

Methods of cataloguing

WHAT WOMEN WANT TO
KNOW?

Harvard Digital Collection

What Women Want To Know?

The screenshot shows a web browser displaying the Harvard CURIOUSity Collections search results. The title 'What Women Want To Know' is prominently displayed in the center of the page. The search interface includes a sidebar for 'LIMIT YOUR SEARCH' with dropdown menus for Creator / Contributor, Place of Origin, Publisher, Date, Genre, Subject, Place, Series, and Repository. The main search results area shows 96 results out of 211, with a message about searchable text from transcripts or OCR. Below this, eight book covers are displayed in a grid, each with a title and a brief description. The titles include 'American-Japanese cook book ; Yōwa shin ryōri shō...', 'Helps for the hostess ; including 43 original and...', 'Whitehead work saving kitchens ; incorporating g...', 'Favorite recipes save time and money', 'YOUR WEIGHT', 'COOKERY FOR AMERICAN HOMES', 'PLAYING FRIENDS', and 'KITCHEN COOKERY'.

What Women Want To Know

CREATOR / CONTRIBUTOR

PLACE OF ORIGIN

PUBLISHER

DATE

GENRE

SUBJECT

PLACE

SERIES

REPOSITORY

Showing 1 to 96 of 211 results

Searchable text from transcripts or OCR is available for some items. [Search inside text of items instead.](#)

American-Japanese cook book ; Yōwa shin ryōri shō... Helps for the hostess ; including 43 original and... Whitehead work saving kitchens ; incorporating g... Favorite recipes save time and money

YOUR WEIGHT

COOKERY FOR AMERICAN HOMES

PLAYING FRIENDS

KITCHEN COOKERY

https://curiosity.lib.harvard.edu/what-women-want-to-know/catalog?page=1&per_page=96&search_field=all_fields&view=gallery

Harvard Digital Collection

What Women Want To Know?

Different Components

Date range: 1888–1940

Core topics: health, household, hygiene, beauty

Examples: advice books, women's magazines, advertisements, cookbooks, beauty manuals

How Are They Similar?

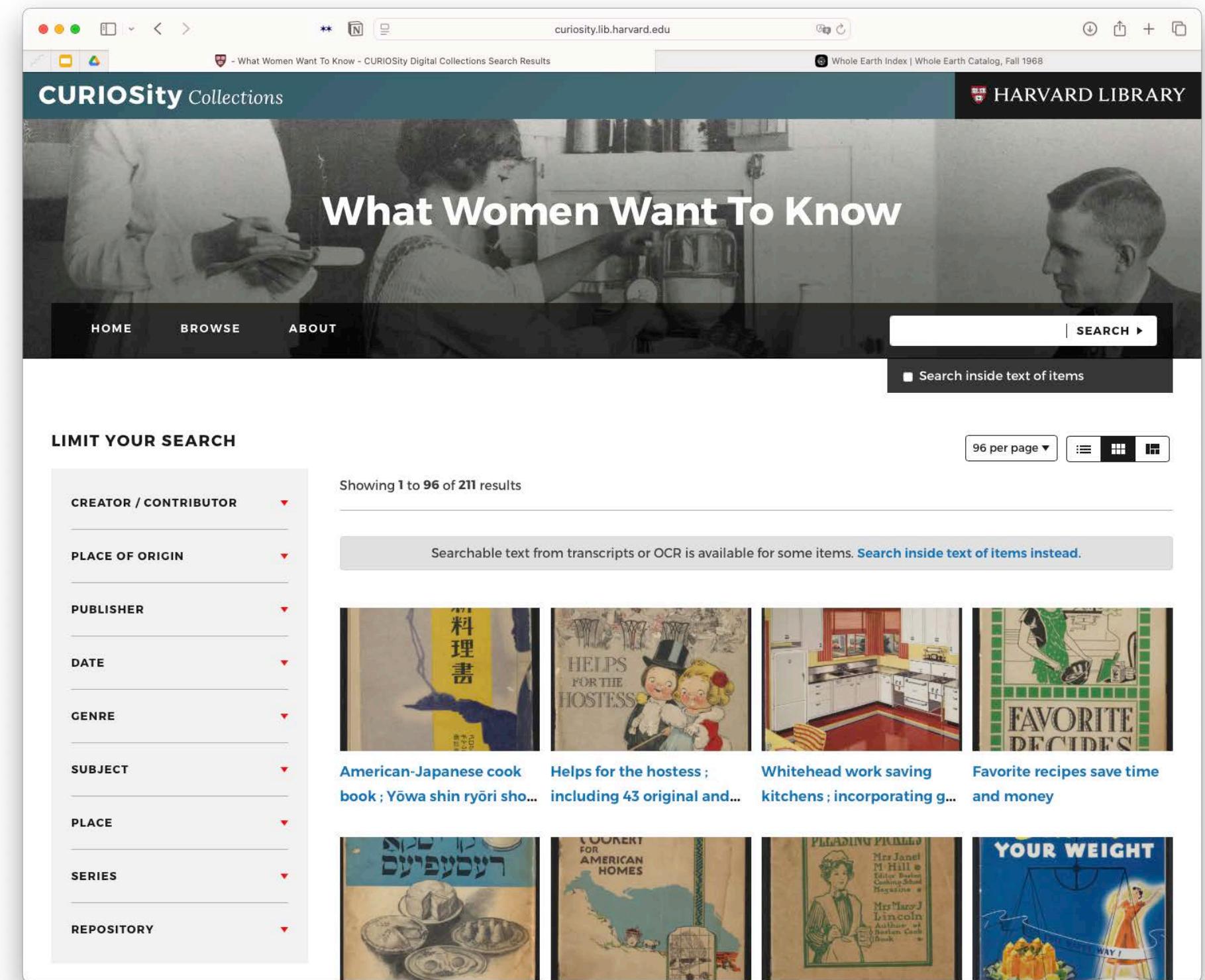
Connected by one big theme: domesticity and control — teaching women how to behave, look, or care.

