


Cosmopolitan Magazine: The Male Issue



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Cosmopolitan cover from May 2008.

"Cover Photo," *Cosmopolitan*, May 2008.

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Figure List

Figure 1: Image of June 2007 *Cosmopolitan* cover (page 16).

Figure 2: Image of March 2008 *Cosmopolitan* cover (page 18).

Figure 3: Image of model with actor Ed Westwick in fashion spread, example of “bashful knee bend” pose (page 19).

Figure 4: Image of cover girl Kate Upton posing lying down (page 20).

Figure 5: Image of man and woman in office (page 21).

Figure 6: Image of woman lying down in egg-shaped chair wearing underwear (page 22).

Figure 7: Image of half-naked woman engaging in sexual relations with a man on top of a bed (page 23).

Figure 8: Image of man and woman together in shower (page 23).

Figure 9: Image of woman waist-up in bra engaging in sexual relations (page 24).

Figure 10: Angel Eau De Parfum advertisement (page 27).

Figure 11: Lady Gaga Fame Perfume advertisement (page 28).

Figure 12: Image of January 2007 *Cosmopolitan* cover (page 45).

Figure 13: Image of thin model in fashion spread (page 46).

Figure 14: Image of model in fashion spread (page 50).

Introduction

“[Helen Gurley Brown] convincingly assured each [*Cosmopolitan*] reader, or at least each woman who became a loyal reader, that the magazine was all about her, regardless of the variety of issues addressed and regardless of the images of female perfection that graced each month's cover.”¹

Coming from a very conservative family, I knew very little about sexual practices, so it came as no surprise shortly after I started dating my first high school boyfriend that I became an avid *Cosmopolitan Magazine* reader. I was determined to understand how to “correctly” participate in sexual practices and, based on the very big and bold “Sex Tips” caption displayed on just about every *Cosmopolitan* issue I saw in the grocery store, I figured this magazine would be of great help to my clueless, naïve self. I remember the first issue I ever bought; it was the May 2008 issue, “The Sexy Issue” to be exact, featuring a hot pink background and actress Kristen Bell on the cover. Many of the blurbs on the front cover advertising the articles in this issue quickly caught my eye, including the guy-tested, “Little Touches He’ll Love You More For,” “67 New Sex Tricks Including the Tongue Swirl That Will Push Him Over the Edge,” and “Our Naughtiest Sex Q&A.” Desperate to learn the sexual tricks of the trade avoid embarrassment when I was with my boyfriend, I did not hesitate for even one second before making this purchase.

When I did finally read the issue, I read it very carefully from cover to cover. I remember my toes curling as I read their featured sex tips on my flight and my friend and I continued to go back to the magazine throughout the week. Needless to say, I immediately

¹ Jennifer Scanlon, *Bad Girls Go Everywhere: The Life of Helen Gurley Brown* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 149.

became hooked on what I would quickly begin to refer to as my “Sex Bible.” For years I continued to buy each single monthly issue, ensuring I never did miss one. I was intrigued by all of the sex advice and was determined to learn new tricks and improve my sex skills. It was no wonder then, as I approached my senior year at Dickinson, that I thought writing about sex and *Cosmopolitan* would be a great topic for my American Studies thesis.

While trying to think of a concrete topic to write about, a fellow classmate asked, “Well, why don’t you write about how *Cosmopolitan* mainly writes articles about how to pleasure men?” For a minute I sat there pondering this thought, and I realized she was right. Almost every single article I could recall reading was all about what a woman can do in bed for the benefit of a man, or how she can present herself and what actions she can take in order to attract a man. For about five years I had been a loyal *Cosmopolitan* reader and was completely oblivious to the fact the magazine very rarely talked about ways a woman can please herself or what a man should do to help her reach climax. *Cosmopolitan* is a magazine that is supposed to be for women, so I assumed I was reading it for my sexual benefit, rather than for men. This newfound awareness led me to write this thesis on how *Cosmopolitan* empowers men more than women through its the content and images. This is important because I am sure many other readers, like myself, are unaware of what *Cosmopolitan* is really saying about women. This thesis analyzes the messages sent through the content and images of 72 issues of *Cosmopolitan Magazine* from January 2007 to December 2012 and argues they subordinate women and promote a patriarchal society.

Cosmopolitan Magazine was originally created by Paul Schlicht as a literary magazine focused on fiction and poetry pieces in March 1886.² After going bankrupt and failing several times, it was bought by William Randolph Hearst in May 1905.³ In April 1952, the magazine was taken over by Richard Berlin, who had become the new head of Hearst Publications.⁴ Berlin changed the magazine's focus from fiction and nonfiction to more general editorial content catered to women, including articles like, "When Should Your Husband Change His Job?"⁵ By the late 1950s, *Cosmopolitan* had completely turned into a general women's magazine.⁶ Just like the other traditional women's magazines such as *Good Housekeeping*, *Cosmopolitan* focused on the sentimental, depicting and catering to women as homemakers and housewives through its images and content on world news, fashion, and the home.⁷ The magazine did not do so well, however, and by 1965, the publication was again near the brink of extinction.⁸ Luckily for Hearst, Helen Gurley Brown, successful author of bestseller *Sex and the Single Girl*, was in search of a magazine she could create to be aimed at the sexually curious if not sexually experienced young American woman and revamped the magazine.⁹

Gurley Brown was born Helen Gurley in Green Forest, Arkansas on February 18, 1922.¹⁰ Living during the Great Depression, the Gurley family was quite poor and was hit

² James Landers, *The Improbable First Century of Cosmopolitan Magazine*, (Columbia: University of Missouri, 2010), 2, 17.

³ Landers, 23.

⁴ Landers, 213.

⁵ Landers, 215.

⁶ Landers 218.

⁷ Scanlon, 147.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Scanlon, 144.

¹⁰ Scanlon, 1.

even harder economically after Gurley Brown's father died in an elevator accident in 1932.¹¹ A few years later in 1937, the family relocated to Los Angeles temporarily.¹² However, just a few months after this Gurley Brown's sister contracted polio and Gurley Brown spent much of her time taking care of her sister when she wasn't in school.¹³ Growing up, Gurley Brown became obsessed with the idea of having money and beauty, two insecurities she had in herself that would contribute to her philosophies seen in *Cosmopolitan*, and suffered from emotionally distant men in her relationships.¹⁴ In the mid-1940s, Gurley Brown went from job to job as a secretary before meeting her future husband, David Brown.¹⁵ Brown was a production executive in Hollywood, and married 37-year-old Gurley Brown in 1959.¹⁶ Three years later, Gurley Brown quit her job as an account executive at a major advertising agency's Los Angeles office due to the great success of a book she wrote, titled *Sex and the Single Girl*, published in 1962.¹⁷ Gurley Brown's book was aimed to liberate the single, workingwoman and was supposed to be about self-improvement, though it focused on a woman's sexual allure and sexualized behavior.¹⁸

The overwhelming success of *Sex and the Single Girl* resulted in Gurley Brown acquiring a large fan base, many of whom sent in fan mail.¹⁹ In order to better address her fans on a wider scale, Gurley Brown decided to edit a women's magazine.²⁰ The magazine she created would maintain Brown's own personal philosophies depicted in *Sex and the*

¹¹ Scanlon, 7.

¹² Scanlon, 12.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Scanlon 16, 21.

¹⁵ Scanlon, 22.

¹⁶ Landers, 222.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Scanlon, 94, 95.

¹⁹ Scanlon, 143.

²⁰ Scanlon, 144.

Single Girl: that a woman should be able to support herself financially, be a go getter, have a career, preferably be single, and, most of all, enjoy having sex. After pitching her magazine idea to Richard Deems, president of Hearst Publications, Brown was offered a two-year renewable contract to edit the magazine.²¹ Gurley Brown's inaugural issue was put on the stands in July 1965 and immediately increased sales by 1.4 million copies from just the month before.²² *Cosmopolitan Magazine* quickly became a success across the nation, having thought to have "reinvented the women's service magazine by addressing the needs of the thousands of women who grappled with outdated definitions of womanhood, femininity, sensuality, and sex."²³

During the time of *Cosmopolitan's* transformation, the second wave feminist movement was well underway. In 1963, Betty Friedan published her popular book, *The Feminine Mystique*. In this work, Friedan argues that there was dissatisfaction among women in the middle of the twentieth century because they were told their only jobs were to be housewives and mothers.²⁴ Friedan referred to this dissatisfaction as "the problem with no name," arguing that being defined as a housewife limited women to be nothing more and nothing less. During the aftermath of World War II, millions of jobs were creating for women.²⁵ However, despite this, women met exclusion from higher paying blue-collar jobs as well as managerial and professional positions and received lower salaries than men.²⁶ Women were also discriminated against in higher education, being told it was not a place for

²¹ Scanlon, 148.

²² Scanlon, 151.

²³ Scanlon, 154.

²⁴ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), 57.

²⁵ Sara M. Evans, *Tidal Wave: How Women Changed America At Century's End*, (New York: The Free Press, 2003), 19.

²⁶ Ibid.

women.²⁷ In the mid-1960s, the trend for women getting married at a young age was reversed; they began to challenge dominant societal norms by entering the labor force and educational institutions in numbers.²⁸ The introduction of the birth control at this time, which had weakened the link between sex and marriage, also contributed to falling fertility rates and those who did bear children spent less of their time focused on being a child caretaker.²⁹ As women began to leave their role in the domestic sphere, they knew they should have more than just a private life.³⁰ Thus, the second wave feminist movement was born and led to the creation of National Organization for Women (NOW) by Betty Friedan in 1966, who's purpose was to publicize grievances about sexism and gender discrimination.³¹ This movement was focused on the idea of women's liberation from patriarchal oppression and emphasized issues about personal choice, identity, and interpersonal behavior³². Sexual freedom was a prominent focus of this movement, as the fight for equality had a strong focus on reproductive rights as well as reclaiming the female orgasm and liberation from monogamy.³³³⁴

Though *Cosmopolitan* addressed these issues of sexual liberation for women and attracted a vast, strong fan base, the magazine was not without its critics. Feminists, including Kate Millet and Betty Friedan, were not supporters philosophies and female depictions presented in the magazine. Friedan and other liberationists like Gloria Steinem

²⁷ Evans, 20.

²⁸ Evans, 21.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ James Skinner, "Second-Wave American Feminism As A New Social Movement," Conference Papers -- American Sociological Association (2009 Annual Meeting): 1, SocINDEX with Full Text, EBSCOhost, (accessed 5 Dec. 2012).

³² Skinner, 9, 11-12.

³³ Gerhard, 81, 82.

³⁴ Gerhard, 81.

and Germaine Greer accused the magazine of perpetuating the idea that women are nothing but sex objects.³⁵ Friedan described *Cosmopolitan* as “an immature teenage-level sexual fantasy. It is the idea that woman is nothing but a sex object, that [she] is nothing without a man, and there is nothing in life but bed, bed, bed.”³⁶ In 1970, Kate Millet and her followers raided the *Cosmopolitan* office in New York, claiming the magazine was not a feminist space and demanding that their feminist ideas and content be included in the publication.³⁷ This thesis supports these feminists and argues that *Cosmopolitan Magazine* subordinates women through depicting them as sex objects, through the magazine’s idea of beauty, and through its depiction of female sexual pleasure and sexuality.

This thesis is divided into three different sections. The first examines how *Cosmopolitan* sexually exploits women through its images, content, and advertisements. It argues that these images and content subordinate women by resembling pornography and depicting women as sex objects for men. The second section analyzes the messages *Cosmopolitan* sends to women about beauty, thinness, and class. It will look at how the magazine portrays the use of cosmetics, style, and fitness to boost women’s sexual desirability. The third section will analyze the magazine’s depiction of female sexual pleasure, sexuality, and how women should act in heterosexual relationships. It examines the messages the magazine permeates about men having control in both sexual situations as well as more emotional, romantic situations as well. Over all, this thesis finds that the sexual exploitation of women, depiction of beauty, class and thinness, and messages about female sexual pleasure, sexuality, and women in relationships perpetuate the idea that women are

³⁵ “Helen Gurley Brown: That Cosmo Girl,” *60 Minutes*, first broadcast March 1974 by CBS, Interview with Helen Gurley Brown by Morley Safer.

³⁶ Scanlon, 109.

³⁷ Scanlon, 180.

subordinate and inferior to men, a notion conditioned in society that leads to the magazine's manipulation of women.

Section One: Female Sexual Exploitation and Pornography

*"...I feel being a sex object is so divine and so wonderful there is nothing better, that you can be a sex object and you can also be the president of General Motors. I think men are sex objects and it certainly doesn't slow you down because women desire you sexually, you are still able to get on with your work every day."*³⁸

This section will explore the sexual exploitation of women through *Cosmopolitan's* images, advertisements, and content. *Cosmopolitan Magazine* is a magazine about sex, so, of course, the majority of its images, advertisements, and of course, its content, are sexualized. However, the sexual content within the magazine has been criticized by feminists, advertisers, and the like for sexually objectifying women. Helen Gurley Brown was a strong believer in the sexualization of females. She believed that women should be seen as sex objects;³⁹ in an article titled, "Bad Girl," printed in the March/April 1963 *Psychology Today* issue, Brown was quoted saying, "'If you're not a sex object... you're in trouble.'" ⁴⁰ She thought that one of the best things in life is having someone want a woman sexually and that one had to be an object of desire in order to get a man into bed with them.⁴¹ That is because, for Brown, a key aspect need for "complete" liberation for women included being free sexually and having pleasurable sex.⁴² She believed that a woman being seen as a sex object was just as important as having the equal rights, including the right to work and the right to

³⁸ "Helen Gurley Brown: That Cosmo Girl."

