

Filipino Women Ad-Makers' Standpoint on their Professional Environment's Regard of Women and Women in Beauty Product Ads

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Abstract

This paper rests on a premise that women ad-makers' experience in the act of making advertisements (ads) of beauty products places them in a complex situation of 'encoding' ad content. They are not just making any other advertisement, but ads of products that have them as target consumers by virtue of them being women. Using Sandra Harding's Standpoint Theory and employing an interpretivist paradigm, this article answers the question: How do Filipino women ad-makers perceive their environment's regard of women as workers and of women characters in the ads they make?

Using maximum variation sampling, twelve (12) women advertisement makers were included in in-depth semi-structured interviews; and another twelve (12) were included in two (2) focus group discussions (FGDs). Qualitative analysis reveals that the ad-makers have a strong situated procedural knowledge on how the professional standard of the advertising industry either impedes on or facilitates how women maneuver through their work life.

Keywords: feminist standpoint, women in advertising, beauty products, situated procedural knowledge

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Introduction and Statement of the Problem

Virginia Woolf (1929) in *A Room of One's Own* lamented the lack of space for women's rumination and theorizing in professional settings— she suggested that a woman deserves a room of her own in order to thrive in the world, and that within its protective walls, she is safely able to assess how the world outside the room regards her, and how others operate. Although she was mostly referring to women academics in universities, her observation of this lack of consideration for a woman's need to think and articulate what she knows about the world is relevant to the premise of this article. Today, while ad-makers are deemed deserving of their *rooms*, only through an open critique of the ad-world can an objective account of the ad-world be truly possible.

This paper rests on the theoretical premise that women ad-makers' experiences in the act of making advertisements for beauty products place them in a very complex situation of 'encoding' ad content. They are not just making any advertisement; rather, they are creating ads of products that have themselves as target consumers, by virtue of them being women. The content of the ads is not only prescriptive, as all advertisements are. It also starts from the idea that women's bodies as inherently defective (Featherstone, 1991).

The analysis of media production in advertisements through women ad-makers' stories—their experience of making sense of how their environment regards women—offers an extended view of how media production works. While the organizational structure of media organizations has been studied tremendously, the examination has mostly concentrated on the production of news (Klein, 2001). This article is a contribution to literature on the actors behind advertisements as media texts. In particular, this article focuses on women ad-makers' standpoint in relation to prevalent beliefs and practices regarding women.

Moreover, when gender is considered in studies that look into the interaction of gender with organizational variables and its links to how women communicators create media text, gender is often studied as gender per se. When women journalists, for instance, are studied, the theoretical presumption is that there is a feminine way of creating media text and that "woman" is a stable construct. Feminist communication scholars criticize this as being oblivious to the theoretical deficiency present in the premise that the presence of women in media production automatically improves women media discourse. Van Zoonen (1994) puts it this way:

Apart from expecting a particular input from women, it is assumed that the individual communicator is

sufficiently autonomous to implement her own preferences without significant modification by colleagues, technical requirements, professional values, organizational routines, etc. (p. 64)

On the other hand, when the whole of the media organizational structure is analyzed, the leading themes are the tension and conflict that arise from the subordination of individuals to the organization they work for, without a serious theoretical consideration of how specific organizational practices are intersected by other variables such gender, ethnicity, race or sexuality.

There is a growing number of media-trend analysts who affirm what experts in the academic and business sectors have observed for several years now: that the global advertising industry is in free fall. People hate seeing ads, especially in the most visual platforms such as social media and television (Hsu, 2019). There are many reasons for this including the increase in affordances in people's viewing devices to skip, ignore, or avoid ads altogether. Advertisement placement, therefore, has found new ways of reaching audiences. A growing number of beauty product ads, for instance, bank on social media influencers and third-party reviewers. These materials have also become shorter and tighter compared to their counterparts ten years ago (Nazarenko, 2020). However, advertisements in different forms—30-60 second audio-video commercials, prints, e-brochures, and video clips—continue to be made for mass audiences and targeted audiences alike (Sanchez, 2020).

In 2018, the market size of TV advertising in the Philippines was valued at 573.1 million US dollars, with TV advertising accounting for about 64.5 percent of the total advertising market in the same year (Sanchez, 2020). It is forecasted to be valued at 952.2 million US dollars in 2024 and is expected not to slow down post-pandemic (Sanchez, 2020). Thus, there is a continuing clamor for the elevation of discourse in advertising.

Fortunately, the elevation of advertising discourse is now deemed morally necessary, not just by academics but by the industry as well. The advertising industry in the Philippines is active in initiating conversations among its players on the imperative response to the ever-evolving audience's needs, including the call for better representations (INQUIRER.net BrandRoom, 2019).

Still, there remains a lack of inward reflection into the human actors in the advertising industry. Despite the degree of feminization in the industry since the 1990s generated by the entrance to the labor market by a non-heteronormative-male labor force, a certain male-centric standardization in the ad-world remains (Martín-Llaguno, 2007)). In the Philippines,

because of the level of familiarization with how ads become successful economic and cultural texts, comparatively less examination has been conducted on how the industry acts a constraining ideology of labor and of commerce (Celades, 2012; Sinclair, 1987). Consequently, this taken-for-granted ideology of commercial normativity has relegated the analysis of women's ways of knowing and understanding the industry as an auto-response. We still understand little about how women workers construct active, situated knowledge-making beyond human capital. Their work rhythm and communicative styles, for instance, have been normalized to the point that the steady decline of female creative directors in Europe and in the US (Ellis, 2018) has not been fully studied. In the UK, the females who leave creative work are called the "lost girls". These girls were becoming account managers, planners and project managers but not creatives despite training specifically for this role (Ellis, 2018). There is an unconscious male bias in the industry that pushes women to choose masculine work in these positions (García-González and Piñeiro-Otero, 2011).

Indeed, there is a lack of reflection on the gendered process of advertising-making (Martín-Llaguno, 2007). As van Zoonen (1994) warned two decades ago, no real breaking of gender-based boundaries can be achieved in the media content we consume if there is no examination of media production structures. Van Zoonen offered the invitation to look at these media production universes, not just as problematic labor structures, but as socio-cultural sites for the examination of knowledge-production that should not necessarily be measured through the economics of labor and profit but as windows to "ways of thinking" and "ways of doing" creative work. In Woolf's (1929) eyes, there is an active theorizing that goes on in women's rooms—literally provided or not for women ad-makers—about how women ad-makers are regarded in the industry and how they see the industry stand in the discourse on women representation.

