

**SELLING POST-FEMINISM?
DISCOURSES OF FEMININITY IN AMERICAN AND
HUNGARIAN PRINT ADVERTISING**

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Abstract

This thesis is a comparative analysis of popular cultural discourses of post-feminism in two widely read women's magazines: the American *Good Housekeeping* and the Hungarian *Nők Lapja*. In recent years, the topic of popular cultural discourses of post-feminism has received increasing attention, with some scholars viewing it as a global phenomenon. Combining feminist scholarship on gender in advertisements with theories from the field of cross-cultural advertising, I examine the ways in which the discourse of popular post-feminism is articulated in the two mediascapes. I argue that, despite numerous similarities between the advertisements in the two magazines, the representations of femininity in *Nők Lapja* are embedded in a very different cultural-historical and discursive context than the U.S. context, and therefore do not correspond to Euro-American discourses of post-feminism and new traditionalism.

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Introduction

A lamppost, a plastic bag, a window, a pen, a helicopter, a shaved head. What do all of these things have in common? In an age where every inch of blank surface seems to scream ‘Your ad here!’, all of these have been used as advertising space. In a Euro-American context and, to an increasing extent, throughout the globe, advertising seems to be ubiquitous. It influences what we eat, wear, read, watch, who we vote for, where we travel for vacation. In short, advertising has immense power over the preferences and desires of consumers, as well as over “the entire shape and content of contemporary media” (Gill 2007, p. 73). Therefore it is not surprising that both scholars and practitioners in the field of advertising have been fascinated by this topic for decades, examining how advertising works, the ways in which it influences consumer behavior, how it affects families and social relations in general, and how its efficiency varies according to different factors.

The study of advertisements has been particularly useful in examining cross-cultural divergence. As Maria Sidiropoulou (2008, p. 338) notes, “[a]dvertisements are excellent choices for tracing intercultural difference”, since their condensed messages provide valuable information on the de/recontextualization process that entails articulations of cultural values and meanings. The potential of advertising as a conveyor of cultural specificity is particularly evident when examining different local variants of advertising for global brands or looking at adverts for a particular category of products in different cultural spaces. Unfortunately, most of the literature on cross-cultural advertising does not discuss cultural differences in terms of gender. Nonetheless, feminist academics have provided extensive contribution to the ever growing advertising scholarship for over fifty years (Gill 2007, p. 73), highlighting issues such as gender stereotypes and the objectification of women as sexual targets. However, most of the feminist scholarship in this field focuses on advertising within a specific social space rather than applying a cross-cultural approach.

In this thesis, I wish to combine these two approaches by examining discourses of femininity in magazine advertisements published in two different countries: in the United States and Hungary. The analysis is based on print advertisements collected from *Good Housekeeping* and *Nők Lapja*, two very popular women's magazines targeting approximately the same market segment in their respective countries.

Although often ridiculed and deemed frivolous, women's magazines are read by millions worldwide. For over two centuries, such publications have offered advice and entertainment, functioning as "survival manuals, providing their readers with practical advice on how to survive in a patriarchal culture" (Storey 2009, p. 153). As such, the advertisements featured in women's magazines are arguably just as important as the articles themselves, in that they construct desires and depict ideals in a way which makes it difficult to separate advertising from the *actual* content of the publications:

What is ultimately being sold in the fictions of women's magazines, in editorial or advertisements, fashion and home furnishing items, cookery and cosmetics, is successful and therefore *pleasurable* femininity. Follow this practical advice or buy this product and be a better lover, a better mother, a better wife, and a better woman.

Storey 2009, p. 154 [emphasis in the original]

But if advertisements are instrumental in conveying the 'how to' message of such magazines (i.e. how to perform womanhood successfully), what does this 'pleasurable femininity' that John Storey describes look like, and what kinds of meanings are associated with it in the two examined magazines? Based on the analysis of the selected advertisements I wish to argue that articulations of femininity *seem* to be embedded in popular cultural discourses of post-feminism in both publications, but they respond to very different cultural-historical and discursive contexts.

At this point, it is important to differentiate between academic and popular cultural discourses of post-feminism. As it is used in an academic context, the term denotes "the intersection of feminism with postmodernism, poststructuralism and colonialism, and as such

represents a dynamic movement capable of challenging modernist, patriarchal and imperialist frameworks” (Brooks 1997, quoted in Gorton 2007, p. 83-84). This usage of the term is highly controversial in feminist circles: as Kristyn Gorton (2007, p. 84) argues, feminist politics already tackle all of these structures, hence academic post-feminism can be viewed as nothing more than an unnecessary ‘rebranding’ of feminism.

The second usage of the term – the one I make use of in the analysis of the selected advertisements – is linked to the popular cultural representations of post-feminism and the methods and discourses through which the media co-opts feminist concepts and discourses, emptying them out of political meaning in order to make them marketable to mainstream audiences:

Generally the representation of feminism in the media performs a kind of fashion-show approach to politics. What the media does, whether intentionally or not, is reduce the complexities of a movement such as feminism into a marketable success *or* disaster story, one that interferes directly with the practice of feminist politics. [...] The need to herald every recent take on feminism as ‘new’ and ‘improved’ should remind its reader of the media’s role in the marketplace: to sell.

Gorton 2007, p. 85

Instead of completely denying the merits of feminism, neo-liberal discourses of post-feminism claim that recent developments around the topic of gender equality indicate that feminism has achieved its goal (Lazar 2009, p. 17). Ignoring conspicuous gender discrimination and oppression not just in the so-called ‘West’, but around the globe, popular post-feminism rather turns to the ecstatic celebration of femininity, advocating that women can achieve anything they wish, provided they work hard enough (Ibid., pp. 17-18).

Post-feminism has also been explored through the perspective of what McRobbie (2009) views as a “double entanglement”, i.e. the peculiar coexistence of neoconservative and liberal values. Aspects of neoconservatism in popular post-feminist discourses are particularly significant for my examination of advertisements given that both of the selected magazines have a family-oriented profile and are targeted primarily at women who are

married with children. Therefore, I devote a significant part of the analysis to Elspeth Probyn's (1997) theorization of new traditionalism, and the ways in which it is represented in the two examined mediascapes. Probyn views new traditionalist and post-feminist discourses as closely interlinked, even inseparable, given that they both react to the same social developments.

In recent years, there has been a growing body of literature focusing on post-feminist discourses in the media (see, for instance, Gill and Scharff 2011, Gorton 2007, Lazar 2009, McRobbie 2009). Most of this scholarship examines Western "mediascapes" (Appadurai 2002, p. 50), therefore the question arises: to what degree is it possible to talk about post-feminist (and, by extension, new traditionalist) discourses in other media sites, specifically in Hungary? According to Michelle Lazar (2009, p. 371), the neo-liberal discourse of post-feminism is a global phenomenon. Although both *Good Housekeeping* and *Nők Lapja* construct femininities which at a first glance seem to conform to discourses of post-feminism, in the following chapters I would like to argue that the discourses of femininity represented in the analyzed Hungarian magazine do not completely correspond to popular cultural post-feminism as it is defined in the Euro-American context.

It is important to note that by adopting a comparative approach I do not intend to view the American mediascape as a model or ideal against which the discourses in the Hungarian context should be measured. Rather, I believe that a comparative approach can potentially highlight cross-cultural differences and details which would otherwise remain unexplored. Furthermore, examining a section of the American print advertising landscape in comparison with its Hungarian counterpart, and highlighting the significant differences between the two can destabilize the common assumption that globalization entails a process of homogenization and Westernization emanating from the United States. As Marieke de Mooij explains:

The assumption that there will be one global culture is based on Western universalism and the wishful thinking of global companies, reinforced by American marketing and management philosophies. The opposite is the case: People may desire to think globally but as a result of globalization actually become more aware of their specific local values.

Mooij 1998a, pp. 286-287

The question whether globalization leads to homogenization is a much discussed issue in studies of cross-cultural advertising. For decades, scholars and practitioners in the field have been debating whether cross-cultural differences are increasingly being erased by the supposed emergence of global markets. Given that cross-cultural differences and similarities are the focus of attention in this scholarship, I believe some of the literature on cross-cultural advertising can be very useful in the analysis of the two selected magazines. I discuss these issues in Chapter 1, where I look at the ways in which a cross-cultural comparative approach can be combined with a gendered analysis of advertising.

Chapter 2 presents the methodological approach applied in the analysis of the collected *Good Housekeeping* and *Nők Lapja* advertisements. I start by explaining the logic behind the selection of these two particular magazines. Furthermore, I discuss the methods of analysis, as well as the significance of integrating into the examination Geert Hofstede's data on the five dimensions of culture.

In Chapter 3, I conduct a comparative analysis of the discourses of femininity represented in the two selected magazines. The first section of the chapter focuses on the discourse of new traditionalism, tackling the concept of choice and how it relates to new traditionalism and post-feminism. I discuss the methods through which advertising in both the Hungarian and the American context sustains women's association with qualities such as nurturing and caring. Furthermore, in the second section of the paper I look at the ways in which advertisements in the two magazines co-opt quasi-feminist discourses through representations of so-called 'entitled femininity' (Michelle Lazar 2009). I focus on this specific type of femininity due to the fact that Lazar views it as a global phenomenon in the

media, closely linked to popular discourses of post-feminism. Hence, my main question in this section is whether the discourse of entitled femininity appears in the Hungarian context as well, and how it relates to the notion of autonomy and agency.

Finally, in the conclusion, I revisit some of the most important aspects of the comparative analysis of the two magazines, and reflect upon the question whether the term ‘post-feminist’ is accurate to be used to describe discourses of femininity within the Hungarian mediascape.

1. The trouble with global advertising and discourses of femininity

According to Arjun Appadurai (2002, p. 58), what characterizes contemporary culture on a global level is “the politics of the mutual effort of sameness and difference to cannibalize each other and thereby proclaim their successful hijacking of the twin Enlightenment ideas of the triumphantly universal and the resiliently particular”. Sameness and difference can thus be viewed as key concepts in a comparative analysis of various mediascapes. While some consider homogenization (in the sense of increasing cultural convergence) to be a main feature of globalization (see Levitt 1983), the question arises whether the homogenization of the media, as it manifests itself in advertising in various parts of the world, is really consumer-driven or whether it rather mirrors the worldview of media producers who have enthusiastically bought into the idea of the birth of a ‘global culture’.