All address women as consumers of knowledge or practitioners of care.

Especially centered on health and beauty as measures of worth.

All are privately owned or published by commercial companies with limited understanding of what “women’s interests” really are.

Share a visual and linguistic “grammar”: smiling women, spotless homes, glowing skin, love.



https://curiosity.lib.harvard.edu/what-women-want-to-know/catalog?page=1&per_page=96&search_field=all_fields&view=gallery

Harvard Digital Collection

What Women Want To Know?

How Are They Different?

Some feature imagery of power (healthy, smiling women), while others show fragility or obedience.

Tone and sophistication differ — some are scientific, others sentimental or moralistic.

While all claim to educate or empower, most reinforce limitation or dependence.

Variations appear in how much freedom or agency is suggested: “modern woman” vs. “dutiful wife.”

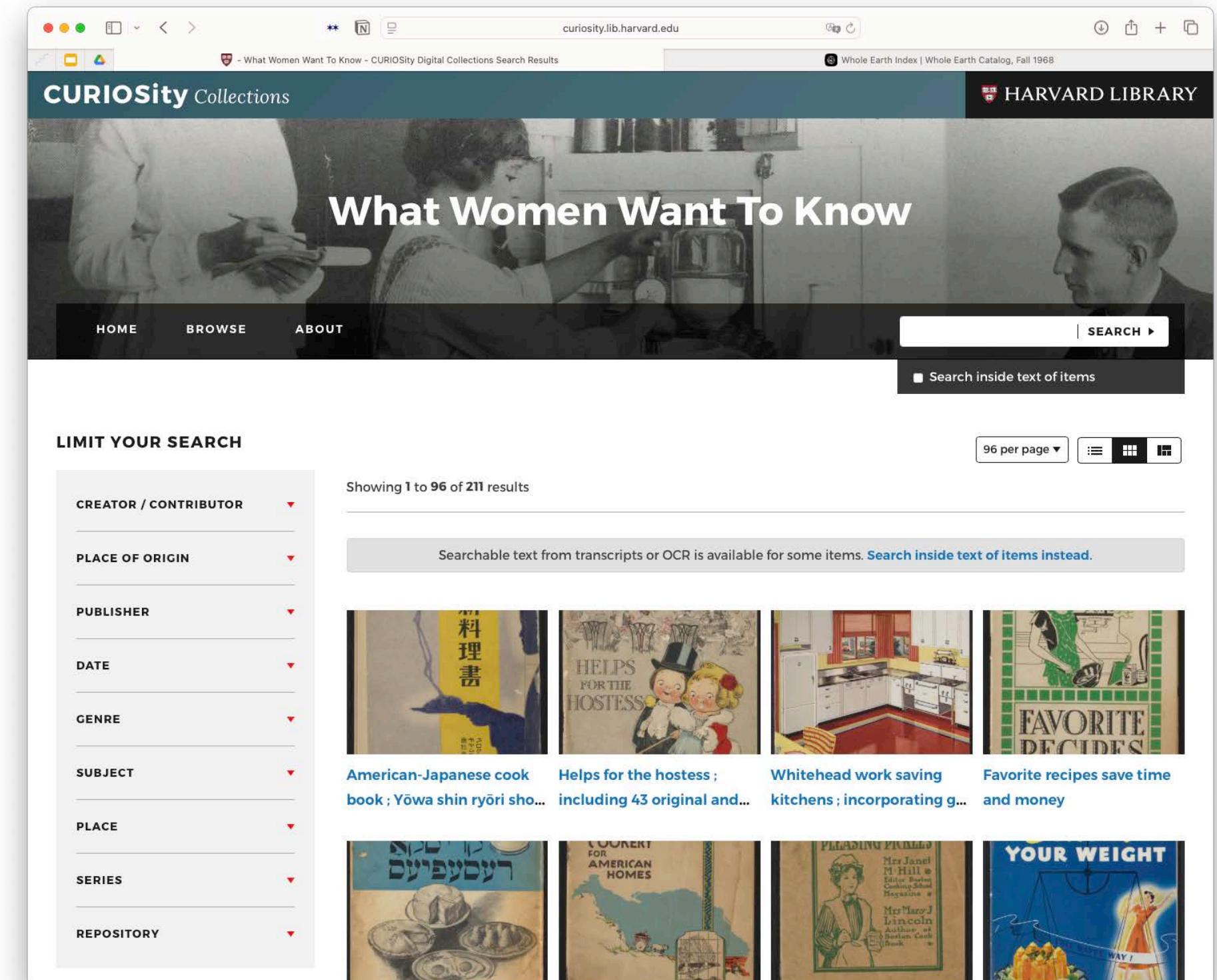
Patterns & Relationships

“Inverted representation” — women are made responsible for their own well-being but within strict social boundaries.

Beauty, health, and domestic order presented as intertwined virtues.

Ads and manuals often blur the line between education and marketing.

Pharmaceutical, beauty, and cleaning products overlap in tone and promise.



https://curiosity.lib.harvard.edu/what-women-want-to-know/catalog?page=1&per_page=96&search_field=all_fields&view=gallery

• all systems - form at communication
 • change the mode of communication
 • take a system and analyze, and
 • create new
 (between the range of formal and
 assented, circu-
 se methods
 ly.

