

Representation of Gender Relations in Cypriot popular culture: the cases of the *Cypriot Radio Sketch* and Cypriot lifestyle magazines

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ABSTRACT:

Mass media concurrently shape and are shaped by social norms, in Cyprus as in all other cultures. Specific images, speech and/or actions are gendered in the media and such gendering is both linked to, and influential of, wider social and cultural norms, attitudes, and practices. This paper investigates gender and gender conflict as they are represented in two popular Cypriot media forms. The first, the Radio Sketch, is a radio entertainment programme that is unique in the media of Cyprus and which was one of the most popular media outputs in Cyprus from the 1950s until the late 1980s. The second mass medium considered in this paper is lifestyle magazines, one of the most popular contemporary Cypriot mass culture forms.

This paper identifies and analyses specific features of the representations of gender relations that predominate in each of these media forms. As the entire spectrum of gender relations cannot be fully explored in a single project, we have chosen to focus our research to the investigation of how gendered images and characteristics manifest gender relations, and to explore the power relations conjured in and through these representations. Finally, we compare and contrast the findings from our studies of the Sketches and lifestyle magazines. This enabled us to reflect on the changes in gendered images, and thereby gender relations, in popular Cypriot media over the period from the 1970s until today, and to consider how social change might relate to the alterations in these gendered media representations. We view this review as a first step in a larger investigation of the representations of gender relations in the most popular Cypriot media.

KEY – WORDS: Radio Sketch, Life style magazines, Cyprus, Discourse Analysis, Gender Relations

1. Introduction: The *Radio Sketches* and Lifestyle Magazines in Cyprus

In Cyprus, the term *Radio Sketches* is used to refer to a theatrical program that arose on the national radio channel (CyBC), starting in 1953, with the aim of presenting the country's rural (and later urban) society, history, customs and traditions¹. They were (and still are) aired regularly on Sunday at noon². Although the first *Sketches* became popular due to their humor, they later evolved into a form of social drama, alternating between humoristic and tragic. The *Sketches* are standalone plays which last approximately twenty minutes, without continuous storylines or fixed characters, even though specific character features are repeated in most and seem to favor a traditional representation of gender relations³. Their popularity peaked in the 1970s and 1980s due to their subject matter, which appealed to the entire family, and the fact that they were enacted in the indigenous Cypriot dialect. Later, it declined due to the rise of electronic media more modern than the radio and the social perception of the *Sketches* as merely 'light' entertainment⁴.

Lifestyle magazines made their appearance in the Cypriot media three decades later than the *Radio Sketches*. Specifically, the first weekly lifestyle magazine, entitled *To Periodiko*, began to be published in the 1980s and several others followed. This was a consequence of the contact Cypriots had established with European and Anglo-American cultures since the 1970s, due to tourism and media programs imported from these cultures⁵. Due to the influence of the latter, the visual and textual representation of gender relations in magazines began breaking from tradition⁶. Today, in addition to home magazines, Cyprus imports most Greek lifestyle magazines because of the common language and culture, and also a number of European and Anglo-American ones, which illustrates the popularity of these publications.

Nevertheless, despite the popularity of the *Sketches* in the 1970s and 1980s, and the present popularity of lifestyle magazines, there has not been any systematic social research on either. Moreover, there have not been any studies on the depiction of gender (power) relations in them. Thus, as a first step in filling this gap, this paper investigates specific features of the representations of gender and the relations of men and women that predominate in the *Cypriot Radio Sketches* of the 1970s and 1980s and lifestyle magazines of 2011. In addition, we will explore the social change(s) in these topics, at least as represented by these two media forms.

2. Theoretical Framework and Methodology

Discourse is a term which has variable definitions, associated with different researchers, academic schools and/or fields⁷. In this work, we use the term to mean the verbal and/or written linguistic elements and mannerisms of a specific discursive position on a particular topic⁸. This implies that there can be various discourses to represent the same subject from different perspectives⁹.

There exists a dialectical relationship between a society and the discourses it produces. In order for discourses to have a recognisable and meaningful form, they must be articulated within a social context in which they can be understood¹⁰. In addition, they relate to social events by making it possible to interpret them, thereby enabling discourses to articulate the society itself, maintaining its current statuses and/or recontextualising them, depending on the power¹¹ of the social actors which articulate them. By extension, then, there also exists a dialectical relationship between society and the media, in which texts are published and which therefore can become the sites of contention for power.