More specifically, when looking at articulations of post-feminist discourses in two different mediascapes, it must be examined whether *seemingly* very similar discourses are indeed associated with the same meanings in different contexts. I argue that scholarly literature on cross-cultural advertising can shed light on the various factors that are potentially taken into account by advertisers in decision-making processes. There are a number of elements which determine how a particular product is advertised in a specific region. Being aware of such factors can prevent taking for granted what seem like consumer-driven elements of difference, and allow us to consider whether they may reflect advertisers’ own views about a particular group of target consumers.

The following section presents some of the main scholarly debates around the topic of cross-cultural advertising, and discusses the ways in which advertising scholarship on cross-cultural difference and sameness can inform a more accurate comparative analysis of the post-feminist discourses in the two selected magazines. The second part of the chapter

reflects on the main trends in the feminist criticism of advertising and discusses the way in which a gendered perspective on advertising can be enriched by applying a cross-cultural method of analysis.

1.1. One size fits all? The standardization/adaptation debate

In recent decades, the increasing mobility of commodities across national borders has generated a vast body of literature on cross-cultural consumption, communication and advertising, with influential works such as those by Nikolaos Papavassiliou and Vlas Stathakopoulos (1997), focusing on advertising strategies and tactics from an international marketing perspective, or by David Howes (1996), who analyzes issues relating to the globalization of consumer society and cross-cultural consumption. Marieke de Mooij (1998a, 1998b, 2008), an expert in cross-cultural communication, has had considerable impact on the field as well with her examination of the convergence and divergence of consumer behavior across national borders based on Geert Hofstede's (1997) dimensions of culture. One of the key issues problematized within this scholarship – and, for this thesis, perhaps the most important one – is the degree to which advertising can and should be adapted to individual target cultures in order to maximize efficiency.

As international brands are becoming widespread (in Hungary as well), advertisers are faced with the decision between the “standardized” approach, i.e. advertisements with a certain uniformity across all markets, and the “tailored” or adaptation approach, i.e. advertising that is sensitive to cross-cultural differences and is adapted to a specific target audience (Tansey, Hyman and Zinkhan 1990, pp. 30-31). As Melewar and Vemmervik (2004, p. 863) note in their overview of the so-called standardization debate in international advertising strategy – the debate about the efficiency of the standardized approach –, there is a conflict between the two above-mentioned schools reaching back to over forty years ago, a

debate in which both academics and practitioners have been actively involved and which is far from being resolved.

Proponents of the standardized approach emphasize the fact that standardization facilitates the creation of a global brand image (Ibid.). Others, such as noted American economist and Harvard professor Theodore Levitt – one of the main proponents of the standardization school – argue for the significance of cross-cultural commonalities and the emergence of homogeneous market segments on a global level (Levitt 1983). Conversely, the advocates of adaptation – most notably, Hite and Fraser (1990), Cavusgil et al. (1993) and Boddewyn et al (1986) – claim that, due to numerous potential cultural differences, standardization cannot be efficient, and point out that such an approach often leads to a decrease in sales and a lower competitive advantage (Melewar and Vemmervik 2004, p. 863).

A more nuanced view of the standardization debate is represented by a third approach, complementing the standardization and adaptation schools. According to Melewar and Vemmervik (2004, p. 867) this additional approach is the compromise school, which on the one hand takes into consideration cultural specificity, and, on the other hand, considers standardization to be both possible and desirable. A variant of this approach is the contingency perspective which “suggests that there are factors within and outside the firm that determine the approach to advertising strategies” (Ibid.). Two of the proponents of this position are Nikolaos Papavassiliou and Vlas Stathakopoulos (1997), who conceptualize standardization and adaptation as polar ends of a continuum rather than as discrete approaches.

Such debates about the efficiency and preferability of various advertising approaches are undoubtedly shaping advertising in Hungary as well. Following the fall of the communist regimes, the increasing proliferation of foreign brands created new markets in Eastern and Central European countries, leading to a higher diversity of products and significant changes

in the modes of advertising. Hungarian markets have been flooded with foreign brands, creating an environment in which the standardization-adaptation debate is unavoidable.

What transpires from these intense debates is that proponents of different schools of thought disagree to a great extent on the degree to which cultural values and preferences are converging or diverging on a global level. This influences the analysis of the *Good Housekeeping* and *Nők Lapja* advertisements in two fundamental ways. Firstly, given the very different views advertisers hold regarding the significance and extent of cultural difference, it is clear that a contrastive analysis of advertising in various social spaces must avoid the assumption that advertisements are necessarily true representations of some kind of ‘reality’. Rather, what the examination of advertisements can reveal in this thesis is how advertising *constructs* representations of femininity and how it articulates post-feminist discourses in the two magazines.

Secondly, examining post-feminist discourses of femininity in cross-cultural advertising with the standardization-adaptation continuum in mind allows for a more cautious analysis of the data: as the literature on cross-cultural advertising indicates, practical considerations – such as the significance of a unified brand image – greatly affect the style and content of advertising. Apparent similarities between advertising style and content in different mediascapes therefore do not necessarily point towards cultural convergence. As Marieke de Mooij, a strong proponent of adaptation explains: “The decision to standardize has more to do with corporate culture than with the culture of markets and nations” (Mooij 1998a, p. 5).

1.2. Gender and advertising

As advertising has become ubiquitous in our lives in the past decades, criticism against its nature and effects has been accumulating. Author and professor of communication Robert McChesney has even called modern marketing “the greatest concerted attempt at

psychological manipulation in all of human history” (McChesney 2008, p. 277). Similarly, feminist scholars and activists started expressing concern and criticism of women’s representation in advertising as early as the 1960s (Gill 2007, p. 73), and they continue to protest through various, often very creative, means¹:

[Advertising] has also been the object of much feminist activism, with campaigns ranging from boycotts of companies using women in demeaning or offensive ways in their advertisements, protests to regulatory bodies against specific advertising campaigns, sticker campaigns highlighting women’s anger at the way they are portrayed in adverts, to acts of semiotic ‘guerrilla’ graffiti – rewriting advertising copy in amusing and subversive ways.

Gill 2007, pp. 73-74

During the 1970s and 1980s, studies focusing on women’s portrayal in advertising in the U.S., the U.K. and other countries systematically showed that there was a tendency to the use of gender stereotypes, and, above all, to women’s depiction as housewives and mothers (Ibid., p. 78). Such studies generally used content analysis to uncover dominant patterns in advertising – a methodology which is often critiqued for its clear limitations, such as its superficiality or inability to analyze data according to different levels of meaning, its problematic conceptualization of meaning, and the assumption – frequently taken for granted by studies examining the portrayal of women in advertisements – that the media should reflect ‘reality’ or the ‘real society’ (see, for instance, van Zoonen 1994, pp. 69-73; Gill 2007, pp. 44-45). As the previous section has shown, this latter assertion (that advertising *can* or *should* represent an objective reality) is particularly problematic. Given the high number of elements that factor into advertising decisions besides the perceived profile of the target consumers, advertisements cannot be viewed as a faithful reflection of the wider society to which they are addressed.

Nonetheless, studies based on content analysis are extremely influential and can constitute a powerful tool in areas which favor so-called ‘hard data’, such as policy or program development (van Zoonen 1994, p. 73). Moreover, content analytic research can

¹ For a detailed account of women’s groups’ efforts world-wide at media monitoring and activism against oppressive depictions of women in the media (including advertising), see Gallagher 2001.

reveal other minorities within the broader category of ‘women’, which are even more invisible or completely relegated to a number of unflattering stereotypes. As Rosalind Gill (2007, pp. 78-79) points out, older women, for instance, are either invisible or linked to the stereotypical image of the gossiping, interfering mother or mother-in-law² in the ‘Western’ media.

Although research on Hungarian media representations is scarce, this latter phenomenon has been partially noted in the Hungarian context as well. József Jászberényi’s 2008 study on the visibility of the elderly in Hungarian television advertisements shows that this segment of the population is extremely underrepresented in adverts (Jászberényi 2008). More disturbingly, Jászberényi’s data reveals that the visibility of the elderly is barely higher than that of animals, and, while all of the animals depicted in the examined ads are portrayed in a positive light, the majority of the seniors are shown in negative or strictly stereotypical roles and situations, such as giving bad advice or being the butt of the joke. Jászberényi’s study focuses on this specific age group without taking into account gender; nonetheless, given that seniors are generally rendered invisible in adverts, it can be assumed that older women are underrepresented as well. Specifically because of this lack of gendered perspectives in Hungarian media research, additional studies on the subject are much needed.

As discussed above, numerous scholars use content analysis to highlight women’s underrepresentation or stereotypical portrayal in the media. Others, however, view the identification of such stereotypes as insufficient and apply semiotic analysis to a wide range of media texts. Such an approach allows a deeper understanding of advertisements’ appeal to consumers and of the way in which they work. Rather than focusing strictly on numeric data, it can highlight the processes of meaning-making through which advertising constructs representations of femininity and reinforces particular discourses.

² Such stereotypical representations of the interfering mother-in-law can also be detected in the Hungarian mediascape. For a good example, see the first *Domestos* advertisement discussed in section 3.1.2.

In this area of scholarship, Ervin Goffman's work has been particularly influential. In *Gender Advertisements*, his landmark study of the depiction of women and men in American advertisements (Goffman 1987), he uses semiotic analysis to examine non-verbal signs linked to gender displays. Through the analysis of gestures, posture and the positioning of bodies, Goffman highlights the ways in which women are systematically depicted as inferior and weak. His discussion of details such as relative size, 'the feminine touch' or the ritualization of subordination offers a model for reading advertisements which goes beyond mere statements about the occurrence of stereotypes about femininity, and opens the door towards interpretations and explanations – in short, it does not only describe the *what*, but also points to a *how*.

More recently, feminist media scholars have studied what seems to be a shift towards (quasi-)feminist or post-feminist themes and discourses in advertising in the Euro-American context (see, for instance, Macdonald 1995, Lazar 2009 or Gill 2007). As a result of social changes, advertisers started recognizing the limitations of openly antifeminist rhetoric and images of 'traditional' femininity. Additionally, they needed to respond to women's increasing purchasing power – or, as Rosalind Gill (2007, p. 84) puts it: "it is no good showing women lying on or draped over a car, for example, if you want to sell that car *to women*".