MY SET: **WHAT WOMEN WANT TO KNOW?**

DIFFERENT COMPONENTS: COOKING, HOUSEHOLD APPLIANCES, CLEANING, HEALTH, BEAUTY

DATE RANGE: 1888 - 1940

COMPONENTS:

- cook books, recipes, adverts, books about cooking, books about 'freedom', books about beauty, about perfume, book of ads + cooking, about childbirth, about bringing up, about entertaining, about life, how to be a housewife, ads of hygiene (menstruation) products, cleaning, weight, marriage, catalogues

HOW ARE THEY SIMILAR?:

- connected by one bias that dominated back at the time
- indicate specific role of women in society - AMERICA
- contain engaging imagery on covers
- present women as housewives or excessively feminine
- very often they're sponsored by private commercial companies
- limited in understanding of what women 'want'
- white + ornamentation in imagery

HOW ARE THEY DIFFERENT?:

- some contain imagery of people, some have just text (women usually)
- made in different states in different times
- sophisticated serifed typography

UNDERSTANDING OF COMPONENTS in relation to the other parts in the set

- limited representation of women as a mere tool for men, women as a housewife and a mother
- targeted consumers of pharmaceutical and cooking things - curated voice
- sophisticated fonts
- dressed women
- specific language
- limited imagery (housewives and food)
- texts address specific topics
- books, catalogues, pamphlets, ads, books as ads, promotional material

IDENTIFIABLE GRAMMARS of patterns:

- no education rights presented, circulated or accessed

TAXONOMISING METHODS, re-captioning

how systems of representation shape female desire and how reframing them can expose or rewrite those narratives?

classifying emotion or desire?

what women wants across the time?

sequencing, recontextualizing

life in the catalogue

TOOLS OF WORK

mantenance tool of critique

you to create new
 (between the range of formal
 and
 assented, circu-
 se methods
 ly.

change the mode of communication
 take a system and analyze, and
 create new
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 se methods
 ly.

1) guide to be a perfect woman

- classify emotions or desires
- can be collected in a zine or a digital form
- personal diary
- tool of self-validation
 'A voice that stays'
- use exaggeration and exposure

2) looking at power

create link between narrative & power

language + narrative
 showcase text and
 language would be interesting
 to frame
 as a book shop

mostly ads companies

look at the voices presented in the archive

ALONGSIDE THE PUBLICATIONS

3) maybe look at the imagery?

what types of objects are presented?
 what representation is chosen?

interface of the private and public worlds

visual taxonomy

How to find absurd or playful logics?

organization, interpretation

turn cold collection into personal observations

change the perspective but also share worries and anxieties

language

need to know? who were the voices behind "what women need to know"? whose interests (commercial, industrial, moral or political) shaped women's education & self-understanding?

1

How systems of representation shape female desire and how reframing them can expose or rewrite those narratives?

methods

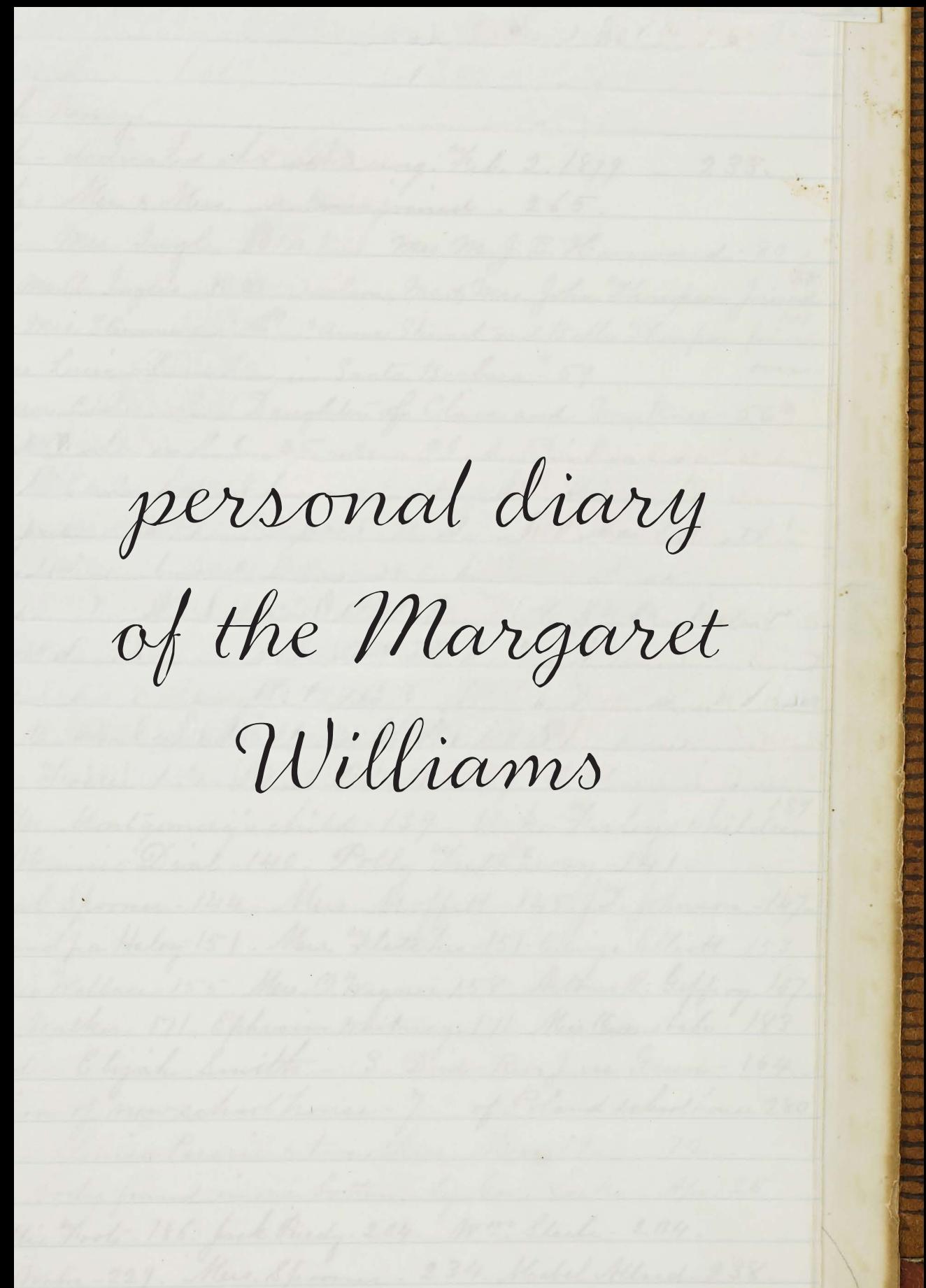
sequencing, recontextualising, captioning