Gender relations constitute one of the social aspects in which power has been unevenly distributed. The term 'gender' was introduced to distinguish the non-biological aspects of men and women from their biological difference and to indicate that any differences in the personal and/or social interactions and needs between the sexes is "learned, mediated or constructed" by the society, and thereby not innate¹². Like any other identity, gender is socially enacted by discourses¹³ i.e., social ideologies¹⁴, norms and/or values, as well as their related practices, define the context and boundaries of the different speech patterns and behaviours which are acceptable for females and males in each interaction within their societies. Jane Sunderland (2004) suggests that:

an important aspect of performing identity is the use of the discourses which are deemed appropriate to that identity. A 'gendered discourse' represents, maintains and/or contests, and (re)constructs practices attributed to specific gender identities by a society¹⁵.

Due to the dialectical relationship between the media and society, specific images, discourses and/or actions are gendered in the media and such gendering is both linked to, and influential of, wider social and cultural norms, attitudes, and practices.

In this work, we undertake a qualitative sociological discourse analysis of gender relations in the *Cypriot Radio Sketches* and lifestyle magazines. Specifically, we investigate their discourse in order to determine the gender power relations represented by them. As discussed in 1, our work is still exploratory, so we focus on the content and text of both media forms and additionally on images and titles¹⁶ in lifestyle magazines with the aim to discover general trends in the representation of gender relations rather than performing a detailed discourse analysis on them.

3. Selection of Empirical Data

For this work, we have analyzed seven *Cypriot Radio Sketches*¹⁷ from the 1970s and 1980s and nine lifestyle magazines of 2011. Table 1 gives the titles and years of broadcasting of the *Sketches*, and the title abbreviations we use to refer to them in the analysis (4.1). Table 2 gives the titles of the lifestyle magazines analyzed in this work. Two of these target male audiences, three are women’s magazines and four are gender-free. All magazines were selected because they are produced and published in Cyprus. In total twenty-four June 2011 issues were studied: one for each magazine and each date of publication.

Table 1. *Cypriot Radio Sketches*.

Title	Year	Abbreviations
Better if he would marry the poor girl	1970	Poor1970
The Fake Wedding	1971	Fake1971
Danae	1977	Danae1977
Just from a smile	1979	Smile1979
Mrs. Loulla	1981	Loulla1981
The Spoiled Brat	1982	Spoiled1982
Katerina	1984	Katerina1984

Table 2. Lifestyle magazines.

	Men’s magazines	Women’s magazines	Gender-free
Weekly	0	0	4 (<i>OK, Downtown, Beautiful People, To Periodiko</i>)
Monthly	2 (<i>Man, Icon</i>)	3 (<i>Must, Omicron, Madame Figaro</i>)	0
Total	2	3	4

4. Analysis

4.1. The *Cypriot Radio Sketches*

In the society described in the *Sketches*, marriage is depicted as the ultimate goal of the younger male and female characters, directly in explicit dialogues pertaining to this topic and indirectly in conversations on other subjects. The discourse of *marriage as the ultimate goal*¹⁸ is repeated interdiscursively¹⁹ in all the *Sketches* of the 1970s and 1980s mentioned in 3. In fact, both male and female characters of a marriageable age appear to want to accumulate those specific characteristics and assets which can be used to characterize them as *ideal spouses* in their community, so that they can get married. The purpose of this analysis is to identify the characteristics and assets which seem to function so as to support or further marriage in the society of the *Sketches*.