³⁹ Scanlon, 109.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Scanlon, 107.

an abortion, two goals within the second wave feminist movement.⁴³ In early 1970, a media women's activist organization aligned itself with the Women's Liberation Movement to meet with Gurley Brown and ask her to publish more material regarding women's pay, inequity, and limits on career advancement in *Cosmopolitan*, but she declined and continued to make sex and pleasing men her focus.⁴⁴ This made it clear that Gurley Brown's ideals of physical attractiveness and material rewards were at odds with the more serious agenda of cultural, economic, and political reform of the feminists during that era.⁴⁵

The importance Gurley Brown placed on being sexually appealing to a man can be seen in her bestseller *Sex and the Single Girl* and *Cosmopolitan Magazine*. In *Sex and the Single Girl*, Gurley Brown tells readers that to be sexy, she must enjoy sex.⁴⁶ She also shares her rules for acquiring "taste" in fashion so the reader can "dress beautifully and please a man"⁴⁷ and offers advice on how to become beautiful through the way one acts and wearing cosmetics in order to have a man go nuts over them.⁴⁸ Gurley Brown continues to tell readers in *Cosmopolitan* they should put themselves on display for men through her content, images, and monthly covers. Every month, the cover of *Cosmopolitan* would feature "a beautiful woman, alluring and confident, dressed in fashionable clothes and sparkling jewelry, staring confidently and directly at a prospective buyer."⁴⁹ And, as the magazine became more and more profitable and popular, the women models gradually became more and more exposed;⁵⁰

⁴³ Scanlon, 174.

⁴⁴ Landers, 257.

⁴⁵ Landers, 258.

⁴⁶ Helen Gurley Brown, *Sex and the Single Girl*, (Fort Lee: Barricade Books, 2003), 65.

⁴⁷ Gurley Brown, 191.

⁴⁸ Gurley Brown, 204.

⁴⁹ Landers, 283.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Gurley Brown wanted at least every one in three covers to have breasts showing.⁵¹ The images of women on the cover and in the magazine were not the only aspect of the magazine that became more provocative. In early 1967, the magazine had established a record of success, allowing it to be more “daring” and publish what was considered to be graphic articles on sexual conduct appeared.⁵² By the 1970s, articles and nonfiction book excerpts became more sexually explicit, with references to the penis more prevalent and references to certain sexual acts, such as fellatio, replacing general term of oral sex.⁵³

However, *Cosmopolitan*’s amplified sexual content and images, which stemmed from Gurley Brown’s view that it was favorable for women to be viewed as sex objects did not go unchallenged. Though feminists, such as Kate Millett, did accept in principle the importance of sexual expression for women, the increased exploitation of women in the media and advertisements, where women’s bodies were far more prominently displayed, raised second thoughts.⁵⁴ Active women’s liberationists in the second wave feminist movement such as Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem all agreed that Gurley Brown and *Cosmopolitan* were the enemy, accusing both the person and the object of perpetuating the idea that women are nothing but sex objects.⁵⁵ On Women’s Equality Day, which is celebrated on August 26th every year as the date women received the right to vote, in 1970, *Cosmopolitan Magazine*’s New York office was a target of public demonstrations led by feminists including Kate Millett, author of *Sexual Politics*.⁵⁶ At the demonstrations, feminists protested the portrayal of women in ads, commercials, newspapers, T.V. programs, and magazines, just like

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid, 250.

⁵³ Ibid, 266.

⁵⁴ Peter N. Stearns, *Sexuality in World History*, (London: Routledge, 2009), 155.

⁵⁵ “Helen Gurley Brown: That Cosmo Girl.”

⁵⁶ Landers, 257, 258.

Cosmopolitan, accusing these mediums of stereotyping women as subordinate in status to men and as sexual objects.⁵⁷ Friedan also spoke out on female objectification within the magazine, stating that, “Instead of urging women to live a broader life... it is an immature teenage-level sexual fantasy. It is the idea that a woman is nothing but a sex object, that [she] is nothing without a man, and there is nothing in life but bed, bed, bed.”⁵⁸

Though it was clear *Cosmopolitan* had its critics, the magazine’s great success demonstrated it clearly had its fans as well. Gurley Brown believed that if she had truly crossed a line with the female exploitation in the magazine, she would have lost readers.⁵⁹ However, based on the magazine’s great success, this was surely not the case. During its first three years, *Cosmopolitan* increased its average monthly circulation from 782,000 copies to 1.05 million copies, along with gaining an influx of advertisers, raising an average of 29 advertisement pages to 64 advertisement pages and increasing revenue by \$157,000 each issue.⁶⁰ In late 1976, the magazine circulated 2.515 million copies and by the end of March 1986 it had circulated 2.98 million copies.⁶¹ Today, *Cosmopolitan* remains popular amongst readers and circulates three million copies in the United States alone.⁶² Based on the analysis to be given of the issues from January 2007 though December 2012, it is clear that Gurley Brown’s views on females as a sex object continue to be projected. Images and advertisements throughout the issues continuously portray females in a demeaning sexual

⁵⁷ Ibid, 258.

⁵⁸ Scanlon, 109.

⁵⁹ Scanlon, 164.

⁶⁰ Landers, 225.

⁶¹ Landers, 285.

⁶² Edith Zimmerman, “99 Ways to Be Naughty in Kazakhstan: How Cosmo Conquered the World,” *New York Times*, August 3, 2012, accessed April 22, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/05/magazine/how-cosmo-conquered-the-world.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0.

manner, and the magazine content is graphic, even pornographic, both when discussing sex tips and in the fictional piece input at the end of each issue.

Sexualization of Women in Images

The images within with the magazine add its pornographic elements, starting with the cover and continuing with the images associated with the magazine articles. The cover of each magazine features a female celebrity, each one beautiful and thin, wearing a tight, short,



Figure 1: Image of June 2007 *Cosmopolitan* cover.

“Cover Photo,” *Cosmopolitan*, June 2007.

and low-cut outfit. Cleavage, their legs, or sometimes both, are always revealed, and the women are normally looking directly and seductively at the camera. A perfect example is seen on the June 2007 cover, with Ashlee Simpson is the featured celebrity (see left). She is wearing a fitted, blue dress that is low cut into a deep v, with a quarter of each breast popping out. She is standing posed with her left hand on her hip, which is simultaneously lifting up her dress and revealing her upper left thigh. She is staring directly at the camera, head slightly tilted down and smiling. This is just one example of the many ways the celebrities featured on each cover appear. These images such as the one just described places women in the male gaze. The male gaze occurs when a woman is positioned to be looked at and watched by men.⁶³ This concept is explained through John Berger’s theories in his third essay in the book, *Ways of Seeing*. Berger states that the way people see

⁶³ Sut Jhally, *The Codes of Gender: Identity & Performance in Pop Culture*, DVD, directed by Sut Jhally, (Northampton: Media Education Foundation, 2009).

things is affected by what they know and believe.⁶⁴ Therefore, when looking at a woman in an image, one bases their opinion of her on knowledge and beliefs about women along with what we see in the actual image. He says a woman's presence expresses her own attitude to herself, and defines what can and cannot be done to her.⁶⁵ Her presence is manifested in her gestures, voice, opinions, expressions, clothes, chosen surroundings and taste; there is nothing a woman can do that does not contribute to her presence.⁶⁶ Men survey the way a woman in an image presents herself and bases how they think they should be treated on the messages their presence sends to them.⁶⁷ Therefore, the way a woman presents herself in an image to some extent regulates what type of treatment is and is not 'permissible' by a man.⁶⁸ This interpretation of a woman's presence in the image by men is the male gaze. In this gaze, men are the surveyors and women the surveyed, the relationship between men and women.⁶⁹ The woman turns herself into an object, most particularly an object of vision: a sight.⁷⁰

⁶⁴ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*. (London: Penguin Books, 1972), 8.

⁶⁵ Berger, 46.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Berger, 47.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Berger, 46.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

According to feminist Kathryn McMahon, the “Cosmo girls” on the cover of each issue are wearing outfits that signify leisure and sexual availability and levels a male gaze that suggests at least pique if not downright hostility, especially when paired with blurbs of articles offering readers ways to earn love, success, sex, and money.⁷¹ This can more clearly be seen on the cover of the March 2008 cover with Rihanna as the featured celebrity (see below). She is wearing a low cut, fitted dress with her breasts popping out, looking as if her nipples may appear. Her right hand is holding onto her dress strap as though she is about to take it off, and her left hand is holding up her dress to reveal the top of her upper left thigh. She is staring seductively at the camera, eyes slightly closed and mouth in a sexy grin. Surrounding her in large print are blurbs about sex, including “21 Naughty Sex Tips.” In this case then, having female celebrities not only dressed seductively but also looking seductively at the camera, or once on the shelves, the consumer, *Cosmopolitan* is inviting readers to view the women on the covers as sexual beings. Putting their bodies on display openly tells readers the magazine wants them to be looking at women in this way, while having the female celebrities looking at them seductively indicates to readers that they in fact *want* to be viewed in this manner, making this sexualization “okay.” Plus, surrounding this image with

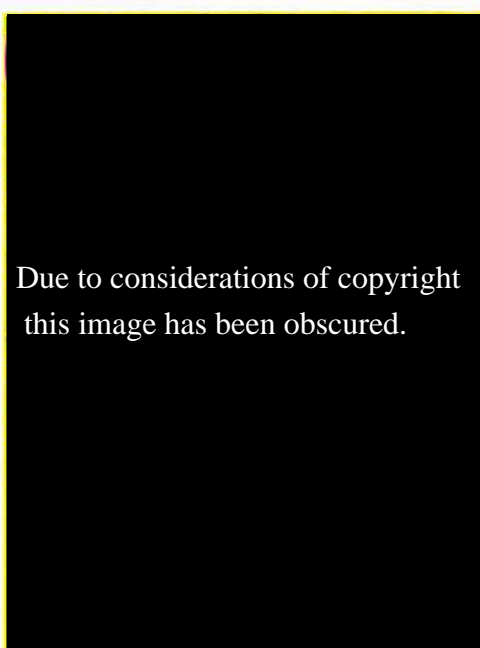


Figure 2: Image of March 2008 *Cosmopolitan* cover.

“Cover Photo,” *Cosmopolitan*, March 2008.

⁷¹ Kathryn McMahon, “The ‘Cosmopolitan’ Ideology and the Management of Desire,” *The Journal of Sex Research: Feminist Perspectives on Sexuality Part 2* 27.3 (1990): 381, accessed March 18, 2013.

sex related words causes readers to associated the celebrity's sexual appearance with sex and sexuality.

In addition to the provocative images on *Cosmopolitan* covers, the images within the magazine continue to perpetuate the acceptance of female objectification and subordination as well. As Sut Jhally nicely summarizes, Erving Goffman says women are often positioned in images in a way that signifies their submissiveness and sexual availability, an idea shared with pornographic images.⁷² Goffman also says that pictures are carefully crafted scenes that warrants for drawing a sound conclusion as to who is present and what is going on it.⁷³ In other words, the composer of this image, or the photo shoot director in *Cosmopolitan's* case,

Due to considerations of copyright
this image has been obscured.

creates the image for the viewer to make assumptions about what is going on in the scene instead of what is really happening in the picture.⁷⁴ Goffman also discusses how placing females in certain positions acts as a signifier to their passivity. Two that stand in *Cosmopolitan* out are women lying down and a pose Goffman refers to as the "bashful knee bend" (see left). The "bashful knee bend" is a canting position where the women is tilted, not upright, and off center that implies women are ungrounded and therefore less than

Figure 3: Image of model with actor Ed Westwick in fashion spread. Example of "bashful knee bend" pose.

"Westwick and Model," *Cosmopolitan*, December 2008, 178.

⁷² Jhally, *The Codes of Gender: Identity & Performance in Pop Culture*.

⁷³ Erving Goffman, *Gender Advertisements*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979, 15.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

prepared to react quickly and firmly to their surroundings.⁷⁵ Having women lying down in images implies that they are difficult to defend themselves against possible threats, are submissive, and powerless (see below).⁷⁶



Figure 4: Image of cover girl Kate Upton posing lying down.

“Kate Upton,” *Cosmopolitan*, November 2012, 188-189.

In addition to the appearance and poses of women in images, Jean Kilbourne says also the accompaniment of words or captions that are sexual as well.⁷⁷ The words in associated with these images help guide the viewer to perceiving the image the way the ad composer wants them to. Examples of Kilbourne’s thoughts on words with images along with Goffman’s poses can be seen throughout every issue analyzed in *Cosmopolitan Magazine*. Accompanying an article titled, “My Sleazy Coworker” the “Your Work Life” section of the January 2007 issue, there is an image of a woman in the work place wearing a

⁷⁵ Jhally, *The Codes of Gender: Identity & Performance in Pop Culture*.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Jean Kilbourne, *Killing Us Softly 3: Advertising’s Image of Women*, DVD, directed by Sut Jhally, (Northampton: Media Education Foundation, 2002).

tight, sleeveless dress. She is chewing on her pencil seductively while staring at a man, presumably her boss, who is staring at her and away from the camera. Having the woman putting the pencil, a penis shaped item, in her mouth while staring at a man causes readers to infer that she is thinking about giving oral sex and reduces her to a sexual object (see below).

Further, caption with this photo

states, “Did I say take a memo? I

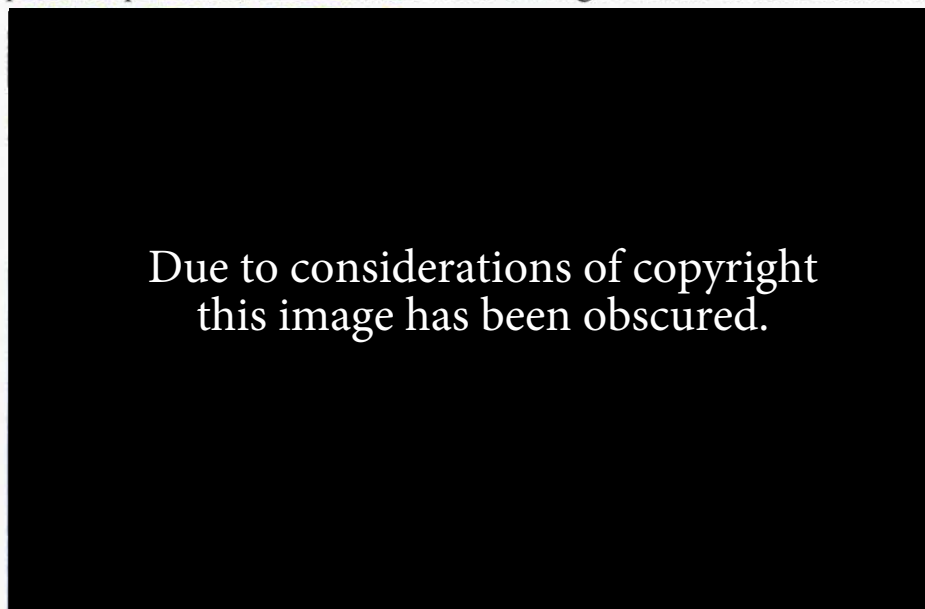


Figure 5: Image of man and woman in office.

