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Representations – A critical look at media's role in cleanliness conventions and inconspicuous consumption

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Abstract

In post-industrialist societies, similar high standards of living are becoming not only desired but also expected the world over. Globalising processes ensure that every material desire is within the reach of ordinary citizens, and then flame these desires in order to sustain continuous growth narratives. But are increasingly resource-intensive lifestyles sustainable, or even desirable? This article investigates cleanliness using representations in media to understand how practices – including washing, disinfecting and sanitising – have become increasingly normal. Five popular Swedish magazines from 1985 to 2015 are used to track the representations of cleanliness. Idealisation, shame and medicalisation are the main themes arising from this data set. These themes aim to perpetuate higher cleanliness conventions and translate them into consumer goods. The article is inspired by a critical theoretical perspective which helps to reveal inequalities perpetuated by the way media represents cleanliness and suggests that the imperative to clean falls most heavily on those who lack the resources to resist. Processes of inclusion and exclusion are inherent in consumer culture and this attempt at using critical theory to understand consumption practices illuminates consumption's role in not only increasing pressure on the natural environment but also amplifying social stratification.

Keywords

Cleanliness, magazines, representation, social practice, Sweden, media, inconspicuous consumption, critical theory, discourse, sustainability

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Introduction

Cleanliness is a classic example of global synchronisation and acceleration in accepted ways of doing, leading to increasing consumption of water, energy and other resources, over the past 100 years (Ashenburg, 2007; Shove, 2003a; Vigarello, 1988). Daily showering, domestic vacuum cleaning, tumble-drying, disinfecting and sanitising are all examples of intensifying cleanliness practices, which can be found the world over, even in places with vastly varied access to cleanliness infrastructure (Shove, 2003a). Historically, cleanliness conventions have been geographically embedded, but under the influence of globalisation, desires and practices are becoming ever-more uniform with ever higher consumption of natural resources (Wilk, 2002). Aspiring to new cleanliness conventions is environmentally demanding, requiring increasing resources to sanitise, transport and heat water and so on. Modern domestic cleanliness practices also consume energy, both embodied in appliances and in performing and re-performing cleanliness practices (Browne, 2015; Gram-Hanssen, 2007). Mounting resource intensity arises from expansions in both frequency and volume of washing and an increasing demand for not only 'clean' clothes (Jack, 2013a; Yates and Evans, 2016: 112), but also clean bodies and clean homes. Accelerating cleaning is a case of inconspicuous consumption, requiring water energy and other resources, inherent yet invisible in their performance. Although decreasing cleanliness standards do not necessarily lead to physical or social disgrace in modern societies (Jack, 2013c), cleanliness practices continue to escalate despite water and energy systems experiencing tension due both to higher social expectations and also population growth (Rigby, 2011). Above basic sanitation, higher standards of cleanliness are more to do with status and boundaries and give diminishing returns on quality of life (Ger and Yenicioglu, 2004). Meanwhile using products related to cleanliness can in fact be bad for health (Wakefield-Rann, 2017), especially cleaning chemicals when combined and interacting with each other (Nazaroff and Weschler, 2004). Furthermore, access to cleanliness infrastructures is different for different groups and thus attaining increasing standards is more challenging for social groups that have unequal access to resources and may already be facing disadvantages, leading also to social stratification.

Cleanliness practices are intensifying in the Swedish context. Despite an ambitious energy policy since the 1970s (Di Lucia and Ericsson, 2014), collective environmental consciousness and less time spent on cleaning activities, the pressure to present a clean appearance is increasing (Jack, 2017). To understand the paradox of increasing cleanliness practices despite environmental and social challenges, this article turns to five popular Swedish magazines and asks how cleanliness is represented since the 1980s, aiming to gain insight into how media representations interact with cleanliness conventions. This study takes social constructionism as a departure point, where media is taken as playing an important role in constructing attitudes towards certain phenomena (cf. Barker, 2003; Hall, 2003), in this case cleanliness conventions. Furthermore, consumption is seen as a part of everyday life, not carried out by active consumers motivated by concerns for personal

identity and status, but rather habitually (Warde, 2014: 283). In positioning and anchoring everyday routines, people use media (Keller and Halkier, 2014), so knowing what representations are present in media may help understand persistence and change in everyday cleanliness practices. This knowledge is promising for those interested in reducing inconspicuous consumption in everyday life and resisting structural inequalities.

In exploring media representations of cleanliness this article takes inspiration from critical theory. First, I provide an overview of media and discourse and explore some of the ways that media representations impact everyday life. I also take up critical theory and explore social pressure and stratification tendencies. I then discuss cleanliness as a case from which to explore inconspicuous consumption, environmental tension and social stratification. Building on the foundations of previous research I introduce the empirical case of cleanliness representations in five popular Swedish magazines. I analyse this case by investigating the amount of space cleanliness takes in these magazines, which themes are used to represent cleanliness, and how these themes relate to class and gender. Unsurprisingly, cleanliness is represented as ideal, suggesting that readers should be cleaner to have a better life. An unexpected shame theme also arose from the material, wherein uncleanliness was suggested to be shameful and in some cases a medical issue. This finding supports existing discussions on shame's function in society and the potential impetus for further social stratification. I surmise that media representations of cleanliness increase the pressure to wash more and consume not only more products but also inconspicuously water and energy. I argue that this pressure falls most heavily on marginalised groups, inadvertently setting whole societies on track to not only water and energy-intensive lifestyles, but also increasing social stratification.

