

# The reinforcement of hegemonic ideologies and gender and sexuality stereotypes wi...

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Magazines have implicitly and explicitly been influencing humans for decades. They are continually more involved in the media, however the market is highly competitive.

It is extremely important for magazines to maintain the readers' interest and loyalty therefore they must excel in its appearance and content. Helen Brown created the Cosmopolitan magazine in 1965. It holds a spot as one of the most successful women's magazines of all time, and proceeds to be the number one selling monthly magazine. Ouellette, 360, 2005).

According to Merriam-Websters' online dictionary, Cosmopolitan means, "having wide international sophistication" and is also a popular cocktail (2010). Some synonyms include: multicultural; worldwide; sophisticated; urbane; glamorous. Therefore the word Cosmopolitan, it is unquestionably a suited title for a magazine that is geared towards young women looking for advice about sex, fashion, beauty and sophistication. The trends of its general content, glossy and seductive pictures, narrowed focused target audience, cross promotion and online magazine versions are key components to its ongoing successes; reinforcing hegemonic ideologies, gender and sexuality stereotypes. Cosmopolitan advances an unrealistic image and ideal, whereby women create identity through sexuality and through commodity exchange.

Cosmopolitan magazine, which offers 110 editions in an impressive 28 languages, reaches 36 million women worldwide with the slogan "for fun, fearless females" (Ouellette, 360, 2005). As such, it is the perfect venue to

investigate representations of contemporary female stereotypes in the media around the world. To start off, David Machin and Theo van Leeuwen investigated the representation of female identity and practice in the U. K. , Dutch, German, Spanish, Greek, Finnish, Indian and Taiwanese versions of Cosmopolitan magazine. However they are not interested in the magazine per se; the styles of writing, image-making and graphic design, the constructions of female identity and practice that the magazine disseminates are not unique to Cosmopolitan, but “ form a part of a wider cultural and ideological trend within neo-capitalism” (Machin & Leeuwen, 2003, p. 494). Machin and Leeuwen identifies the ‘ problem-solution’ discourse schema and while it is clearly global and occurs in all versions of the magazine, it allows for local variation in terms of the kinds of problems and solutions it can accommodate.

2003, p. 509). Also, the community of readers of the magazine is described as the “ globally dispersed and linguistically heterogeneous speech community”(Machin & Leeuwen, 2003, p.

509). This created community, which is bound by its allegiance to the values and lifestyles portrayed in the magazine and similar discourses, signifying them by means of dress, fashion accessories and slender bodily form is often sufficient. (Machin & Leeuwen, 2003, p. 510).

Machin and Leeuwen conclude their investigation by saying, “ although the magazine constantly reminds them of their vulnerability, their loneliness and the restrictions imposed by their gender, they continue to strike the pose of

the ' fun, fearless female'. " (2003, p. 510). Amy Hasinoff is the author of " Genetic gender determinism in Cosmopolitan magazine," whereby she focuses on the sociobiological discourses that appear in Cosmopolitan.

Haisnoff argues, " the use of scientific common sense consistently offers anti-feminist justifications for the practices and techniques of normative femininity" (2009, p. 69). Using a textual analysis, she examines the connections between Cosmopolitans' sociobiological discourses and the popular press and academic versions of this scientific discipline. Hasinoff's theory is that Cosmopolitan's sociobiological discourses are frequently positioned as uncontroversial scientific truth, which is used to " construct an inflexible genetically encoded gender binary that justifies the standards of conventional beauty and femininity", as well as, " the need for women to do domestic work and to tolerate men's bad behaviour" (2009, p.

79). Hasinoff reveals the sociobiological discourses in Cosmopolitan " stress the work, planning and consumer goods it takes to perform femininity by presenting these laborious techniques as strictly adhering to a biological pre-determined set of natural and ultimately unchangeable rules of gender" (Hasinoff, 280, 2009). Additionally, its' sociobiological discourses insist on a self-help rhetoric that encourages women to solve their own problems but at the same time stresses the fact that Cosmopolitan can tell them how (Hasinoff, 280, 2009).