Such recent analyses of popular cultural discourses of post-feminism provide valuable insight into the ways in which advertising appropriates particular elements of feminist discourses in order to promote a conservative agenda. However, the majority of the feminist studies on this topic either focuses on individual media sites, or overgeneralizes the research by referring to a vague notion of the 'West'. For instance, in her book *Gender and the Media*, Rosalind Gill (2007) conducts a thorough examination of the various techniques through which the media reacts to and co-opts feminist discourses. However, discussing examples

from various countries from the U.S. to South Africa and the U.K., she does not restrict her analysis to a particular region or mediascape, but defines her research as an examination of “gender in the media in contemporary Western societies” (Ibid., p. 1). But what does this ‘West’ refer to? Is it viewed as the opposite of the ‘East’, the Third World, or some other region³?

I would like to argue that approaches which disregard cross-cultural differences focusing merely on commonalities run the risk of ignoring subtle variations in media representations. As the analysis in Chapter 3 will show, discourses and representations of femininity which seem very similar on a cross-cultural level may have different local roots, and can be interpreted and received in different ways by various target consumers. The combination of a gendered analysis of advertisements and insight gained from the scholarship on cross-cultural advertising can potentially provide a solution to this problem. Thus the following chapter discusses the particular ways in which my examination of post-feminist discourses in *Good Housekeeping* and *Nők Lapja* advertisements seeks to intertwine these two aspects of analysis.

³ The ambiguous nature of the term has been theorized by scholars such as Martin Lewis and Karen Wigen (1997).

2. Looking at advertising in women's magazines.

Methodology

The previous chapter mentioned some of the perspectives and methodologies which have been applied by scholars to examine gender in advertising. In the following sections, I will present the rationale behind the choice of magazines and set of advertisements for this particular analysis of advertising in American and Hungarian women's magazines, as well as the methodology used to explore and compare discourses of femininity in the two social spaces.

2.1. Magazines surveyed

For the purposes of the analysis, I have selected two publications with relatively similar profiles, and targeting comparatively analogous market segments in their respective countries: *Good Housekeeping* and *Nők Lapja*. Founded in 1885, *Good Housekeeping* remains to this day a trusted and popular brand in the United States (Nicholls, 2008). In its original format, the magazine featured articles primarily focusing on running a home, as well as literary contributions (Library of Congress, 2011). As my sample indicates, today the content of the magazine is mainly comprised of articles and advice on topics such as family life, childrearing, food, beauty, health, fitness and, of course, housekeeping. According to data provided by the company, the average *Good Housekeeping* reader is in her 40s, married with children, and interested in home decorating and cooking (Hearst Digital Media, 2011). With a 2010 circulation of over 4.4 million (Audit Bureau of Circulations, 2010), the magazine not only continues to be the leading American publication targeted at women, but as the lasting success of the Good Housekeeping Seal⁴ indicates, it remains a brand that inspires trust for millions of consumers (Nicholls, 2008).

⁴ For over one hundred years, the Good Housekeeping Research Institute (GHRI) has been testing products advertised in the magazine (Nicholls, 2008). Products which have earned the Good Housekeeping Seal are generally considered trustworthy by consumers, given that the magazine guarantees the replacement, refund or

Good Housekeeping's Hungarian quasi-equivalent, *Nők Lapja* (literally: "women's magazine"), is sold in almost 250,000 copies according to the Hungarian Audit-Bureau of Circulations (Magyar Terjesztés-ellenőrző Szövetség, 2010), and read by over 850,000 readers (Sanoma Media, n.d.). These figures may be dwarfed by *Good Housekeeping*'s circulation of 4.4 million; nevertheless, *Nők Lapja* is a market leader in the Hungarian context and has got the highest sales among women's weeklies in the country (Ibid.). First published in 1949, the magazine's dominant discourses of femininity shifted several times throughout the decades, and *Nők Lapja* has retained an ambivalent relationship to feminism for most of its existence (Kádár, 2002). According to Sanoma Media, the magazine's publisher, today *Nők Lapja*'s target readership is comprised of family-oriented women in the 25-49 years age group (Ibid.). With articles on personal stories, health, fashion, beauty, psychological advice, housekeeping and gardening, the magazine's content is very similar to that of *Good Housekeeping*. Although, according to the above-mentioned figures, the average *Good Housekeeping* reader is somewhat older than *Nők Lapja*'s typical reader, the two magazines' similar content, popularity and positioning on their respective markets enable a significant comparison between the representations and discourses of femininity in the advertisements they feature.

While *Nők Lapja* is a weekly with an average page number of 80-90⁵ and around 25 advertisements in each issue, *Good Housekeeping*, a 230-240-page monthly, features a significantly higher number of advertisements: approximately 100 per issue. For a fair comparison, the chosen sample of magazines therefore includes twenty-four issues of the

repair of any product approved by the GHRI which becomes defective within two years (Hearst Communications, n.d.).

⁵ With the exception of the Christmas/New Year's double issue which usually has a higher number of pages.

former and only six issues of the latter magazine, covering the same period, i.e. July-December 2010, and including approximately the same number of advertisements⁶.

Given the reduced size of the sample and the qualitative methodology used, it is important to note that this study does not aim to be representative of advertising in American and Hungarian women's magazines in general. Instead, my goal is to explore the processes of meaning-making in discourses of femininity, with a special focus on the ways in which certain discourses are used to naturalize and legitimize specific ideologies.

2.2. Reading advertisements

In the process of uncovering discourses of femininity in the selected magazines, I use discourse analysis in order to examine the ways in which meaning is (re)produced through language and text. I rely specifically on Fran Tonkiss's definition of discourse, i.e. "a *system* of language which draws on a particular terminology and encodes specific forms of knowledge" (Tonkiss 1998, p. 248). Tonkiss (Ibid., p. 249) pinpoints two major aspects of discourse analysis which are crucial for my examination of discourses of femininity: the *interpretative context* of the discourse and its *rhetorical organization*. The former enables a better understanding of external factors which reach beyond the text, yet have a significant influence on the discourse: in case of this specific analysis, this includes information regarding the profile of the magazine in which the advertisements were published, the profile of the target audience, (perceived) cultural specificities, etc. The latter facilitates a more thorough analysis of not only the organization of statements within a text, but of aspects which are especially important in the case of persuasive genres such as advertisements, namely:

⁶ A few additional issues of *Nők Lapja* were consulted in order to examine particular details which were not represented in the initial sample.

[...] the effects that these statements seek and their insertion into a larger rhetorical context within which certain forms of knowledge will be privileged, certain modes of argument will be persuasive, and certain speakers will be heard as authoritative.

Tonkiss 1998, p. 250

In addition to Tonkiss's approach, I use Norman Fairclough's (2003) work on the significance of assumptions and intertextuality in discourse analysis. Given that both assumptions and intertextuality are closely linked to ideology, attention to these notions may not only reveal the authors' positionality, but, as Fairclough (Ibid., p. 58) points out, may also highlight the ideological work behind the examined texts.

Given that the vast majority of the examined magazine advertisements rely heavily on image-based data, semiotic analysis is particularly useful in uncovering the processes of meaning-making that characterize the adverts. As Liesbet van Zoonen (1994, p. 79) notes, "[a]s a concentrated form of communication, advertising [...] depends heavily on the successful exploitation of the connotative power of signs". Decoding these signs – through semiotic analysis – provides an insight into the ways in which advertising encourages female consumers to occupy a specific subject position and identify with a certain ideal of femininity, as well as sheds light on the methods through which advertising perpetuates particular discourses.

Judith Williamson's work on processes of meaning construction in print advertisements is specifically useful in understanding how advertising works. In her landmark book *Decoding Advertisements*, Williamson (1978) explains the ways in which advertising not only creates difference between products through processes of signification, but also establishes linkages between ideologies and products so that meaning is transferred from the former to the latter. Exploring these linkages between the advertised products and notions such as caring and nurturing, for instance, furthers my analysis by highlighting the discourses the adverts take advantage of in order to convey a particular meaning and achieve the desired effect.

In addition to Williamson's approach, Erving Goffman's (1987) influential book *Gender Advertisements* also informs the semiotic analysis of the advertisements in my sample. Focusing primarily on details in the visual composition of adverts, Goffman examines so-called 'gender displays', i.e. conventionalized depictions of "culturally established correlates of sex" (Goffman 1987, p. 1) in order to uncover patterns in the representation of gender difference. His examination of such gender displays – including factors such as the relative size of the people depicted in advertisements, 'the feminine touch' or 'licensed withdrawal' – complements the discursive analysis of the adverts in the *Good Housekeeping* and *Nők Lapja* sample by highlighting the way in which visual elements reinforce the discourses conveyed by the advertisement copy.

2.3. Interpreting cross-cultural convergence and divergence: Hofstede's 5-D model

Prominent scholarship on gender and advertising is essential in the process of uncovering the discourses of femininity in the selected set of advertisements. However, an additional layer can be added to this analysis by taking into account theories and models which are widely used by researchers and practitioners in the field of cross-cultural advertising. In the examination of the selected adverts I rely specifically on Geert Hofstede's comprehensive studies of cultural differences across nations.

Over a period of around thirty years, Hofstede, a renowned Dutch social psychologist, conducted comprehensive qualitative research consisting of more than 110,000 questionnaires aimed at revealing cultural patterns (Mooij 1998a, p. 72). In order to explore cross-cultural similarities and differences, Hofstede developed a model based on five dimension of culture:

- *Power Distance*, i.e. "the extent to which less powerful members of a society accept and expect that power is distributed unequally" (Hofstede n.d.1);

- *Individualism versus Collectivism*, i.e. “the degree to which individuals are integrated into groups” (Ibid.);
- *Masculinity versus Femininity*, referring to “the distribution of roles between the genders” (Ibid.);
- *Uncertainty Avoidance*, i.e. “a society's tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity” (Ibid.);
- *Long-Term Orientation versus Short-Term Orientation*, representing “the extent to which a society exhibits a pragmatic future-oriented perspective rather than a conventional historic or short-term point of view” (Mooij 1998a, p. 87).

As a result of the research, each surveyed country was assigned a score for each of the above-mentioned five dimensions. While assigning numeric scores to societies' cultural characteristics can be viewed as problematic, the scores are to be used primarily in a comparative context: in other words, what is significant is the relative positioning of one country in comparison with another, not necessarily the specific individual score.