Theoretical frame: Cleanliness, representation and discourse

Discourses underpin everyday life and are a part of shaping our practices. They are subject to a host of influences, not least media. Media is predominantly a process of representation, so meanings transmitted through media processes are constantly changing (Hall, 2003: 9), representations of 'cleanliness' or 'dirtiness' differ in, and in-between, different media. What is perceived as 'dirty' varies between time periods, classes and individuals (Berner, 1998: 316), of course '[t]here is no such thing as absolute dirt: it exists in the eye of the beholder' (Douglas, 1966: 2). Processes of representation are also confounded by transmitters, for example, advertisers, who have specific agendas – often of increasing consumption. Advertisers attempt to twist discourse to their ends, enhancing and omitting information in order to forward particular meanings they wish to privilege, for example, that more cleanliness practices are good in order to sell more soap. Viewers, however, are at least partially involved in reception, proffered (cleanliness) discourses only catch on when actively read by audiences prepared to 'participate' and assume the perceived meanings (Cottle, 2006: 428–429): practitioners draw on and interact differently

with different media discourses when constructing everyday routines (Keller and Halkier, 2014). Meaning, while constantly changing, is an active element of practice: fear of shame, for example, can accelerate cleanliness practices so that practitioners feel insured against potential future shame, but only if they are prepared to accept (whether consciously or otherwise) and interact with the fear of shame. While media processes of representation are active in forming consumption practices, discourses are experienced in contexts and thus continually negotiated.

While immersed in and absorbing meanings prominent in media, viewers have also started to be more cynical of representations, especially since the 1980s. In response, media is becoming closer to reality in a game of art and life mirroring each other. Lifestyle blogs written by 'everyday' people, reality television and DIY magazines now saturate the media space. Consuming media is no longer about passively adsorbing messages, but rather about acting, and interacting with material objects and trying new ideas in everyday life (Arsel and Bean, 2013: 912). Media practices have grown to include producers and performers and also interactive audiences, 'audience members who would like to become performers, and non-viewing members of the public' (Couldry, 2012), these actors all contributing to the direction discourses take. Practitioners' exposure to media discourse is tempered by identities, previous experiences and wider social commitments (Cottle, 2006: 416). Media is also counter-tempered by perceived realities: representations cannot stray too far away from accepted discourse if they want to be recognised and engaged with by their audiences. The closing gap between media and everyday life means that media has the potential to play a significant role in (re)producing discourses, and thus consumption practices.

Discourse, and media's role in shaping discourse, is a powerful tool in resisting, perpetuating and deepening social stratifications. From a critical theoretical perspective, ways of talking about or representing, produces knowledge that shapes how ways of doing are seen, a process tightly entangled with power structures (Hall, 1992: 225). According to Hall, media representations gain currency in the collective consciousness and become a pattern that invites performances that reproduce discourse in specific directions, a process from representation to discourse to truth (Hall, 2003: 49). Dominant discourse and repression can be felt across social segments, but often they fall heavily on the most vulnerable. For example, cleanliness expectations may be more sharply experienced by those without access to, for example, plumbing, and who thus need to expend more time and energy to access resources needed to meet cleanliness prescriptions. Discourses while underlining many of the assumptions upon which societies are built, are invisible unless critically examined (Haslanger, 2012); vulnerability begets vulnerability if ignored or not actively resisted. Prescriptive cleanliness conventions cannot be attributed solely to 'evil soap corporations', however, the discourses created and circulated in the media are powerful in accelerating cleanliness conventions.

While critical theory can be accused of setting up imaginary villains, it does provide a framework from which to explore oppression as an increasingly complex system consisting of individuals, networks and machines with no obvious centre

(Sassen, 2014: 10). The goal of critical theory is to lift the scrutiny of practices from the individual to the societal level – situating a practice within a broader context invisible to those engaged in the practice (Haslanger, 2012: 20). Processes involving different actors including the state, industry, military, religion, education and, not least, media combine to stimulate and homogenise modern consumer culture. Social categories like class, gender and ethnicity can provide clues as to how oppression falls differently on differing groups with differing intersectionality. Critical theorists see consumerist desires for modernity as restricting agency in everyday life while giving practitioners the illusion of 'choice' and 'individuality' (Dant, 2003: 66). They also argue that, while at the micro level practitioners can be conscious, playful, even agential, at the macro level the same oppressions affect whole groups (Fuchs, 2001), and practitioners are conscripted into reproducing discourses that don't necessarily represent the best interests for social and environmental sustainability. Cleanliness is a salient example here, as high levels of cleanliness demand (expensive) water, energy, detergents and tools like mops, cloths and machines, and time, yet there is little evidence of hyper-hygiene increasing physical or mental well-being. Dissecting social categories like class, ethnicity and gender may help to unravel how cleanliness conventions are accelerating, despite posing social and environmental disadvantages.

