adults. The basic difference lies in the feminine focus on connection, and the masculine focus on status (p. 438). For women, it is approval that's crucial (they are liked by their peers or people they want to be close to); for men, their peers' respect. In the texts of *Candy*, there is emphasis on the need for teenage girls and young women to be part of a *barkada* (peer group) and to be liked by the cute boy next door. Examples: "You bring loads of fun to the *barkada* which is why no gimmick is ever complete without you." and "I recently learned from friends that he has a crush on me too!"

For Tannen, telling stories is another aspect of conversation where there is a distinct sex difference. Women's stories are often about others, and on those occasions they tell their own stories, these are usually about their having done something foolish, rather than something clever. This is because the downplaying of self puts the narrator in the same level as her listeners, thus connecting her better and strengthening her support network. Men, on the other hand,

generally tell more stories than women—especially jokes. Jokes are a masculine way to negotiate status, and men's jokes often have that "Can you top this?" flavour (Griffin, 2000, pp. 439-440). When they are not trying to be funny, men tell stories about themselves where they are heroes, often acting alone against great obstacles (p. 440).

The texts in *Candy* that reflect Tannen's observation of women's ways of telling stories are found in the *oops!* column where readers share embarrassing stories about cheating in exams.

The photos, illustrations, and other graphics in the columns, articles, and ads found in the August 2002 issue of *Candy* all support the theoretical frameworks cited. All photos of the girls show them in the latest fashion, accessories and hairstyle, or trying out a new make-up, lipstick, cologne or facial wash. Other photos and illustrations are of goods and services that perpetuate an American popular culture and a middle-class lifestyle. These images and representations are consistent with how the publisher of *Candy* describes the magazine: *Candy is the hottest teen magazine today for Filipino girls. Inside every issue of Candy is a world of limitless teen possibilities: trendy fashion, beauty booty, cool hair and makeup lessons, revealing quizzes, relationship articles, expert advice, juicy interviews with teen stars, and lots of fun contests where lucky readers can win totally cool prizes. Candy hopes to help Filipino girls through their adolescent years, as well as empower them to make their dreams come true and become the best person they can be.*

The August 2002 issue of *Candy* magazine challenges girls and young women to be themselves. The *body buzz* column tells them that it does not really matter even if they are not as reed thin as Gwyneth Paltrow, that the point is to be healthy. Ironically, however, all the magazine's pictorial representations, including those in the ads, are all slim and model types. The food items in photos or mentioned as the favourite snacks of most girls and young women are chocolate bars, sodas, pizza, ice cream, and designer coffee (think Seattle's Best and Starbucks)—far from any dietician's or nutritionist's recommendations.

All the articles in the *Candy* issue socialise girls and young women to aspire to be 'cool' by being on top of the latest in fashion, music and gimmicks. These encourages them to always keep themselves beautiful, stylish, and fashionable to be noticed by the boys. Only three out of the issue's 96 pages do not contain text that projects the cool image.

The Political Economy

Seventy-one out of the August 2002 issue's 96 pages (74 percent) contain advertisements of various products—lipstick, baby powder, body lotion, skin whitening lotion, tooth paste, cologne, shoes, bags, jeans, T-shirts, accessories, cellular phones, stuffed toys, music CDs, MTV shows, and a shopping mall. In addition, it has a five-page adver-

tising section sponsored by a local brand of a cologne gel. The magazine is practically a catalogue that endorses not only individual items for sale but also a lifestyle marked by urban-based consumerism. A scan of the other issues of *Candy* reveals the same pattern of heavy advertisements.

Obviously, the target market of the advertisements are the readers—teenage girls in the A, B, and upper C markets, or those with the buying capacity. Evidently, the principal goal of the publishers is not to entertain, enlighten, provide information, or encourage debate. It is to make a profit. The profit objective is shared by all those who, in one way or another, contribute to the *Candy* issue, including companies with products and services to sell, and the advertising and modelling agencies.