A young female character who is attributed the depiction of an *ideal wife* by the male characters of her age group is represented as hard-

working. This adjective has a specific, commonsensical connotation in the *Sketches*: although women are described as having entered the labour market, it is used to connote primarily their housekeeping abilities. That is, a hard-working wife takes care of her “household” and “her children”, knows how to “cook” and how to “knit and sew”, as shown in *Smile*1979 and *Loulla*1981. Conversely, a female character who does not possess the above skills is represented in a derogatory fashion as shown in *Poor*1970, *Loulla*1981 and *Spoiled*1982. Nevertheless, some female characters are represented as challenging this outlook: for example, in *Smile*1979, the heroine is shown to be looking for a husband who “will know how to cook”. Importantly, she does not challenge the fact that she will be doing housework, but that this work should be more evenly divided between her and her spouse, which implies that the distribution of housework was asymmetric in the society described in the *Sketches*²⁰. To be represented as an *ideal husband*, a male character should also be “hard-working”, as shown in *Loulla*1981, i.e., he should have a job with the earning potential to provide for his family. This gendering of work implies that the husband is depicted as representing his family in the public sphere, contrary to the wife who functions mainly in the private sphere²¹; i.e., social power is primarily handed to the *ideal husband* by the society represented in the *Sketches*.

The *ideal wife* is also portrayed as sexually “modest”, as shown in *Poor*1970 and *Danae*1977. The representation of sexual “modesty” is coupled with the notable omission of sexual references from the text of many *Sketches*, which constitutes a kind of ‘virginizing’ of the *ideal wife*²². In fact, premarital sexual relations are portrayed as dishonourable to the *ideal wife*, and female characters who are described as even being suspected of having premarital sex are shunned by the society of the *Sketches*, as shown in *Fake*1971. In order to protect the virginity and “honour” of female characters, the ideal husband is represented as sexually “honest” and “decent”, seeking marriage rather than premarital sexual dalliances, as shown in *Fake*1971 and *Katerina*1984. In fact, male characters depicted as throwing themselves at young women are represented as derogatory, and they are shunned by their communities, as shown in *Katerina*1984. The implication in the distinctions of the description of the *ideal husband* versus the sexual predator is that women are represented as sexually passive in the *Sketches* and that men are portrayed as having the power either to take advantage of them or to protect them.

The *ideal wife* is attributed with “youth” and physical “beauty” in many of the *Sketches*, as shown clearly in *Poor*1970 and *Danae*1977. Nevertheless, male characters are not depicted as using the adjective ‘attractive’ to describe their perceived ideal mates. Beauty, therefore, is not identified with sensuality or sexuality, but with naturally appealing physical characteristics. In these *Sketches*, it is emphasised that the female character must care for her external appearance, but to a limited extent and with little help from beauty products, to avoid being described as “vain”, as shown in *Poor*1970, *Smile*1979, *Loulla*1981 and *Spoiled*1982. On the other hand, the external appearance of the *ideal husband* is not judged with the same criteria as that of a female

character. The *ideal husband* is represented mainly as being having a “masculine physique”, as shown in *Loulla*1981 and *Katerina*1984. This implies that male characters were expected to dominate their wives in physical size (but not beauty). From this analysis, it seems that the *Sketches* adopt an ideology in their depiction of gender relations which is more traditional, promoting a lifestyle of marriage in which authority is not evenly distributed between the spouses.

4.2. Lifestyle Magazines

Men’s magazines in Cyprus depict a *man* who is independent and fun-loving, but under a strict rule: keep away from commitment towards women. In the June 2011 issue of *MAN*, the lead story (pp.86-90) is presented under the title “MBA (Married But Available) Rules” and provides a list of do’s and don’ts in order to seduce a married woman, i.e., a woman who is already committed in a relationship and is thereby only looking for fun. The article, presented in a humorous tone, offers thorough advice on how to spot a married woman seeking to flirt with younger men. Two of the articles in *MAN* conceptualize icons of the *ideal woman* by presenting two famous women chosen by the editor due to their affairs with younger men²³. These articles emphasize that both women are above 40, divorced with children. According to the editors, these figures guarantee that they are not seeking commitment, since they have already tried it. That is, the male version of the *ideal woman* is not represented as an older woman, but as a woman who does not demand commitment. The June 2011 issue of *ICON* seems to attempt to reinforce the idea of polygamy. Its lead story entitled “SEX vs POLITICS: The legs that opened and the careers that closed” refers to well-known sex scandals in world politics²⁴ idealizing strong male politicians who were involved, while married, with younger women. However, there is a derogatory tone in the article indicating that the social consequences of this behaviour, included in the phrase “the careers that closed”, may be severe.