Cleanliness provides a clear case entailing both tendencies for increasing resource consumption and social stratification. Cleanliness has a long association with the media and advertising industry: in 1884 soap was one of the first branded products in America (Paterson, 2006: 199). Cleanliness was soon seen as a marker of civilisation (Elias, 2000 [1939]) and fetishisation of cleanliness became synonymous with Whiteness, validating and reinforcing colonial ideologies (McClintock, 2013). Cleanliness is also linked to media and advertising via 'soap operas' – TV shows sponsored by soap corporations – where the rise in TV viewing spread awareness of soaps and cleaning products (Paterson, 2006: 199). Representations on television, as well as in print and more recently online, are idealised versions of perfection; they use groomed bodies and immaculate homes, to suggest bad breath, body odour or oily hair are shameful and then offer commodities to alleviate these invented problems and provide social salvation (Kellner, 2014: 177). The permeation of hyper-perfect representations of cleanliness into the domestic domain may create dissonance between promoted ideals and everyday experience leading to a feeling of dissatisfaction (Martens and Scott, 2005: 395). Lefebvre describes this feeling as an outcome of both material processes – producing and consuming commodities – and social processes dampening 'real' social motivations and flaming instead desires for new products (1972 (in Dant, 2003: 71)). Lefebvre offers women's magazines as a prime example as they link physical products, like washing powder, with a form of rhetoric that imbues them with a mystical quality that readers will never be able to attain (Lefebvre, 2000: 86). Through the media (both advertising and editorial), representations of material products reconfigure and idealise the aesthetics of everyday life. Practitioners change their relationship with cleanliness conventions in different contexts. For example, it is fine, even

liberating, to be dirty at a summer festival, while at the office cleanliness is more important, and dirtiness is seen as shameful (Hitchings et al., 2018). Media could provide a demonstration site, so not only the reproducer and influencer of a convention, but also a specific site. Translating idealised cleanliness representations from glossy pages to everyday life is well-nigh impossible, which may create undue tensions between idealised images and practical reality: the representations are unpractice-able. Cleanliness representations in media thus provide a case from which to explore tendencies for increasing resource consumption and social stratification.

Historically, women disproportionally experience social pressure from media-prescribed cleanliness conventions. Especially working-class women experience the pressure of, for example, femininity demanding 'radical' disciplining, nearly impossible to reach, thus imposing a sense of shame to the female psyche (Skeggs, 1997: 81–82). Since at least the 1950s, media has been the foremost transmission channel for domestic ideals, actively constructing new unattainable standards (Holt, 2006). Magazines in particular played a large role in this cultural scripting due to the wide readership. Stereotyping of gender roles via magazines restricted women to roles of homemaker, wife and mother, with many 1960s American housewives experiencing persistent claustrophobia (Friedan, 1963). This is an extreme stance; more recently, media is seen as having a moderate importance in shaping cultural norms (Razer, 2016), more evenly targeted; now men are also subjected to appeals to cleanliness (Lambert and Desmond, 2015).

Cleanliness is furthermore a case of inconspicuous consumption as the resources consumed in pursuit of cleanliness are often inadvertent. Cleanliness practices have become so mundane that they are nearly unquestioned, even though they consume environmentally sensitive resources (Gronow and Warde, 2001; Shove and Warde, 2002). This routine type of consumption is subtler than conspicuous consumption (see, for example, Veblen and Banta, 2009), however, it still involves deciphering a discourse and then participating in its reproduction. Even if not traditionally conspicuous consumption, the ordering and organisation of materials and services involved in cleaning are at the core of consumer culture (Martens and Scott, 2005: 380). Acts of cleaning mobilise various elements of practice: devices, products and environmental resources, and these are all a part of production and consumption systems. These inconspicuous practices depend on energy, water and scarce resources (Warde, 2014: 287), changing patterns of practice which then have the potential to reduce environmental effects and slow social stratification. That media representations may play a role in changing discourses demands further scrutiny (Jack, 2013b: 72). There is a social and environmental imperative to understand how media represents cleanliness conventions in understanding inconspicuous consumption and social stratification.

Methods and materials: Researching cleanliness representations in Sweden

To gather empirical data on media representation, I focused the broad concept of cleanliness into household practices that consume water, energy and chemicals.

Activities like showering, body maintenance, laundry, washing-up, ironing and wiping were included – these usually occur in one of three places, kitchen, bathroom and laundry. These activities could be considered a part of very different practices, however, while reading the magazines it became increasingly obvious that these physical doings shared meanings across the representations and would therefore reinforce each other.

Five magazines were used to plot cleanliness representations in Sweden from 1985 to 2015: magazines were chosen for four main reasons. First, traditional television viewing is dropping in Scandinavia (Harrie, 2016), second, advertising on social media platforms is specifically targeted and a representative sample of advertising and content is hard to attain, third, magazines have a stable readership over time and finally are available via archives. Furthermore, the closing gap between media and everyday life, as discussed above, points towards magazines being more likely than ever to give a glimpse into everyday life. Situated inside the social world, content creators are so entangled within culture that even as they try and 'steer' consumer behaviour, they are also a part of existing discourses and thus are bound to reflect modes of appropriate conduct back into culture, leaving residues of how 'ideal' practices exist, an aggregation of acceptable, if idealised, practice.

Magazines included in the sample were: *Allers* (Allers), *Femina* (Femina), *Hemmets Journal* (The Home's Journal), *Må Bra* (Feel Good) and *Sköna Hem* (Beautiful Homes). These magazines were chosen due to their wide circulation, that they were published continually since 1985 and that they were accessible (see Table 1, magazine readership). Readers of these magazines are mainly Swedish-speaking women over a broad age range according to their five different websites. *Allers* and *Hemmets Journal* (lower cover price) are targeted towards working class, *Sköna Hem* (higher cover price) is more middle class, while *Femina* and *Må Bra* (middle cover price) are in-between. Allers' content ranges from cooking, competitions and knitting patterns through to DIY. Femina is a fashion magazine with emphasis on career, beauty, bodies, health, travel, cooking, culture and home. Hemmets Journal is a women's entertainment magazine with gossip articles, crosswords and horoscopes. Må Bra is a health and well-being magazine that covers topics from losing weight, beauty, bodies and health to cooking and human interest. Sköna Hem is a home decoration magazine with articles on gardening, renovations, organisation and inspiration. While there may be class, gender and age differences in whom the magazines are targeted towards, there are many groups in society that don't read magazines. However, the representations can also provide a more general case of reproducing discourse and thus findings may be more broadly applicable.