The 5-D model is viewed by some scholars as very controversial for several reasons. For instance, some argue that nations, as units of analysis, are inappropriate for examining cultural specificities, while others accuse Hofstede of having overgeneralized a study initially based on data gathered at various subsidiaries of a single company (Hofstede 2002). Arguably, much of the dismissal of the 5-D model stems from a misinterpretation of its scope and purpose. Hofstede acknowledges that both ‘culture’ as such and the dimensions proposed by him are merely constructs; nevertheless, they continue to be useful to the extent that they explain and predict behavior (Ibid., p. 5). Moreover, Hofstede's findings were repeatedly validated through dozens of other wide-scope studies (Ibid., p. 4; Mooij 1998a., pp. 72-73), hence the 5-D model remains a valuable resource for cross-cultural research. Notwithstanding

these controversies, Hofstede is widely considered to be an influential scholar: as John W. Bing (2004) points out, “Hofstede is the most-cited Dutch author and the ninth-most cited European in the 2001 Social Science Citation Index”.

Originally, the Hofstede model was – and still is – used in research focusing on work-related cross-cultural differences in corporate environments (Mooij 1998a, p. 73). Nevertheless, the model has since been applied by scholars and professionals in a variety of fields, including for didactic purposes in translation studies in order to develop linguistic competence (Sidiripoulou 2008, p. 341), in a Hungarian study of generational conflicts through a gendered perspective (Urbán 2008); in website design, corporate leadership training, studies of business practices, and even in NASA-approved research on the use of automation in airline cockpits (Bing 2004).

In the field of cross-cultural communication and advertising, Marieke de Mooij (1998a, 1998b) applies Hofstede’s 5-D model in order to explore convergence and divergence in cross-cultural consumer behavior, as well as look at the ways in which cultural diversity affects advertising and marketing. As de Mooij explains, the Hofstede model can be of great use for practitioners:

The 5-D model can be used to recognize these values [within a specific society] and thus help develop more appropriate advertising. It can also explain differences in actual consumption behavior and product use and thus can assist in predicting consumer behavior or effectiveness of marketing strategies for cultures other than one’s own. This will be particularly useful for companies that want to develop global marketing and advertising strategies.

Mooij 1998a., p. 92

Her correlation of specific advertising styles with different scores on the five Hofstede indexes is particularly useful for my examination, as it provides an additional layer to the analysis, and offers possible explanations for differences and similarities in advertising content and style. Given that, in order to maximize efficiency, advertisers rely on the kind of statistical data on cultural values that Hofstede offers, applying the model in this context

provides insight into advertisers' own perceptions about the dominant cultural values and traits within a society.

3. Women are women are women? Examining femininity in advertisements

*The future is female, we are told.
Feminism has served its purpose and should now eff off.*
Greer 1999, p. 4

Popular cultural discourses of post-feminism are generally rooted in the idea that, given the recent social and political developments in Western industrialized societies, feminism has achieved its goals, and therefore must clear the way to a new school of thought (Lazar 2005, p.17). Angela McRobbie (2009) has called the advancement of this perspective in popular culture a process of “undoing feminism” which simultaneously appears to recognize its merits. Choice and autonomy seem to be key concepts within this discourse; however, as I will argue in the following sections, popular post-feminism in the American and Hungarian mediascapes offers little more than a false sense of freedom entirely reduced to consumerism.

In the following, I turn to the analysis of new traditionalist discourses in *Good Housekeeping* and *Nők Lapja*, examining the differences and similarities between the ways in which advertising in the two publications frames women’s activity within the private sphere. Subsequently, in Section 3.2 I look at articulations of so-called ‘entitled femininity’ in order to explore the representation of the concept of ‘autonomy’ in the two contexts.

3.1. Angelic mothers and domestic goddesses of the twenty-first century

In January 2011, an article published in the *Wall Street Journal* by Amy Chua (2011), a law professor at Yale University unleashed a surprising wave of media frenzy. The article quickly earned the author the status of most criticized mother of the blogosphere and generated outrage and even death threats (Dolak, 2011). Her offense? Chua, a Chinese-American, published a book entitled *Battle Hymn of a Tiger Mother*, in which she explains what she views as the strict ‘Chinese’ parenting philosophy. In the *Wall Street Journal* article, she

describes how her children were never allowed to watch television, get grades lower than ‘A’, or play instruments of their own choosing, and even confesses to having called one of her daughters ‘garbage’ (Chua 2011). Granted, her use of terms such as ‘tiger mom’ or ‘Chinese parenting’ is problematic and perpetuates stereotypes; nevertheless, I would argue that the extreme media outrage was triggered first and foremost by her refusal to conform to stereotypical images of the caring, nurturing, self-sacrificial mother.

As Myra Macdonald (1995, p. 132) points out, “[f]emininity, denigrated in many other aspects, has long been cherished for its caring qualities”: women, for centuries closely linked to the domestic sphere, are generally thought to have a natural inclination towards nurturing. While feminist discourses of the past few decades have brought about significant changes in the way people talk about women’s role as mothers and within the home, my sample of *Good Housekeeping* and *Nők Lapja* advertisements indicates that mothering, caring and housework are recurrent themes on the pages of American and Hungarian women’s magazines of this type. Of course, given the two magazines’ profiles (as mentioned in Chapter 2.1, both are primarily targeted at married, family-oriented women), certain discourses and product categories are to be expected in the advertisements. The most interesting aspect of the adverts is that they seem to want to have their cake and eat it too: they both borrow from feminist discourses, as well as mobilize what Elspeth Probyn (1997) calls ‘new traditionalism’.

Examining so-called ‘female-centered’ television programs, Probyn discusses what she views as a “recentring of women in the family and the home” (Ibid., p. 128), a result of the backlash to feminism. The discourse of new traditionalism resonates with contemporary women in that it posits the home as an ideal and reassuringly peaceful place, the antithesis of the hectic public sphere as a site of struggle for women. Framing women’s return to the

domestic sphere as a matter of *choice*, new traditionalism manages to gloss over its conservative value system:

As Leslie Savan has pointed out, new traditionalism has become synonymous with a new age of ‘choiceoisie’ and it is precisely this ideology of choice that articulates new traditionalism and post-feminism. According to *Good Housekeeping*, new traditionalism marks a ‘reaffirmation of family values unmatched in recent history’. *Good Housekeeping*’s magazine ads feature happily reformed women returned to the family home and flanked by children.

Ibid., p. 130

As Probyn (Ibid., p. 131) notes, the problem arises in the fact that new traditionalism portrays the home as if it were the natural choice – “which means, of course, no choice”.

The following sections examine new traditionalist discourses with a special focus on the concept of choice, and analyze women’s portrayal as mothers, wives and homemakers (and cleaners-in-chief) in the selected advertisements. What we see are mothers who – be they energetic or exhausted, happy or worried – never seem to forget the value of caring and nurturing, and, most importantly, never act like a tiger mom.

3.1.1. “With love, with protection, with bifidus.” Nurturing and caring.

If one is to believe advertisements, mothers’ lives are troubled by constant worrying about the integrity of their families, and about the future, health and safety of their children. Father figures are largely absent from these family portraits painted by the adverts, reinforcing the idea that it is primarily mothers who carry the responsibilities of the domestic sphere.

An American advertisement for ADHD medicine perfectly captures the frustration, worrying and loneliness implied by such responsibilities:

His math homework is two days late. It’s in his backpack, which he left on the bus. Again. It feels like everyone is giving up on him. I need a way to help him, but all I have is tears.
- Laura, Kyle’s mom

ADHD can be a lonely experience for both the child and the parent. But Laura is not alone. And neither are you.

Good Housekeeping, August 2010

Assuming Laura is not a single mother (which is a fair assumption, given that advertisements tend to perpetuate the ideal of the nuclear family), one must ask the question why Laura must

be alone with the hardship of a child with a learning disability. Problems such as learning disabilities are not only worrying for the child's sake, but they must be contained so as to preserve the idyllic peace of family life as a site of fulfillment and love, in accordance to the values of new traditionalism, as described by Probyn (1997, p. 131).



A 1 - Good Housekeeping, July 2010

The caption in A1, another ADHD medicine advertisement, asks, “Are your child’s ADHD symptoms consistently controlled even during family time?”, and the picture shows a smiling, relaxed mother helping her content and calm son study. This is clearly the figure of a successful mother who is not only supportive of her son and patient with him, but what is implied is that she also manages to protect the peace of highly valued ‘family time’.

Whether capitalizing on mothers’ fear and frustration as in the first ADHD medicine example, or offering the promise of hope and peace as in A1, advertisers clearly recognize the appeal of discourses on the safety and health of children. Mothers must be constantly wary of the threat of drugs (a pink girly jewelry box can be just that, a jewelry box, but also a hiding place for drugs, as suggested in A2), worried about their children’s weak school performance (A3), or about their daughters’ dry skin (A4). Luckily, advertisers always have the right solution for desperate mothers’ problems. If mothers should suspect their child might be taking drugs, they can turn to a support website – naturally, one with direct

mother's qualities thus depend on what she is willing to buy for the sake of her children's wellbeing.

A particularly absurd American advertisement for Nestlé Toll House cookies (A5), for instance, asks consumers: "Who would you bake some love for?", showing two boys who have set up camp in a living room. As the caption of the advertisement explains, in order to express her love, the mother surprises them – with great success – with a batch of cookies. Of course, love has long been associated with food and cooking (see, for instance, the popular saying "The way to a man's heart is through his stomach"); nevertheless, there is something peculiar about the implication that motherly love is best expressed through cookie dough pre-made by the largest food company in the world. Nonetheless, appealing to emotions is a dominant feature of the American advertising style (Mooij 1998a, p. 272). As Marieke de Mooij (Ibid., p. 149) explains, "[a]ny manufacturer claiming superiority on the basis of attributes finds competitors responding with identical or even better claims in a short span of time", thus provoking an emotional response from customers becomes an effective way of differentiating between very similar products.

A Hungarian advertisement for baby food (A6), incidentally also produced by Nestlé, uses the same process of meaning making as the Toll House advert. Its slogan "BEBA. With love, with protection, with bifidus!" (*BEBA. Szeretettel, védelemmel, bifidusszal!*) equates motherly love and care with a particular ingredient of the advertised product, 'bifidus'. Both the American cookie advertisement and the Hungarian baby food advert reduce the notions of caring and mothering to consumerism. However, it is interesting to note that while the former implies at least *some* kind of labor (the dough is pre-made, but must be baked), the latter completely erases the effort that goes into nurturing.



A 5 - Good Housekeeping, November 2010
“Who would you bake some love for?”