“Office Romance,” *Cosmopolitan*, January 2007, 138.

meant take off your shirt.” Therefore, in this example, the accompaniment of the article title and caption with the image also implies that women can only succeed in the work place if they use their sex appeal to seduce their boss. Having the boss seemingly be a man in this image indicates men will be the ones who “clearly” hold the superior positions, which supports Goffman’s claim that, when placed with a woman in an image, the man is the one performing the executive role.⁷⁸ An image in the “Love & Lust” section also presents an image relating to oral sex. In this image, a woman is laying down back in an egg shaped chair only wearing a black bra and underwear. Her legs are up and bent and she has her finger in

⁷⁸ Goffman, 32.

her mouth while smiling at the camera. The caption reads, "Um, dude, I think she's trying to tell you something." Being posed as laying down in this image in her underwear indicates she is both sexually available and powerless against an outside party (see right). Further, image paired with the caption directly indicates to readers that the woman's finger in her mouth is an indication that the woman is not only thinking about performing oral sex on a man, but also wants to give it to him.

Her smiling in the picture further implies that she is happy about this. This reinforces a theory by Helene Deutsch, that a sexual act is connected with the idea of the subjection of woman to man, an idea that is deeply rooted in society and inaccessible to intellectual correction.⁷⁹ Having both women in the mentioned images using an object or a body part to send a message of oral sex implies women want to be subjected to men through oral sex and expresses their sexuality as being subordinate or submissive through their body positions.

Other images in the magazine feature the women either completely naked, half naked, or only in bras and underwear. The coverage they have of their private parts is very minimal, with their breasts and vaginas either being covered by their lingerie, one of their own body parts, such as their arm, or by a man's body. In the majority of these images, the woman is with a man either engaging in or about to engage in sexual activity, though in some she is by


Due to considerations of copyright this image has been obscured.

Figure 6: Image of woman lying down in egg-shaped chair wearing underwear.

"Woman in Chair," *Cosmopolitan*, January 2007, 93.

⁷⁹ Helene Deutsch, *The Psychology of Women*, (New York: Grune & Stratton, 1944), 259.


herself, like in the two images mentioned previously. The man is almost always staring the woman's private parts, not her face or eyes. Having him do this reduces the woman to just her body, as that is the only place the literal male gaze is positioned (see below).



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this image has been obscured.

Figure 7: Image of half-naked woman engaging in sexual relations with a man on top of bed.

"Couple in Bed," *Cosmopolitan*, January 2009, 76-77.



Due to considerations of copyright
this image has been obscured.

Figure 8: Image of man and woman in shower together.

"Couple in Shower," *Cosmopolitan*, October 2008.

Additionally, in the majority of these images, only part of the woman's body is being shown. Sometimes this could be from the waist up whereas other times it may be only her waist down that is shown; other times it may just be part of the body. One example of this is in the January 2009 issue alongside an article titled, "The Cosmo Climax Clinic." The image is of a woman lying on a couch, but you can only see her head. Her eyes are closed and her head is leaned back, facing upward. Part of her bare shoulder is put on display, and it looks like she is not wearing any clothing. Because this image is paired next to an article about climaxing, one can assume the woman is masturbating. Another similar image can be seen in the April 2012 issue, next to an article titled, "The Thing He's Dying to See During Sex." In this image, the breasts are the main focal part: the woman is only shown from the waist up and part of her head isn't shown. She is in a sheer bra, with her head tilted back, and you see hands, presumably a man's, grabbing her torso.

Due to considerations of copyright
this image has been obscured.

Figure 9: Image of woman waist-up in bra engaging in sexual relations.

"Woman on Top," *Cosmopolitan*, April 2012, 155.

This image infers that the woman is engaging in woman-on-top sex with a man. According to speaker and feminist Jean Kilbourne, images such as that one with this body dismemberment

further adds to the dehumanization of women.⁸⁰ This is because only one body part of the woman, as opposed to the woman in her entirety, is being focused on, truly reducing her to a body part, an object.⁸¹ This dismemberment then creates a climate for violence because, as Kilbourne states, turning someone into a “thing” is the first step towards violence of that person or type of people.⁸² This means that, because the person is not being viewed as another human being, they therefore will not be treated as one, giving others an excuse to act out on them, as they will. Thus, pornographic images, such as the ones in *Cosmopolitan*, dehumanizes women and leads to violence and rape, as these pornographic images normalize these concepts.⁸³

Feminists from the anti-pornography singled out pornography⁸⁴ as the major cause of the perpetuation of male violence against women and argued that it encouraged men to mistreat women and keep women submissive to men and male sexual desires.⁸⁵ According to feminist Catharine MacKinnon, violence against women refers to aggression against and exploitation women.⁸⁶ She goes on to say that this violence includes sexual harassment, rape,

⁸⁰ Kilbourne, *Killing Us Softly 3: Advertising's Image of Women*.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ In this thesis, pornography will be defined as the “explicit description or exhibition of sexual subjects or activity in literature, painting, films, etc., in a manner intended to stimulate erotic rather than aesthetic feelings; printed or visual material containing this.

“pornography, n.,” OED Online, March 2013, Oxford University Press, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/148012?redirectedFrom=pornography> (accessed April 26, 2013).

⁸⁵ Jane Gerhard, *Desiring Revolution: Second-Wave Feminism and the Rewriting of American Sexual Thought 1920 to 1982*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 174.

⁸⁶ Catharine A. MacKinnon, “Human Rights and Global Violence Against Women (1992),” *Are Women Human? And Other International Dialogues*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 29.

battering of women, and pornography.⁸⁷ Thus, depicting women as objects for sexual use implies they are something that can be owned as property of possession and can be violated and abused at will.⁸⁸ In congruence with MacKinnon's beliefs, feminists such as Susan Brownmiller and Naomi Wolf also worried that sexual exploitation both promoted and would lead to rape and sexual harassment, especially in situations where women would begin to participate in sexual encounters and then later change their minds.⁸⁹ Brownmiller believed that a woman's attractiveness, or sexual desirability, to men is in direct proportion to their ability to play the victim.⁹⁰ In her book, *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape*, Brownmiller also talks about the popular "she was asking for it" claim that rapists make, meaning a woman seduces or "cock-teases" a man to rape her."⁹¹ The seductive, exploitive images of mentioned previously women do just that. They depict women as sexually desirable through their poses and captions. Similarly, the images mentioned relating to oral sex can be seen as examples as "asking for it" as the women are seen as wanting oral sex. As Berger says, images like this tells men that women do indeed want to be seen as sexual beings, so they will then be treated as such. Wolf supports this notion by saying that sexual imagery, such as exposed breasts as seen on *Cosmopolitan* covers, protects men's sexual confidence and implies women want to have been raped.⁹² Sexual imagery gives off this message because it conditions viewers to believe that women want to be used, even abused, sexually. By positioning the women as wanting to engage in sexual acts, viewers come to

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Gerhard, 174.

⁹⁰ Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975), 333.

⁹¹ Brownmiller, 312.

⁹² Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women*, (New York: W. Morrow, 1991), 139, 136.

believe this is true. Therefore, when in a real life sexual situation, men will likely force themselves on women because they believe this is how they want to be treated.

Sex Sells: *Cosmopolitan* Advertisements

In conjunction with the covers and images included in *Cosmopolitan*, advertisements in the magazine contain pornographic elements as well. In order to entice consumers to buy their products, advertisers continuously turn to using sex or sex appeal in their advertisements. As noted by Pitirim A. Sorokin in *The American Sex Revolution*, advertisements for commodities, “are all saturated by sexuality and all designed to catch the buyers through sex appeal.”⁹³ These commodities can include anything from household items to apparel and cosmetics.⁹⁴ By associating sex with commodities, “...advertising sex invites

Due to considerations of copyright this image has been obscured.

vicarious consumption of an anonymous erotic experience beyond the boundaries of formalized ‘relationships’ or emotion attachment... traditional gendered expectations of sexual desire are often reversed, as women more than men are celebrated as sexual hunters.”⁹⁵ This is most definitely seen in *Cosmopolitan* advertisements. In the December 2012 issue, there is an advertisement for Angel Perfume

Figure 10: Angel Eau De Parfum advertisement.

featuring Eva Mendes (see left). She is wearing a very

“Angel Eau De Parfum,” *Cosmopolitan*, December 2011, 88.

⁹³ Pitirim A. Sorokin, *The American Sex Revolution*, (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1956), 37.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Gail Hawkes, *Sex and Pleasure in Western Culture*, (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2004), 17.

tight, short sequined dress. Her body proportions do not look normal, almost like those of a Barbie doll or the cartoon character Jessica Rabbit, with very large breasts, a thin waist, and thin, yet curvy thighs, one of which is showing due to the giant slit in her dress. Her hair is covering half of her face, and she is holding the bottle of perfume up by her chest, where her breasts are fully exposed. Again, having the woman dressed so provocatively invites a sexual gaze upon her and reduces her to her body, and therefore an object and not human. However, by pairing this “look” with a commodity, the advertisement is telling consumers that buying and using this product causes you to be sexy and desirable. In contemporary society, popular culture, through its limited images of beautiful, thin female celebrities as those who can easily attract a man and are desired by all, tells women that in order to attract a man, you must be sexy and attractive so that they will desire you. Therefore, advertisers use these sexual images in advertisements to convince female consumers that they need to purchase these products to invite the male gaze and be desired; they do not realize that in reality by submitting to the messages sent out about women and their desirability in popular culture, women are continuing to engage in their own subordination.

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this image has been obscured.

Figure 11: Lady Gaga Fame Perfume advertisement.

“Fame Perfume,” *Cosmopolitan*, December 2013.

On the other end of the spectrum, previously discussed with the images associated with articles in the magazine, images of women in advertisements can also provoke and trivialize violence through its images. Also in the December 2012 issue, there is an advertisement for singer Lady Gaga's perfume, Fame (see above). In the ad Lady Gaga appears to be lying naked with one arm up back behind her head. Her face is half covered by a black leather mask around her eyes, giving the advertisement a sadomachistic feel. You can only see her from the neck up, and it appears that men are crawling up her all over body, As they climb up her, their hands act as claws and dig into her skin, which can be seen by the indents surround the hands of the men. This advertisement not only reduces Lady Gaga to her violence, but also perpetuates violence on women. The men are aggressively sinking their hands into her naked body, and she does not even flinch or do anything to attempt to stop them: she is essentially accepting the violence occurring against her. Furthermore, the fact that her face is covered continues to reduce her to her body, as it conceals her identity and causes the reader to focus more on her body. Her dismemberment in this image also dehumanizes her and causes her to be seen as an object. In the advertisement, an image of her perfume bottle is placed in the middle of the bottom, but it is lost within the overarching sexual, violent image. This type pornographic image, as feminist Hester Eisenstein states expresses the psychosexual need of masculinity not only to control the woman, but to annihilate "it".⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Hester Eisenstein, *Contemporary Feminist Thought*, (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1983), 119.

Sexual Articles and Fiction

In addition to the images and advertisements in *Cosmopolitan Magazine*, examples of female objectification and pornographic elements are also seen in the sexual content of the magazine. As said in a speech by feminist Andrea Dworkin:

In pornography we literally see the will of women as men want to experience it. This will is expressed through concrete scenarios, the ways in which women's bodies are positioned and used. We see, for instance, that the object wants to be penetrated; and so there is a motif in pornography of self penetration. A woman takes some thing and sticks it up herself... This is not a human being.⁹⁷

Dworkin's statement, for the purpose of this thesis, does not imply that all forms of sexual penetration of women are wrong and dehumanizing. Rather, this statement is saying that the problem with discussing the penetration of women occurs when women are put on display as simply a "thing" to be penetrated by an object to a reader or viewer. When women are only defined in the sexual sphere by vaginal penetration as opposed to other forms of sexual pleasure, including clitoral stimulation by a hand or oral sex, adds to the dehumanization of women because they are seen as objects that desire masochistic pleasure, meaning pleasure in pain and suffering. As psychoanalyst Helene Deutsch writes, coitus is associated with the act of defloration and defloration with rape and a painful penetration of the body.⁹⁸ One can assume that in this context, defloration is not a girl losing her virginity on her own will, but a girl's virginity being taken from her by a man, giving him a sense of power, just like with rape. Deutsch goes on to say that rape also relates to reproduction, and therefore the sexual organ it is associated with, the vagina, as the reproduction function requires toleration of a

⁹⁷ Andrea Dworkin, "Speech, Equality and Harm: Feminist Legal Perspectives on Pornography and Hate Propaganda," (speech, University of Chicago Law School, March 6, 1993), <http://www.nostatusquo.com/ACLU/dworkin/PornHappens.html>.

⁹⁸ Deutsch, 277.

significant amount of pain.⁹⁹ In the antipornography movement, heterosexual intercourse, or penetration, is considered an expression of a man's power over women with his penis as a weapon in an effort to keep women submissive to a man's power.¹⁰⁰ With that in mind, mainly associating sexual practices for women with penetration and therefore the penis, a weapon, implies that women both want and should be treated violently. Thus, depicting women to readers only as objects of penetration through its association with coitus acts as an exaggerated "rape fantasy" that implies that women should not only be seen as sexual objects that want to be penetrated, but they accepted the fact that their sexual pleasure becomes dependent on pain.¹⁰¹ Therefore, just like with the images in the magazine, the content promotes ideas about rape and sexual violence as well.