This study's earlier starting point in the field of communication was intrapersonal communication/intracommunication, considered to be the most anomalous form of communication as it is outside the communication exchange between at least two individuals. When the social and the private, as well as the speaker and the hearer coincide, intrapersonal communication is diluted and eventually lost in between studies on cognition and interpersonal comm (e.g., message design logics, uncertainty reduction, communication accommodation, and expectations violation) (Geurts, 2017). In very few instances when intracommunication takes center stage, it is utilized as a strategy for persuasion optimization, making a difference, and maximizing tools for change in the individual level. In Foss and Foss' (2011) *Constricted and Constructed Potentiality*, intracommunication is a

powerful tool in making sense of the world with the intentional end goal of social change through leadership.

Joining the conversation is Honeycutt's (2008) *imagined interaction* defined as "social cognition where individuals imagine anticipated or prior communication encounters with others" (p. 157). This process of reflecting within one's self before or during an interaction with another has its place in communication studies (Cunningham, 1992).

These few resurgences in intrapersonal communication researches support my interest in women media encoders' standpoint. However, the need for a psychological construct—procedural knowledge—is imperative as existing literature on intracommunication is limited to micro interactional contexts such as conversations, speeches, conflict resolutions, and dialogues (Vickery et al., 2015; Honeycutt, 2008; Cunningham, 1992). As will be argued later, my interpretivist critical approach craves for less individualistic motivational reasons for understanding interpersonal spaces. These intrapersonal communication perspectives on cognition cannot sufficiently be integrated with my feminist socialist critique of media organizations.

Arguing for the need to look at the ad industry as an important context in studying how women think through the creative process while also having a clear vision of the layers of cultures they operate in; given the women ad-makers' standpoint as an understudied area in communication and media research in the Philippines; and given the necessity to present gender as a unique starting point for professional work, this paper asks:

How do Filipino women ad-makers perceive their environment's regard of women as workers and of women characters in the ads they make?

Framework of the Study

Using Sandra Harding's (1991, 2004) definition of standpoint as an objective account of reality coming from the subjugated group's -- the ad-makers'-- estimation of their "environment's" regard of women as workers and of women as subjects in ads – this study provides contextualization of the ad-makers' subjugation. This particular subjugated experience may not obviously be regarded as "subjugated" at first glance given that the women in this study hold positions of power (i.e., the executives) or of significance (i.e., middle-range managers and team members).

Harding's (1991, 2004) Standpoint Theory makes the following principal claims:

First, that knowledge is socially situated; second, that dominant and non-dominant groups have different accounts of reality; third, that subjugated groups are socially situated in ways that make it more possible for them to

be aware of things and ask questions than it is for the non-subjugated; and finally, that research particularly focused on power relations should begin with the lives of the subjugated group.

The concept of a standpoint in this context not only takes on the Marxist connotations of the term, as achieved through collective identity or consciousness, but also forwards feminist empiricism and post-structuralist feminism. This means highlighting subjugated groups' experience in light of the evocative content of the complexity and richness of their subjugated experience (Poggio, 2006).

I argue that the experience of women ad-makers as the "subjugated experience" in relation to the advertising industry is crucial, given that they are women creating and selling "wares" to an audience of which they are a part of and, more importantly, that their experiences are structured by how they approximate the culture's dominant views of women. I would like to confirm through the ad-makers' objective accounts of reality how convoluted the performance of their roles is in an industry that meticulously examines, portrays, approximates and venerates women's beauty. Central to the subjugated experience are the ad-makers' inevitable attachment to the subject-at-hand: women's bodies.

Taking off from Standpoint Theory's *situated knowledge* as an objective account of reality, I relate Mary Field Belenky et al's (1986) "procedural knowledge-making" among women as an empirical account of the subjugated experience.

Situated knowledge is an important substantiation of standpoint and is a dynamic subject matter in an on-going conversation among feminists. It forwards the embodied position of a person through which one understands, perceives, and knows the world. It is a view from *somewhere*, originally from the margins, but now understood to also include the marginal positions found in the centers (Collins, 1997; Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1999). It is not just about the marginalized body of the oppressed worker in fundamentalist Marxism, but also considers knowledge of the 'god language' that both oppresses the knower and allows her access to the oppressive center (Collins, 1997; Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1999). This often operates as a conflicted knowledge of structures and ways of the world (Stoetzler & Yuval-Davis, 2002).

Meanwhile, *procedural knowledge* is how women project a voice of reason, as they continuously design means to thrive in contexts that are often, but not always, professional. It is one of the many ways of knowing which women access and demonstrate. Procedural knowledge-making is in particularly high gear in professional settings where an understanding of how things work is essential. With procedural knowledge, intuitions

are substantiated with reasoned assessment of how things are seen in specific contexts and, in the language of Standpoint Theory, how the dominant culture regards specific sectors, subject matters, or phenomena. In this study, procedural knowledge is not composed of a set of “how-to” instructions or steps of doing, but rather, a web of significations in the form of impressions, reflections, and accounts of how the environment regards women (Belenky, et al., 1986).

With situated knowledge and procedural knowledge as supplemental concepts to standpoint, I operationalize them in the ad-makers’ estimations of their environment’s regard of women as workers and as subjects of ads as their deliberate means of performing their tasks. These compose a particular kind of *situated procedural knowledge*. As subjugated individuals, their assessment of how their environment regards women contributes to the manageability of procedures which in turn gives them more control of situations. The sense of control in whatever form is always a professional aspiration especially when the ad-makers’ task is externally gauged by the client.

Situated procedural knowledge, in this context, will be presented as women struggling to enact an elaborate professional performance of formal and informal content-making procedures. The incongruity between what they might personally believe to be an acceptable regard of women, and what they might endorse through the ads, is a common state of mind that women in the *margins of centers* regularly experience (Haraway, 1988). Yet the aptitude for co-existing with this dilemma is precisely what situated knowledge presupposes—this embodied dispute among personal, professional and social notions of the body. At the same time, since having such knowledge equips them to proceed through work with competence, the situatedness of this procedural know-how is an important chronicle of this conceptual integration. Situated procedural knowledge is presented as a professional ability for managing tensions pertaining to notions of women’s bodies and in their experiences as members of organizations.

As the women articulate how certain notions are experienced and observed, they not only articulate their standpoint and therefore add to the objective account of reality in the ad industry concerning beauty products, they likewise substantiate their procedural knowledge. This, therefore, likewise adheres to the Standpoint Epistemology (Harding, 1991) that values participation in research being an empowering and revelatory experience not just to the researcher but to the research cooperators (i.e., informants and participants) as well (Rolin, 2009; Guerrero, 2002).