Conversely, all women’s magazines portray the same pattern concerning gender relations: women seeking advice on what to do/not to do when in a relationship to keep it alive. The lead article of *OMICRON*, June 2011, pp.140–144, entitled “Everything you need to know about relationships”, provides the readers with do’s and don’ts in a relationship and advice on how to attract a partner. The article “Free Willy” in *MADAME FIGARO*, June 2011, pp.124–128 suggests that some days women must be willing to give their male partners breaks to allow them to do “man things with [their] friends” so as not to feel imprisoned. According to the article, this is the recipe for a man to commit. The fact that romantic love is represented as women’s bid for happiness is reinforced by the lead article of *MUST*, June 2011, pp.130–135: “WINDSORS: The Royals”. In this, the recent marriage of Prince William and Kate Middleton is used as a spark to recount all the love stories of the British royal family for the past century, describing how great kings fell in love with simple yet beautiful women and made them their princesses. Following this pattern²⁵, gender-free magazines portray what constitutes the external appearance of their version of the *ideal*

woman, i.e., of a woman who can attract a man and have a steady relationship with him. Specifically, the issues we examined depict famous women from Greece and Cyprus in their bathing suites in their covers, with most titles referring to their great looks and spicy relationship details.

The above imply that lifestyle magazines still portray women who seek the fairytale romantic relationship and men whose happiness is compromised by loyalty. Although the word 'marriage' is no longer directly mentioned, it is connoted that the aim of women is to find their version of the *ideal man*, who will be in love and will want a stable relationship with them²⁶. In order to achieve this aim, women are represented as being expected to make their external appearance appealing, and afterwards they are expected to assume the responsibility of keeping the relationship going. This discourse of *keeping your man*²⁷ repeated throughout women's magazines, represents a more traditional outlook of relationships by placing the weight of responsibility singularly on women. On the contrary, lifestyle magazines seem to cultivate the feeling that men should naturally want to avoid a committed relationship. This portrayal suggests that the power to choose a relationship lies with the male partner who is free to leave rather than the female partner whose goal must be to remain in this relationship.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

The absence of the word 'marriage' from lifestyle magazines and its constant presence in the *Sketches* seemingly suggests that the former have broken from the traditional values portrayed in the latter. However, we would argue that this is not the case, as the magazines examined here still encourage women to find steady, lasting relationships akin to marriage. In addition, they are still portrayed as assuming the responsibility of making their partner happy in order to make the relationship work, similarly to the women portrayed in the *Sketches*, who are responsible for the housework in order to keep their husbands happy. Furthermore, men are still represented in magazines as having the choice of being in a relationship, just like male characters are portrayed as being able to choose the *ideal wife* in the *Sketches*.

What has changed, based on this research, is the depiction in mass culture of how the goal of companionship can be achieved. Specifically, women are portrayed with sexual connotations in magazines (e.g., swimming suits and spicy relationship details) instead of the sexual modesty described in the *Sketches*, and they are advised to make themselves into these icons for the express purpose of attracting and keeping their male partners. The greatest break from tradition is in the representation of the male philosophy for relationships: while in the *Sketches* male characters are urged to get married as much as female characters, in lifestyle magazines they are encouraged to avoid commitment and only seek pleasure, a fact which was considered derogatory in the society described in the *Sketches*.