Examples of this can be seen through the descriptions that accompany the sex tips printed in the magazine issues. In the May 2008 issue in an article titled, "67 New Blow-His-Mind Moves," with the tag line stating, "Since this is The Sexy Issue, we rounded up the most stellar mix of tips to date. They're so sizzling, they should come with a warning label!" For this article, men sent in sexual scenarios they experienced with a woman, writing what sexually pleasing acts the women did to them that they liked, and women also sent in tips for achieving sexual pleasure. One man, Andy, sent in, "While in missionary, this chick grabbed my butt, pulled me in, and told me not to resume pumping until she climaxed. Then she began stroking her clitoris. The agony of watching her masturbate while I was inside her nearly killed me, but as soon as she finished, I had the most powerful orgasm ever."¹⁰² One woman, Samantha, also sent in a tip. It states, "While lying side by side, grab one of his

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Gerhard, 175-176.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Myatt Murphy, "67 New Blow-His-Mind Moves," *Cosmopolitan*, May 2008, 138.

hands, and use it to stimulate your clitoris. Then take his other hand, and guide his first two fingers inside you.”¹⁰³ In the October 2011 issue, similar tips are seen again in an article titled, “Naughty Sex Tips” with the tag line, “We know daring babes like you are always up for a lusty challenge: Achieve Cosmo Sex Ninja status with our boundary-pushing, masterful moves.” This article, much like the one in the May 2008 issue, gives sex tips to improve sexual pleasure. One tip states, about a good place to have sex, “Another great confined space: the bathroom. Prop yourself up on the sink, pull up your skirt, and have him enter you as you control the thrusting by guiding his butt with your heels.”¹⁰⁴ These tips are just a few examples of the many graphic, sex-related tips sent in by readers and are published in the magazine issues. Though the sexual content in *Cosmopolitan* does not explicitly state that women should feel pain when they receive sexual pleasure, mainly depicting their sexual endeavors as involving penetration implies that they do. The scenarios where women are dominated and dehumanized by penetration that Dworkin describes are the same scenarios included via sex tips like the ones provided, either written by an author or submitted by readers, in *Cosmopolitan*. The magazine masks the idea that penetration is a way for men to “use his penis as a weapon,” as stated earlier in this section, by showing the woman to have some sort of control in the sexual situation. For example, in Samantha’s tip a woman is seen as guiding the man’s hand into her instead of the man just sticking his fingers inside her on his own and in the tip about where to have sex, the woman controls the thrusting through her heels on the man’s butt. However, though the woman are supposedly have some control in the situation, showing them as wanting this penetration tells men that they enjoy being used sexually and welcome the penetration of their bodies.

¹⁰³ Murphy, “67 New Blow-His-Mind Moves,” 141.

¹⁰⁴ Bethany Heitman, “Naughty Sex Tips,” *Cosmopolitan*, October 2011, 142.

In addition to the sex tips included in the magazines, the fiction stories of sexual encounters placed at the end of each monthly issue also play a role in the perpetuation of pornography in the magazine. Each story is either an original short story or an excerpt from a published novel of a sex scene in which sexual intercourse between a man and woman occurs. One may argue that the inclusion of this sex scene is to arouse women because it is theorized that women prefer words to images when it comes to pornography.¹⁰⁵ This is because reading porn allows women to create the images of the fantasies themselves, allowing them to put themselves in it, instead of watching the images of other people.¹⁰⁶ However, these sex scenarios, though they are written, as women prefer, actually continue to subordinate and dehumanize women through its pornographic elements of female objectification and male domination. An example of this is seen in the March 2009 excerpt from the novel *Flirting with Temptation* by Kelley St. John, titled, "Paging Dr. Lust." St. John writes,

...her inner muscles stretched around him as he stroked her, and another spiraling sensation built within her. He pushed in, then withdrew, each time giving her more of him.

"Babette, look at us," Jeff said. She followed his gaze to the full-length mirror on the wall, capturing his impressive length as it retreated from her, long and hard and slick, before pushing all the way back in. Their rhythm increased, and Jeff braced his hands on the headboard while his hips continued thrusting. It was impossible for Babette to tear her eyes from the sight of them making love.

Three more strokes, and she could not control herself. Her climax caused her to tremble as Jeff let go with her, pushing inside one last time. When things grew still and quiet, Jeff pulled Babette close and looked into her eyes. "Was this worth it?"

"Yes," Babette whispered.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Clarissa Smith, *One for the Girls! The Pleasure and Practice of Reading Women's Porn*, (Bristol: UK, Intellect, 2007), 189.

¹⁰⁶ Patrice A. Oppliger, *Girls Gone Skank*, (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2008), 47.

¹⁰⁷ Kelley St. John, "Paging Dr. Lust," *Cosmopolitan*, March 2009, 213.

In this excerpt, Jeff has complete control over the situation. Any sexual action taking place is committed by him. Additionally, Babette is only seen as being penetrated, an object being used for Jeff's sexual pleasure, not a human participating in "love-making" as the excerpt attempts to portray to readers. Another short story featured in the August 2011 issue, written by author Meg Cabot, echoes the same pornographic principles of the March 2009 issue.

Cabot writes:

And then when it felt like every nerve ending in my body was ready to burst and I could stand no longer, he lifted me out of the pool in those strong arms, carried me over to a nearby chaise longue, laid me down, and continued to thrust so slowly I thought I might scream. I lifted my hips hungrily to take in more of him.

And then his control broke, and he began to pump harder, filling me in a way I never thought anyone could. With every stroke, I could feel my pleasure swell, until finally I climaxed, digging my fingers into his arms as the orgasm vibrated through me. He followed quickly after.¹⁰⁸

In this short story, just like Jeff, the male character, Tom, has the control in the situation. In this story, he is the one taking all of the sexual action and initiates it originally. The female character, Gemma, is just seen as a body there for penetration. In both of these sex scenes, the dominating sexual nature of the male characters is associated with the sexual pleasure the women experience. This is seen in almost every single fiction piece in the *Cosmopolitan* issues. As Clarissa Smith writes in her book, *One For the Girls!*, employing this discourse of sexual pleasure presents women with the appearance of their enjoyment and embrace of sexual activity while convincing men that this overly dominating sexual nature is actually what women want.¹⁰⁹ Doing this also persuades women of the naturalness and positive benefits of a patriarchal system where women are supposed to be passive, submissive, and

¹⁰⁸ Meg Cabot, "Falling in Lust at the Jersey Shore," *Cosmopolitan*, August 2011, 226.

¹⁰⁹ Smith, 34.

controlled by men.¹¹⁰ Even in the latter sex scene this is depicted. When Tom loses all of his control and starts to “pound” Gemma harder than before through vaginal penetration, Gemma feels a great surge of pleasure that leads to her climax. In this situation, Tom’s dominating and uncontrollable nature is celebrated through Gemma’s sexual pleasure. By including the fact that Gemma is being pleased, pornographic sex scenes such as those included in *Cosmopolitan* mask the fact that women are being dehumanized and degraded by attempting to convince readers that the sexual pleasure of the women are being placed on a pedestal instead of that of men.

Furthermore, the sex tips in *Cosmopolitan* continue to dehumanize women by subordinating them through male control. Again in the October 2011 issue, readers see tips that explicitly tell them to give the man all of the control over the woman. One tip states, “Lie with your back on the skateboard and him on top of you. He’ll have the control of the rolling, but it feels just as good.”¹¹¹ Another writes, “Let him take control. Have your guy hold you by the hips and move you any which way.”¹¹² In the December 2009 issue in an article titled, “Sexy Way to Use a Vibrator With Him,” the article tells readers that during oral, a woman should use a vibrator on the man’s testicles and give him control on the speed and where it is placed.¹¹³ In her speech, Dworkin stated that women have to be inferior and dehumanized, or in other words, controlled, less autonomous, less free, and less real, in order for men to have sexual pleasure with women.¹¹⁴ This, she says, normalizes the ways women

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Bethany Heitman, “Sexy Ways to Use a Vibrator With Him,” *Cosmopolitan*, December 2009, 144.

¹¹² Heitman, “Sexy Ways to Use a Vibrator With Him,” 142.

¹¹³ Heitman, “Sexy Ways to Use a Vibrator With Him,” 140.

¹¹⁴ Dworkin, “Speech, Equality and Harm: Feminist Legal Perspectives on Pornography and Hate Propaganda.”

are demeaned and attacked, as the humiliation and insulting of women are made to look natural and inevitable through these pornographic depictions.¹¹⁵ Having men take control over the women in the bedroom as shown in these sex tips does just what Dworkin fears: they reduce women to their body, turning them into objects instead of a real human, giving men reason to treat women as such. Susan Brownmiller, a U.S. feminist, agrees with Dworkin's theory about male control, saying that pornography is a system that causes men to learn to dominate women and for women to accept their position as submissive and passive.¹¹⁶ Again, by providing tips for sexual pleasure in which the male is taking control over the woman and the sexual actions taking place, *Cosmopolitan* is telling women that they are supposed to act insubordinate and passive because men are the superior sexual actors.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Gerhard, 176.

Section Two: Women's Aesthetic and Class

*"It is clear in women's magazines today that when it comes to beauty, clothing, and lifestyle advertisements, being young, thin, and flawless is still in."*¹¹⁷

Just like the sexualized images in *Cosmopolitan*, the messages the magazine sends about women through beauty and the body both oppresses and sexualizes women as well. Before the second wave feminist movement, women's magazines focused on articles and advertisements related to household products and domestic sphere.¹¹⁸ However, after women gained more rights and were no longer confined to the domestic sphere, magazines and advertisers had to find a new "hook" to save the magazine industry from economic fallout.¹¹⁹ In order to be successful, advertisers have to convince people their product is something that they *need* to have.¹²⁰ So, they created a new artificial problem with the natural state of women and elevated it to become THE female dilemma after the second wave movement.¹²¹ This "problem" is what feminist Naomi Wolf refers to "the beauty myth." According to Wolf, the beauty myth tells a story: "beauty" is a quality that universally exists.¹²² Women must embody it and men must want to possess women who embody it.¹²³ In the United States, the beauty myth is perpetuated by the beauty standards depicted in popular culture that women are held to. Images and content on television, billboards, advertisements, and of course magazines dictate what a woman should and should not look like in order to be

¹¹⁷ Jennifer Nelson, *Airbrushed Nation*, (Berkeley: Seal Press, 2012), 60.

¹¹⁸ Wolf, 66.

¹¹⁹ Wolf, 66, 67.

¹²⁰ Pamela K. Keel, *Eating Disorders*, (Upper Saddle River: Pearson Education, Inc., 2005), 63.

¹²¹ Wolf, 67.

¹²² Wolf, 12.

¹²³ Ibid.

accepted in society in successful in any aspect of their life. It establishes an unattainable beauty ideal, simultaneously creating the impression that one is deficient in some way and establishing a market for products.¹²⁴ The standards become equated with femininity and womanhood, and therefore any woman who does not comply with them is neither feminine nor a woman. Women are deeply by these messages, especially within magazines, because it is all they have to represent their mass culture.¹²⁵ This leads to the perpetuation of the powerful industries involved in marketing manipulation, including the \$33 billion a year diet industry, \$20 billion cosmetics industry, and \$300 million cosmetic surgery industry.¹²⁶ Thus, the beauty myth causes women to attain “a raving, itching, parching product lust,” and an abiding fantasy: the longing for some fairy godmother to arrive at her doorstep and give her everything she needs to be beautiful.¹²⁷ *Cosmopolitan Magazine* perpetuates the beauty myth by attempting to be a woman’s “fairy godmother.” This section explores these messages that *Cosmopolitan* sends to women about beauty and the body and argues that they hold women to unrealistic standards while at the same time is only including those women of a higher class in the magazine’s conversation. The articles and images throughout the magazine tell women how to be successful, sexy, and able to attract a man; they must be thin, but in shape and healthy, beautiful, either naturally or with the help of cosmetics and hair styling, have a good fashion style, and, in order to be able to maintain this idea of a “true woman,” they must, to some degree, have a fair amount of money to afford everything they need to be what society calls and accepts as a woman.

¹²⁴ Keel, 63.

¹²⁵ Wolf, 70.

¹²⁶ Wolf, 17.

¹²⁷ Wolf, 70.

Within the articles of *Cosmopolitan* lies Judith Butler's theory about gender performativity. Butler argues that gender identity is socially constructed and is formed based on a series of repetitive acts a person participates in.¹²⁸ Butler writes, "Significantly, if gender is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous, then the *appearance of substance* is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief."¹²⁹ This means, in terms of women, that a woman can only identify herself as and believe herself to be a woman if she engages repeatedly in acts that a stereotypical woman would participate in. As a woman commits these acts, she herself is being an actress: she is putting on a show by performing her female identity through her acts. Conversely, as Butler says, the more a gendered identity is reproduced in society, the more deeply it becomes entrenched or sedimented expectations of gendered existence.¹³⁰ According to feminist Kate Millet, because of social circumstances, an implicit gender identity is developed through the culture's notions of what is appropriate to each ender by temperament, character, interests, status, worth, gesture, and expression.¹³¹ Thus, if a person who identifies themselves as a woman does not act, or perform, as such, she will be "punished,"¹³² as she will not be performing their gender the way society expects them to. They are then stigmatized by "normals" in society, meaning they are seen as having some

¹²⁸ Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* Vol. 40 No. 4 (Dec. 1988): 519, accessed February 6, 2013.

¹²⁹ Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," 520.

¹³⁰ Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," 524.

¹³¹ Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics*, (Garden City: Doubleday, 1970), 31.

¹³² Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," 522.

sort of discredited attribute or something unusual and bad about their moral status.¹³³ In terms of the messages sent out by *Cosmopolitan Magazine*, this punishment will be that a woman will be unable to attract a man and be considered inadequate. Because of this, the real issue with the beauty myth has nothing to do with whether women wear makeup or don't, gain weight or lose it, or dress up or down, but it is the lack of choice women seemingly have when it comes to their participation in these practices.¹³⁴ By including articles and images advocating wearing cosmetics, stylizing hair, and staying thin either through diet, exercise, or both, *Cosmopolitan* is telling female readers that in order to be considered a desirable woman, they must engage in these practices, too.

Thinness and the Body

Up until the late nineteenth century, being fat was associated with the elite citizens of the United States. If one was fat, it meant they had both wealth, meaning enough money to buy significant amounts of food and have physical leisure, and had good health, meaning they were free of any disease that wasted away bodily flesh.¹³⁵ As such, fatness was often linked to those of prosperity, distinction, and high status.¹³⁶ However, this linkage between fatness and the upper class has drastically changed. During the first wave feminist movement, the movement's opposition created cartoon images of women as fat, unattractive, and masculine as a staple to anti-suffrage propaganda.¹³⁷ The fat on the women in these

¹³³ Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, (New York, Simon & Schuster, 1986), 1, 3.

¹³⁴ Wolf, 272.