Although I am borrowing the concept of procedural knowledge from the field of psychology, this study is not about the psychological process

of procedural-knowledge-making. The concept is used here in relation to situated knowledge in standpoints more commonly considered in communication research. Situated procedural knowledge is my take on women ad-makers' standpoint as "encoders" of texts.

The diagrams below are an integration of the theories discussed above, and consequently, how these concepts were operationalized:

Figure 1. Integrated theoretical framework of the women ad-makers' standpoint.

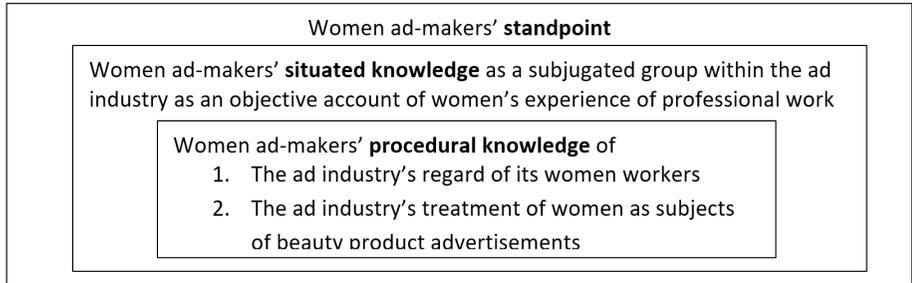
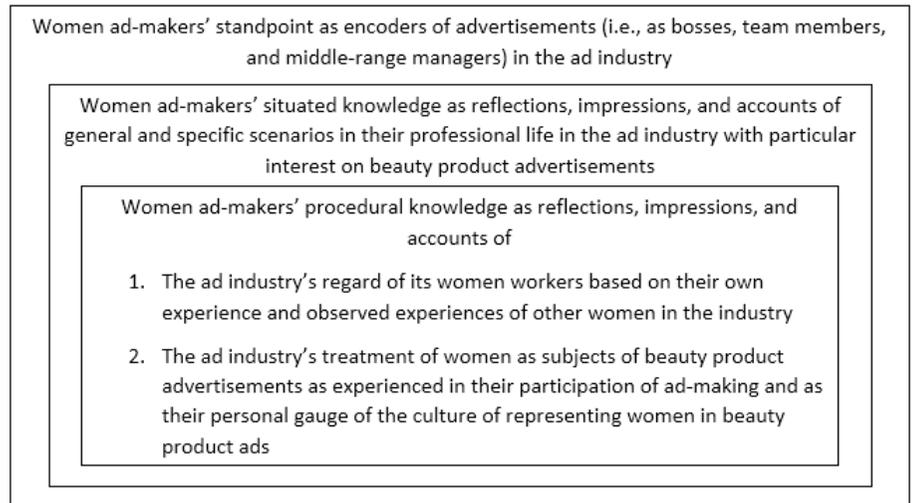


Figure 2. Integrated operational framework of the women ad-makers' standpoint.



Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative interpretive and critical approach to research. It specifically looked into the gendered encoding of media text in advertisements by exploring women ad-makers' standpoint, operationalized through their situated procedural knowledge as women workers in the advertising industry and how women are represented in beauty product advertisements.

To understand the position of women ad-makers in relation to their role as workers in the industry and to their creation of media text, I sought out their interpretations of how the industry regards them and other women as workers, team/crew members, or bosses. In addition, I sought information on how they see the ad industry's accepted, negotiated, and implemented notions of how women as subjects in beauty product ads are treated. I sifted through their estimations as important situated procedural knowledge that makes their roles workable.

Twelve (12) women advertisement makers were included in in-depth semi-structured interviews; and another twelve (12) were included in two (2) focus group discussions (FGDs).¹ The informants represented twenty (20) different advertising agencies/companies in the Philippines with nineteen (19) being labelled as advertising and marketing companies; 12 are under large holding companies that are mostly multinational companies having offices in the Philippines. The interviews and FGDs were conducted between 2015 and 2019. The following criteria for the maximum variance sampling were used in the selection of the interviewees and participants: (a) She makes or has made advertisements for TV or on-line media; (b) she has been directly involved in the making of an advertisement of a beauty product at least thrice in her career; and (c) she is at least one of the following: art director/creative director in an advertising agency, copy writer in an advertising agency, a member of the creative team in an advertising agency, account manager in an advertising agency, advertising manager in a company (maybe under the Marketing Department, but has closely worked with the advertisement of the company's beauty product), or a product manager who directly handles the making of the advertisement of a beauty product brand.

The transcripts of the interviews and notes from the FGDs were first laid out in a rugged thematic index with descriptive impressions for each initial categorization. This first part of the analysis was done to have an inventory or a "window" to the data set in organized form. This step also facilitated the descriptive part of the final written output. Next in the analysis was the first-level interpretation using an overlap of axial and cluster methods of coding. The third part of the analysis used "memoing" to infer how the informants' reflections/estimations/accounts-as-knowledge became facilitators of their professional performance (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). English translations have also been made from Filipino or TagLish (Tagalog-English) words, phrases, and sentences in quoted interview and FGD excerpts.

Results and Discussion

The following results reveal the ad-makers' understanding of the culture of their organization and the advertising world with regard to women's place in the professional setting. This understanding makes the ad-makers effective, albeit negotiative, participants in their professional environments. Consequently, this understanding also facilitates their situated procedural knowledge-making of their professional work. Their stories show the complex webs of significations they undergo as they make the most of their jobs.

A. The Advertising Industry's Regard for its Women Workers According to the Women Ad-makers

The data for this section are taken from the ad-makers' account of their work experience including their impressions of the views and treatment of other women in the ad industry.

A.1 "Women are Highly Regarded, But...":

Commendable but Limited Gender Sensibility in the Workplace

A majority of the ad-makers spoke of a culture of gender sensibility, although limited, in their respective ad agencies. For some, this could be the lapses in people's sensitivity to co-workers' sexual orientation, "outing people," or insensitively asking them if they are gay or not.

For instance, in Cynthia's ad-agency, there is still the usual curiosity regarding "who is the woman in the relationship" when it comes to non-heteronormative relationships. She considered this as a lack of gender sensitivity that is tolerated because of the belief that gays are very respected in the ad-world. Meanwhile, Joy—who came out as a lesbian 17 years ago—said that for her, this meant providing guidance to her male boss, who was nice enough to admit he did not know how to deal with "the news." She recalled being told, "It's a good thing you are not the typical 'obvious' lesbian. You still look like a woman." At present, she no longer hears insensitive remarks about her sexual orientation, although she mentions that some have suggested that being a lesbian is a blessing based on the assumption that she does not want to have children. Other examples include Lanie, who was surprised to have been blatantly told several times to dress up for a client meeting when she thought she was already appropriately dressed; and Chloe, who recalled how "power dressing" became a subject of mockery in her office after a client said they wanted "deliverables, guys, not power dressing."