Few researchers have explored sexuality in advertising across multiple countries or the factors that may contribute to its' content. Michelle Nelson

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and Hye-Jin Paek examine the degrees of sexuality in advertising within Cosmopolitan across seven countries (Brazil, China, France, India, South Korea, Thailand and the U. S). Nelson and Paek's study discloses, " even within a transnational Western magazine, degrees of sexuality differ" (2005, p.

371). More specifically their research showed that cultural values and political/economic systems are related to degrees of sexuality presented in advertisement and the " presence of Western (nondomestic) models, sexual freedom values, and a less authoritarian political culture contribute to greater sexuality in magazine advertizing. " (Nelson & Paek, 2005, p. 379). Also the findings indicate, " the links between commodity and sexuality are rather explicit" (Nelson & Paek, 2005, p. 381). Moreover, the majority of us realize that in advertisements sex, sells! J.

Sean McCleneghan conducted a descriptive study using content analysis and Likert scale measurement for the development of attitudinal perspectives of why college women regularly read and subscribe to the top-selling global women's magazines: Cosmopolitan and Glamour (2003, p. 319). The results revealed, " the varimax-rotated three factor loadings account for 75% of the total variance under 49% sexuality, 15% freedom and 11% opportunity" (McCleneghan, 2003, p.

323). This basically means that the majority of college women read and subscribe to these magazines because of the sexual content it provides. The target market for Cosmopolitan and Glamour is females 18-25 years old who

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are either single or in a relationship and are targeted for sex in product promotion because they have “ more disposable income for things such as clothing, beauty products, entertainment, food and magazines” (McCleneghan, 2003, p. 323). Finally, Cosmopolitan and Glamour continue to be highly successful and influential because they “ appeal to the niche audience who support them” (McCleneghan, 2003, p. 324). Advertisements play a vital role in the success and reading enhancements of a magazine. Cosmopolitan intrigues women around the world due to its unique and narrow topics.

Cosmopolitan, however, reinforces hegemonic ideologies, as well as, gender and sexuality stereotypes by producing an unrealistic image and ideal, whereby women create identity through sexuality and through commodity exchange. The following will exhibit a structural (semiotic) analysis of three advertisements rooted in Cosmopolitan. Cosmopolitan displays many distinct advertisements throughout its pages. The first advertisement up for analysis is one for the new ‘ fat free CoffeeHouse Inspirations Skinny’.

Even though they do not use a person to sell their product, they distinctly place two CoffeeHouse Inspirations Skinny bottles in the centre of the page. Likewise these bottles are graphically designed to have the ‘ hourglass figure,’ which is what most women desire to have because of the emphasis the media has imposed. The media, including Cosmopolitan, stress these ideologies that the ‘ hour-glass figure’ is the body every man dreams and fantasizes of, as well it reflects beauty, confidence and seductiveness. Too

often they make women feel wretched about their size since they are constantly comparing themselves with unattainable, unrealistic figures of celebrities and models. In addition, this ad utilizes a tape measure to reinforce the notion that a women's waist needs to be thin and they should measure themselves.

When I first glanced at this advertisement, my eyes were immediately drawn to the tape measure across the 'waist' of these bottles. These images pose a significant risk to the physical and mental health of young people as it leads to anorexia and bulimia (Nelson & Paek, 2005, p. 380). Also the heading for this ad says, "Bring the coffeehouse to your house without the Fat". The ad is blurring between the lines of selling its new CoffeeHouse product and reinforcing the hegemonic ideology that women should not be fat. As well notice how the "f" is capitalized in the word "fat". The advertisers clearly wanted to accentuate the word "fat" since we have conceptualized bad thoughts and feelings towards it. Finally, you would not see this advertisement in a magazine for males although they are big coffee drinkers too, because this ad was intentionally designed to influence females as most men are not concerned about body image and the hour glass figure.

