



Stars, Fans, and Consumption in the 1950s: Reading Photoplay

Higashi

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As the leading fan magazine in the postwar era, Photoplay constructed female stars as social types who embodied a romantic and leisured California lifestyle. Addressing working- and lower-middle-class readers who were prospering in the first mass consumption society, the magazine published not only publicity stories but also beauty secrets, fashion layouts, interior design tips, recipes, advice columns, and vacation guides. Postwar femininity was constructed in terms of access to commodities in suburban houses as the site of family togetherness. As the decade progressed, however, changing social mores regarding female identity and behavior eroded the relationship between idolized stars and worshipful fans. When the magazine adopted tabloid conventions to report sex scandals like the Debbie-Eddie-Liz affair, stars were demystified and fans became scandalmongers. But the construction of female identity based on goods and performance that resulted in unstable, fragmented selves remains a legacy evident in postmodern culture today.

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