Others noted that some bosses still expect their women subordinates to make coffee for them during meetings. There would be some occasional sexist comments on women coworkers' physical attributes, such as their legs

or breasts. These are not overtly harmful, according to the ad-makers, but they are damaging nonetheless. Raquel stated, “It is okay if the co-workers are familiar with each other because they’re friends. But it’s not okay if the girl is just new in the office and the boss is already treating her like that.”

As far as they know, there are no sexual harassment cases in their workplaces, only occasional misunderstanding and even office “affairs that have seen exciting days but that eventually died tragic deaths.” Gina recounted:

We don’t have strict rules that say “Gender Rules,” but because of what we have right now, we are forced to be sensitive and to be diversified in our views. Of course, we still hear things like, “He’s gay, that’s why” or “Because she is menopausal.”

Gina also observed that in her agency, the most gender insensitive are the “old ones.” In general, women enjoy autonomy and high regard, especially those who have been in the organization for more than two decades. The usual Filipino decorum of being most respectful to the seniors apply to these agencies. Joy, however, shared that in her organization, the senior women are the ones who are more serious with work while the male seniors tend to be more relaxed, humorous, and more likely to joke with subordinates and exchange convivialities in corridors.

Other statements from the informants support these general findings, including claims that:

- “Gender doesn’t get in the way.”
- “We have had countless gender sensitivity [trainings] here.”
- The workplace is “gender saturated.”
- “We’re woke here, for real.”
- “We have lapses but we call-out each other.”
- “The new generation is an enlightened generation when it comes to this.”

Zee likewise attested to how gender equality is both a desired state and one that is challenging to achieve in her ad agency. She stated that the organization is “seeing more women rise up the ranks. I’m lucky that our CEO is female and she is very inspiring, but at the same time, her feat has always been a tall order.”

A.2 Liberal Regard for Women at the Workplace versus Conservative View of Women as Target Market

All of the informants shared that while women are highly regarded in their respective work spaces, their target market for beauty products is still pictured as conservative and traditional, except for those in the high-income bracket. Lanie explained:

We tremble here around women executives because they cannot be fooled. I benefit from this collective respect for them. But I admit that collectively also, [my organization] still infantilizes women as consumers. We still hold on to conservative ideas because many of us still are.

Raquel, meanwhile, described the dissonance she experiences between what she thinks and how her organization operates:

...we commend ourselves because we are making things happen for ourselves and for other women too. We see women in an optimistic way. But as a market, we see them as calculating. We want to cater to this calculating woman.

This awareness of the difference between women in their workplace and women as target audience trickles down to how they make ads. Joy, who is a creative director and writer, admitted to “toning down” certain “realistic looks” that she originally envisioned for “her woman,” a term she often used to refer to the main character in her ads. She explained that there have been times when her team tried to convince the client that a 100 percent realistic “before” shot would work for the Filipina audience. She personally admitted to liking Hollywood celebrities who look raw in movies, so she reasoned that women consumers would appreciate the same thing in ads. Unfortunately, according to Joy, the team eventually decided that the audience would not yet be ready for this kind of realism. They eventually junked the 100 percent natural “before” look.

Likewise, Chloe’s first job was on print magazine accounts, where she worked closely with photoshop editors to manipulate the images of women in ads. It was common practice to edit women’s faces and bodies.

Other interviews added to this sense of irony in the ad industry, as participants said that “buyers of beauty products [are] still traditional,” that “Filipinas [are] careful to push tradition,” and that acceptance of more modern approaches to natural or realistic looks is “not yet there.” Thus, while women ad-makers agree that women executives and other women in the industry are seen as movers and shakers, Filipina beauty product buyers are still treated cautiously and infantilized as a conservative group.

A.3 Work is Most Challenging for Mothers with Young Children

Most of the ad-makers, whether they had children or not, observed that their work is most challenging for mothers, especially those with very young children. Joy, who is unmarried and has no children, attested to this:

I am fully aware that the ones who make it here are the single people—the unmarried ones who don't have children. She may have a plant or dog or a robot gold fish at home... So I thought of this job as not for everyone. The ones who excel here are gays like me. The ones with families have it most difficult here.

Mylene added to this, highlighting the burden of the long hours or the “overtime work” that was expected from everyone. She said:

I realized this industry is not really kind to women with small children... The agency views women as equal to men, to our disgrace... because women get pregnant and all, but the treatment is all the same. It's as if it's so easy to twist this concept of equality.

Zee, also unmarried and without children, made a similar point:

I think that we are on the way to represent women better. It's nice to hear that there are people who'd go the extra mile to support the women who aim to be at a decent spot in their advertising careers. I myself, try to understand that there'd be times when a colleague will need to put down her office deadlines so that she can attend to her child, without prior notice brought about by an emergency.

Chloe, a solo parent, hid her pregnancy throughout the first trimester from her boss and colleagues. Others narrated how family life can take a back seat as one starts in the industry, how sleep deprivation is placed on a pedestal and treated as admirable, and how “stretching one's self” to the point of exhaustion is seen as a “badge of honor.” There is a predominant sentiment that mothers who make it to high positions are exceptional, or even “super human.”

A.4 Women are Dynamic, Energetic and Talented Worker-Leaders

The ad-makers pictured the ad-world as a host for the most dynamic, energetic and talented women. This is telling, they said, of how the industry expects nothing less of them. Here, women are go-getters, achievers, and “alien-like ... in their superpowers to launch the biggest projects,” according

to Mylene and “pushers—as in pushers of envelopes” according to another. One informant viewed women in the ad-industry as “ever-optimistic battered wives—believing one day the industry will in fact shake the world, which it does somehow, except when the product is a beauty product.” Talent is a woman’s passport to this exciting world. As Cynthia explained, “what is given premium is talent.” Others added to that, describing this quality as “talent to reinvent the wheel” and an “eye to retell age-old stories in a way that dances [with] the current tune.” However, since the industry is fast-paced, one is only as good as her last project. Women are expected to be quick-thinking, and to always “hit the ground running.”

Women are also expected to endure long working hours—an ability that used to be identified with men. Several informants mentioned “night owls,” “coffetarians,” “freshies,” and “busybodies” as having the best chance of succeeding in the industry. Unfortunately, as Mylene observed, “This is a very exciting world for the young, for the un-committed... but as you build [a] family, you may become an outcast.” Joy added:

The ad-world is really exciting for the creative people who work for the money. Hahaha. Just as long as you are great, you thirst for success... so I really think this is not for everyone. There is a sense of restlessness around here because success is short-lived. We are as good as our last project and we have many competitors.