impact

turning external information into personal diary to make it relatable to the human experience creating intimacy between author and the reader

By adding narrative to the collection, I tried to make the set more personal.

Obviously, the set is limited in perspective and reinforces the bias towards women, and, therefore, through monologue-style descriptions I tried to inject fictional worries and anxieties of the American woman of the 20th century.



July 26th 1990

Lemon and Salt for the Sink (and the Soul)

I clean the kitchen on Sunday afternoons. I cut a lemon, pour salt over it, and scrub until metal smells like brightness.

It's supposed to remove rust, but I swear it lifts something heavier. The act of scrubbing becomes a ritual — an exorcism of the week.

You'll learn that cleaning is never just cleaning. It's a way to make the world briefly obedient.

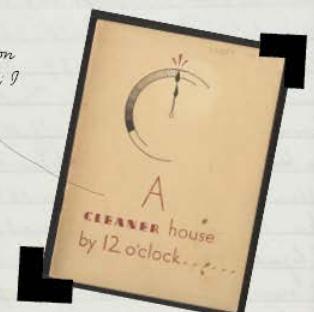
File this under Domestic Alchemy, tag: temporary order.



Aug 2nd 1990

The Red Lipstick for Courage

Bought it when I had my first job interview. Still use it for every confrontation — meetings, arguments, heartbreaks. It stains cups, masks, pillows. It claims to be long-lasting, it lies, but beautifully. Once I read that Cleopatra mixed crushed insects for pigment. I think of her each time I reapply — how survival is always a performance.



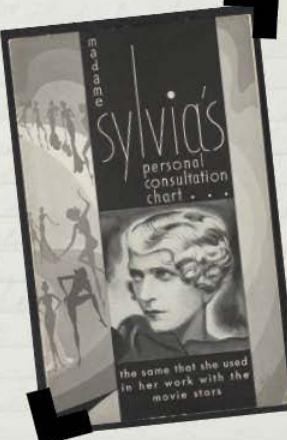
Domestic Alchemy

Disguise Systems

My dearest girl,

I began this diary when I realised that women collect not only things but also methods — the quiet systems that keep a life together. Our shelves are lined not just with creams and recipes but with habits, instructions, and inherited gestures.

I wanted to leave you something more than advice. Think of this as a catalogue of my own small discoveries — things that have kept me clean, fed, and sometimes even whole. It isn't perfect. Some entries are stains, others are miracles. Take what you need, and make your own system one day.



Flip forward to page twelve for the proof.

Necessary Maintenance

July 21st 1990

Cream for the Face, Cream for the Nerves

The face cream is used morning and night. It says "anti-ageing," but it really means "don't disappear." I pat it under my eyes while the kettle boils. The same motion I use to comfort you when you cry — circular, rhythmic, convincing.

It costs too much. But on the days I skip it, I see the world's small punishments — the colleague's glance, the mirror's silence.

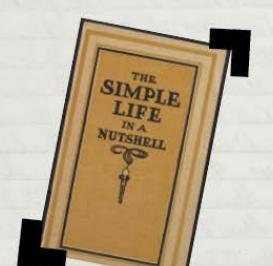
I catalogue this under Necessary Maintenance, subcategory Hope in a Jar.

September 20th 1990

Recipe for Stillness

Ingredients:
1 quiet room
2 minutes of breathing
3 thoughts you refuse to chase

Method. Sit until your mind stops marketing to you. Listen until you hear your own voice again. This is the hardest recipe to master. It spoils easily.



I left a crease there, I wanted you to notice

Emotional Utilities



The woman in that book looks calmer than I ever felt...

Sep 29th 1990

Laundry Day Philosophy

The washing machine hums like a low prayer. I separate colours carefully — not from habit, but because order feels like safety. Sometimes I add vinegar to remove the smell of defeat. Sometimes I forget. Each cycle is an invisible labour: you clean the clothes, but also the evidence of living.

Repetition as Redemption

*If you ever inherit this book, add
your own entries.*

*Paste your own ads, your own fixes
and failures.*

Call it Our Catalogue of Survival.

*Love,
Mama*

Who were the voices behind “what women need to know”?

Whose interests — commercial, industrial, moral, or political — shaped women’s education and self-understanding?