¹³⁵ Amy Erdman Farrell, *Fat Shame: Stigma and the Fat Body in American Culture*, (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 27.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Farrell, 88.

caricatures were representative of the women's suffrage movement, indicating that, just like the fatness on their bodies, the desire for the vote and for more power was excessive and out of control.¹³⁸ In response to these negative images, women's suffragists created a counter image of the quintessential women's rights advocate: beautiful, white, youthful, and thin.¹³⁹ The goal of this counter image was to represent the female body as one that was fit for citizenship, and, with the fat body being uncivilized, this meant a thin body was one that was associated with being a true citizen, or human.¹⁴⁰ With this in mind, though the feminists were trying to counteract the negative images created of them by the anti-suffragist movement with their more positive counter images, the women's suffragists were actually continuing to perpetuate the idea that in order to be a woman, one must be white, beautiful, and, most importantly, thin. And, because suffragists were fighting for more rights as a United States citizen, the images they projected indicated that in order to be eligible for these rights, a woman must conform to the images of the "model" woman they were trying to represent to the public. Whether they realized it or not, suffragists were actively participating in the very conversation they were trying to reject, that fat, masculine women were not "women" or citizens at all.

Women continued to promote a thinness ideal during the second wave feminist movement. Within the fight for reproduction rights, the ideal of thinness emerged as a way to free women of their traditionally feminine, hourglass shape that emphasized the presence of breasts and hips.¹⁴¹ Though this new body ideal was meant to empower women, it actually did the opposite. Thinness in women, such as the model icon Twiggy, reinforced patriarchy

¹³⁸ Farrell, 89.

¹³⁹ Farrell, 94.

¹⁴⁰ Farrell, 95.

¹⁴¹ Keel, 61, 62.

by suggesting women were weak because of their frail appearance, asexual because of their lack of fat, which is filled with sex hormones and therefore is representative of reproductive power, and hungry.¹⁴² It also caused women to have a skewed view of fatness on their bodies. In a 1965 *Glamour Magazine* survey, 75% of women aged 18 to 35 thought they were fat; of this sample, only 25% of women were considered to be medically overweight and 45% of them were underweight.¹⁴³ Twenty years later, the weight of women plummeted and the average model, dancer, or actress is thinner than 95% of the female population.¹⁴⁴

This obsession with thinness amongst women is still being seen in contemporary society in the United States. Among high school girls, 63% reported they are currently attempting to lose weight by dieting and 73% reported trying to lose weight in the past.¹⁴⁵ Among college women, 76% reported dieting at some point in their life and 76% reported desiring weight loss currently, yet only 43% described themselves as being overweight.¹⁴⁶ This shows that fatness is seen as a character flaw, a parasite, a crying evil on one's body.¹⁴⁷ It is seen as a sign of a deficient body that is not correctly demonstrating the restraint and constraint that God requires of it.¹⁴⁸ The fat body, therefore, is a body that is uncivilized and primitive because it is unable to keep itself in control.¹⁴⁹ This goes hand in hand with Michel Foucault's theory of disciplining of the body. Foucault writes that the body is an object and target of power, one that is manipulated, shaped, trained, which obeys, responds, becomes

¹⁴² Wolf, 184, 192, 196.

¹⁴³ Wolf, 185.

¹⁴⁴ Wolf, 185.

¹⁴⁵ Keel, 68.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Farrell, 36.

¹⁴⁸ Farrell, 45.

¹⁴⁹ Farrell, 68.

skillful and increases its forces.¹⁵⁰ He goes on to say that the body, one that may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved, is one that is docile.¹⁵¹ In other words, a docile body is a body that is capable of being manipulated into a different type or shape. Foucault's thoughts on a docile body implies that any body, in this case, a fat body, has the ability to be shaped and transformed into a different type of a body, a thin body. Therefore, it is assumed that people are indeed in control of their body weight, so those who do not have a thin body are out of control and lazy. *Cosmopolitan Magazine* is one of the media texts that send out these messages out to women. In conjunction with Foucault's theory about the body being docile, articles and images related to the female body in the magazine imply that, if the woman works hard and does what she is supposed to, she will be able to transform her body, whether it be a fat body or even an average sized body, into a thin body. And, if she does this successfully, this will mean she will be considered a woman, a citizen, and able to attract a man. Because of this idea, women spend more time attempting to discipline their bodies through extreme dieting and exercise in order to achieve femininity, causing themselves to become less socially oriented and more focused on self-modification.¹⁵²

From the very first glance a woman takes at the cover of *Cosmopolitan*, they are already being told what they should look like physically in order to be desirable and attractive to a man. As mentioned in the previous section, the cover of each issue features a beautiful female celebrity, thin, wearing tight clothes, which are either low cut, short, or both, looking seductively and confidently at the camera, or the consumer. Therefore, in order for a

¹⁵⁰ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Westminster: Vintage, 1995), 136.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 166.

woman to be as desirable as one of the celebrities on the front cover, they, too, must be beautiful, thin, and wear stylish, yet sex appealing clothing. However, what the reader may not know is that the female images they are seeing on the cover, or throughout the magazine, for that matter, are not a true reflection of the women's body. As Jean Kilbourne said in the film, *Miss Representation*, computers allow photos to be digitally altered to make the image of the woman "perfect."¹⁵³ This technology allows the editor of a photo to airbrush the woman's body, making them appear flawless and with body proportions unattainable for 99% of the American population.¹⁵⁴ This skewed perception of the female body falsely tricks readers into believing that they are capable of, as Foucault would say, manipulating their bodies to match those seen on *Cosmopolitan* covers and on the female models and celebrities featured throughout the magazine. However, because these airbrushed images of thin bodies are featured everywhere in society, such as in other magazines, films, television shows, etc., these "fake" bodies become naturalized. Therefore, no one questions their legitimacy or whether or not this body type can truly be achieved by all because it is the main body type that is seen in almost every single image in popular culture. These images lead to low self-esteem in women. This is because these images reflect how one should feel about their body and place in the world.¹⁵⁵ This essentially means that if one does not have the body they see on the cover of the magazine, one does not have the "ideal" body type.

¹⁵³ *Miss Representation*, DVD, directed by Jennifer Siebel Newsom, (Sausalito: RO*CO Films Educational, 2011).

¹⁵⁴ Oppliger, 132.

¹⁵⁵ Jessica Weiner, *Do I Look Fat In This?: Life Doesn't Begin Five Pounds From Now*, (New York: Simon Spotlight Entertainment, 2006), 104.

The images of women *Cosmopolitan* further add to this notion. For example, the cover of the January 2007 issue featured Carmen Electra, a beautiful, thin actress. In the article featured about her, images of her “style evolution,” which consists of images of Electra in different types of wardrobes over time, were placed and discussed, saying how over time it became more and more revealing of her breasts, stomach, and legs.¹⁵⁶ The caption of this photo read, “With that body, who could blame her for showing it off?” This caption puts Electra’s

seemingly thin, and therefore perfect, body on a pedestal, implying that she is only able to show off parts of her body because she is thin. In the October 2007 issue, an image going along with the article, “Why Don’t You... Really Dig Your Body,” puts thinness on a pedestal as well. The title of the article suggests that a woman should love her body no matter

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this image has been obscured.

**Figure 12: Image of January 2007
Cosmopolitan cover.**

“Cover Photo,” *Cosmopolitan*, January 2007.

¹⁵⁶ Carmen Electra Style Evolution Images, *Cosmopolitan*, January 2007, 26.

what her body type. However, the image associated with this article suggests otherwise. It is

Due to considerations of copyright
this image has been obscured.

of an extremely thin model, wearing a short, sheer dress with her upper thigh, legs, and breasts showing. A similar image can be seen to the left. Just like with the images of Carmen Electra, this image suggests that in order to be able to have sex appeal and show off your body, one must be thin. Though the article does not explicitly state that a woman must be thin to “dig her body,” using an image of a thin model implies that this woman is able to “dig her body” *because* she is thin. In order to truly send the message that a woman should be able to “dig her body” regardless of its shape or size, images of different women with different body types should be included. Showing images of women of a variety of bodily shapes and sizes

Figure 13: Image of thin model in fashion spread.

“Thin Model,” *Cosmopolitan*, September 2011, 232.

Movement (HAES).¹⁵⁷ This movement promotes self-acceptance and day-to-day practices, regardless of whether or not a person’s weight changes.¹⁵⁸ HAES also advocates size and self-acceptance through “respecting and appreciating the wonderful diversity of body shapes, sizes, and features (including one’s own!), rather than pursuing an idealized weight, shape, or

¹⁵⁷ For more information about this movement, see:

Deb Burgard, “What is ‘Health At Every Size’?,” in *The Fat Studies Reader*, ed. Esther Rothblum and Sondra Solovay, (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 42-53.

¹⁵⁸ Burgard, “What is ‘Health At Every Size’?,” 42.

physical feature.¹⁵⁹ However, having only images of thin women in the magazine, like the one below, does not do support this movement.

Going hand in hand with the images in *Cosmopolitan Magazine* is the content in the health and fitness related articles. This content, just like the images, continues to put the thin body on a pedestal. In the February 2007 issue, actress Eva Mendes was chosen as the, "Fun Fearless Female of the Year." In her interview, Mendes spoke about her body. She said she is happy with her body, and allows her weight to fluctuate: she is her skinniest in a size 27 jean, and her heaviest in a size 29 jean.¹⁶⁰ Though Mendes says she is happy with her body despite the fact she is clearly constantly losing and gaining weight, a size 27 and 29 jean are still not that large of a size; even at her "heaviest," Mendes is still quite thin. That being said, Mendes is of course okay with her body at that size because, in society's eyes, she is still on the thinner side. Additionally, in the article Mendes goes on to say that, though she lets herself fluctuate in size, she does not allow herself to be any heavier than a size 29. This indicates that there is still some level of self-control and disciplining of her body, two traits associated with being thin, that Mendes has over her clearly docile body. In tandem with this idea that even at a woman's fattest she is still thin, some of *Cosmopolitan's* content is contradictory to the images they display. For example, in the "Behind the Scenes at *Cosmopolitan*" section in the March 2007 issue, editor Kate White writes that they are always conscious of casting models who look healthy in her letter about how there are some models that are becoming way too thin.¹⁶¹ However, in writing this, White is associating being thin with being healthy and therefore fatness as being unhealthy. According to Deb Burgard, this notion is false. She

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Stephen Rebello, "Fun Fearless Female of the Year: Eva Mendes," *Cosmopolitan Magazine*, February 2007, 38.

¹⁶¹ Kate White, "Behind the Scenes at *Cosmopolitan*," *Cosmopolitan*, March 2007, 40.

states that 91% of what counts as health outcomes does not have anything to do with weight, and more specifically BMI (body mass index).¹⁶² Therefore, just because one is thin does not necessarily mean they are healthy and those who are fat are not necessarily unhealthy.

Burgard goes on to say that one cannot apply what weight is considered “acceptable” or “unacceptable” on a person because a healthy weight varies among individuals.¹⁶³ Further, this article seems as though White is using “health” to defend the choice to use thin models throughout *Cosmopolitan* in their images. Doing this as well as depicting the women in the magazine’s images as very thin conditions women to believe that the majority of women in American society are both thin and healthy because readers are not being exposed to women of other shapes and sizes. Though the article is promoting ideas of being healthy with the notion of thinness, spreading the idea that most women are naturally thin and healthy can lead to dangerous and unhealthy lifestyle habits by women. If the “normal” woman as seen in *Cosmopolitan* is thin and healthy, those women readers who are healthy and not thin may feel dissatisfaction with their bodies because their bodies are considered to be “normal.” Therefore, the societal ideal of thinness leads to a disturbance in a woman’s perception of weight and shape, something documented among many women with eating disorders.¹⁶⁴ A 1999 study of college women, Thomas E. Joiner found that body dissatisfaction, such as that felt when comparing their bodies to those seen in magazines, was associated with higher levels of bulimic symptoms.¹⁶⁵ Thus, this distorted view of their own weight and shape that is evoked by these images and content can lead to eating disorders among women.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶² Burgard, 43.

¹⁶³ Burgard, 44.

¹⁶⁴ Keel, 67.

¹⁶⁵ Keel, 68.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

Furthermore, the fitness content in *Cosmopolitan* emulates Foucault's ideas about the body being docile, the idea of control, and that in order to be sexy one must be thin. Articles with titles like, "Hot-Body Basics: To truly be smokin' you can't neglect these trouble spots" and "Slim and Sexy All Over" with the tag line, "'Tis the season to stuff your face (hello, cupcakes). Burn it all off with this total body workout," again, imply that the body is able to be manipulated into the ideal, thin body and that being slim is equated with being sexy. In "Hot-Body Basics," Victoria Lucia gives tips on how to work the upper and lower half of your body so that they are equally proportionate and on control food cravings.¹⁶⁷ By mentioning in the tag line that in order to be "smokin'" one cannot neglect "trouble spots," the article is implying that, unless these parts of your body are put under control, one cannot be considered attractive. Also, discussing control cravings indicates to readers that they are capable of controlling their appetite and, that if they do not, they are in the wrong and risk becoming fat. In "Slim and Sexy All Over," the author gives workout moves for readers to do in order to burn off all that extra "bad" food they eat during the holidays.¹⁶⁸ Just like with the other article, the tag line says it all: one is able to eat what they want during the holidays, but only if they engage in practices that discipline their body after the fact in order to reverse the what would be negative effects from the "bad" food, or cupcakes, on their body. These are just two examples of similar types of articles that frequent every single *Cosmopolitan* issue.

Fashion and Beauty

Equally as important as the messages *Cosmopolitan* sends about being thin and the body are the messages sent out through what is expected to be worn on the body: ideas of

¹⁶⁷ Victoria Lucia, "Hot-Body Basics," *Cosmopolitan*, February 2007, 226.

¹⁶⁸ "Slim and Sexy All Over," *Cosmopolitan*, December 2007, 150.

fashion and beauty through cosmetics. Gurley Brown was a huge advocate for fashion, believing one should “dress to impress,” and that if one wears what they like and feel good in, as long as they follow the rules of fashion and taste, they will be able to attract the man of their desire.¹⁶⁹ These beliefs are still represented in *Cosmopolitan* today, as the type of

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this image has been obscured.

