Abstract

This paper examines how advertisements in print media in Singapore are promoting a new notion of masculinity to Singaporeans – a man who is conscious of his appearance and engages in grooming practices to enhance his masculinity. Does this recent change in societal perception of grooming/beauty practices as a permissible act for both females and males, entail more equality between the two genders? Using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), various advertisements taken from print media are analyzed and compared to uncover the discursive strategies used by the beauty industry to rationalize the need for male grooming and to promote this practice as socially acceptable. An analysis of lexical choices in the advertisements reveals that the methods of scientification, problem-solution schema, valuing of youthfulness and objectification are used for both genders to encourage the start of and continued use of beauty/grooming products and services. Despite this convergence, findings from the study also suggest that the reasons given to both genders to justify their grooming/beauty practices reinforce traditional gender stereotypes and biological differences behind a façade of empowerment and liberation. Such a move can be argued to be anti-feminist as it reinforces the socially constructed boundaries between acceptable ways of being a man and woman in order to encourage consumption and to allow the expansion of the beauty industry. Further, by drawing attention to men’s looks through the promotion of grooming practices, men are being increasingly appraised as objects and therefore can be said to follow suit with decades of female objectification by the media. As the media and beauty industry continue to exploit and manipulate people’s normative assumptions about gender and
gender roles to increase profit, the implications of the study point to the need to raise awareness to the intricate relationship between gender, discourse and consumption.