By portraying an unrealistic image and ideal, Cosmopolitan encourages women to create an identity through sexuality and commodity exchange.

Next for analysis is an advertisement for 'Trident White' gum. The advertisers use an image of an extremely attractive woman, with a perfectly white smile, in her car looking up at a police officer. At the top of the image

in sates, “ 35% more getoffwithawarningable” and below the image in says, “ Trident White prevents over 35% of strains for a smile that’s very convincing”. Basically this image implies that women who are flawless have an advantage, and can get a way with breaking the law.

It also reinforces gender stereotypes; that women do not need to be smart to get out of the law, they need beauty. In addition, even though you cannot see the police officers face in the advertisement you can clearly tell that it is a male. Again it is reinforcing gender stereotypes; men take on the more serious, risky careers such as police officers, firefighters and doctors. Where as it shows women engage in more nurturing careers such as nurses and teachers.

Moreover the woman they present in the image is stunningly beautiful, has proper posture, flawless skin, long luscious hair and the perfect smile with straight, white teeth. Without a doubt, the association between commodity exchange and sexuality involvement within advertisements is explicit. Again this represents an unattainable, unrealistic image and ideal for women across the world. Last but not least is an advertisement for ‘ my skins’ lingerie. The purpose of ‘ my skins’ lingerie advertisement is to express and emphasize the fact it provides lingerie in “ twenty skin-matching colours”, virtually making you look and feel “ almost naked”. Moreover the bulk of the page contains an image of the back-view of four tall, slim females. All of these women have the ideal hourglass figure, are tall and slim with long hair.



Out of the four women, only one has dark skin and only blondes and brunettes are shown – no red heads.

This reinforces the hegemonic ideology that only blondes and brunettes are beautiful and red heads are unseen, unwanted, and ultimately ugly. Also at the bottom of the page, it encompasses four, front-view, individual images of the women. Again all women are ravishing with beauty, long luxurious hair, stunning smiles with straight white teeth, flawless skin, thin and with larger more appealing busts. It is not normal for women to be thin, with the hourglass figure and have a large bust, however this is the ideal image the media portrays everyday. As a consequence, women feel the pressure of having to conform to an unrealistic and unattainable stereotype, which plagues them their whole life. Cosmopolitan advances an unrealistic image and ideal, whereby women create identity through sexuality and through commodity exchange.

Cosmopolitan's publishers know they will make further profit off of advertising products then including more articles therefore they choose to overwhelm their magazine with advertisements. They target young women because they are highly influenced as most women are interested in the new fads, and products that will change their look or make them feel better about themselves. I agree with McCleneghan conclusion, that the reason why Cosmopolitan magazine continues to thrive in success and manipulation because their content and advertisements “ appeal to the niche audience who support them” (2003, p. 24). In addition, I concur with Machin and

Leeuwen's " globally dispersed and linguistically heterogeneous speech community" (2003, p. 509).

Cosmopolitan readers share an involvement with the same modalities and genres of linguistic communication, as well as the same linguistic constructions of reality. After a structural analysis of some advertisements illustrated in *Cosmopolitan*, I can conclude that *Cosmopolitan* seeks to create a community of readers, envisaging them as thrown back onto their own resources, depicting their flaws and portraying an unrealistic and unattainable body ideal. Moreover it is unquestionable that *Cosmopolitan's* advertisement relationship between commodity exchange and sexuality are rather explicit. Which is what Nelson and Paek's study revealed.

The trends of its general content, glossy and seductive pictures, narrowed focused target audience, cross promotion and online magazine versions are key components to its ongoing successes of reinforcing hegemonic ideologies, and gender and sexuality stereotypes. References Hasinoff, A. A. (2009). Genetic gender determinism in *Cosmopolitan Magazine*.

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