Figure 14: *Cosmopolitan*, December 2008, 172.

fashion that is depicted as being “current” or “trendy” is that of sex appeal. According to Patrice A. Oppliger, fashion and clothing choices are the major ways that women can express their sexuality.¹⁷⁰ *Cosmopolitan* promotes that very idea, with many of its fashion articles or spreads relating to the level of a woman’s sex appeal it projects or to what type of clothing a man wants to see on a woman. In one fashion spread titled, “Get Your Flirt On,” a thin model wears fashionable clothing in pictures, some of which were taken with the British, *Gossip Girl* actor, Ed Westwick

(see left and Figure 3).¹⁷¹ Westwick comments on each outfit the woman wears, saying what he likes about them and equating them with their sex appeal. On a tight, purple strapless dress with a zipper going down the middle, Westwick says, “This dress accentuates every curve, and the zipper is a ‘Here I am, come and get me’ kind of thing.”¹⁷² On a green top with bows on the front paired with jeans, he says, “The bows are very provocative—it makes

¹⁶⁹ Gurley Brown, 199.

¹⁷⁰ Oppliger, 7.

¹⁷¹ “Get Your Flirt On,” *Cosmopolitan Magazine*, December 2008, 172-179.

¹⁷² “Get Your Flirt On,” 172.

me imagine untying them!”¹⁷³ Westwick’s overtly sexual comments equate fashion with being sexy, or at least being sexy to a man’s standard. This further subordinates women, as they are being told that they must dress for a man, meaning they must dress sexy and provocative. Other articles, such as one titled, “Clothes That Create Great Cleavage,” further attest to this notion as they again are sexualizing a woman through her apparel. Oppliger states that today’s fashion seems to selling trends that reinforce the idea that women are interchangeable sex objects, as discussed in the previous section.¹⁷⁴ The clothing items shown as sexy and desirable for women to wear in order to attract men in *Cosmopolitan*, as seen in the fashion spread with Ed Westwick, are perfect examples of Oppliger’s notion. They put women on display sexually due to their tight fit and short, low cut features.

Going along with apparel, the cosmetics tricks also sexualize a woman for a man’s pleasure as well. As Nina G. Jablonski says in *Skin: A Natural History*, the vast majority of cosmetics products are designed and marketed for enhancing parts of the body that are important in conveying emotional information and sexual attraction, including the eyes, eyebrows, lips and cheeks.¹⁷⁵ In order to highlight the eyes, mascara, eyeliner, and eye shadows are used.¹⁷⁶ These products accentuate the size of the eye, a quality used to distinguish female from male faces, the distance between the eye and eyebrow, the up turning of the outer corners of the eyes into a true smile, and can imitate the “eyebrow flash,” a microexpression created by brief raising of the eyebrows to signify recognition and

¹⁷³ “Get Your Flirt On,” 179.

¹⁷⁴ Oppliger, 20.

¹⁷⁵ Nina G. Jablonski, *Skin: A Natural History*, (University of California Press, Berkeley: 2006), 147-148.

¹⁷⁶ Jablonski, 148.

attention.¹⁷⁷ Jablonski also discusses the importance of lipstick and blush. Lips are singularly important in verbal communication and kissing, something that establishes social bond and intimacy with others, so their red color needs to be emphasized.¹⁷⁸ Further, cosmetics that heighten cheek color are popular because blushed cheeks are associated with emotional and physical wellbeing and suggest a rosiness of youth and a flush of sexual excitement.¹⁷⁹

Gurley Brown agrees with Jablonski, as she believed that fashion and cosmetics could enhance your sexiness¹⁸⁰, and this belief is displayed through the tips in the last six years of *Cosmopolitan*. An advertisement for a book titled, *Cosmo's Sexiest Beauty Secrets: The Ultimate Guide to Looking Gorgeous*, states:

Cosmo knows what qualities make a woman alluring: healthy, glowing skin; lush, shiny hair; smoldering eyes; and lusty lips--for starters. In our hot new how-to book, you'll find hundreds of easy beauty tips that'll kick your sexiness up a notch. "Your eyes have the ability to hypnotize a man. Here, a sneak peek at ways to harness their seductive power with makeup."¹⁸¹

This advertisement goes on to give a tip that there is actual scientific proof that guys are "total suckers" of sultry, smoky eyes before going on to say what type of eye shadow a woman should use to emulate this look.¹⁸² By giving a tip for what a man wants to see in a woman's cosmetics, this advertisement, for a *Cosmopolitan* created book, implies that a woman should purely wear cosmetics to attract a man.

Another book titled, *500 Secrets About Men*, written by the editors of *Cosmopolitan* in 2012, during the six year time period of the magazines analyzed, also gives tips about what

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Gurley Brown, 76.

¹⁸¹ *Cosmo's Sexiest Beauty Secrets: The Ultimate Guide to Looking Gorgeous* Advertisement, *Cosmopolitan*, October 2008, 40.

¹⁸² Ibid.

cosmetic looks attract men. One tip states: “guys are more attracted to women with dark limbal rings (the outer edge of your iris). Rim your inner lines with white eyeliner to create alluring contrast.”¹⁸³ Another tip states, “Men are biologically attracted to women with full lips, since they’re linked to fertility. (Bonus tip: Swipe on a pale pink lipstick since it reflects light and makes your mouth look plumper.)”¹⁸⁴ These tips demonstrate that *Cosmopolitan* perpetuates the idea women should wear cosmetics in order to become more sexually attractive to men. This notion is further affirmed in an article titled, “Is your look guy hot or girl hot?,” in which Karl Molvar writes about what cosmetic looks a man does and does not like to see on a woman.¹⁸⁵ By associating positive or negative feelings about styles of make-up with a man, a woman is told that she should vary what she wears according to his preference rather than her own. Additionally, in every issue analyzed there are at least one or two beauty spreads relating to cosmetics. These spreads lay out a set of cosmetic products that can be used to “enhance a woman’s look,” or in other words make them appear more attractive. Often, they will be accompanied by taglines relating to men. An example of this is seen in the September 2011 issue. An article titled, “Sexy Edgy Eyes” has the tag line, “Ebony-lined eyes ruled fall runways in never-before-seen fearless looks. Our four favorite effects are simple, sultry, and just wicked enough to make him wonder what naughty thing you’ll do to him next.”¹⁸⁶ This tag line implies that women should follow these tips in order to be more attractive to men, further demonstrating *Cosmopolitan’s* message that women need cosmetics to be beautiful and sexually desirable.

¹⁸³ Mina Azodi, *500 Secrets About Men*, (New York: Hearst Publications, 2012), 67.

¹⁸⁴ Azodi, 65.

¹⁸⁵ Karl Molvar, “Is Your Look Guy Hot or Girl Hot?,” *Cosmopolitan*, November 2008, 208.

¹⁸⁶ Marta Topran, “Sexy Edgy Eyes,” *Cosmopolitan*, 2011, 248.

Class

This whole concept of class, just like the beauty and body discourses, relates to Butler's gender performativity theory. If a woman does not have money to afford the products or services necessary to engage in these beauty and body practices, they will be unable to perform society's idea of an identity as a woman and as a result will become outcast and excluded. Therefore, women readers of the working class will not be considered a true woman in society and will experience a "punishment" in the social sphere, in this case being their inability to attract a man as *Cosmopolitan* implies.

Though *Cosmopolitan* is supposedly aimed at all women readers, its fashion and beauty spreads only include those of a higher class, or those with money to spend on items that are not necessities. Despite the fact that, in theory, virtually anyone who reads *Cosmopolitan* is able to follow the fashion and beauty advice given in the magazine, the products on display in association to these said spreads are on the more expensive side. According to Jennifer Nelson, women's magazines showcase a slew of clothing, shoes and accessories in their issues that are extremely pricey.¹⁸⁷ This is seen in *Cosmopolitan*. The majority of their items, especially clothing, are more expensive, some times even reaching over \$1,000 in price. However, though the vast majority of the clothing in the magazine is on the more expensive side, women's magazines contrast these expensive items with more affordable "knock-off" items.¹⁸⁸ Though members of both classes are being catered to through the advertising of the more expensive and lesser expensive clothing items, the "knock-off" items are seen as "steals and deals," or the next best thing compared to the

¹⁸⁷ Nelson, 95.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

higher end items.¹⁸⁹ As Oppliger says, fashion is a display of wealth and serves as a status symbol.¹⁹⁰ Therefore, those who purchase the cheaper items are considered to be lower in status than those who are able to purchase the more expensive items.

Further, *Cosmopolitan's* seemingly obsession with thinness also relates to class. As mentioned previously, the images of thin models that fills the magazines paired with its content relating to health and fitness permeate the idea that in order to sexually desirable, women must be thin. However, becoming thin requires both time and money, to an extent. An example of this can be seen in current popular culture Khloe Kardashian and Christina Aguilera, two celebrities had been criticized for their heavy weight. Kardashian was finally able to lose weight, but only with the help of her exercise trainer and with 60 Days of Fitness Founder Deandre Morris, who helped her eat right with a diet plan.¹⁹¹ Aguilera was able to lose 35 pounds in four months, but not without the help of trainer Te Sorge, who helped her lose weight with dance classes combined with resistance workouts.¹⁹² Trainers and nutritionists cost money. Thus, in order to lose weight successfully, one must have money. They must also have time to spare to do these workouts. A working class woman may not have either of those things, especially if they have a family. Therefore, women of a lower class, according to the messages from popular culture, would not be able to become thin. Thus, the magazine again implies those of the working class are of a lower status because they are unable to adhere to the magazine's messages about being a sexually desirable woman.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Oppliger, 7.

¹⁹¹ "I Love Being the Sexiest Kardashian!," *Life & Style*, April 15, 2013, 28, 30.

¹⁹² "Christina's Sexy Slimdown," *Life & Style*, April 15, 2013, 45.

Section Three: Sex, Relationships, and Sexual Orientation

*"For seventeen years I worked hard to become the kind of woman who might interest [my future husband]."*¹⁹³

The Freudian concept of "penis envy" and the fight for female sexual liberation has a direct link to *Cosmopolitan Magazine*. This section will use "penis envy" to explore sex and sexual autonomy for women, the advice given to women on what actions to take in order to attract and retain a man, as well as its implicit and explicit depictions of female sexual orientation. A large part of the fight for women's equality in the second wave feminist movement was rooted against Sigmund Freud's concept of "penis envy," a concept argued to be a main constituent of the oppression of women by men. Freud explains this concept in his book, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*:

It is of little use to a child that the science of biology justifies his prejudice and has been obliged to recognize the female clitoris as a true substitute for the penis. Little girls do not resort to denial of this kind when they see that boys' genitals are formed differently from their own. They are ready to recognize them immediately and are overcome by envy for the penis—an envy culminating in the wish, which is so important in its consequences, to be boys themselves.¹⁹⁴

Essentially Freud is saying that women desire to have a penis instead of a vagina or clitoris and thus, in that respect, wish they to be male instead of female. Because of this notion, Freud is putting the "penis," and therefore men, on a pedestal and is giving them ultimate power. Thus men are deemed to be superior and women in contrast inferior. Women become subordinated. According to Freud's theory, women's strong desire for a penis to become men implies that they believe men are superior to them and suggests that women are biologically

¹⁹³ Gurley Brown, 4.

¹⁹⁴ Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, (New York: Basic, 1962), 61.

inferior to men because they do not have a penis. Feminists such as Betty Friedan challenge Freud's theory with the belief that "penis envy" is what trapped women as subordinates in society.¹⁹⁵ In *The Feminine Mystique*, Friedan writes that Freud saw women as strange, inferior beings and less than human.¹⁹⁶ Friedan believed that, to Freud, women were childlike dolls who existed only in terms of a man's love: her primary purpose was to love a man and to serve him.¹⁹⁷ Freud thought it was simply in a woman's nature to be ruled by a man, and her sickness was to envy him.¹⁹⁸ Choosing to use the word "sickness" to describe a woman's lust for a penis implies that "penis envy" was a disease women had starting from early childhood, a concept that adds to their subordination. Friedan also pointed out a major flaw in Freud's work: many of his theories stemmed from his own life, so he was trapped in his own framework and his theories therefore trapped others in this framework as well.¹⁹⁹ This means that Freud's theories, including that of "penis envy," should not be considered universal, as they are only truly applicable to the life experience Freud had with a select few women.

Though feminists such as Friedan reject these Freudian views, Freud's concept of "penis envy" still managed to normalize traditional gender roles and the idea that women are inferior to men in American society. Because of this concept, women are trained from early childhood to accept a system which divided society into male and female spheres and which allocated public power exclusively to the male sphere.²⁰⁰ This conditions women into

¹⁹⁵ Friedan, 166.

¹⁹⁶ Friedan, 172.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Friedan, 173.

¹⁹⁹ Friedan, 171.

²⁰⁰ Domna C. Stanton ed., *Discourses of Sexuality: From Aristotle to AIDS*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1992), 6.

accepting their secondary status to men, causing them to willingly, whether they are aware of it or not, give men the ultimate power in society.²⁰¹ Men are then able to recognize this power and use it to exert their domination and superiority over women. Antonio Gramsci's idea of hegemony and power explains this concept of social conditioning. As defined by Lee Artz and Bren Ortega Murphy, hegemony is "the process of moral, philosophical, and political leadership that a social group attains only with the active consent of other social groups."²⁰² Artz and Murphy go on to say that hegemony is a system of power that has the support of the subordinate: for this power to be best secured, subordinates must buy into the arrangement, agree to the terms, and make the relationship theirs.²⁰³ This consent can be achieved by the dominant group by providing the subordinate group with some sort of tangible benefit in order to offer them incentive to participate in these practices that are not necessarily in their best interests.²⁰⁴ Thus, dominant groups do not try to achieve this by "performing some sleight of hand" to *deceive* the "masses," but rather they conduct a clever propaganda campaign to *mislead* subordinate groups.²⁰⁵ For American women, Freud and his theory of "penis envy" is that clever propaganda campaign Artz and Murphy refer to. As previously mentioned, Freud's widespread idea that women are biologically inferior to men conditions women to buy into their subordinate body, most specifically their clitoris' and vaginas, to men and their penis'.

Feminists in the second wave movement like Betty Friedan and Kate Millett sought to free women from the idea of "penis envy" and therefore from their traditional gender roles.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Lee Artz and Bren Ortega Murphy, "Power Through Consent," *Cultural Hegemony in the United States*, (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc., 2000), 1.

²⁰³ Artz and Murphy, 2-3.