Meanwhile, Raquel offered a more detailed description of the typical young professionals in her ad-agency:

The zombie-types. The coffee drinkers. It’s okay to sacrifice one’s love life in favor of a project. Seriously, the ones who fit here are the fresh graduates who can use their experience here for their resumé. It says a lot that you’ve survived the ad industry for at least 5 years.

Lanie admitted having gone through two “major breakdowns” in recent years. She attributed these to her getting old, while Chloe shared her honest plans for the future—she does not intend to stay in the industry much longer, planning to go to graduate school and eventually shift careers.

For Gina, the reason why women thrive in the industry is their ability to endure “the hardest of times and longest of nights.” There is an intensity in ad-making that, Gina said, women seem to be at home with. It is even common for women to “come in heels in the morning and go home in rubber shoes.” This shows how the urgency intensifies over the course of a day in the ad-world.

Joy also mentions the kind of mental and emotional endurance required to thrive in the ad industry. She said:

This is the adrenaline that I am at home with. The kind that just keeps me pushing for more. Don't mind the client who pissed me off, in the end, I'll finish the race. This is a different level of endurance.

She added that the industry is not kind to the “weak-hearted,” especially to “the ones who cannot extend their waking hours, and the ones with small children.” One ad-maker talked of having “makapal ang apog” (the closest translation is “thick-skinned”) while another one mentioned the importance of “not [being] sensitive to sermons.”

Mylene gave an account of how she has been embarrassed many times in the past. She stated, “I was embarrassed and shouted [at] many times... while my peers resigned, I stayed. My boss said, ‘You belong here because you have endurance.’”

Another similar tale came from Gina, who stressed the importance of endurance and how it is needed to “pay one’s bills.” She said,

[T]his industry has the brightest of people. At least, it attracts the brightest of people. But not everyone stays. There’s a great mortality rate here...I don’t think there’s discrimination. The gold standards here are courage, hard-work and endurance...

Chloe shared how anxiety has now become synonymous with focus. “One is anxious because one is in the zone.” Others described the typical effective worker as “high-strung,” “*bibo*,²” “*kaladkarin*,³” and “*haggardo virtuoso*.⁴” One described a highly regarded member of her organization as a “Zen-zombie”—a term describing a person who is so hyper-focused on tasks that she cannot be bothered to engage in any interaction until the day’s to-do list has been checked off completely. The “zen” in this colloquial term is the esteemed trait.

A.5 Women Cannot Let Their Guard Down

Still, the ad-makers were aware that anybody is dispensable. They knew they could easily be replaced at any time by a younger, newer employee willing to do all-nighters. The fear of losing accounts to other agencies is what stretches the workers in the ad-world. Raquel shared:

We accept even the most difficult projects because they can always look for other agencies that have many fresh

graduates who are insomniac. Then if your teammates get pregnant or get married, you're dead.

This sense of being expendable was felt by Gina when she was told that she was not as updated as the others in terms of pop-culture sensibilities. Then she realized that she could never let her guard down, no matter how much she had already given to the company. She later quit to establish her own company.

For Mylene, her most vulnerable time was the period after a pregnancy. She always felt the pressure to perform doubly hard after her maternity leave. She said that the pressure to over-perform was not directly stated, but there would always be instances when she would be made to feel that others could do it better. She opined,

Teams get shuffled frequently. The ones you have groomed are placed in other units. So every shuffle, you start from scratch. Then I would feel that I can always be replaced.

Joy has a similar account:

It's difficult to be lax just because you are a senior. For me, as I stayed longer, the more I realized that the next hire with the fresh amazing skill may just as well replace me. I have seen it happen many times before. They're now in PR.

In the same regard, Zee observed how women have to take the extra mile just to be respected at work:

[T]hey go the extra mile to give their children the best of both worlds—that is financial and a happy home life. However, a lot of them fail because they cannot be in two places [at one time]. You cannot be at the top of your game, without having to sacrifice time [you devote] to your kids. What's sadder is that women who work fulltime seem to bear a cross on their shoulders and later, crucified. They are slaves of the corporate world, and slaves of the notion, the ideal of how a mom should be once she reaches home.

All the women in this study were very articulate on how the professional standard of the industry impedes on or facilitates how women maneuver through their work life. It is important to note that in their articulations, they illustrated a tongue-in-cheek know-how of what gender-based limitations have been overcome, but at the same, what gender biases remain strong. This is important situated procedural knowledge. These attributed

meanings to events and practices make them not just careful but also agentic professionals in testing boundaries and accepting difficult compromises that one woman described to be “temporary roadblocks of this generation.” With this situated knowledge about these unwritten procedures, some of them have openly shared cautions and instructions to other peers who come uninitiated to the trade.

Social expectations are also well articulated. Others are more defiant of these social expectations within the industry but most of them expressed that full defiance in practice has not yet been achieved. It was apparent in the interviews that the women are faced with moral dilemmas in moments when moral choice is needed. Almost all of them expressed context-specific resolutions of moral debacles:

- “I would weigh in [on] the situation.”
- “I talk to the higher-ups then to my colleagues.”
- “I think it through because not everything is under my control.”
- “Talk one-on-one first before we resolve as a group.”

Four women admitted to having regrets regarding actions implicating their fellow women. Some examples include:

- I “doubt[ed] if her child was indeed sick.”
- I “forc[ed] her to admit she was getting married.”
- I “[told] the office she was dating [her team-mate].”
- I “ignore[ed] the signs that she was having postpartum [depression].”

Most of these women had a strong reflexive tone in discussing their past reactions and actions with regard to how they are deemed by others on the basis of their being women in the profession.

B. The Advertising Industry’s Treatment of Women-as-Subjects-in-Ads

There are no written general rules as to how women should be treated in the advertisements that the ad-makers take part in producing. The process of creating advertisements is a collective undertaking, with the ad-agency usually being at the last end of the line of decision-making, while clients and their marketing executives have the final say. Nevertheless, as told by the ad-makers, there is an established informal understanding as to how women should be treated among the players in their ad-agencies. There have been innovations and changes, but the general trend is towards a slow integration of how women can be best represented with the highest regard for them. This slow integration, according to the ad-makers, is most true in beauty product advertisements.

Also, a general consensus exists that the ads they make are the best representation of what the agency, through market research data, deems to be “what real women out there actually prefer.”