While the magazines varied in their frequency from weekly to quarterly, only four issues from each year were included in my sample: January, April, July and October when available, otherwise the closest following issue. Years include 1985, 1990, 1995, 2000, 2005, 2010 and 2015, a total of 140 magazines. The selected magazines were read cover to cover and all content related to cleanliness – including advertising, articles and imagery – was scanned, providing around 1800 pages

Table 1. Magazine readership (Callius and Ekman, 2017).

Readership	*Allers*	*Femina*	*Hemmets Journal*	*Må Bra*	*Sköna Hem*
Print (weekly)	370,000	191,000	371,000	253,000	319,000
Online (daily)	128, 000	101,000	73,000	13,0009	138,000
Founding year	1877	1944	1921	1979	1979
Cover price 1985 (sek)	8.45	19.95	8.45	15.95	33.00
Cover price 2015 (sek)	25.00	55.00	29.90	49.00	62.50

Table 2. Appeal over time clusters, net number of codes.

	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015
Quality & luxury	52	48	33	57	59	58	36
Idealisation	46	64	59	78	50	45	81
New & better	44	76	70	99	81	74	106
It works	36	28	26	31	21	26	30
Efficiency	5	5	2	4	3	3	3
Price, bargain & win	4	13	8	15	15	2	7
Mild & sensitive skin	9	11	13	13	5	4	7
Nature outdoors	4	2	29	4	10	5	2
Env. friendly	2	6	5	0	1	10	10
Not too clean	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
Shame	0	4	2	7	12	8	9
Medicalisation	7	10	8	13	8	11	14

of cleanliness editorial and advertising. I created a probability density function (PDF) file for every magazine, per year, per month (e.g. Må Bra 1990 April), with each file containing between 2 and 35 images. The PDFs were loaded into the NVivo qualitative analysis software. I then deductively coded the images for: genre (advertising, editorial), person (absent, man, woman, child), place (body, home) and product (soap, technology, etc.) and used a more inductive 'in-vivo' technique to capture the discourses the magazines were appealing to (Appendix 1 code book). The line between cleanliness and beauty was hard to draw, especially as the two came closer together, shampoo and conditioner were included as a part of cleanliness, hair dye was not. Every time a decision of this sort was made, it was noted and used for future categorisation, consistency was my key concern. The appeals node received a growing number of sub-nodes which allowed me to see how various discourses are appealed to over time (see Table 2, appeal over time for number of codes and Figure 1, appeal over time for changes in relation to the total number of pages). While I aimed for consistency with coding, some of the content

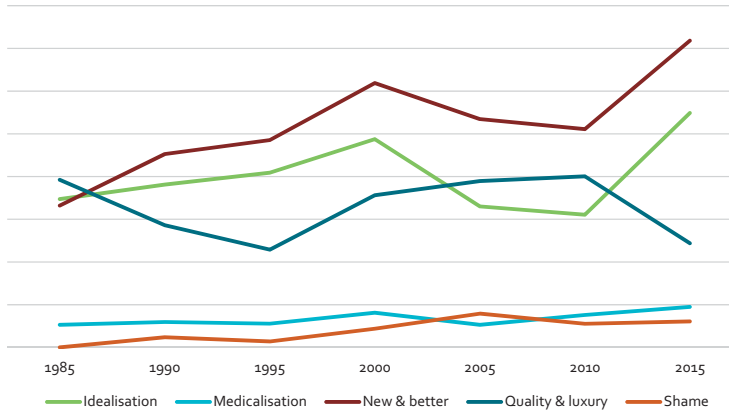

Figure 1. Changes in appeal over time, key themes relative to the number of pages.

appealed to more than one discourse, or fell in the middle of two themes; themes should accordingly be taken only as a rough gauge of the content and messages. Furthermore, while I differentiated between advertising, 'announcements' and editorial, I chose not to rely too heavily on these distinctions in my analysis, as the line between paid and unpaid content was opaque. A 'journalistic' article on dust allergies is followed a few pages later by advertising for anti-allergy vacuum cleaner and so forth. Moreover, many of what I interpreted as announcements, pages promoting a specific product or products, were not signalled with the legally required 'annons'. Readers may be attuned to these discrepancies in different ways and read them with varying levels of cynicism, which I had no data on. Treating different types of content in the same way was thus more logical than arguing for each specific piece to fit into a particular category, with a particular influence. The themes didn't change dramatically over the past 30 years, reflecting previous research where 1980–2000 is combined as thematically similar media period (Martens and Scott, 2005: 381). While it was interesting to count the pages and compare the percentage of magazine space dedicated to cleanliness over time, my main focus was rigorous qualitative analysis.

Findings: Cleanliness representations in Swedish magazines

The material provided a variety of cleanliness representations, in this section discussed first quantitatively, in terms of total space, and also class and gender. I then focus on two cleanliness representation appeals, the carrot of longing and seduction, which here materialises as *idealisation* and the stick of fear here emerging as *shame*.