²⁰⁴ Artz and Murphy, 3.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

In the middle of the twentieth century, great dissatisfaction rose amongst women.²⁰⁶ Society told them that their jobs were to be housewives and mothers, turning their only acceptable career into finding, keeping, and pleasing a husband as well as having babies.²⁰⁷ Therefore, to be in the home is to be feminine, a woman, and to be in the working world is to be masculine, a man. This, in turn, created a sexual problem for women, as they would wait all day for their husbands to come home and satisfy her in order to, as Friedan writes, “make her feel alive: because her only identity was as a wife and mother.”²⁰⁸ Thus, sexual pleasure was a woman’s escape from her domestic identity. The anatomy of the female body was considered to be a woman’s destiny²⁰⁹, meaning her sole purpose and identity in the sexual realm was to reproduce. If reproduction was the main sexual purpose for women, then their own personal sexual pleasure, an orgasm, was of little importance. It was believed that truly feminine women would find sexual pleasure from pregnancy and vaginal sexuality, which is where reproduction, pleasure, sexuality, and gender all come together.²¹⁰ Because of these notions, a sexual revolution rose within the second wave movement with a fight for women’s equality with female sexual pleasure and sexuality. According to author Jane Gerhard, feminists that took part in this revolution envisioned sexual pleasure as empowering and as a route out of patriarchal repression of the body.²¹¹ Gerhard argues that, “sexual freedom within second wave feminism was about women actively determining what should happen to their bodies, about empowering women to feel entitled to their desires whatever they may be.”²¹² Gurley

²⁰⁶ Friedan, 57.

²⁰⁷ Friedan, 57, 59.

²⁰⁸ Friedan, 75.

²⁰⁹ Friedan, 136.

²¹⁰ Gerhard, 47-48.

²¹¹ Gerhard, 2.

²¹² Ibid.

Brown aimed to support these issues through the reinvention of *Cosmopolitan*, a women's service magazine that addressed the needs of thousands of women who grappled with what were considered outdated definitions of womanhood, femininity, sensuality, and sex.²¹³ However, though Gurley Brown may have had feminist intentions by promoting the female orgasm and the single, working girl, *Cosmopolitan* still works to subordinate women through promoting Freud's theory about "penis envy."

Sexual Practices & Autonomy

A main aspect of the sexual revolution revolved around misconceptions about female sexual pleasure that is still being perpetuated in *Cosmopolitan* today. According to Freud, women both feel and desire pleasure from repetitive stimulation of the clitoris during infancy and childhood.²¹⁴ However, once a woman hits puberty, this sexual stimulation gets transferred from the clitoris to the vagina, causing the vagina to become the new leading zone for sexual activity.²¹⁵ This transfer causes the "normal" sexual aim of women to be with the union of the genitals in the act known as copulation, which Freud claims to release sexual tension and the temporary extinction of sexual instinct.²¹⁶ Therefore, in the "normal" sexual life of the adult, the final outcome of sexual development lies in the pursuit of pleasure under sway of the reproductive function, in which there is a firm organization directed towards a sexual aim attached to some extraneous sexual object.²¹⁷ Essentially, what Freud is saying is that, as a woman transforms into adulthood, her feelings of sexual pleasure move from her

²¹³ Scanlon, 154.

²¹⁴ Freud, 56.

²¹⁵ Freud, 87.

²¹⁶ Freud, 15.

²¹⁷ Freud, 63.

clitoris, which is equated to a man's penis, to her vagina. Because the vagina is the area associated with reproduction, a woman's ultimate goal to achieve sexual satisfaction is through trying to reproduce. This led to the traditional medical view, all "healthy" women desired penetration by males and are sexually incomplete and unsatisfied unless so penetrated.²¹⁸ Thus, Freud's theory developed the misconception that all women should be able to achieve sexual pleasure, or an orgasm, through vaginal intercourse with a man. Because of this notion, women who were unable to achieve orgasm through heterosexual coitus were viewed as flawed or suffering from sort of physical or psychological impairment.²¹⁹ This sexual "flaw" has generally been defined by men as frigidity, or the failure of women to have vaginal orgasms.²²⁰ As Anne Koedt points out in "The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm," instead of tracing female frigidity to false assumptions about the female anatomy, medical "experts" have declared frigidity a psychological problem of women and is diagnosed as a failure to adjust to their role as women.²²¹ Further, because there is such a strong cultural emphasis on intercourses that is deeply entrenched in society, physicians and their patients do not question their diagnosis, let alone the fact that women should be receiving sexual pleasure purely from vaginal intercourse.²²² Because Freudian concepts of sexual pleasure are embedded in society, people are reluctant to challenge the hypothesis that

Freud's theory of the female sexual development, by which the female is supposed to pass through a stage of "clitoral" sexuality, and then to "outgrow" it, is a myth.

²¹⁸ Rachel P. Maines, *The Technology of the Orgasm: "Hysteria," The Vibrator, and Women's Sexual Satisfaction*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University press, 1999), 50.

²¹⁹ Maines, 6.

²²⁰ Anne Koedt, "The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm," CWLU Website Archives, accessed February 7, 2013, <http://www.uic.edu/orgs/cwluherstory/CWLUArchive/vaginalmyth.html>.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Maines, 112.

penetration of the vagina to reach male orgasm, and falsely female orgasm, is the only kind of sex that matters.²²³

However, despite the popular belief orgasm for women is achievable through vaginal coitus, there is evidence that suggests that the clitoris, not the vagina, is the main source of female sexual pleasure. In 1953, Alfred Kinsey published a study of human sex behavior. This study consisted of 15 years of research and was intended to extend knowledge in an area in which scientific information appeared to be limited.²²⁴ According to this study, it was found that there are many women incapable of maximum arousal unless the clitoris is sufficiently stimulated.²²⁵ Out of the 5,940 white females who participated in the study, 98% responded to the stimulation of the clitoris as opposed to 11% to 14% of women who responded to stimulation inside the walls of their vagina.²²⁶ Kinsey also discovered that 84% of the women who had ever masturbated depended on clitoral techniques:²²⁷ even the effectiveness of masturbation involving direct penetrations of the vagina depended on the fact that the base of the clitoris, which is located in the anterior wall of the vagina, was most likely being stimulated by the penetrating object.²²⁸ As Gerhard nicely summarized, Kinsey also claimed that the vagina does not have the endowment of nerves to make it the center of female sexual response, unlike the clitoris, which is the center for female orgasm.²²⁹ These findings counter Freudian thoughts about female sexual pleasure by demonstrating that the main source of pleasure and thus an orgasm in women is indeed located in the clitoris, not the

²²³ Maines, 116.

²²⁴ Alfred C. Kinsey, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*, (Philadelphia: Saunders, 1953), 3,7.

²²⁵ Kinsey, 574.

²²⁶ Kinsey, 577.

²²⁷ Kinsey, 158.

²²⁸ Kinsey, 575.

²²⁹ Gerhard, 58.

vagina. Koedt argues that the reason this had been ignored in the past is because women have been defined sexually in terms of what pleases men.²³⁰ Vaginal penetration is the preferred physical stimulation method for the penis, as the women's vagina provides the necessary friction and lubrication for a penis.²³¹ Further, because the clitoris is not necessarily stimulated during conventional coitus, its importance is ignored.²³² The only purpose of clitoral stimulation was believed to make a woman naturally lubricated for vaginal intercourse, not to help achieve orgasm.²³³ Ignoring the significance of the clitoris is what oppressed women. They were willing to sacrifice their own sexual enjoyment in order for a male to reach orgasm as well as not to burden them with the requirement of clitoral stimulation.²³⁴ Therefore, just as sexual oppression by men was epitomized in the act of penetration, the assertion of female sexuality and liberation came to be epitomized in the pleasure of the clitoral orgasm.²³⁵ Additionally, though it was found that the clitoral stimulation is needed for women to achieve orgasm, men continue to choose to maintain the "myth of the vaginal orgasm." Men fear that they will become sexually expendable if the clitoris is substituted for the vagina as the center of sexual pleasure for women because their penis, the center of their masculinity, will no longer be required to help them reach orgasm.²³⁶ With this new knowledge, women would be able to pleasure themselves through masturbation either on their own or with another tool, such as a vibrator. Thus, women would be in control over their own sexual pleasure rather than men.

²³⁰ Koedt, "The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm."

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Hawkes, 157.

²³⁴ Maines, 116.

²³⁵ Hawkes, 163.

²³⁶ Koedt, "The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm."

Throughout every single one of the 72 issues sold from last six years, *Cosmopolitan* made sure to pay special attention to content surrounding sexual pleasure for men and women. However, based on my analysis, I have found that the majority of the content surrounding sexual practices actually favor sexual pleasure for men rather than women. In issues from the past six years, articles promoting female sexual pleasure appeared 57 times. Out of these articles, 25 were related to women reaching an orgasm. Articles promoting male sexual pleasure, on the other hand, appeared 86 times: that is 29 more articles promoting sexual pleasure for men instead of women. Out of these 86 articles for men, only 7 specifically mentioned men reaching orgasm, which is 18 less than those for women.²³⁷

Though the female orgasm is mentioned in articles more than the male orgasm, the only reason is that, based on the content read, it is assumed that men will reach an orgasm almost every single time he is sexually pleased by a woman. The majority of the sexual content for men involves sex and vaginal penetration by the penis, which almost always results with ejaculation and orgasm. The other content that did not directly mention an orgasm was related to foreplay, normally through oral sex or touching the penis, which one can assume will lead to either an orgasm directly. An example of this can be seen in an article in the January 2007 issue titled, "The Surprising Touch He Craves" with the tag line "You stroke and fondle, but there's one other randy move that your main squeeze (hint!) would love you to try." This article is all about places to squeeze on a man in order to stimulate pleasure for them and how to properly do it.²³⁸ Another similar article can be seen

²³⁷ Note: For these statistics, the articles promoting sexual pleasure for either males or females were either actual articles or articles consisting of multiple tips written by experts or submitted by *Cosmopolitan* readers. Individual tips or small blurbs relating to sexual pleasure placed throughout the magazine were not included in this data.

²³⁸ Molly Triffin, "The Surprising Touch He Craves," *Cosmopolitan*, January 2007, 108.

in the April 2007 issue, titled, “Make Him Shiver With Pleasure” with the tag line, “One of the sexiest sensations? Tingly touches. These electrifying moves will have him quivering and quaking.” Tips in this article include using items such as ice cubes and cinnamon lube to stimulate his sensations as well as putting a mint in your mouth before giving oral sex or clawing at a man’s chest to stimulate him physically.²³⁹ These are just two examples of articles that appear repeatedly in every issue of *Cosmopolitan* throughout the last six years.

Additionally, articles that included sex tips sent in by men promote sexual pleasure for men. In an article in the May 2008 issue, one male reader submitted, “‘If a girl pins down my arms with her hands while she rides me, I feel like a rock star. It’s like she needs 100 percent of my penis, with no interruptions allowed.’”²⁴⁰ In an article in the September 2012 issue titled, “25 Moves He Wishes You’d Do,” more sex tips sent in by men promoting male sexual pleasure appear again. One tip printed states, “‘A twist on washing-machine sex: I sit on top, and you climb onto my lap and wrap your legs around my waist. That way, I get to experience the vibrations, too.’”²⁴¹ Another tip says, “‘It’s hot when a girl tells me when and where to climax. But it’s even more of a turn-on if you say something like, ‘I can’t wait to taste...’ Deep down, guys know semen isn’t appetizing, so we love it when you make us feel like it’s the best thing ever.’”²⁴² The latter type reaffirms the notion that it is expected men will orgasm when engaged in sexual intercourse. By stating he like it when a girl tells him where and when to climax, he is inferring that he will orgasm at some point during his sexual interaction with his female partner.

²³⁹ Elise Nersesian, “Make Him Shiver With Pleasure,” *Cosmopolitan*, April 2007, 150.

²⁴⁰ Murphy, “67 New Blow-His-Mind Moves,” 139.

²⁴¹ Azodi, 199.

²⁴² Azodi, 198.

Furthermore, the reason the female orgasm is most likely mentioned more often than a male orgasm is because it is more difficult for a woman to reach orgasm. As Gurley Brown summarizes to her readers in *Sex and the Single Girl*, Kinsey found through his reports that only 1/3 of women reach orgasm most of the time, 1/3 reach it half of the time, and 1/3 rarely reach orgasm.²⁴³ With this in mind, it is no wonder *Cosmopolitan* has a much stronger focus on the female orgasm. If it is more difficult for a woman to reach orgasm, then it is assumed it requires more practice and skill to achieve it. However, though *Cosmopolitan* does refer to the female orgasm, less than half of the articles surrounding female sexual pleasure relate to the orgasm. This is a problem because it is more difficult for a woman to achieve orgasm. With that in mind, not providing tips on how to specifically reach orgasm or directly referring to reaching female orgasm more in *Cosmopolitan* continues to oppress women sexually. By ignoring the female orgasm in more than half of the sexual related articles and alluding to the male orgasm in every sexual related article for them, *Cosmopolitan* is in turn ignoring the quest for female sexual liberation. Ignoring the orgasm, which is at the peak of female sexual pleasure, something equated with liberation and a route out of patriarchal repression of the body, in turn denies women their sexual freedom. As a result, this subordinates women.

To add to the concept of female oppression through the depiction female sexual pleasure in the magazine is the fact that almost every single time the female sexual pleasure or the female orgasm was indeed mentioned, it had some sort of relationship to a male sexual partner. Out of all of the articles relating to female sexual pleasure printed in the last six years, only six of them related to female sexual autonomy. Sexual autonomy is when a

²⁴³ Gurley Brown, 68.

person can please himself or herself without the help of another. Every other article printed either involved female sexual pleasure from having heterosexual, vaginal intercourse or from a male stimulating a female sexually in some way. This gives the men control over the sexual pleasure of their woman partner. Some examples of this can be seen in the March 2012 issue in an article titled, "50 Hot Sex Tips." In this article, women send in their own personal sex tips to achieve more pleasure for them and their men. One tip referred to as "The Double Dip" says, "'Instant O: I'm on my belly and he's on top of me, entering me from behind. Then he gently pulls my hair and sticks a finger in my mouth at the same time. It feels overwhelming in the best possible way.'"²⁴⁴ Another tip, called "The Pelvic Thrust," states, "'Tilt your pelvis down when you're in missionary. This forces your vaginal muscles to tighten, so you can feel every inch of his thrusts.'"²⁴⁵ These tips only depict women as having sexual pleasure when having heterosexual coitus. This perpetuates the "myth of the vaginal orgasm," as there is no mention of the clitoris in either tip. Another example can be seen in the December 2009 issue in an article titled, "Sexy Ways to Use a Vibrator With Him." In this article, the reader is told how to use a vibrator to give both her partner and herself sexual pleasure. Some suggestions given on how to use the vibrator to give the woman pleasure includes giving the man control of the vibrator: he can use it on the woman during penetration and he can also stick it inside her vagina to reach her G-spot while he gives her oral sex.²⁴⁶ What is especially interesting about this tip is that the man uses the vibrator on the woman. As Betty Dodson points out in *Passion & Power: The Technology of Orgasm*,

²⁴⁴ Carol Kylstra, "50 Hot Sex Tips," *Cosmopolitan*, March 2012, 166.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Heitman, "Sexy Ways to Use a Vibrator With Him."

the vibrator is a symbol of female sexual autonomy,²⁴⁷ as it is normally a device women use on them to receive sexual pleasure and achieve orgasm. Having the man in this tip use the vibrator on the woman implies even more so that women need men to provide them with sexual pleasure; this tip implies women are incapable of even using a device designed for their own personal use on themselves.