Women as the target market is the framework through which the ad-makers see women in society. For them, women as consumers are a force to be reckoned with, thus, need to be listened to. For one ad agency which specializes in products for women, the ad-maker admits that she is optimistic about staying in business just for the women consumers alone.

This “women power” is also based on their organizations’ belief that women are the decision-makers in the consumption behavior of households. In recent years, this consumption has been translated into an increased consumption for themselves.

In general, the ad-makers saw women as “purchasing, powerful women” who have control over household resources—including her husband’s, for those who are married. Joy confirmed, “We live by the promise of so many researches that women hold the power when it comes to purchasing for the home, for the family and for herself.”

B.1 Done with “Sexy Only”: Advertising’s Badge of Honor

Foremost in the mind of ad-makers was the consideration that women should be represented as thinking persons who cannot be easily fooled. This is the number one unwritten rule in the ad agencies. “Women in our ads should and must be intelligent women who know what they want. She has standards and live by them,” Raquel said. Joy affirmed, “These days, if she appears stupid in the ad, you’re dead, even if you didn’t intend it to be.” As for Mylene, she said:

[S]he is a powerful intelligent human being...She is thinking because she knows what she wants. She has money, obviously, why else would we want to sell her things. She is clever. She cannot be fooled easily.

Mylene added that when she came into the agency, she carried the baggage of the “old rules” from her previous company. As she was trained in digital editing and story development, she tried to wow her boss in how she could “make the light bounce on women’s faces” because that was her expertise before. However, she recalled being “condemned” for being too mechanical in her treatment of women in the ads. She recalled,

I remembered being lambasted because I was all light and shadow. My boss asked, ‘Where is the story behind this woman? What is her problem and what is she thinking? She

has to be thinking.’ So there, I was back to barracks and I realized I needed more skills in story-telling.

For the ad-makers, the industry is past the “dark ages.” Two of them used that term to refer to a period when women were unabashedly objectified for their beautiful faces and bodies. At present, the industry knows better, and it has a renewed respect for women as whole persons. Ad-makers describe this phenomenon using several telling comments:

- This is “something that may have not been foreseen to be possible 20 years ago.”
- The contemporary woman consumer is seen as “one who has a head between her shoulders.”
- In ads, “she has to have a purpose even if she is just walking across the street.”
- “She is no longer *just* one face selling lipstick.”
- There has been a “fall of empires,” and the old notions of beauty are seen now as “too simplistic and too flat for human sensibility.”

Gina mentioned that she had heard of several ads axed for their sheer “dirt,” and that the producers of these discarded ads “did not see the light of day.” Raquel added:

We can be protective of our profession because we know that people hate us. The media hate us. Universities hate us and parents hate us too. So if we feel that our kind are making commercials that are below the belt, we reprimand them, especially if they’re our competitor.

This has been possible, ad-makers said, despite the slow evolution in representations, especially in beauty or body products. Seven of the informants mentioned the term “political correctness,” and most of the ad-makers proudly claimed that the ad-world is able to regulate itself. The ad industry, they say, is at the forefront of knowledge when it comes to collective conversations about various subjects in media institutions, in corporate board rooms, in academic institutions, and in local communities, because it is in the business of packaging current sentiments in 60-second clips. Joy said:

[T]he industry... knows what is taboo now, what is below the belt. We know which lines we cannot afford to cross... We are good at this because we are nosy—what are the network executives talking about? What are the debates in the university? What are the demands of women out there, the men in basketball courts, in the church... all of them.

Chloe shared how a make-up brand's new endorser's chubbiness was seen as a breath of fresh air in the array of skinny endorsers on television. She found it interesting "how chubby cheeks could be so radical in 2017." Another took pride in how one YouTube influencer caused a stir when "out of nowhere she was chosen to name-drop our face scrub and I was glad my boss knew her. [The influencer] is not your typical pretty face."

B.2 Strategic Stereotyping: Women are Treated with Highest Regard Given the Limitations

The prevalence of stereotypes in the representations of women has been affirmed by the ad-makers. Such stereotypes, however, are now designed to appeal to a variety of segments of women buyers. According to Mylene,

We no longer just stereotype for its own sake. We have somehow taken the leap into being more ambitious in ads for higher income or older women [consumers]. We portray more empowered women for ads for the higher and older women; while we have safe stereotypes for the younger and lower income group.

The stereotypes that most ad-makers referred to were about the safe treatment of advertisement narratives that involve not-so-complicated storylines. They described this as "girl has a problem, say frizzy hair, a solution is presented, then [a] reward at the end—attention, from [a] crowd or audience or men." Meanwhile, a less common stereotype may be framed this way as recounted by Gina:

Girl thinks of the future. She envisions herself on top of the mountain... she soaks in the sun as she soaks in her dreams... something like that. Her concerns are no longer just immediate. We show a bit of transcendence somehow.

Zee's version of strategic stereotyping had to do with how a client can be best pleased. It is a balance between "enlightenment" and "profit." She shared,

As I have mentioned, the bigger offices are seeing that gender roles must be addressed immediately. We are trying to educate clients that there are other ways to present women, and still get the profit. It's a long run, but I strongly believe it's worth it.

Others saw this as a form of "having fun for fun's sake, no need to explain why she is having fun." Or, to give a more specific example: "Anne

Curtis dancing and not making sense why she's dancing but she's cute like that without being slutty."

There seemed to be a push-and-pull between what may appear to be two conflicting measures of how women should be represented: accessible and detached, friendly cute and erotically sexy, chill and focused, and revealing and mysterious. This conflict though was also taken to be the most interesting trait of women as subjects of advertisements.

"Typically, we begin by asking, 'How can we play with this given the limitations and boundaries?'" Raquel explained. Several participants describe women in ads using the following statements:

- "This makes them easy to play with."
- "[She] is caged but she's adored."
- "The conquest for her highest good [is her] ticket out [of] the imposed limitations."
- "She plays the game because she's fully aware it's a game."
- The woman is "fully aware that beauty is tricky and can be a trap, but she has learned to enjoy playing this trick."

The ad-makers also believed that there had been improvements in how they framed women in their commercials, yet this woman somehow remained the same. Her attributes might have changed implying a stronger sense of control, but her physical look remained the same. Chloe clarified,

My Mom loves to comment that there is nothing new in what I do. She lived through the sexist 80s in the ad industry. But once in a while she would be proud how my generation of ad-makers would get away with certain edgy propositions.

Gina shared a very interesting story about how her agency today had really gone beyond the so-called "dark ages." She had seen projects being radically changed from something "nakakasuka⁵" to something morally respectable. She narrated,

What I'm saying is, you could have seen the original idea. It was from the dark ages—body, sexy, come and lick me, come and take me to bed, no kidding. I say, 'Come on, my goodness, not like that. We can do better.' Our version is not holy. We are not puritans here but at least let us picture the woman as having a brain. Yeah, not Bob Marley radical, but something that we can tolerate.