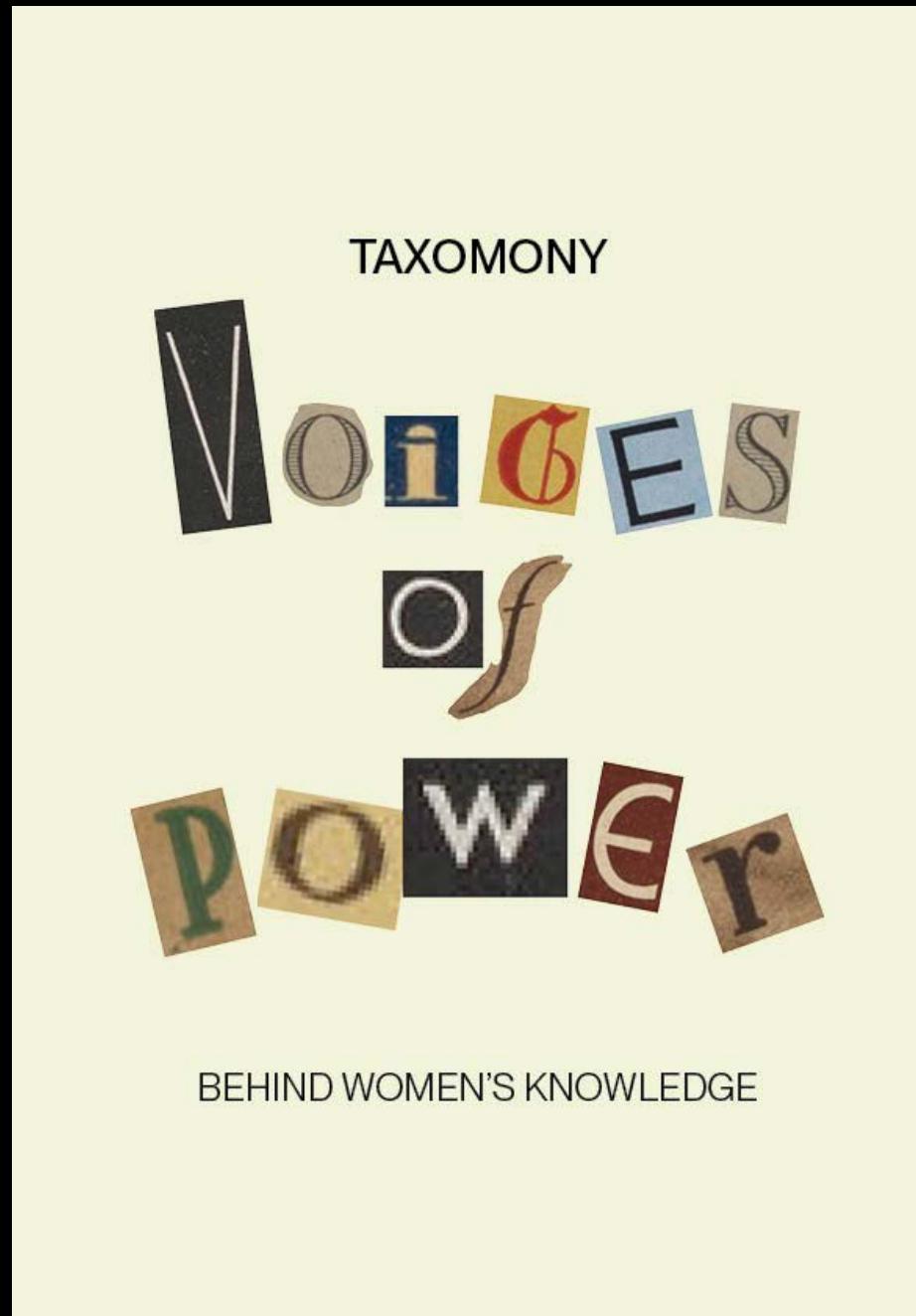
methods

taxonomising, captioning

impact

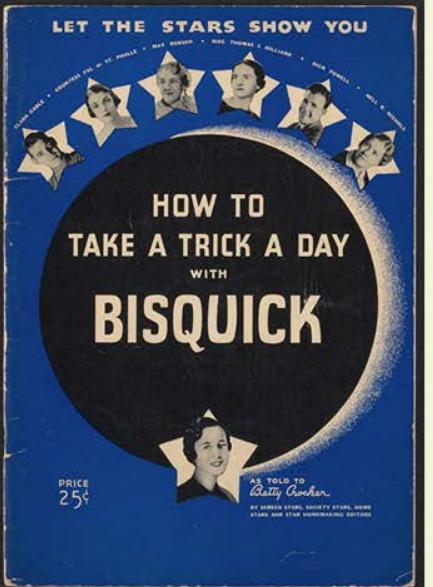
catalogue becomes a map of influence and intention (a taxonomy of who spoke, why they spoke, and what they wanted)

By adding classification fields it allowed me to classify power, not information, turning the catalogue itself into a map of ideology



Sell products by shaping women as ideal consumers, housekeepers, and caretakers.

1 INDUSTRIAL AND CONSUMER CAPITALISM



[02]

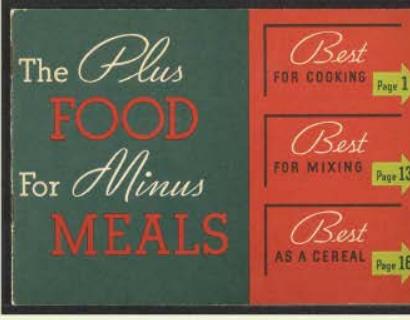
PUBLISHER:
General Mills, Inc.