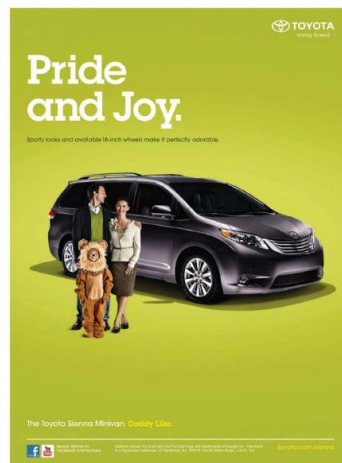


A 6 - Nők Lapja, 17 November 2010
“With love, with protection, with bifidus!”

Such constructions of femininity centered on women’s role as mothers seem to echo what Myra Macdonald (1995, p. 77), writing about advertising in the interwar period, describes as “manufactured versions of feminine responsibilities or aspirations that had particular resonance for the women of the period”. Yet no direct link can be established between the femininities described by Macdonald and those depicted in the above-mentioned advertisements of the twenty-first century without taking into account the concept of ‘new traditionalism’ as theorized by Elspeth Probyn (1997). Similarly to what Macdonald describes in relation to the interwar period, contemporary advertising manufactures ideals of femininity – within the discourse of new traditionalism – which have a special resonance for today’s women.

The mothers in the adverts discussed above thus seem to have the same insecurities and worries – about health, hygiene, and the future and success of their children – as women in the first half of the twentieth century. Such striking similarities in spite of the difference of several decades between the two can be attributed to the fact that new traditionalism naturalizes family values as *eternal* values (Probyn 1997, p.131). What is different this time is that, in the American context, this newer articulation of the discourse which glorifies mothering and family values is rooted in the assumption that feminism has achieved its goal, and thus women are free (and encouraged) to *choose* the caretaker role. In contrast, the

Toyota advertisement published in *Good Housekeeping* (A8) shows a man-woman-child trio standing in front of what is presumably the family car, as if posing for the ‘family shot’ genre. The careful positioning of the trio, reminiscent of family photos, and the caption “Daddy like” at the bottom of the advert instantly establish the familial relationship between the depicted figures. While the child and the mother are looking straight into the camera smiling, the father is throwing an admiring glance towards the car. The spatial positioning of the figures thus confirms Goffman’s (1987, p. 39) observation that adverts tend to show fathers standing a bit outside the family circle. The gaze of the father in the Toyota ad is directed at the car, signifying a world outside of the domestic sphere.



A 8 - Good Housekeeping, November 2010

The twist lies in the tongue-in-cheek main caption that reads “Pride and Joy”, illustrating the way in which men are perceived as having a different relationship to their families and to the domestic sphere in general than women. A quick ‘commutation test’⁷, as described by Myra Macdonald (1995, p. 44), reveals how the discourse of new traditionalism would not allow this advertisement to function if the gender roles were switched. After all, it

⁷ In order to uncover stereotypes, Macdonald (1995, p. 44) suggests “taking one element in communication, altering it, and then observing the impact of this change on the overall meaning”. The commutation test is thus an excellent way of revealing stereotypical images of gender roles, by simply mentally substituting women with men (and vice-versa) in advertisements.

is only 'normal' that a mother's "pride and joy" is her family – anything else would qualify her as a bad mother who refuses the 'natural' choice of the family and the home.

3.1.2. "Get ready to enjoy an incredible cleaning experience." The pleasure and pain of domestic work

The discourse of new traditionalism is closely linked to the notion of domestic labor: women's return to the home as a result of the success of the feminist movement supposes a return to a long list of regular household duties – proper housekeeping is, after all, as the name of the magazine *Good Housekeeping* implies, the concern of every woman.

When looking at advertising for cleaning products and household appliances, it becomes immediately clear that, as far as the visibility of domestic labor goes, a significant paradigm shift has occurred over the last one or two centuries. Anne McClintock (2003) has written about the phenomenon of concealed labor in the middle-class circles of the Victorian Era, and the conventions which dictated the meticulous erasure of all evidence of housework:

Housewifery became a career in vanishing acts. A wife's vocation was not only to create a clean and productive family but also the skilled erasure of every *sign* of her work. Her life took shape around the contradictory imperative of laboring while rendering her labor invisible.

McClintock 2003, p.651

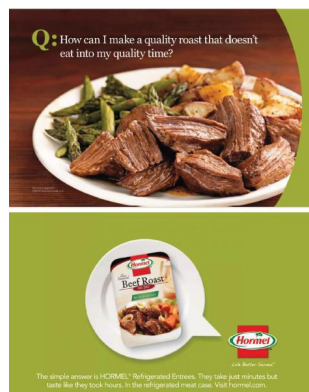
In contrast, domestic work, as a fundamental aspect of women's role within the home, is significantly more visible in contemporary advertisements. This shift can be primarily attributed to the ways in which new traditionalist discourses (predominantly in 'Western' societies) articulate the success of feminism: as a response to feminist discourses on women's work within the home, new traditionalism acknowledges household duties as *labor*, and frames them in terms of 'efficient management skills' – as if attempting to elevate their significance. Instead of depicting housework as a lowly, shameful activity, advertising frames domestic work as a *job* which requires much of the same skills as the labor market does. The message seems to be: why would a woman want to choose a career in the public sphere, when she can make use of her management and multitasking skills for the benefit of her family?

What advertising promises in this sense is to help women perform better at this difficult – but ‘natural’ and satisfying – job, and guarantees increased efficiency through consumption. A good product must therefore not only be effective, but quick and easy to use as well.

This paradigm shift in the visibility of domestic labor as a matter of management and efficiency is particularly evident in American adverts for pre-cooked meals, most of which are prized for their time-saving qualities:



A 9 - Good Housekeeping, December 2010



A 10 - Good Housekeeping, September 2010



A 11 - Good Housekeeping, November 2010

3 minutes to dinner. A home-cooked family dinner is easier than you think. QuickCook™ tastes just like regular pasta, but cooks in only three minutes. A delicious dinner **has never been so fast.**

Good Housekeeping, December 2010 (A9) [emphasis added]

How can I make a quality roast that **doesn't eat into my quality time?** [...] They take just minutes but taste like they took hours.

Good Housekeeping, September 2010 (A10) [emphasis added]

Egg burrito to sausage and egg burrito **in 1.5 seconds.** A heartier breakfast is **quicker** and easier with Jimmy Dean fully cooked sausage crumbles.

Good Housekeeping, November 2010 (A11) [emphasis added]

The recurring emphasis on *time* not only references women's increasingly hectic lives within the domestic sphere, but also indicates that there are other tasks, deemed more important, which women must take care of. The technology of processed food thus comes at busy women's rescue, freeing up time and making domestic work more pleasurable. This logic reinforces the new traditionalist claim that women's return to the home is a choice

worth making – after all, they have modern technology and innovative commodities at their disposal to help out with the workload.

Thus instead of having to invest time and energy, and making it look effortless in the end, products such as the ones promoted in the above-discussed advertisements provide a recipe for ‘cheating’: they promise high quality food which mimics home-cooked meals (“They take just minutes but taste like they took hours.” – A10; “QuickCookTM tastes just like regular pasta” – A9), allowing women to play the role of ideal housewives with less effort involved, and to secure some ‘quality time’ for themselves. However, the logic of such advertisements for processed or pre-cooked food seems to clash with messages which construct women as safeguards of the family’s health and wellbeing. This is a contradiction which is primarily characteristic of the American advertisements in the sample. While *Good Housekeeping* features a relatively high number of adverts for pre-cooked food (including frozen dinners, pizza and desserts), *Nők Lapja* rarely advertises such products – a significant difference which can likely be attributed to the two societies’ varying eating habits. Moreover, the rare food-related products that do appear on the pages of *Nők Lapja*, such as margarine for baking or bouillon jelly, tend to serve as ingredients for other, more time-consuming home-made dishes; hence the time-saving argument is seldom used in this context.

Not only cooking practices seem to differ in the two countries, but the advertising style associated with foodstuff varies as well. As Marieke de Mooij (1998a, p. 27) notes, advertisers view food-related products as highly culture-bound, thus the level of adaptation tends to be higher in case of this product category. *Knorr* products are a particularly good example for this phenomenon. The global brand image is ensured by the brand name, logo, and similar packaging style, whereas the contents, i.e. the products themselves, vary according to local tastes (Ibid., pp. 17-18).



A 12 - Good Housekeeping, December 2010



A 13 - Nők Lapja, 29 September 2010

The two advertisements pictured above promote pre-made *Knorr* products – the American advert is for Pasta Alfredo (A12), the Hungarian one for bouillon jelly (A13), under the same recognizable brand image (sustained in these ads first and foremost through the use of the company logo and a particular color palette), but aware of local expectations towards advertising. The products themselves, though sold under the same brand, are highly localized: Pasta Alfredo is an Italian dish which is very popular in the U.S.; whereas the Hungarian advert recommends bouillon jelly as an ingredient in bean goulash, perhaps the most well-known traditional Hungarian dish.

Regarding the actual design, the difference in the amount of text used in the two adverts is striking. Both advertisements include a recipe⁸; however, the American one uses a short advertising copy with an emphasis on visual elements, while the Hungarian one relies heavily on text. The Hungarian *Knorr* ad thus seems to confirm the correlation between certain advertising styles and a high uncertainty avoidance index in the Hofstede model. As cross-cultural advertising expert Marieke de Mooij (1998a, p. 199) explains: “[s]trong

⁸ The two recipes confirm the point discussed above regarding what counts as ‘acceptable’ cooking time in the two cultural contexts: while the American *Knorr* recipe specifies a total preparation and cooking time of 30 minutes, bean goulash takes 80-100 minutes to cook according to the Hungarian recipe. As other previously discussed *Good Housekeeping* advertisements indicate, American consumers would probably view this recipe as unusually time-consuming, therefore the advert would not work in the U.S. context.

uncertainty avoidance translates into the need for explanations, structure, long copy, testing, and testimonials by experts”. The Hungarian *Knorr* ad not only features detailed explanations regarding the quality, usage and benefits of the product, but also includes an interview with Hungarian star chef Lázár Kovács⁹, whose recommendation and expert opinion is used to confer credibility onto the product. Hungary ranks high on Hofstede’s uncertainty avoidance index (Hofstede n.d.1). This, combined with the above discussed characteristics, such as the use of long advertising copy and the inclusion of expert opinion, seem to confirm that advertisers are aware of cross-cultural differences, and this awareness of diverging needs and perceived cultural values is translated into varying advertising styles.