The art of playing with subtleties has been mastered by the ad-makers as supported by the culture of their ad agencies. "Subtle" is used here because there remain so-called "eternal themes," which include concepts

like nurturance, softness, frailty, gentleness, and “over-all nice[ness].” These eternal themes are what the ad-makers considered in some instances as the limitations they had learned to accept. Mylene explained,

Women themselves won't relate with a woman who is just smart and clever. This woman has to be soft too... still a woman. If she wears pants in the morning, come evening, she is somebody else, in a dress or with a red lipstick. It's a limitation that I have made peace with because I am just a mere mortal here.

Joy also specified how she learned the craft of working with limitations. She developed a technique she called “subdued romance of seduction” where she plays with very romantic visuals but with an accompaniment of edgy-hip-raw acoustics. The acoustics humanizes the “divinity” of the visuals.

One informant described her go-to analogy for beauty ads as “model-walking-in-ramp-thinking-murder, looking like she means business, only she is actually the one being sold.”

B.3 Fantastical Women: Rooting for the Complicated and Mystifying Woman

There was a consensus among the ad-makers that although they try to portray women who reflect the women in the real world, they are bound by the fantastical nature of advertisements. One ad-maker used the term “magical,” while the other one used “enchanted world,” and another one used “heavenly bodies,” to describe women-centered ads. Raquel said,

I guess, this is already common sense that the women in ads are not real women. You don't see perfect women in your office. So the flipping of the hair is in slow-mo. The sun always shines on her face... because she is a fantasy.

An aspect of this fantastical nature of advertisements was also labeled to be the industry's aspirational role. The ads exist for the mere act of inspiring people to want for more and hope for something better. Joy quipped tongue-in-cheek,

It's boring if there would be no commercials about these heavenly bodies. Somehow, they're the ones who show us the possibilities of what we can dream for. They are our present Greek mythologies.

Gina shared that in the ad-world today there are more risks taken in how women in ads are trusted, unlike in the past. She particularly referred to how ads on beauty have evolved into picturing women as complicated human beings while maintaining their mystery. She said, “Many are doing this [in the industry], treating women as complicated, so many things go[ing] on in her mind, in her world... all of it is still subtle [though] that’s why she remains mysterious.”

For Raquel, the act of writing about this woman—one who has insecurities but, at the same time, has strong desires about improving herself—continues to inspire her and she is glad she is not alone. She shared that during an ad congress, she sat with colleagues over coffee, and “we somehow understood that this is what we want to do—portray women as ‘many sorts.’ Let’s figure her [out] because it’s our business, but in the ads, let’s leave room to the imagination. She deserves, like a goddess, to be mysterious still. That’s where her power is.”

In a similar vein, Mylene shared an insight as to how the advertising industry in recent years has become very respectful of the complexity of women. For her, this has become such a motivation in her work. She said, “When you start making women [in ads] more complex, or more layered, then others do the same thing, so you get the sense that we have consciousness in this industry.”

Lanie and Chloe said that in their ads, they highlight the woman who has the defiant-yet-conforming aura in her. Others also made statements relevant to this idea, describing the woman they portray in their ads. They said she is:

- “of this world but she is above it.”
- “among us but above us”
- “relatable but still has an awe-[striking] factor.”
- “simple, yet she rocks.”
- “human but also godly.”
- “funny and serious and deep.”
- “laughing and crying, falling and rising, fool and wise.”
- “all-out and ‘everything,’ but still imperfect and limited... she should have a goal that is yet to be achieved.”

B.4 Femvertising: Women Rocking the World and Women with Careers

Femvertising, according to Joy, is the art of playing with the stereotypes and twisting them at the end. Others describe this as utilizing “shock value,” “*kilig*⁶ factor,” and “the salt in the sugar.” The goal is to show that there is more to women than what society has come to know. Joy said:

With femvertising, there are many possibilities. It's not corny. It's a breath of fresh air. I even wish I have grown with these images – Barbie doll who is African American, Hispanic.

Others mentioned “being something more,” “breaking the expectations,” and “a twist at the end” to refer to a particular woman who “rocks at the start, and then at the end, she is that same woman sitting by the window pane with a teacup.” Others described her “[maybe being] a ballet dancer at the start...[then] the ending shows that she is a car racer too.”

They often refer to this woman having a “professional look” or a “professional appeal.” She has to be “busy working” and show that she is preoccupied with something important. She is a professional, but has a family. One informant illustrated an example from a make-up brand:

Notice the ads of this international brand that has this woman who is in a business district. Then she transitions to a party scene. Then there's her boyfriend joining her in the last frame.

B.5 Inching its Way into Raw and “Real” Women

Occasionally, the ad-agencies ventured into what may be considered as an unorthodox practice in the making of beauty product advertisements. Joy had a clear recollection of how her ad-agency took risks in minimizing the special effects on the woman's hair in a shampoo commercial. According to her, this was something almost unimaginable. She recalled,

[F]or the first time in the Philippine ad industry we didn't use special effects for the hair, except for the use of electric fan to blow the hair. We used lights, of course, to connote 'bright sun' but the hair was not filtered. The celebrity endorser was really beautiful. We were also surprised that she said yes to it.

Raquel likewise shared how her ad-agency ventured into occasional “effects-less” treatment of women in her ad-agency's commercials. She said,

This product is for pimple removal. There was someone who agreed to have her shot taken for the 'before face.' She really had a lot of pimples. Our footage was really raw. Then we compared her 'after face' to these raw shots. The product really worked.

Zee, meanwhile called these innovations as “inching their way” to more realistic brand representation. She wrote,

I'd like to believe that we are in the middle of what I'd like to call The Great Shift. With the new breed of consumers, people want more authentic, more personal, more #NoFilter stories. So, while we are yet to see the innovations to the norms, we are inching our way there.

B.6 Women Buyers being Critical or Gullible as Inspirations for Ad-making

However, the women “out there” or “real women” as most of the interviewees refer to the women consumers, were profiled by the participants in this study as both critical and gullible. Joy said,

We have a sense that women are vulnerable, or should I say, gullible in being made to buy products. We see women at the malls take time to listen to sales agent who demonstrate the uses of products, right? 8 out of 10 women make time for such even if the product is for men.

Raquel further reflected that the two extreme types of women are the “intelligent ones” and the “impulsive ones.” In many instances though, these extreme traits are both found in all women. “I, myself, am like that. Sometimes I just buy things impulsively. And many women are like me.”