INDUSTRY:
Food / Baking

INTEREST:
Transform women's domestic labor into patriotic consumption and self-expression through branded products.

INDUSTRIAL AND CONSUMER CAPITALISM

[03]



1 INDUSTRIAL AND CONSUMER CAPITALISM



[04]

PUBLISHER:
General Baking Co.

INDUSTRY:
Baking / Bread

INTEREST:
Framed women's domestic labor as patriotic and efficient.

INDUSTRIAL AND CONSUMER CAPITALISM

[01]



HEALTH, HYGIENE, AND "SCIENTIFIC WOMANHOOD"

PUBLISHER:
General Laboratories / E. Griffiths Hughes, Inc.

INDUSTRY:
Medicine / Chemistry

INTEREST:
Reframing women's domestic labor as an extension of industrial progress – promoting obedience to technological authority.

TITLE: LET THE STARS SHOW YOU HOW TO TAKE A TRICK A DAY WITH BISQUICK

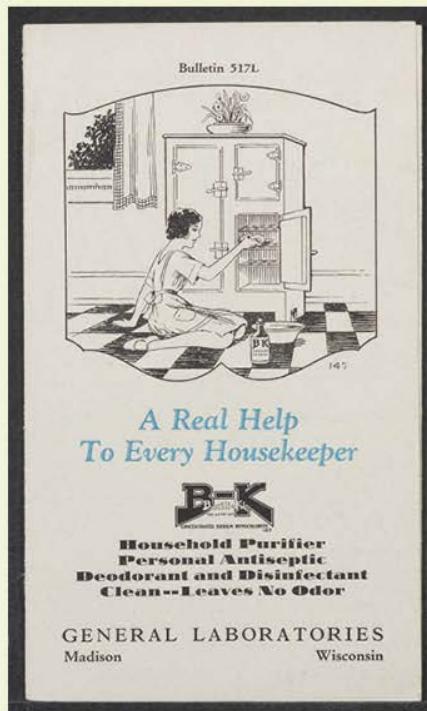
TITLE: THE PLUS FOOD FOR MINUS MEALS

TITLE: «THE BEST TOAST I EVER TASTED»

TITLE: A REAL HELP TO EVERY HOUSEKEEPER

Magazines and trade publishers worked to naturalize women's domestic role as a public duty, blending morality, aesthetics, and commerce.

2 HEALTH, HYGIENE, AND "SCIENTIFIC WOMANHOOD"



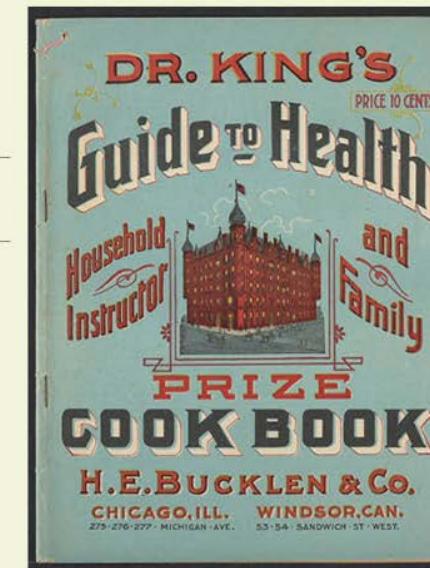
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PUBLISHER:
General Laboratories / E. Griffiths Hughes, Inc.

INDUSTRY:
Medicine / Chemistry

INTEREST:
Reframing women's domestic labor as an extension of industrial progress — promoting obedience to technological authority.

HEALTH, HYGIENE, AND "SCIENTIFIC WOMANHOOD" 2



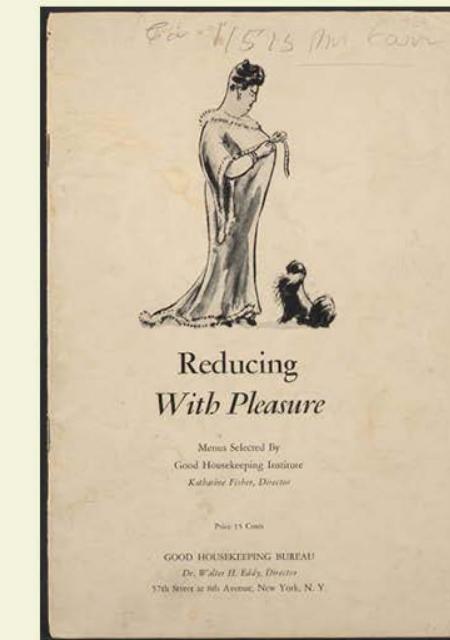
[03]

PUBLISHER:
H. E. Bucklen & Co.

INDUSTRY:
Patent medicine

INTEREST:
Naturalize patriarchal authority within the domestic sphere.