What is also noteworthy in the two *Knorr* advertisements is the visual absence of women as working mothers and wives. The Hungarian advert interestingly features a successful professional *male* chef as the representation of authority. It is he who not only ‘elevates’ simple bouillon jelly to the status of premium ingredient due to his reputation, but also lectures female consumers on the benefits of the product. Hence, while the discourse of new traditionalism posits the woman as an authority within the home, it simultaneously upholds hegemonic gender relations – in this case, through the figure of Lázár Kovács as a higher authority than the women whom the advertisement addresses. As Probyn (1997, p. 131) explains: “In the best logic of advertising, new traditionalism both symbolizes and reproduces the solid nature of the status quo as it urges women to get on the bandwagon, to buy into the old as new”.

In addition to foodstuff, advertisements for cleaning products and household appliances represent the most prominent category of ads in the two magazines addressing the topic of domestic labor. Such advertisements promise not only greater efficiency but an easier process of housekeeping as well. Unlike cooking, cleaning is often portrayed as a war against

⁹ Lázár Kovács is a famous Hungarian chef, best known for his work on the popular cooking show *Receptklub*.

dirt, and housewives need special weapons to fight the battle: copies such as “Fight stains with science” (Wisk – *Good Housekeeping*, November 2010), “Now messes will fear you” (Windex – *Ibid.*) or “Power out more stains” (OxiClean – *Ibid.*) even sound like battle cries. Apparently, the tough ‘tiger mom approach’ that is so harshly judged when applied to raising children (as Amy Chua’s experiences with the media has shown) is completely acceptable when directed at dirt and stains.

Instead of concealing the signs of labor, as middle-class women would have done a little over a century ago, the painstaking process of domestic work is emphasized both verbally and visually. An advert for *Pam* baking spray (A 14), for instance, shows a woman armed with a hammer arduously trying to remove dried muffin remnants from a baking pan. For full effect, she is pictured as being barely taller than a muffin herself.



A 14 - Good Housekeeping, November 2010

Such advertisements clearly borrow from feminist discourses, given that they go to great lengths to illustrate the effort involved in housekeeping and to recognize domestic work as ‘real’ labor. Furthermore, by addressing only women, they largely miss the mark: instead of challenging the status quo, they preach false empowerment through commodities. The advertised products may *help* with the housekeeping, but it is still women who actually have to *do* the work.

A further interesting point is what determines the women in these advertisements to fight the battle against dirt. In A14 there is no direct reference as to why the woman must

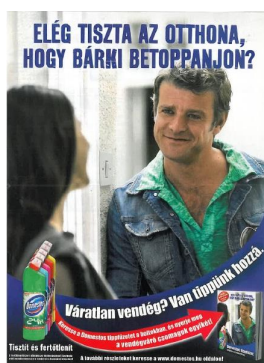
frantically scrape the pan, thus she seems to have a certain level of autonomy. In contrast, a Hungarian advertisement for *Domestos* bleach makes it clear that women who fail to live up to expectations associated with cleanliness and homemaking duties must face social shaming (or worse, the mother-in-law's fastidious inspection). The advert opens with the following desperate lines:

“Oh my! Who could be ringing at the door? Oh no, it's the mother-in-law! Oh-oh, will she notice that the kitchen is not quite in order?” Does this sound familiar? Don't worry, unexpected guests can come anytime if you always have Domestos in your home.

[„Nathát, vajon ki csöngetett? Húha, az anyós! Ajjaj, vajon észreveszi, hogy nincs minden rendben a konyhában?” Ugye, ismerős a helyzet? Nyugalom, a váratlan vendég is bármikor jöhet, hat mindig kéznél van otthon a Domestos.]

Nők Lapja, 20 October 2010

The advertisement not only perpetuates old stereotypes about the mother-in-law as a judgmental monster with whom the wife must fight over a man's love and appreciation, but also reinforces the idea that women have a natural responsibility for the neatness and cleanliness of the home. A second version of the *Domestos* advert (A15) features a caption that reads “Is your home clean enough so that anyone can pop in?” (*Elég tiszta az otthona, hogy bárki betoppanjon?*), and the image shows a woman opening the door to Iván Kamarás, a popular Hungarian actor with the reputation of a womanizer in the Hungarian tabloid media.



A 15 - Nők Lapja, 13 October 2010

As these two advertisements indicate, women must be ready at all times to be held under scrutiny, and to have their skills as homemakers examined by outsiders. Of course, what

woman would not gladly prepare for visitors when the guest could be an attractive man (or so the logic of the second advert seems to suggest)?

In an especially absurd twist, domestic work is also associated with fun and pleasure. After all, cleaning becomes enjoyable with so many wonderful products lending a helping hand. Women now scream with joy at the sight of a special brand of cleaning products which are – supposedly – not only effective, but also eco-friendly (A16), and the advert for *Gain* dishwashing liquid (A17) promises “amazing scents that no one can resist”, and warns us to “Get ready to enjoy an incredible cleaning experience”.



A 16 - Nők Lapja, 6 October 2010



A 17 - Good Housekeeping, October 2010

Victorian women had to go to great lengths to conceal all signs of domestic work and pretend that they conformed to the feminine ideal of the idle woman. Today’s women, if one is to learn a lesson from advertisements, must go to equally great lengths to show that it is their choice to do it – and that they actually enjoy it.

3.1.3. Looking at new traditionalism(s)

The previous sections explored the ways in which advertising in both the U.S. and Hungary articulate a type of femininity which can be linked to discourses of new traditionalism. Examples have shown that, through naturalizing mothering as *the* choice, in other words – by ‘selling’ family values as the only values worth living for, advertising in both mediascapes sustains women’s association with domestic work, and with qualities such as caring and nurturing. Although advertising styles may vary according to the advertisers’ perceptions

regarding cultural values and specificities, representations of women's role as mothers and homemakers seem to be rooted in the same discourse of new traditionalism in both social spaces.

As Probyn (1997, p. 130) explains, discourses of post-feminism and new traditionalism are closely interlinked, to the point that "it's hard to have one without the other". Thus, to understand the implications of new traditionalism, one has to look at the social context in which post-feminism emerged and continues to thrive in the so-called 'West'. Conceptualized by Michelle Lazar (2005, p. 17) as both a "masculinist backlash that defends against the whittling away of the patriarchal dividend" and a view with which some feminists identify themselves as well, post-feminism is a response to the feminist discourses of the Second Wave and the subsequent social developments in terms of gender equality:

According to this discourse, once certain equality indicators (such as rights to educational access, labour force participation, property ownership, and abortion and fertility) are achieved by women, feminism is considered to have outlived its purpose and ceases to be of relevance.

Ibid.

Hence, as long as these 'newly empowered' women's return to the domestic sphere can be labeled as 'choice', it remains – according to the logic of new traditionalism – a valid one. In a sense, then, these advertisements are merely selling back old ideas in a different guise to consumers.

But to what extent is it feasible to talk about new traditionalism in the Hungarian context? While apparently very similar, do the discourses dominating these adverts represent a reaction to the same phenomenon? In comparison to the United States, feminist discourses have a very different historical background in Hungary. While in 'Western' democratic societies the family was critiqued by feminists as a tool of the subordination of women, as Barbara Einhorn (1993, p. 6) notes, state socialism urged women to "participate in the public sphere of work, and praised 'heroine workers'". Moreover, the state disapproved of housewives who did not work outside the home, leading to a deepening public/private divide,

which allowed the idealization of the domestic sphere. Viewed as a “harmonious collectivity pitted against the difficulties and strife of coping with the shortcomings of daily life”, the family was positioned as the antithesis of the overreaching state (Ibid., p. 59). Women’s return to the home in a post-socialist space thus carries very different overtones compared to American new traditionalism.

One of the most prominent signs of the different meanings associated with this discourse in the two social spaces is the degree to which advertising tends to acknowledge women’s labor within the home. As the examples have shown, *Good Housekeeping* adverts often recognize the hardships of domestic work: they place great emphasis on time-saving qualities and increased efficiency through products and technologies. As a response to feminist discourses, the effort that goes into housework does not go unnoticed; it is rather mitigated through commodities. Although domestic work remains the duty of the woman, it is now depicted as quicker and easier. In contrast, the Hungarian advertisements in the sample mostly fail to acknowledge the great effort associated with women’s role in the private sphere. There are, of course, some exceptions, such as the *Domestos* adverts which do emphasize the need for quick and easy solutions. Nonetheless, advertisements such as the one for *Knorr* bouillon jelly (which features an almost two-hour recipe without any reference to the product’s potential time-saving qualities) portray domestic labor as ‘natural’ – or ‘naturally’ time-consuming.

As my sample of advertisements indicates, the same kinds of discourses seem to be at work in American and Hungarian advertisements addressed to or representing women as mothers, caregivers and homemakers. Portraying the return to the home as the path towards a wholesome life, most of these adverts seem to echo discourses of new traditionalism. Nevertheless, the similarities are only partial: while both versions of this new traditionalism

represent the renouncement of feminism, they carry very different kinds of historical baggage, and thus, presumably, resonate differently within the two societies.

3.2. Reinventing autonomy

“How grossly do they insult us who thus advise us only to render ourselves gentle, domestic brutes!” – wrote Mary Wollstonecraft in 1792, famously decrying the oppressive feminine ideals of her age (1994, p. 84). For centuries, women have been associated with feminine ideals of passivity, frailty, domesticity and submissiveness, which long outlived Wollstonecraft. Since the emergence of women’s movements and scholarship in the twentieth century, ‘traditional’ depictions of women based on such ideals have been at the forefront of feminist media criticism. Throughout its history, advertising has repeatedly adapted to technological, economic, social and fashion-related changes – in the past few decades perhaps more so than ever (Gill 2007, p. 82). As a response to the increasingly vehement feminist voices critiquing media representations of women, advertisers in the ‘West’ turned to what Robert Goldman dubbed ‘commodity feminism’ (Goldman 1992, cited in Gill 2007), i.e. an attempt to co-opt feminist discourses, while simultaneously emptying them out of their political potency.

In the following section I examine some of the ways in which, by adopting popular cultural discourses of post-feminism, *Good Housekeeping* and *Nők Lapja* advertisements negotiate a middle ground between the ideal of passive, delicate femininity and discourses seemingly embracing women’s empowerment and autonomy.