There was some variation across magazines and years; the higher cover price magazines Femina, Må Bra and Sköna Hem all increased the content related to cleanliness to around 20% while the lower cover price Allers and Hemmets Journal stayed steady at around 5% by 2015. When the percentage of space dedicated to

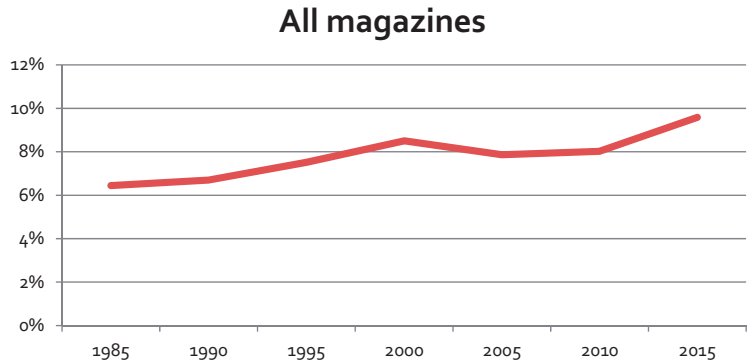

Figure 2. Percentage space dedicated to cleanliness over time.

cleanliness (advertising and editorial) was aggregated, the proportion of magazine space dedicated to cleanliness increased from just over 6% to nearly 10% over the 30 years (see Figure 2, percentage space dedicated to cleanliness over time).

While cleanliness was allocated more space in magazines over the 30 years, time dedicated to cleanliness-related activities, laundering, ironing, washing-up and personal hygiene has decreased slightly over the same period, largely due to women's time use decreasing down towards men's steady allocation of time to cleanliness. The relationship here is not clear-cut, but it is interesting to note that while cleanliness content increased slightly in these women's magazines, the time women spent on cleanliness decreased by nearly 10 minutes per day (Jack, 2017). That time used for cleaning decreased does not necessarily indicate decreasing cleanliness as there is unquantifiable interference from timesaving devices (washing machines, dishwashers, etc.). Time versus content is not a failsafe parallel as producers may advertise more when sales are down. It should also be noted that this 30 years of available time-use data is shorter than the longer period discussed in either Vigarello (1988), Berner (1998) Ashenburg (2007) or (Martens and Scott, 2005), where cleaning trends were explored over more than a century.

The most dominant themes represented in the magazines between 1985 and 2015 were idealisation, new & better and quality & luxury, suggesting if readers invest in these discourses and/or buy these products their lives will improve. A counter theme was shame and medicalisation, threatening that if readers do not invest in these discourses and/or purchase products their lives will deteriorate (see Figure 1). These themes reflect each other, longing for a better life, acceptance and prestige versus the fear of ostracisation, both longing and fear contributing to the drive for higher cleanliness. The positive appeals were present across all magazines: 'new & better' was emphasised in the working-class magazines (Allers and Hemmets Journal) while 'idealisation' and 'quality & luxury' were more present in the middle-class magazines (Femina and Sköna Hem). The negative appeals – 'shame' and 'medicalisation' – were present in middle class Femina and Må Bra, the magazines focusing on the body (see Figure 3, appeal by magazine). Given that

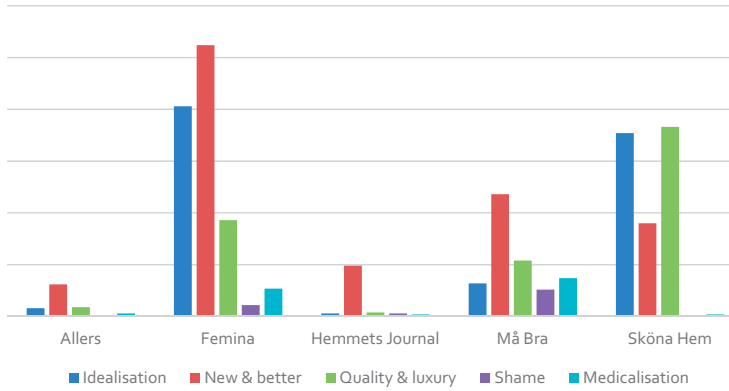

Figure 3. Appeal by magazine.

women appear more often than men (821 vs 113 appearances), both women and men were equally likely to appear in content appealing to idealisation. Women were more likely to be represented in the content appealing to new & better, while male models were used in content appealing to luxury & quality. In the negative appeals, men were more likely to be used in appeals to shame although as those to be rescued from shame, for example, by a mother who buys acne cream for her teenage son and rescues him from embarrassment. Men were also used as those to hide shameful feminine bodily functions from, for example, an ad for panty-liners shows a man bending down to pick up some papers a woman has dropped as her skirt is caught in a lift, the panty-liners assumedly hiding her shameful vaginal leakage from him. Men and women were both used in representing medicalisation, although men were more often used as doctors while women were used to depict those suffering from medical problems (see Figure 4, appeal by gender). Age was not coded for, as it was difficult to tell how old the models were, although many appeared to be young. I did not code for ethnicity either, however, the majority of models looked either Swedish or Anglo-Saxon. More ethnic diversity started to appear in the later issues. Despite, or perhaps because of, varying, contradictory consumer taste, advertisers tend to use 'safer' formats (Warde, 1993) contributing to the stability of themes. Even if 'safe' is relative, as are the various appeals, the way magazines represented cleanliness stayed quite consistent over the 30 years.