3 MORAL AND CULTURAL AUTHORITY



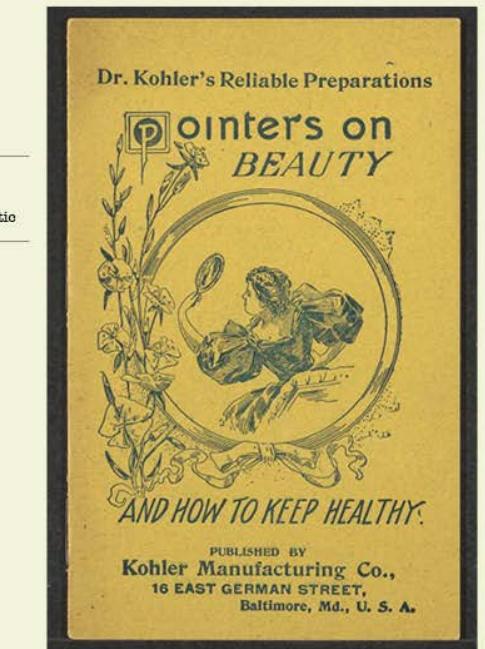
[01]

PUBLISHER:
Hearst Magazines, Inc.
(Good Housekeeping)

INDUSTRY:
Media / Lifestyle

INTEREST:
Converts bodily self-regulation into civic duty and pleasure into a form of obedience; turns private bodily anxiety into collective consumer identity.

MORAL AND CULTURAL AUTHORITY 3



[02]

PUBLISHER:
Kohler Manufacturing Co.

INDUSTRY:
Pharmaceutical / Cosmetic / Patent Medicine

INTEREST:
Equates beauty with self-control; positions women's self-presentation as a reflection of social order.

TITLE: A REAL HELP TO EVERY
HOUSEKEEPER

TITLE: DR. KING'S GUIDE TO HEALTH,
HOUSEHOLD INSTRUCTOR, AND
FAMILY PRIZE COOK BOOK;

TITLE: REDUCING WITH PLEASURE

TITLE: POINTERS ON BEAUTY AND HOW
TO KEEP HEALTHY

These publishers aligned "home management" with American modernity — women as stabilizers of nation and family.



[01]

PUBLISHER:
Genesee Pure Food Co. /
Jell-O Co.

INDUSTRY:
Processed food

INTEREST:
Turned homemaking into
patriotic consumption;
emphasized family unity.



[02]

PUBLISHER:
Francois H. Leggett
& Co.

INDUSTRY:
Groceries / Imports

INTEREST:
Positioned women as
gatekeepers of quality
and national health.

TITLE: JELL-O, AMERICA'S MOST FAMOUS
DESSERT

TITLE: PURITY PREMIER'S RECIPES WITH
PREMIER SALAD DRESSING

3

How do visual taxonomies in early 20th-century women's publications construct and reinforce ideas of femininity, desire, and self-maintenance?

methods

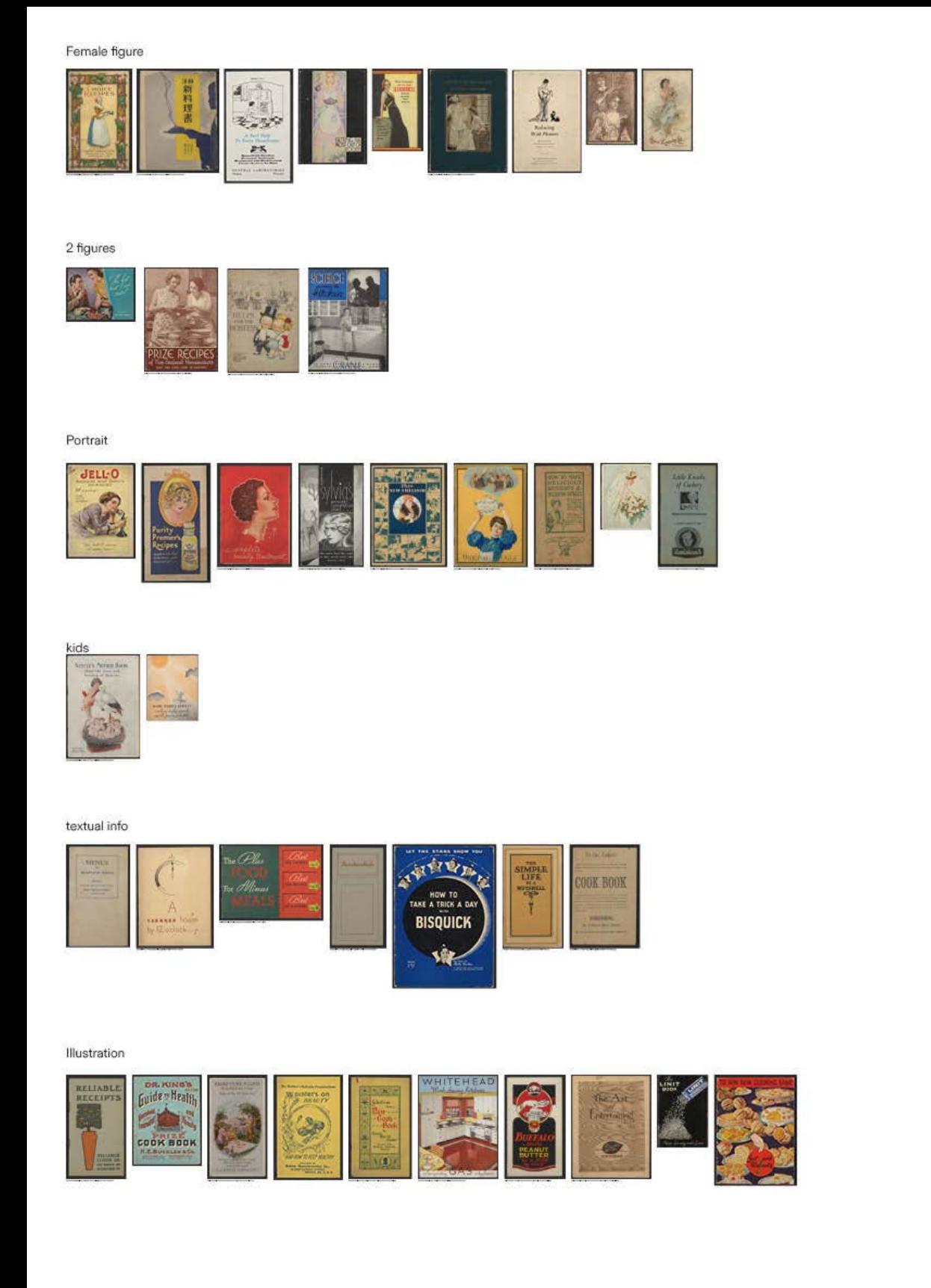
visual taxonomising

impact

how imagery itself constructs knowledge and meaning
— specifically, how recurring visual forms define what “womanhood,” “desire,” or “care” look like.