3.2.1. “Beauty is freedom”: Co-opting feminist discourses

A close-up of a female celebrity, photographed with soft lighting against a pastel-colored background, her hands gently touching her face or caressing her hair – if the image sounds familiar, perhaps it is because global brands such as L’Oréal or Garnier (incidentally, also owned by the L’Oréal Group) have systematically used versions of it in millions of print

advertisements and billboards worldwide. With the depicted soft, delicate features, passive posture and caressing gestures, such images are reminiscent of Erving Goffman's landmark analysis of gender in advertisements in the 1970s. One of the most prevalent visual symbols of delicate femininity identified by Goffman is 'the feminine touch', i.e. precisely the instantly recognizable gesture described above, still omnipresent in advertisements on the streets and on the pages of magazines:

Women, more than men, are pictured using their fingers and hands to trace the outlines of an object or to cradle it or to caress its surface (the latter sometimes under the guise of guiding it), or to effect a "just barely touching" of the kind that might be significant between two electrically charged bodies.

Goffman 1987, p. 29

Self-touching can also be involved, readable as conveying a sense of one's body being a delicate and precious thing.

Ibid., p. 31

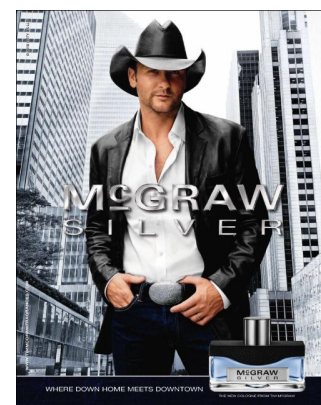
Goffman distinguishes this type of ritualistic, delicate touching from its more utilitarian counterpart which "grasps, manipulates, or holds" (Ibid.), and which, most importantly, is typical of portrayals of men in advertisements. While women are depicted gently caressing their skin, hair, or an object, as demonstrated in A18 and A19, men tend to be shown standing confidently, in more aggressive poses, for instance, gripping their belt as in A20.



A 18 - Good Housekeeping, September 2010



A 19 - Nők Lapja, 24 March 2010



A 20 - Good Housekeeping, December 2010

The gestures seen in these two L'Oréal advertisements (A18 and A19) seem very similar to the ones in Goffman's analysis. However, what has changed in more than three decades since Goffman's discussion of the 'feminine touch' is that the famous L'Oréal slogan, "Because you're worth it" perhaps resonates with female consumers today more than ever. Registered with the United States Patent and Trademark Office in 1976, the slogan only became popular in the late 1990s (Soutoul and Bresson 2010), i.e. around the time when popular cultural discourses of post-feminism started spreading in the 'Western' media (Lazar 2009, p. 372). The sudden success of the slogan can be perhaps attributed to its resonance with increasingly frequent depictions of so-called 'entitled femininity' within popular cultural discourses of post-feminism.

Lazar (2009, p. 374) links the representations of 'entitled femininity' in advertising to popular cultural discourses which claim "leisure and pleasure as women's entitlement, along with the celebration of all things feminine and 'girly'". This is precisely the sentiment conveyed by the famous *L'Oréal* slogan 'Because you're worth it' (and its Hungarian translation, *Mert Ön megérdemli*): it suggests a narcissistic and self-confident stance that embraces beauty practices and consumerism in an unapologetic fashion. The "It's about me!"-attitude signals a definite break from the more 'traditional' view that expects women to gain pleasure purely from satisfying others, and, above all, from serving their husbands and children (Ibid., p. 375).

Nonetheless, discourses which seemingly embrace empowerment are often juxtaposed with visual representations that immediately negate the (tentatively) feminist message. *Nivea*, for instance, published several full-page adverts in *Nők Lapja* with images of young women alongside advertising copies defining beauty, such as "Beauty is passion" (*A szépség szenvedély* – A21), "Beauty is confidence" (*A szépség magabiztosság* – A22) and "Beauty is freedom" (*A szépség szabadság* – A23) – all referencing concepts linked to a popular cultural

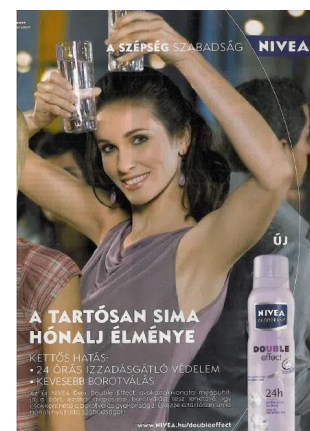
understanding of feminism. While seemingly ascribing agency to women, the overall message of these advertisements reduce empowerment to consumption and appearances: passion is visually represented by a passive woman delicately leaning on her hands, the secret of self-confidence apparently lies in beautiful silky hair, and freedom signifies the ability to drink and party in public. The message is that beauty can provide privileges such as freedom and self-assurance – and not the other way around, which would arguably be a much more empowering message.



A 21 - Nők Lapja, 21 May 2008



A 22 - Nők Lapja, 17 June 2009

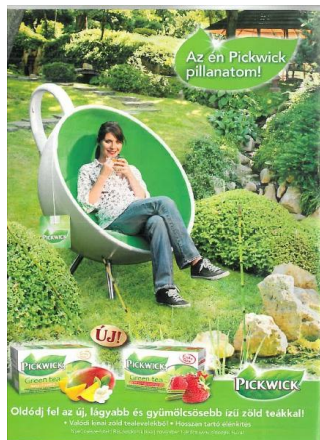


A 23 - Nők Lapja, 28 May 2008

The third *Nivea* advertisement (A23) particularly echoes what Angela McRobbie (2009, p. 9) has identified as a new sexual pact in post-feminist discourses, based on “economic and cultural activity, and consumer citizenship at the expense of a newly defined feminist politics”. According to McRobbie, this new sexual contract promises economic benefits and recognition to young women with the proviso that they relinquish the critique of the patriarchy. The newly gained freedoms, however, include little more than the ‘tamest’ and most superficial accomplishments of feminism – in the case of the above-shown third *Nivea* advertisement, this apparently means simply the right to dance and drink in public without being judged.

To the extent that advertising embedded in popular cultural discourses of post-feminism acknowledges the difficulties of ‘modern’ women’s life, it claims to offer

relief and relaxation through commodities. In this context, pampering becomes emblematic of representations of entitled femininity (Lazar 2009, p. 376). A Hungarian advertisement for *Pickwick* tea (A24), for instance, pictures a woman relaxing in a large teacup-shaped chair in a beautifully groomed garden. All of the visual elements – from the light green colors to the idyllic nature scene – evoke a sense of tranquility and peace. The copy reads: “My Pickwick moment! Relax with the new softer and fruitier tasting green teas!” (*Az én Pickwick pillanatom! Oldódj fel az új, lágyabb és gyümölcsösebb ízű zöld teákkal!*”), suggesting that women deserve to have a ‘moment of their own’. What remains unclear, however, is the particular reason why the woman in the advert *needs* a moment to relax with a good cup of tea. Whether she is relaxing after a long week at work or taking a break from a house full of unruly children is left to the reader’s own interpretation. The topic of work, especially work outside of the home, is thus not addressed directly.



A 24 - *Nők Lapja*, 13 October 2010



A 25 - *Good Housekeeping*, July 2010

In contrast, a similar American advertisement for *Seattle's Best* coffee (A25) states in a straight-forward manner: “Between due dates and play dates”, showing a woman joyfully talking on the phone, with a computer in her lap and a cup of coffee in her hand. The ad openly acknowledges the labor involved in being a woman in today’s world. The reference to the double shift and the image of the multitasking woman, who, in spite of her hectic life,

manages to set aside a few minutes of ‘quality time’ for herself is arguably typical for ‘Western’ popular cultural discourses of post-feminism.

In general, the *Good Housekeeping* advertisements in my sample tend to address the issue of labor and women’s hectic lives (with the purpose of offering the perfect relief through consumption) more often than the ones in *Nők Lapja* do. However, the kind of work that *is* the focus of most Hungarian adverts is what Janice Winship calls the ‘work of femininity’ (Winship 1983, referenced in Lury 1996):

[...] while beauty is not a new component of femininity, advertising in women’s magazines has played an important part in redefining its meaning. [Winship] suggests that advertising has contributed to the idea that beauty is not naturally given – either absent or present – but instead is something that is achievable by any woman, though only through the application of the correct products.

Lury 1996, p. 134

In this context, the female body becomes infinitely improvable, and requires constant work. At a first glance, the idea that the body itself is perfectible may seem like a form of autonomy and agency: as a Hungarian advertisement for *Dove* shower gel proclaims: “YOU shape your body, WE provide the scent” (“TE alakítod a testedet, MI adunk hozzá illatot” – *Nők Lapja*, 24 June 2009). However, this logic ultimately increases the pressure for women to conform to beauty standards. After all, if being beautiful is a *choice*, why would a woman not opt for it?

In order to frame entitled femininity as a matter of wellbeing instead of narcissism, there is a tendency in both mediascapes to associate beauty with health¹⁰ (Macdonald 1995, p. 195). This is clearly a tactic which plays with popular cultural discourses of post-feminism, addressing women as knowledgeable, autonomous subjects who are in control of their own body. Although, as my sample indicates, the equation of beauty with health is characteristic for both magazines, the analysis of advertising styles again (as in the case of the two *Knorr*

¹⁰ Global brands such as *Vichy*, with its slogan “Health is beautiful” (*Az egészség szép*), have been capitalizing on this tactic for years.

advertisements discussed in Section 3.1.2.) reveals the ways in which advertisers are aware of cultural specificities and tailor advertising styles accordingly.



A 26 - Nők Lapja, 21 December 2010



A 27 - Good Housekeeping, October 2010

Both A26, a Hungarian advertisement for *Helia* body lotion, and A27, an American advert for Neutrogena anti-aging face cream, use quasi-scientific discourses in order to link the product to ‘serious science’ and authority. The *Neutrogena* advertisement copy reads “The #1 dermatologist recommended anti-aging brand.”, thus seemingly creating an association with legitimate medicine; however, the image shows famous actress Diane Lane endorsing the product. As Marieke de Mooij (1998a., p. 193) explains, given that status is extremely important in cultures which rank high on Hofstede’s masculinity index (such as the United States), celebrity endorsements tend to be especially effective. Indeed, a large portion of the *Good Housekeeping* adverts in my sample promoting cosmetic products use such celebrity endorsements.

