

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The first chapter introduces how my research was conducted. It includes the rationale, the purpose of the study, the potential benefits, the method, and the scope of the study. I also explain some terminology.

1.1 Rationale

In many societies open discussions pertaining to sex are considered taboo. Taywaditep, Coleman, and Dumronggittigule (2004) reported in *The International Encyclopedia of Sexuality* that in Thailand “discussions about sex are uncomfortable when they are excessively crude or straightforward, overly solemn or intellectual, and socially inappropriate.” This report emphasizes that sex should not be explicitly discussed because it is considered taboo in Thai society. Nevertheless, this has not prevented the media from portraying sexuality through various channels such as movies, music videos, newspapers, the internet, and magazines. Nowadays, media have become an increasingly important part of our lives a source of information as well as entertainment. However, the media also present some information that could pose risks to consumer’s perceptions and violate social values. Sexuality is often used by the media as a tool to sell products and to spread new culture and lifestyles. Articles about Sexuality in magazines claim to provide useful information but in reality they also pose as risk factors since they could change social values toward

sexuality in Thai society. Therefore, the media could cause some social problems in our society relating to the misunderstanding of culture, various lifestyle choices, health, and perceptions of beauty that relate to sexuality. The repeated issue on sexuality in movies, music video, newspaper, the internet, and magazines leads to misconceptions about sexuality. This can lead to premarital sex that is in violation of traditional Thai social values. Moreover, it can lead to unwanted pregnancies, abortions, as well as other serious social problems. The repeated portrayals of sexuality by Thai mass media could change the perceptions of the consumers even though sex discussion is taboo in Thai society.

Strasburger's (1995: 41) work indicates that teens rank the media just behind peers and parents as sources of information. Media play an important role in shaping perceptions of people in the society, in particular attitudes about various sexual behaviors. Other studies have shown that in media the portrayal of sexuality can be manipulated through verbal techniques (Cook, 1989). The verbal techniques used by the media can create a more intimate feeling with the reader. One example is the blurb entitled: SEX UNCENSORED! 200 หมอนุ่มเพชรสนิยมบนเตียงที่คุณไม่เคยรู้มาก่อน!(*Marie Claire*, February 2007). The exclamation mark is used to emphasize that this is important and very interesting so the reader should not miss it. Also, the word "SEX UNCENSORED" attracts the readers even though it is written in English because sex is taboo and is supposed to be censored. However, in *Marie Claire* sex will be uncensored. Contextual link technique is used in the word "รสนิยมบนเตียง" to mean sexual preference or it can mean sleeping preferences like choosing a soft pillow or a hard mattress. However, the reader of the magazine can understand from their schematic knowledge that it means sexual orientation. Verbal techniques are planted in the printed media in a way that consumers are not fully aware of in terms of the social value. As a part of society, as well as media consumers, we should be aware of verbal techniques. Therefore, I feel that examining the verbal techniques used in *Marie Claire* magazine would bring some insight to the general public in terms of media literacy and sexuality construction.

I would like to study the sexuality construction in *Marie Claire* magazine by examining the verbal techniques used in this magazine. The reason why I chose the data from this magazine in my research is because magazines are one of the most accessible, inexpensive, and readily available media sources used to obtain information about sexuality. They also allow for private and repeated reading. *Marie Claire* is a French-based magazine that has been in print for 70 years in 25 countries worldwide, including Thailand. *Marie Claire* has a flair for fashion and beauty coverage, as well as opinions about the realities of life. Their features include sex articles that appeal to the target group for this magazine: women aged 20 – 35 years old. Another reason why I chose *Marie Claire* magazine is because of the result of a poll showing that *Marie Claire* ranked third in popular magazine among Thai female readers. The poll was conducted by Se-ed Book, a Thai leading publishing firm in all three lines of the publishing business: publisher, distributor, and book store chain owner of popular books, newspapers, and magazines sold during 2005.

The data in this study is collected from *Marie Claire* magazine that was printed and circulated in Thailand from January - December 2007, totaling 12 issues. Only blurbs on the cover and two articles written by Thai writers were analyzed. The translated article from the original text in English is excluded. The method of the analysis is based on the principles of verbal techniques proposed by Fairclough's *Media Discourse* (1995) and Cook's *Discourse Analysis* (1989).

Based on Fairclough's analysis of communicative events, "language used in any text always consists of social identity, social relations, and systems of knowledge and belief." That means any text makes its own contribution to shaping or framing society and culture. One example is the blurb entitled "Alternative SEX!" ทางเลือกใหม่ของสาวชอบลอง (*Marie Claire*, December 2007). The original concept in Thailand is that women are expected to be well mannered and save their virginity for their husband. They are not supposed to try to have sex before marriage since it is taboo. However, in this blurb the writer is stimulating the female readers to try to have sex in

alternative ways. This is a new practice introducing to female readers as shown in this blurb ทางเลือกใหม่ของสาวชอบลอง (An Alternative way for young women who likes to try new things). In terms of sociocultural aspect, the perception about premarital sex and freedom to try alternative sex for women is being reconstituted as being appropriate, which is distorting Thai social values.

Based on Cook's contextual link theory, it can be seen that in one blurb ทางเลือกใหม่ของสาวชอบลอง (An alternative way for young women who like to try new things) even though the word การมีเพศสัมพันธ์ (sexual intercourse) is excluded in this blurb, it can be understood through the reader's schematic knowledge. A schematic knowledge technique (knowledge from past experience) is used in order to avoid using an explicit wordการ มีเพศสัมพันธ์ (sexual intercourse), since it is forbidden.

1.2 Purposes of the Study

- 1.2.1 To investigate blurbs and verbal in the articles that distorts Thai social values in the socio-cultural aspect.
- 1.2.2 To investigate the various verbal technique used in *Marie Claire* magazine for sexuality construction.
- 1.2.2To demonstrate how verbal techniques are used in *Marie Claire* magazine for sexuality construction.

1.3 Potential Benefits of the Study

- 1.3.1 To become aware of new practices that being spread through verbal techniques in the magazine that distorts Thai social values toward sexuality.

1.3.2 To understand what verbal techniques are used in the magazine.

1.3.3 To raise awareness among media consumers, especially magazine readers, regarding the verbal techniques in sexuality construction in *Marie Claire* magazine.

1.4 Method and Scope of the Study

The data for this study was collected from *Marie Claire* magazine that was printed and circulated in Thailand. The data from the issues of January – December 2007, totaling 12 issues, were used for the analysis. Only blurbs on the cover and two articles printed in March and April 2007 written by Thai writers were analyzed. The translated article from the original issue in English is excluded. The method of the analysis is based on the principles of verbal techniques proposed by Fairclough, *Media Discourse* (1995) and Cook, *Discourse Analysis* (1989).

1.5 Definition

Verbal techniques are the use of text, words and phrases as a tool to manipulate the hidden meaning. In this study verbal techniques mean the word, text or phrase used in *Marie Claire* magazine to construct the readers' perceptions.

Sexuality is concerned with the biological, psychological, sociological and spiritual variables of life that affect personality development and interpersonal relations. It includes concepts of love and intimacy as well as body image. Sexuality is shaped by a person's values, attitudes, behaviors, physical appearance, beliefs, personality, and spiritual selves, as well as all the ways in which one has been socialized. Sexuality also involves the giving and receiving of sexual pleasure.

Construction is used in this study in terms of shaping, framing, and dominating the perception of magazine readers.

Magazine is a periodical; a printed medium containing a collection of articles, stories, pictures, or other features.

Social Value is related to culture. It is related to beliefs and social practices.



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