Translating this to how Raquel measured the women in her ads, she insisted that this is where true art resides. It is art because it requires sensitivity to the subtle divide between the woman who is critical and the woman who is gullible. Raquel furthered added,

It's art. To the uninitiated, this woman is solid, but for us who create her, she is the hybrid of what the client wants—beautiful and empowered; what the agency wants—technically amazing, well-edited, but still human; and what the story developer, that's me, wants—brave but soft. See? There are so many layers there, see? But at the end of it, my team and I are accountable... Did we deliver?

“To proceed with work” with competence and confidence, as recounted by the women in this study, means not just having a tunnel vision of short-term and long-term goals but also having peripheral visions, as Mary Catherine Bateson (1994) calls them, to refer to making connections between events in the peripheries and knowing when these will matter in due time.

There is also a pronounced sense of adaptive multiculturalism (Bateson, 1994) in how the women weigh-in on different “cultures.” Their adaptiveness sits within the spectrum of being risky and pragmatic with an insistent spirit for play, humor and reasoned “methodolatry,” a term I borrow from a feminist theologian, Mary Daly (1973), to mean a rigid insistence on what works. The women revealed an attunement or what one termed as a “listening act” to what is accepted and what boundaries the industry is challenging.

Conclusion

There are constraints in how women ad-makers perform their creative and professional works. Nevertheless, there are also liberative experiences that still show the agency of the ad-makers. For instance, some of the more senior executives are involved in budget negotiations and communicate directly with clients, ignoring “middle men” in many cases. They also sometimes “inch their way” towards improvement in advertising practices, to ensure a better and more uplifting portrayal of women in ads. These successes are achieved despite the limitations imposed on all sides.

As one informant, Gina, said “The mere fact that I am in this interview and discussing these things shows that there is hope for the advertising industry.” There is also a “great shift” that is happening, as well as “the fall of empires,” as the industry slowly transitions away from the previous paradigm that relied on intensive and insensitive objectifications of women. The women interviewed for this study hope for what one of them referred to as “a parting of the seas”—not overnight, or not even over the next few years, but they are hopeful that meaningful changes can trickle down from the big ad-agencies down to the small ones, or vice versa.

Nevertheless, we have also been shown how individual views can easily be muted when the system also contradicts itself. This is true when the industry ignores what its members believe in, or when there are two contradicting notions of the audience. At any rate, the industry often goes for the more conservative summation.

The results discussed above affirm that the lived experiences of the ad-makers in the performance of their professional and creative works are negotiations, not just between them and the industry, but also within themselves. The negotiations stem from a situated procedural knowledge that is within a risk-taking-pragmatism spectrum. A strong aptitude for the provisionality of realities is likewise reflected in the women’s standpoint. Although their subjugated position is not the extreme opposite of the dominant-subjugated spectrum (i.e., industry-ad-maker), their performance is a by-product of the many considerations they take—what the agency

wants, what the industry prescribes, and what the audiences demand. As a subjugated group, the ad-makers' articulations show how well-versed they are in the dominant group's language—they know what the industry prescribes. According to the Standpoint Theory, between the dominant group and its subjugated counterpart, the latter knows everything about the former and not the other way around. The ad-makers admitted that what they have shared in the interviews were personal information they would not normally share with their bosses or with their clients. Their personal reflections are only shared with very close friends in the industry or with friends and family who are not in the ad-world. In fact, speaking the dominant group's language, they all seemed to reflect the industry's confidence in gender equality in the beginning of almost all interviews and FGDs, only to recall nuances of their workplace's gender sensibilities much later. Although not all of them worded such recalls as oppressions or human rights violations, all of them expressed a well-articulated observation of how certain sensibilities demonstrated gender biases, even to a point of calling themselves out on certain shortcomings.

It is interesting to note that the expectations of the ad-world, including the culture in the ad-makers' respective agencies, have a semblance, albeit not absolute, with how the women in the advertisements are framed—excellent, enduring but still dispensable (Baldo-Cubelo, 2015).

The concept of women's situated procedural knowledge presented at the beginning of the paper has been strongly honed by the findings of the research. Specifically, their narratives surfaced that their situated knowledge is about manifold conflicting points—between what they represent as women's access to centers of power and their own limited expressions of freedom within these spaces; between powerful women who create ad-content and the rest of Filipino women consumers who demand better representations but are ultimately still captured consumers; and between their open endorsement of beautiful healthy and vibrant women's bodies and their personal shadows of body image. The procedural knowledge they manifested included an acknowledgement of open-secret ways of making beauty product ads, a candid mastering of what may be considered as sellable empowering images of women, a mastering of form, and an element of impersonal justification of why work has to be done.

In addition, the ad-makers' manner of maneuvering through their work indicated a personal agency despite the tentativeness of the perceived successes and the far-off ideal they have in mind. I argue that at the heart of this agency is their situated procedural knowledge of realities—that even if they work in an imperfect system, they know what the system is and they can therefore *proceed* through it.

In the end, they all said that they love their jobs even if some may “hate” them too. Their presence in the industry sparks hope because they are able to see possible great new strides.

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Notes

¹ The original data set (interview transcripts of Gina, Joy, Mylene, Raquel, Cynthia, and Zee) and the original findings were part of my 2016 dissertation titled, "Ganda Babae: TV Advertisements' Co-optation of Feminism and Women's Standpoint on and Lived Experience of the Encoding and Appropriation of the Ideals of the Beauty" (Baldo-Cubelo, J.T.Y., 2016, Unpublished PhD in Communication dissertation, College of Mass Communication, University of the Philippines Diliman).

In 2018-2019, I continued interviewing women ad-makers who expressed interest in my study. In 2020 I began expanding the original theoretical premise of my 2016 dissertation on Standpoint Theory. Although there was no drastic departure from the 2016 unpublished write-up, my discussion of Standpoint Theory and the additional data sets supported my theoretical expansion to include situated procedural knowledge as an important argumentation for women ad-makers' standpoint.

² Active, alert.

³ The Filipino root word is "kaladkad" which means "to drag", but kaladkarin colloquially means "a person who says yes to any opportunity, or someone who can easily be persuaded to go as directed."

⁴ The etymology of this slang is a combination of the English word "haggard" and a nod to a local celebrity, Gardo Versoza. Thus Haggardo Versoza essentially means "haggard." "Haggardo virtuoso" is a slang variation particular to the informants' ad-agency which means "haggard but is a virtuoso."

⁵ Revolting or vomit-inducing response

⁶ The closest translation this word has in English is an excitement often felt towards a romantic partner or a romantic notion/image

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