Hungary also ranks high on the masculinity index; however, more importantly, this is combined – in contrast to the U.S. – with a high uncertainty avoidance index as well. As mentioned before (see Section 3.1.2), this usually results in the need for long copy, explanations and testimonials by experts (Mooij 1998a., pp. 200-201), as seen in A26, which features an entire interview with a dermatologist vouching for the quality of the product. Of course, celebrity endorsements are quite common in the Hungarian mediascape as well;

nevertheless, while adverts such as the one depicted above, with very much text and long interviews with experts, can be found in almost every issue of *Nők Lapja* in my sample, are quite rare in *Good Housekeeping*. This again indicates that de Mooij's correlation between certain indexes in the Hofstede model and particular style of advertising is correct.

3.2.2. Post-feminist discourses in advertising: Is there a silver lining?

The previous section examined the ways in which prevalent discourses of femininity in both American and Hungarian advertising targeted at women seem to be embedded in the discourse of post-feminism. Through feminist-informed concepts and catchphrases such as 'choice', 'freedom' and 'autonomy', advertisers in both mediascapes seem to view post-feminist discourse as an effective vehicle for consumerism. As mentioned before, there is a growing body of feminist literature focusing on post-feminist discourses in the American and Western European media. But to what extent is it possible to talk about 'Hungarian post-feminism', as seen in *Nők Lapja* advertisements, and how does it compare to what feminists theorize as 'post-feminism' in the Euro-American context? Furthermore, as a phenomenon which is generally met with skepticism in feminist circles, do popular cultural discourses of post-feminism still have a silver lining? In other words, does post-feminism in the media have the potential to challenge the power relations critiqued by feminism?

According to Michelle Lazar (2005, p. 17), the 'Western' articulation of post-feminism in the media can be viewed as a masculinist backlash against the feminist discourses of the Second Wave and the subsequent social and cultural changes, which were seen as threatening to hegemonic gender relations. On the other hand, deeply marked by anti-communist and neo-nationalist sentiments, Hungarian post-feminism can be viewed as the outcome of a different set of conditions: the Hungarian media rejects feminism by systematically linking it to a variety of widely maligned ideologies and discourses. As Erzsébet Barát's (2005) research on feminist voices in the Hungarian media shows, the

vilification of feminism in the 1990s follows three intertwined lines of argumentation: the discourse of anti-communism, the discourse of anti-Americanism, and the discourse of female difference.

I have already discussed the close connection between communism and discourses of new traditionalism in Hungary (see Section 3.1), and there is a similarly significant link between Hungarians' experiences under the state socialist regime and society's general anti-feminist attitudes. As numerous scholars have noted (see, for instance, Goven 1993, p. 225), hostile attitudes towards feminism in post-transition Hungary can be largely attributed to the aggressive communist policies allegedly promoting women's emancipation. Strongly encouraged by the state to enter the labor force, yet left to deal with most of the domestic work as well, women felt overburdened and forced by the two-wage family unit of the economy (Einhorn 1993). Hence, instead of seeing this socio-political context as a reason to celebrate the possibility to choose waged labor (a freedom their 'Western feminist sisters' were demanding when fighting against the confines of the private sphere), women in post-communist countries perceived more freedom in the ability to return to the home and to ideals of 'traditional' femininity:

In part the rejection of the tractor driver, crane driver, kerchief- or hardhat wearing labourer image of woman-as worker is expressed as a positive reclamation of femininity. The widely held view that state socialist 'emancipation' forced women to neglect their maternal role *and* made them unattractive, old before their time, contributes to this sense of women being happy to rediscover their womanhood through their caring role within the family.

Einhorn 1993, p. 64

Some of the discrepancies between discourses of femininity in the two sets of advertisements in my sample can therefore surely be attributed to the different meanings linked to 'traditional' femininity as a result of the varying cultural-historical contexts of the advertisements' two target audiences.

Furthermore, it has been also suggested that women in the former state socialist countries do not relate to men with as much indignation as ‘Western’ women do, given that the overthrow of the communist regime is seen as a shared effort, regardless of gender relations (Slavova 2006, referenced in Cerwonka 2008, p. 813). Hence a lack of solidarity amongst Hungarian women as a group is still prevalent. As Judit Acsády’s (2008) interviews with leading Hungarian businesswomen and female politicians show, today’s women gladly identify with the parties/companies that they are affiliated with while they are more hesitant to identify with fellow women as a group. Gender equality thus continues to carry overwhelmingly negative associations in the Hungarian context (Acsády 2008, p. 24), not the least because of widespread anti-Communist discourses and state socialist policies which are still alive in society’s collective memory.

Another line of argumentation often deployed in the Hungarian media in order to discredit feminism is embedded in anti-American discourses (Barát 2005, p. 214). According to its logic of argumentation, feminism is not only declared to be problematic in its own US context for having gone ‘too far’ when pursuing its goals, but is also considered to be fundamentally ‘non-Hungarian’¹¹ and therefore rejected as ‘alien’ to the local context.

Lastly, the list of discourses disparaging feminism in Hungary is completed with the discourse of female difference, which, appropriating feminist discourses about “women’s ways of knowing”, argues that women know their own wants and needs, and aggressive, monstrous feminists should leave them alone to choose (Ibid., p. 215). Due to its emphasis on the concept of choice, this third line of argumentation is very similar to the Euro-American popular cultural discourses of post-feminism and new traditionalism discussed in the previous chapters, in that, out of the three discourses described above, it is the only one which gives

¹¹ The argument of ‘non-Hungarian-ness’ has also been used in anti-Communist discourses. As Einhorn (1993, p. 8) notes referencing historian István Rév (1993), after the transition there were attempts to rewrite history, and portray the Soviet Union as the Other that forced an alien, non-Hungarian ideology on the country, in the face of the resistance of the Hungarian people.

some kind of acknowledgement to the feminist movement. In this sense, in contrast to the discourses of anti-communism and anti-Americanism, which can rather be viewed as anti-feminist, the discourse of female difference is indeed similar to Euro-American discourses of post-feminism.

The aim of the analysis in the previous sections of this chapter was to take a critical look at the problem of negotiation between status quo and emancipation, between hegemonic femininity and feminism, as it is represented in the two magazines. What transpired from the examination of the selected adverts was a concerted attempt to promote concepts such as ‘choice’ and ‘autonomy’ while simultaneously remaining within the boundaries of a more palatable discourse: post-feminism. But are the popular cultural discourses of post-feminism and new traditionalism of *Good Housekeeping* and the (seemingly) post-feminist discourse of *Nők Lapja*, with their persistent emphasis on the concept of ‘choice’ and ‘autonomy’, completely devoid of political relevance from a feminist perspective?

The idea of choice, as a leitmotif of popular cultural discourses of post-feminism, permeates the examined set of advertisements. But whether we look at the choice between career and family, the choice between products, or the ability to choose whether to conform to beauty norms, post-feminism seems to fail to deliver on the promise. On the one hand, in the Hungarian context, hegemonic media discourses systematically discredit feminism – thus in this case, feminism is not even included in the list of choices the media seems to offer to women. On the other hand, ‘Western’ popular discourses of post-feminism seem to acknowledge some of the positive developments resulting from the feminist movement. But the kind of feminism that continues to be ignored or even vilified by this post-feminist discourse is still radical feminism (McRobbie 2009, p. 14). Thus the concept of ‘choice’ soon turns out to be nothing more than a fashionable catchphrase and an illusion: as Angela McRobbie (2009, p. 19) puts it, “Choice is surely, within lifestyle culture, a modality of

constraint. The individual is compelled to be the kind of subject who can make the right choices.”

Conclusion

This thesis set out to examine discourses of femininity linked to popular cultural representations of post-feminism in advertisements in two women's magazines – one published in the United States, the other in Hungary – with similar profiles and popularity in their respective countries. Focusing on cross-cultural differences, my aim was to identify the way in which representations of femininity rearticulate values and ideals associated with the discourses of post-feminism and new traditionalism, as they have been discussed in 'Western' feminist scholarship. Given the fact that some feminist scholars consider the popular cultural discourse of post-feminism to be global, my main point of focus was whether seemingly very similar discourses inhabiting different mediascapes are indicative of the same phenomenon.

In the analysis I looked at the ways in which the discourse of new traditionalism, as theorized by Elspeth Probyn (1997), naturalizes women's return to the home. As the advertisements in my sample revealed, both of the examined mediascapes use similar tactics in order to perpetuate women's association with domesticity and qualities such as mothering and nurturing. Such advertisements are selling neoconservative values under the guise of 'choice', facilitated in both the American and the Hungarian context by the discourse of new traditionalism. Likewise, there are a number of similarities between the ways in which both *Good Housekeeping* and *Nők Lapja* adverts tend to co-opt feminist (sounding) discourses in order to portray a kind of knowledgeable, autonomous and 'entitled femininity' which seems to be embedded in popular cultural discourses of post-feminism.

However, the question remains: to what extent is it possible to talk about popular post-feminism in the Hungarian context? As the examples have shown, the representations of femininity in the two magazines are often similar – though there also significant differences, for instance the varying degrees to which women's labor tends to be acknowledged in the two

mediascapes. If we define the popular cultural discourse of post-feminism in terms of the femininities it constructs and their association to concepts such as ‘choice’ or ‘autonomy’, Lazar’s (2009, p. 371) and others’ assessment of the discourse of post-feminism as a global phenomenon may be viewed as accurate. Nonetheless, if we take into account the roots of this discourse in the “masculinist backlash that defends against the whittling away of the patriarchal dividend” (Lazar 2005, p. 17), responding to the feminist discourses of the Second Wave and the subsequent social developments in terms of gender equality, popular post-feminism ceases to represent an accurate description of the discourses in the examined Hungarian advertisements. As I have pointed out in Sections 3.1.3. and 3.2.2., the apparently post-feminist discourses in the Hungarian media constitute a response to a very different set of conditions than similar discourses in the United States. In this sense, anti-feminism seems to be a more precise term to describe the situation of the Hungarian media.

I would rather argue that the discourse of post-feminism in advertising seems global given that it is linked to approximately the same product categories and companies worldwide. As scholars and practitioners in the field of cross-cultural advertising argue (see Section 1.1), a unified global brand image is often extremely important: though advertising style is often tailored to local preferences and values, the brand image and overall message is relatively constant. As Marieke de Mooij (1998a., p. 3) puts it: “There may be global products, but there are no global people. There may be global brands, but there are no global motivations for buying those brands.” Similarly, there may be global representations of femininity echoing Euro-American discourses of post-feminism, but there is probably no global way of reading such images.

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