NOTES

- ¹ Photiου, Irene. ‘Το Κυπριώτικο Σκετς ως Πηγή Ψυχαγωγίας και Πολιτισμού (The Cypriot Sketch as a Form of Entertainment and Culture)’. *Χρονικό (Chronicles)*, 121, 4 – 22, 2010 July 4.
- ² Panayiotou, Andreas. ‘The “Bias of Media as Forms” and Prospects for Peace Journalism’. *Global Media Journal: Mediterranean Edition*, 1(2): 30, 2006.
- ³ Being aired on the national channel, some governmental censorship did exist in the production of the *Sketches*, according to interviews conducted by one of us (IP) with production personnel. This restricted the language that could be used in the dialogue to prevent cursing and violence (since it was directed towards a family audience) and the themes for the plots (to those of interest to the family and promoting family and traditional values). However, the authors had full freedom to create their own characters and stories within these parameters.
- ⁴ Photiου, Irene. ‘Το Κυπριώτικο Σκετς ως Πηγή Ψυχαγωγίας και Πολιτισμού (The Cypriot Sketch as a Form of Entertainment and Culture)’. *Χρονικό (Chronicles)*, 121, 4 – 22, 2010 July 4.
- ⁵ Panayiotou, Andreas. ‘Ανίχνευση της Ερωτικής Ιστορίας της Κυπριακής Νεωτερικότητας (Tracking the History of Sexuality in the Modernity of Cyprus)’, *Εξ Υπάρχεις*, 9, 43 – 62, 2000.
- ⁶ Maniou, Theodora & Chatzipanagiotidi, Anna ‘‘The Press as a source for deriving authentic language material in order to promote antiracist perceptions and attitudes : a practical research in Cyprus’ in Chatzipanagiotidi, Anna (ed.) ‘Schools of Education: Their role in society’: (Nicosia: Frederick University Press ,2011).
- ⁷ Wodak, Ruth and Meyer, Michael. ‘Critical Discourse Analysis: History, Agenda, Theory and Methodology’, in Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer (eds.), *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, (2nd Ed. London: Sage, pp. 1 – 33, 2009).
- ⁸ Fairclough, Norman. *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research*.(London: Routledge,2003.); (see also Kosetzi, 2007a; b; Lazar, 2000; Sunderland, 2004)
- ⁹ Fairclough, Norman. *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research*. (London: Routledge,2003: 26).
- ¹⁰ Fairclough, Norman. *Discourse and Social Change*. (Cambridge: Polity Press,1992).
- ¹¹ Teun van Dijk (1993) defines ‘social power’ as access to resources which a society considers valuable. (van Dijk, 1993; Fairclough, 1992).
- ¹² Sunderland, Jane. *Gendered Discourses*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004: 14)
- ¹³ see also Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble*. (London: Routledge,1990).
- ¹⁴ We use the concept of ideology to designate sets of ideas, values and/or beliefs to which a particular social actor subscribes, pertaining to specific social-cultural topics, issues or events, and which form integral parts of discursive practices (Fairclough, 1992; 2001).

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- ¹⁵ Litosseliti, Lia. *Gender and Language: Theory and Practice*. (London: Hodder Arnold, 2006: 58).
- ¹⁶ Titles are mainly used instead of the whole text of articles because they summarize the text thoroughly and due to considerations of article length.
- ¹⁷ All the *Sketches* were written by Elli Avraamidou, who was the only author in the early years of broadcasting (1950s and early 1960s) and amongst the most productive and popular authors, producing approximately 250-300 *Sketches*.
- ¹⁸ see also Kosetzi, 2007a,b, 2008.
- ¹⁹ Interdiscursivity is the property of discourses to recycle parts of other (earlier) discourses which they may condone and appropriate, challenge, sarcastically report, etc. (Fairclough, 1992).
- ²⁰ Lazar, Michelle. 'Gender, Discourse and Semiotics: The Politics of Parenthood Representation', *Discourse and Society*, (11: 373 – 400, 2000).
- ²¹ In his sociological study, Paul Sant Cassia (1985) noted that this division between male and female dominated spheres of work was present in Cyprus, albeit before the 1950s.
- ²² see also Gill, Rosalind. *Gender and the Media*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007: 235).
- ²³ In fact, the age difference for these couples exceeded fifteen years.
- ²⁴ Specifically, the article refers to the sex scandals of former IMF Director D. Strauss-Kahn, the US Presidents B. Clinton and J. Kennedy, the former French President F. Mitterand, the Italian Prime-Minister S. Berlusconi, as well as the former Greek Prime Minister A. Papandreou.
- ²⁵ see also Morrish, John. 'Magazine Editing: How to develop and manage a successful publication'. (London: Routledge, 2008).
- ²⁶ see also Hadjipavlou, Maria. *Women in the Cypriot communities: Interpreting women's lives*. (Nicosia, 2004).
- ²⁷ see also Kosetzi, Konstantia. 'Challenging Conservative Discourses: the Case of *Σχεδόν Ποτέ* (*Almost Never*)', in Jose Santaemilia et al (eds.), *International Perspectives on Gender and Language*. (Valencia: Univesitat de Valencia, pp. 706-725, 2007a).

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