Idealisation, new & better and quality & luxury

Looking more qualitatively at idealisation, new & better and quality & luxury, some similarities were present. Running on the beach, forests, impeccable skin, white sheets, cleanliness is taken to aspirational extremes in seducing audiences to new levels of cleanliness. Idealisation is interesting due to the juxtaposition between the images used to incite cleanliness and reality. In representing aspirational cleanliness, nature is often used. These devices like beaches, mountains

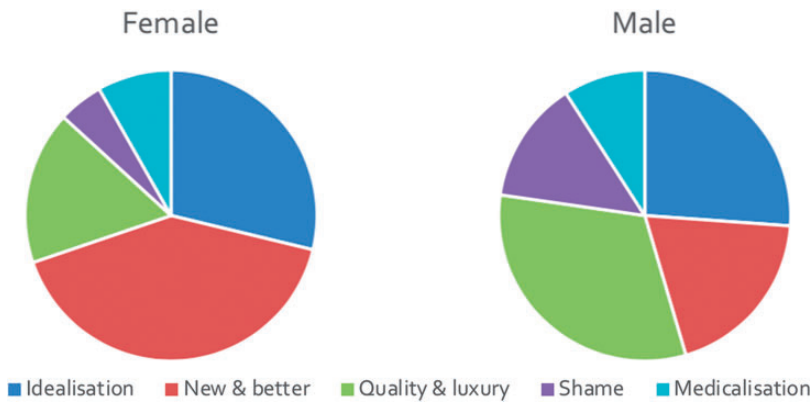

Figure 4. Appeal by gender.

and scenes from nature are in reality alive and crawling with bacteria, bugs and fungus, yet the white surfaces are bleached, sterilised, germ-free, lifeless appropriations of these. For example, an advertisement for hand-soap promises 'mildness in its purest form', with a nozzle pump coming directly from a tree branch, not a hint of ants, dust or other natural contaminants are to be seen. On average, 0.27% of the total pages in the sample magazines (1985–2015) were taken up by representations appealing to nature and being natural (compare idealisation 2.01% or medicalisation 0.34%). The exploitation of nature has been observed before in associating cigarettes: 'artificial, synthetic full of dangerous pesticides, preservatives and other chemicals' with nature as a response to concerns over cigarettes' health hazards (Kellner, 1991: 68–69). Associating unnatural, unhealthy products with nature imbues them with pure, wholesome qualities, as if these products were a natural and healthy part of everyday life. Impeccable bathrooms, articles on hyper-organised cleaning schedules, bleached white interiors and unattainably manicured body parts are blithely splashed throughout the magazines, especially Må Bra, Sköna Hem and Femina, the magazines oriented to the middle class; the predominance of this representation imbues these images with normality or inevitability, an example of Lefebvre's (2000) unattainable ideals. A perfectly styled bathroom suggests that bathrooms can make dreams come true, or a mother running on the beach with her child seems to suggest freedom can come via cleanliness. A luxurious white interior touts medication to avoid menstrual flow and preserve the whiteness of interior decorating. Idealisation is a part of an ideological project to produce and reproduce cleanliness discourses that are promised just beyond the horizons of a new purchase, creating a treadmill effect where audiences are caught up in tidying their bathrooms using cleaning products and perhaps even self-medicating in trying to attain depicted ideal states (see Figure 5). Using nature, but also repetitively showing hyper clean states, imbues sterilising products and processes with naturalness and normalness. Idealisation is perhaps unsurprising: media as

'Bathe/Pray' for our dreams', Sköna Hem, issue 1 1985

A clean feeling, Må Bra April 2000

'Mildness in its purest form'
Take home the feeling of our Nordic nature to your bathroom. Choose between Birch & Meadow, Lingon & Ljung and Blueberries & Mountain stream, Allers, July, 2005

'When you want to reduce your period' Advertisement for medication to reduce menstrual flow (and presumably reduce blood stains around the house), Må Bra July 2000

Figure 5. Representative idealisation content.

discussed in the introduction was expected to focus on desires, aspirations and the just out-of-reach as a strategy to promote higher cleanliness.

Shame and medicalisation

Shame and medicalisation was an alternative theme arising from the data. This appeal plays on the fear of not meeting the minimum social requirements and suffering ostracisation. Typical messages around bodily (mis)functions suggest that without perfect teeth you should be ashamed to smile, without the right deodorising panty-liners you should be embarrassed to stand near strangers in public, and sweaty armpits are embarrassing and should be avoided with strong antiperspirants. Bodies, especially female bodies are constructed as leaky and subject to hormonal functions and volatility (Grosz, 1994: 204), this is present in the material although men are also included in appeals to shame. Shame themes were most present in the magazines with a focus on bodies, Femina and Må Bra, which also had the middle-class cover price. Discourses around shame combine to create a discourse of paranoia, you never know what to be ashamed of next and extra lengths are required in policing any possible aberrations bodies and home may have to the ideal construct. The aim of the styled and stylising representations was ultimately coercing our volatile bodies and homes into sanitised, idealised versions of themselves, reinforcing the idea that uncleanliness is shameful and should be avoided.