In an ideal situation, the role of media and all other communication systems is to provide people with access to the information, advice and analysis that would enable them to know their rights and pursue these effectively. Media, moreover, is supposed to provide the broadest possible array of information, interpretation and debate on issues that involve political choices, and enable people to register dissent and propose alternatives (Golding and Murdock, 1996, p. 18). However, much as some members of media want to, they have not been able to perform this role due to the "various filters" that information has to pass through before it becomes 'big news' or major campaigns for mass consumption (Herman, 1995, pp. 77-78). According to Ben Bagdikian's *The Media Monopoly* (as cited by Herman), such filters include: size, ownership, wealth, and profit orientation.

At the last count, Summit Media publishes 13 other titles besides *Candy*, including *Cosmopolitan Philippines*, *Good Housekeeping Philippines*, *Preview*, *Prevention*, *YES!*, *Seventeen Philippines*, *Bride and Home*, *Entrepreneur*, *FHM*, *First Year of Life*, *K-Zone*, *Real Living*, *Smart Parenting*, and *W.I.T.C.H.* A new division called Summit Books was launched in April of this year. Summit Media also owns Summit Billboards, a subsidiary that offers other forms of advertising services including billboards, illuminated ad boxes, foot sticker ads, mall drop-down banners, lamppost banners, promo booths and comfort ads. Another branch of Summit Media is the Summit Custom Publishing, which services the specialised corporate print communication needs <<http://www.summitmedia.com.ph/contact.htm>>.

Summit Media is a member of the Gokongwei Group of Companies that also owns Robinson's Department Store, Digitel, Cebu Pacific Air and Universal Robina Corporation. The conglomerate, which also has interests in banking, real estate and petroleum, is reported to be the second biggest in the Philippines (Lopez, 2001).

It is no surprise that *Candy* magazine is published primarily for profit. As its accountability is to the corporate hierarchy, the magazine will continue producing issue upon

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issue that promotes a consumerist lifestyle. Its publishers will ensure that no idea that harms the interests of big business will ever see print on its pages.

The primacy of advertising as an income source for *Candy* is indisputable. The rates range from P46,000 (US\$836) for a ¼-page placement to P94,000 (US\$1,700) for a full page. For special positions such as the back cover and inside front cover, the range is from P135,000 to P371,000 or US\$2,453 to 6,742 (Summit Media Advertising Department). According to Barnouw (as cited by Herman, 1995), general-circulation magazines derive about 50 percent of their income from advertising. With advertising, the free market does not yield a neutral system where the consumers decide which or what kind of media suit them best.

Dare to be Better!

Several ideas, images, representations, languages, and images are absent in the magazine. All the models, except for one, are fair-complexioned and slim. The exception is an olive-skinned model with foreign features found in an article entitled “Distressed Princess.” The body type preferred is still the tall and reed-thin built. The facial features are those of the Eurasian, Amerasian or Chinese *mestiza*. None of the round and plumpish, no sight of the flat-nosed Malay features. There is no other culture except for the Western (mainly American), consumerist, market-based pop. In other words, teenage girls who do not enjoy shopping and do not follow the latest fashion trends are not represented. Neither is there a representation of girls who listen to traditional music, who are into the sciences, who are interested in what is happening in their bigger environment, who are involved in social causes.

There is nothing wrong with having media productions that endorse American pop culture and heterosexual images, if we are to look at the media as channels to convey a range of images and propagate different ideologies. The problem arises when such media dominate all other cultural expressions and representations. The problem worsens if the

audience—in this case teenage Filipino girls, are not exposed to other social realities. There are no suggestions of the reality of teenage girls mired in poverty or affected by the rapid environmental degradation, or caught in the midst of socio-political unrest.

Moreover, *Candy* relates only to heterosexual teenage girls (and boys). Girls are only attracted to boys, and boys to girls. There is no space for young lesbians and gays. There is absolutely no diversity in race, ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation, the four bases of a person’s identity represented in the magazine.

With such limited cultural expression and representations, it is ironic for *Candy* magazine to claim that it presents “a world of limitless teen possibilities” and that it “dares girls to be what they want to be.” Needless to say, there is a danger that *Candy* is contributing to the perpetuation of racism, classism, ageism, homophobia, and patriarchy.

Lastly, *Candy* fails to provide a bridge between adolescence and adulthood. While some of the articles and columns identify the school as part of a girl’s environment, not a single article discusses academic activities or career plans. But then again, given the political economy behind the magazine, this comes as no surprise. ☺

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