I am examining the visual taxonomy of my collection: the recurring visual language used across covers, advertisements, and illustrations in *What Women Want to Know*.

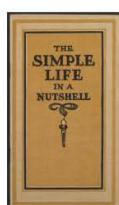
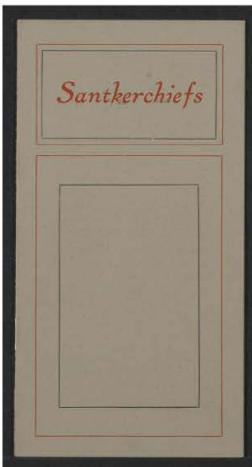
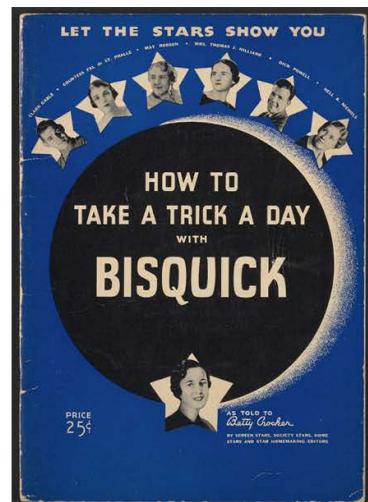
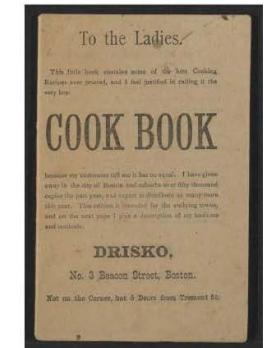
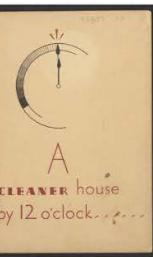
By analysing and reclassifying features such as colour palettes, body postures, facial expressions, and framing, I want to uncover the visual grammar that shaped ideals of beauty, morality, and femininity.



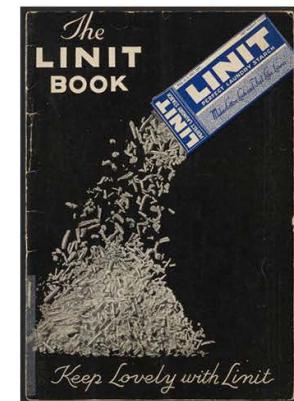
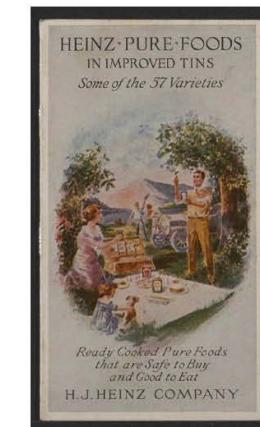
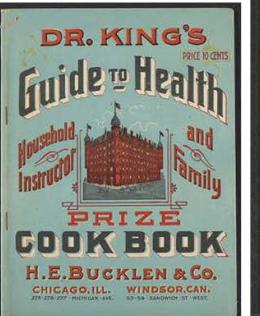
First, I separated images into different group and then classified them according to subjects depicted in the imagery



Textual covers

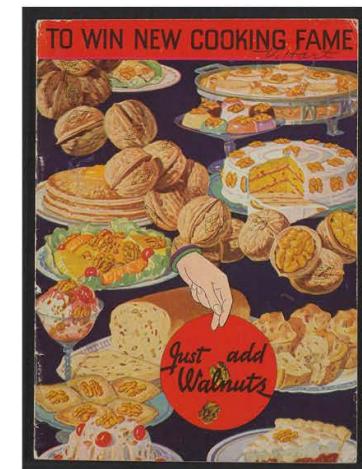
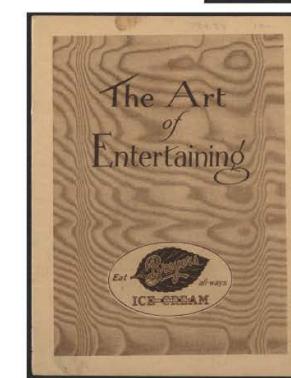


Textual covers

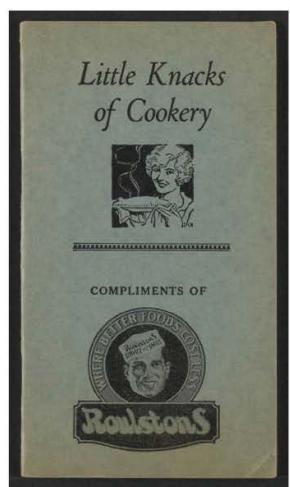
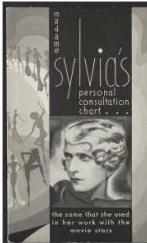


WHITEHEAD

Work Saving Kitchens



Portrait



Female full-length figure