Shame was also present with some conspicuous omissions. When alluding to menstrual blood or urine, words like 'drops' or 'liquid' were often used, suggesting that some bodily functions are too embarrassing to name, further reiterating shame. Hair was also missing from women's and also many men's legs, armpits, chests and bikini lines. Readers are not left in the dark as to how to achieve these states; there were feature articles on different hair removal methods, at least acknowledging that people do have hair, a concession leading to further product categories and potential sales. Mess and signs of life were also missing: the interiors, kitchens, bathrooms and living spaces shown in the magazines were completely spotless. In the few ads where there were signs of life, for example, children messily eating pasta, it was to emphasise how easily a touted product could remove these signs of wear. A letter to the editor describes how embarrassing it was to complain to your new neighbours about how messy the house you just bought was, only to find out they are the previous owners; shame can also come from someone else's shame in not meeting social expectations. These appeals to shame further emphasise that super clean, the absence of any matter out of place, is the desirable state.

Medicalisation is also utilised in the shame theme: deviations from the promoted ideal are suggested as medical problems. Medicalisation is a particularly interesting theme as what is framed here as a health problem is more akin to bodies straying from idealisation, rather than a serious health risk. Advertisements and editorial use words like halitosis (bad breath), hyperhidrosis (sweating), eczema or acne

60% of women who sometimes leak urine are so embarrassed that they use tissues and toilet paper in their undies instead of panty-liners, Må Bra April 2010, translation by the author

'Now I dare to laugh again' advertisement for teeth whitener, Må Bra July 1990

Feel secure, no matter how close you come, sanitary pad advertising, Femina October 2005

Hyperhidros – sickly sweating, Allers July 2015, p107, translation by the author

If you sweat extremely you could suffer from hyperhidros, a disease that affects around three percent of the population.

Suffering from exaggerated sweating is often perceived as shameful, according to Carl Swartling, head of medicine at the sweat clinic in Stockholm, specialising in treating hyperhidros.

What is Hypertrikos?, Må Bra April 2015 p85,

translation by the author

It means superfluous hair growth. Skin therapists have changed from saying 'embarrassing hair growth' to instead use the term superfluous hair growth, hypertrikos. Regarding facial hair growth, shaving is a good DIY method. It doesn't stimulate hair growth in the same way as plucking with tweezers. In the worst cases, plucking can cause soft light hair to become dark and coarse. The most secure method is to permanently remove hair at a skin therapist.

Figure 6. Representative shame and medicalisation content.

(skin conditions) or hypertrikos (facial hair) and show experts in lab coats and packaging reminiscent of prescription medicine (see Figure 6). For example, a man presented as the head of medicine at the sweat clinic in Stockholm talks about the embarrassment of sweating experienced by his patients under the title 'sickly

sweating'. Or readers are introduced to the concept of 'hypertrikos, superfluous hair growth', led to believe it is embarrassing and guided through various hair removal strategies – leaving it to grow is not an option. The medicalisation theme focuses on bodies, and health implications, but also in some cases health risks due to unclean interiors, especially dusty homes are framed as medical problems, often in relation to promoting vacuum cleaners and other dust removal products. By articulating issues as medical problems, media representations legitimise touted products, adding medical undertones to the cleanliness imperative.

Shame and social stratification

That magazines use shame in cleanliness representations reflects broader social processes of shame. This exemplifies existing discussions of shame in social structures, especially the writing of Norbert Elias and Beverly Skeggs. Skeggs sees shame as coercive as it is the 'most social and reflexive of all emotions' (Skeggs, 1997: 88), while Elias sees shame's coercive power arising from fear of helplessness in the face of external constructions of superiority (Elias, 2000 [1939]: 415). Shame surfaces, according to Elias, when a practitioner does something that throws their identity into contradiction with dominant discourse, creating conflict with prevalent social opinion, but also with internal self-identity. This internal conflict is then habitualised, producing a more general social anxiety (Elias, 2000 [1939]: 415). Magazines play on anxiety by depicting discourses that are higher than normal, throwing audiences into contradiction with their everyday lives. Pervasive social anxiety can lead to unnecessary performances to demonstrate adherence to discourse, for example, overtly performing that one is clean to claim respectability (i.e. presenting a clean countenance, not grooming oneself in public). Skeggs observes that some femininity performances, for example, sending your children to school in freshly laundered clothes, are seen by performers themselves as unnecessary 'structural inconveniences', yet cannot be avoided for fear of (real or imagined) social consequences (Skeggs, 1997: 164–165). Whether or not one wants to clean, the visible, performative element of practices can lead to acceleration of conventions. Like the ratcheting up of cleanliness (Shove, 2003b), repugnance and shame thresholds have also been advancing already in the first half of the 20th century (Elias, 2000 [1939]: 414). Shame is a strong, if subtle, social mechanism that media uses in representing cleanliness.

Discourse can be experienced as a double-edged sword at the individual level. An insider who knows the codes of good conduct and has access to the required resources can carry out and use the performance of, for example, cleanliness, to create trust, social capital and prestige in society, thus improving their chances of upward social mobility. Conversely if a practitioner does not know these codes, but is aware that codes exist, they can expend cognitive power in trying to avoid breaking unseen rules, feeling shamed. Not caring can be liberating, but for many, knowing codes for conventions can confirm one's avoidance of vulgarity, making or breaking a self-secure mental state (Bourdieu, 1984: 485). Discourses are

of course inherently unstable, negotiated and renegotiated in cycles of power plays. Groups of practitioners more or less explicitly follow, break or shape codes in order to execute some semblance of reflexivity or agency. Resistance and renegotiation can lead to a furthering of the specific social capital of that group (think of dirty bohemians). For those practitioners who do not understand social codes, changing standards are confusing and add to the everyday stress of conforming to the minimum requirements for smooth, shame-free operating in society. Discourses owe their power to the fact that they function below consciousness and language, inaccessible to introspective scrutiny or control by the will (Bourdieu, 1984: 466), one is always left wondering if an unwritten rule has been transgressed. Discourses can be used to pin power structures in place and decrease social mobility of those who do not have time or cultural resources for critique, and thus these practitioners get sucked into perpetuating discourses that are not in their own best interests. Those who do have the capacity (time, space, social capital) to critique and renegotiate conventions often do it in their own interests – for example, marketers – making it even harder for marginalised groups to grapple with and reproduce counter discourses. A sense of impotence and dispossession are some outcomes of powerlessness, which can lead to self-exclusion (Bourdieu, 1984: 434). The way in which media portrayed cleanliness in this study does not seem to make life easier to negotiate, rather higher, more anxious states of cleanliness are proposed, or shame should be felt for not meeting these new standards. This then takes precedence over other, environmental, social inclusion values. Being clean and belonging is more real and urgent than abstract environmental concerns or solidarity. Consequently, practitioners are caught up in reproducing cleanliness discourses, which increases pressures on already stressed resources and increases social stratification.

That magazines jumped on the bandwagon of shame is an example of what critical theorists fear, that consumer culture invents and imposes problems that fall most heavily on those with least resources for resistance, adding to social stratification. By looking for class and gender differences, I found some interesting differences which may lead to further social exclusion. Using a critical theoretical perspective interprets these representations, not as a leisure activity, but as an oppression of the growing (socially) precarious class. Does this perspective show soap corporations as the imaginary villains Dant (2003) was concerned about? Perhaps it seems that evil soap corporations are to blame; however, it could also help to see these processes that aren't driven by a specific actor, magazines at some level mirror already existing discourses, yet they effectively amplify pressures on the already marginalised. This finding suggests that the centerless system of oppression needs to be governed to reduce undue pressure, and there is space here for policy guidelines about what should be represented in media. Appropriate media guidelines could encourage awareness of social and environmental trends to discourage the unfair pressure on marginalised groups and simultaneously steer conventions away from environmentally intensive practices. Perhaps this view is obvious – everyone knows that magazines are the bad guys – yet the obvious is sometimes

needed in understanding environmentally degrading and socially stratifying trends. Comprehending how discriminations are built into discourse is essential in resisting increasing inequality and unsustainability.

Conclusion

In this article, I used cleanliness to explore the media's role in changing practices and the implicated inconspicuous consumption. In the 30 years' worth of five popular Swedish magazines, representations of cleanliness have not changed dramatically, idealisation and shame are present throughout this time period. The presence of shame and medicalisation in the data suggests that these social processes underlie the representation of cleanliness in popular culture. This is quite clearly shown in the magazines, where fear of social inferiority is used to legitimise and also push the urgency of purchasing products and performing touted cleaning practices.

Cleanliness practices are consuming more resources and are becoming more unevenly experienced. Media representations of cleanliness no longer only promote products to clean bodies and homes, but also suggest how to act, look, think and feel. The fear of not meeting idealised standards, and fear of shame are effectively increasing cleanliness practices, inconspicuous consumption of natural resources and adding to social stratification. Consumer culture is intrinsically about inclusion and exclusion and thus using critical theory to understand representations of cleanliness shows that inconspicuous consumption implicit in cleaning practices not only increases pressure on the natural environment but also intensifies social stratification.

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Author Biography

Tullia Jack recently graduated from Lund University, where her PhD thesis explored media's role in cleanliness and inconspicuous consumption. Her research interests include sustainability, consumption, cleanliness and the way that people make sense and create culture in everyday life.

Appendix 1

Code book

Name	Magazines	Content
Appeal	0	0
Efficiency	20	25
Environmentally friendly	26	34
Idealisation	77	423
It works	82	198
Medicalisation	38	71
Mild & sensitive skin	45	62
Nature outdoors	34	56
New & better	115	550
Not too clean	3	4
Price, bargain & win	39	64
Quality & luxury	80	343
Shame	27	42

(continued)

Continued

Name	Magazines	Content
Content type	1	1
Advertisement	127	1190
Annons	79	199
Editorial	86	371
Letter to the editor	1	1
Tips	2	3
Person	0	0
Absent	124	919
Child	36	49
Female	121	767
Male	64	104
More than 1	72	130
Place	0	0
Body	0	0
Bum	17	24
Ears	2	2
Eyes	6	7
Face	70	359
Feet	18	23
Genitals	35	56
Hair	63	118
Hair removal	14	18
Hands	14	15
Ingestion	21	28
Mind	11	24
Mouth & teeth	56	93
Skin	77	234
Sweat	19	22
Floors & dust	30	56
Home	0	0
Bathroom	72	285
Kitchen	62	331
Laundry & clothes	49	84
Product	0	0
Cleaning agent	106	290
Cream & serum	82	406
Deodorant	15	16

(continued)

Continued

Name	Magazines	Content
Diaper	23	33
Disinfectant & antibacterial	9	9
Fragrance	52	139
Freshener	15	22
How to	50	141
Inspiration & information	72	372
Menstruation	17	28
Mixed, for example, brush and product	50	93
Surgery	9	9
Technology & machine	61	228
Wipe & brushes	33	44