What is ironic about this is that *Cosmopolitan* recognizes the fact that it is difficult for women to achieve orgasm and that they require their clitoris to be stimulated in order to reach their “full” sexual pleasure potential. In an article printed in the January 2009 issue titled, “The Cosmo Climax Clinic” with the tag line, “Every woman has the ability to experience an orgasm each time she gets busy. But let’s admit it: Sometimes O Town is tough to reach. Here, a guide to achieving ultimate pleasure,” writer Bethany Heitman discusses the troubles women have when trying to achieve orgasm, saying they need to be both physically stimulated and in the right psychological state to truly let go.²⁴⁸ Further, Heitman acknowledges the importance of having the clitoris stimulated and that it is difficult for this to happen. She says that, though it might feel good when a “penis glides back and forth inside your vagina,” these motions alone probably won’t sexually stimulate a woman enough to reach climax because there is little or no stimulation of the clitoris, the real key to achieving “an O.”²⁴⁹ Despite the fact Heitman openly admits intercourse alone is not suitable for a female orgasm, she devotes the rest of her article to discussing different sex positions or things to try with a male partner to help increase the possibility to achieve orgasm. She then concludes the article by discussing a type of orgasm that is continuously mentioned

²⁴⁷ *Passion and Power: The Technology of Orgasm*, DVD, directed by Emiko Omori, (First Run Features, 2008).

²⁴⁸ Bethany Heitman, “The Cosmo Climax Clinic,” *Cosmopolitan*, January 2009, 84.

²⁴⁹ Heitman, “The Cosmo Climax Clinic,” 85.

throughout issues of *Cosmopolitan* during the last sex years: the blended orgasm. This orgasm combines both clitoral and G-spot stimulation.²⁵⁰ According to this article, and the many others that refer to the blended orgasm, the blended orgasm can be achieved through the woman stimulating their clitoris using either their fingers, or those of their male partner, as well as having their G-spot be stimulated by their male partner's penis.²⁵¹ According to Heitman, "Eventually, you'll be so overwhelmed by the two different sensations that you'll have to do both moves at the same time... and you'll experience fireworks like you've never imagined."²⁵² Only depicting the blended orgasm, the "ultimate" type of orgasm, as achievable with the penis supports Freud's concept of "penis envy," that women desire the penis. It further emphasizes the out of date stereotype that women require vaginal intercourse to reach orgasm. Though this article and concept of the "blended orgasm" does state that the women also need stimulation of the clitoris for orgasm, equating the ultimate type of pleasure achievable with the necessity of the penis tells readers they still need to be penetrated to reach the best orgasm possible. Also, though at times the female sexual pleasure discussed occasionally does not relate to vaginal intercourse, a male presence is still there doing the pleasuring "for the woman." This further indicates that a man is needed in some way to achieve pleasure, which counteracts the notion that women should be able to be sexually liberated autonomously.

²⁵⁰ Heitman, "The Cosmo Climax Clinic," 86.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Ibid.

Dating & Relationships

Coinciding with the fact women are being subordinated by only being able to truly have sexual pleasure with the help of men is the depiction of women in a heterosexual relationship. Throughout its issues, *Cosmopolitan* offers advice to women, and occasionally men, about how to find, attract, and keep a partner of the opposite sex. This includes what to look for in a partner, how to act around them and their friends, and explanations about why they may act the way they do. From my research, I found that in the last six years, there were 201 articles printed about what a man wants or does not want in a woman character-wise, most specifically to her behavior, and there were 57 articles printed about what a woman should or should not want character and behavior-wise in a male.²⁵³ Though *Cosmopolitan* is a magazine geared towards heterosexual women and should therefore have content relating on how to attract men, in order for the magazine to truly work for the benefit of women it should have an equal amount of content on what they should look for in men. Only focusing on what a male wants to see in a woman and not so much on what a woman should desire in a male implies that women should change and adapt their behavior to that of a man's desire; if they do not, they will not be successful in finding a partner. Further, providing information what a male does or does not desire in a female partner along with an explanation as to *why* places males on a pedestal and defends their behavior: it is as if *Cosmopolitan* is giving female readers excuses for the men. In contradiction, not presenting as much information on what a woman should want in a male also indicates that women should accept men as they are, no matter how they are treated by them or what their character is like. This sets a double

²⁵³ Note: For these statistics, the articles surrounding heterosexual relationships were either actual articles or articles consisting of multiple tips written by experts or submitted by *Cosmopolitan* readers. Individual tips or small blurbs relating dating and relationships placed throughout the magazine were not included in this data.

standard within heterosexual relationships: the woman must change and behave in certain ways to find a man, but a man does not have to change or act differently to successfully attract a woman. Depicting women as the sex that needs to be changed in turn indicates that they are flawed and therefore inferior to men.

This notion is clearly demonstrated throughout the issues of *Cosmopolitan* in 2007 through 2012. In the May 2007 issue, an article titled, “Things No Guy Wants to Hear” with the tag line, “Improve communication by skipping the subjects that make men shut down,” tell women what not to talk about with men in order to improve their relationship. The author, who happens to be a man, says women should never ask men how many women they have slept with (because there is no right answer), what “tomorrow is (because it puts men in panic mode, as they assume they forgot something, and not to gossip (because do not like to listen to it).”²⁵⁴ In an April 2008 issue titled, “50 Things Guys Wish You Knew” with the tag line, “Real men reveal the true thoughts about love and sex that they won’t always clue you in to,” readers are again told how to properly “talk” to men. One fact stated, “Ask me to do something for you and you’ll remind me that I’m a man. On the other hand, tell me how to do something and you’ll remind me of my mother.”²⁵⁵ Both of these tips tell women they need to change the way they speak to men in order to keep him happy. In the latter tip, women are essentially told they are not allowed to be in control of situations with men. Asking them to do something instead of telling them gives men control of the situation, as the men have the ability to choose to do or not do what they are asked. Telling them to do something, on the other hand, is seen as negative because men do not have the ability to say “no,” giving women control of the situation. Another article in the February 2010 issue titled,

²⁵⁴ Jon Wilde, “Things No Guy Wants to Hear,” *Cosmopolitan*, May 2007, 80.

²⁵⁵ Myatt Murphy, “50 Things Guys Wish You Knew,” *Cosmopolitan*, April 2008, 142.

“Why Guys Are So Bad at Picking You Up,” explains why some men are quiet, come off as cocky, or have trouble “breaking the ice” when talking to women. The author writes that men may have trouble talking to girls because they are flirtatiously challenged, they have been rejected, or were continuously “stuck in the friend zone.”²⁵⁶ Explaining why men act a certain way when trying to pick up women justifies their behavior and tells women they should be understanding of their trouble. The article goes on to say that men with the “least game” are the most worthwhile.²⁵⁷ This tells women that they should accept the faults of these men and should embrace this “flaw” instead of looking for a man that may be easier for them to talk to and come off the way they want them to. Unlike the other articles that imply women are flawed and need to change, this article tells women they should accept men and not accept them to change.

Depiction of Sexual Orientation

Another key component to the depiction of women in *Cosmopolitan Magazine* is their sexual orientation. According to Susan Driver, author of *Queer Girls and Popular Culture: Reading, Resisting, and Creating Media*, women’s magazines work as a site for shaping normative investments in heterosexual femininity.²⁵⁸ *Cosmopolitan* is one of these sites. Though it is not stated anywhere explicitly, it is clear through the magazine’s content that *Cosmopolitan*, as mentioned, is indeed aimed at the heterosexual woman. Throughout every single issue, women are discussed in terms of men: their sexual pleasure is by or with men

²⁵⁶ R. Deline, “Why Guys Are So Bad At Picking You Up,” *Cosmopolitan*, February 2010, 56.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Susan Driver, *Queer Girls and Popular Culture: Reading, Resisting, and Creating Media*, (Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.: New York, 2007), 129.

and their relationships are with males. Not one time was advice or information for a lesbian physical or emotional relationship mentioned in any issue analyzed of *Cosmopolitan*. Thus, as Driver writes, it seems paradoxical for lesbians to try to find traces of queer girl culture within a media text that continues to construct fantasy consumer cultures of straight girl etiquette and appearance.²⁵⁹ Therefore, lesbian women are not “invited” to read *Cosmopolitan Magazine* and are disenfranchised from the heterosexual community of women.

During the sexual revolution of the second wave feminist movement, the concept of lesbian experience as a social as well as sexual idea was established.²⁶⁰ As Hawkes writes, “only through lesbian existence could women be free to explore and take control of their own sexuality.”²⁶¹ This is because lesbians, or women who desire other women sexually and emotionally, completely cut off their ties from men, as they do not desire them, or their penis. Some feminist radicals saw lesbianism as not only a sexual preference, but also one of political choice in which every woman must make if she wants to end male supremacy.²⁶² Lesbian separatism, which began in 1971, was a way to establish an authentic connection between women and celebrate their bodies as unique and their sexuality as independent of needing genital sex with males.²⁶³ This threatened male supremacy as well as contested the Freudian view of women and the concept of “penis envy.” If a woman desired another woman, they did not desire a penis. This makes Freud’s theory, one of which *Cosmopolitan* adheres to an extent, completely void, as the penis becomes irrelevant. Furthermore,

²⁵⁹ Driver, 127.

²⁶⁰ Hawkes, 171.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² Rory Dicker, *A History of U.S. Feminisms*, (Berkeley: Seal, 2008), 93.

²⁶³ Gerhard, 154, 158.

choosing not to engage “naturally” in vaginal intercourse means lesbians are able to focus on the organ that can truly help them achieve orgasm: the clitoris. Reaching orgasm in a lesbian relationship continues to support the idea that a woman does not need a man, or his penis, in order to reach orgasm and be satisfied sexually. This makes men sexually expendable, as mentioned earlier in this thesis.

Therefore, *Cosmopolitan* does not include any form of lesbian culture because lesbians challenge the main message *Cosmopolitan* sends to readers: that they should continue to define themselves by the desire of men aesthetically, characteristically, and sexually. Interestingly enough, Gurley Brown did not want to exclude lesbians from *Cosmopolitan* when she first created the magazine. As she writes in *Sex and the Single Girl*, Gurley Brown that it was a shame lesbians had to be so surreptitious about their way of life.²⁶⁴ Unfortunately for Gurley Brown, her employers, which were men, at *Cosmopolitan* at the time of its transformation in 1964 would not let her include content about lesbians because of what they referred to as “taste.”²⁶⁵ This is most likely because, as explained previously, lesbianism threatens the power and superiority of men. Lesbianism sends the message that women do not need men to be satisfied, which is the opposite of what *Cosmopolitan* tells its readers. However, not including lesbian culture in the magazine contests the original aim of the magazines creation. As mentioned previously, *Cosmopolitan* was supposed to address the needs of thousands of women who grappled with outdated definitions of womanhood, femininity, sexuality, and sex.²⁶⁶ This definition implies that all women were supposed to be included in the magazine, not just heterosexual women. Because

²⁶⁴ Brown, 234.

²⁶⁵ Scanlon, 146.

²⁶⁶ Scanlon, 154.

the aim of the magazine was to cater to “women,” excluding lesbians from *Cosmopolitan* implies that they are not “true” women, as they are unable to relate to the practices that are needed to attract men.

Conclusion

When I first began reading *Cosmopolitan* in April 2008, I was extremely excited: not only was I learning about ways to please a boy sexually, something I greatly feared I would not know how to do, but I was also learning about ways to attract a man on both a physical and emotional level. I learned what types of clothes to wear, what types of things to say, what cosmetics to wear and how to get in shape, along tips to “blow his mind.” However, throughout the four years I spent being a dedicated, monthly reader, I never once stopped to think: *what about me?* Somehow amidst all of the sexually explicit images of women, all of the advice that were only there so a woman could find, keep, and please a man, and all of the tips about what sex moves one should do in the bedroom in order to give their male partner an amazing orgasm every time, I missed the fact that *Cosmopolitan* was not in fact catering to the empowered woman reader as I believed it to, but it was actually catering to men: their wants, their desires. However, because these messages are permeated throughout American society, women readers of *Cosmopolitan*, are unaware of their subordination because they have been conditioned her to accept their inferiority. That being said, *Cosmopolitan* continues to perpetuate the societal conditioning of female subordination through its sexual exploitation of women, depiction of beauty, thinness, and class, and messages about female sexual pleasure, sexuality, and role in heterosexual relationships.

This thesis found that *Cosmopolitan Magazine* subordinates women through sexual exploitation. The images, advertisements, and content in the magazine all contain pornographic that depict women as sex objects for men. The images put women under the “male gaze,” meaning they are put on display for men to view; the way women are portrayed

to men then dictate how men will treat them in the future.²⁶⁷ The images in the magazine, starting from the cover and moving right on through the end, tell men that they should sexualize women and treat them as sex objects. In these images, women's bodies are put on display. They wear tight, low cut, and normally short clothes that reveal their breasts and upper thigh. These women also appear happy and often are looking seductively at the camera, inviting men to come look at them. Having women present themselves in a sexual manner tells men they want them to look at them in that way. Also, the way women are posed affects the way men look at them. As Goffman states, having women posed lying down or in the "bashful knee bend" pose implies they have lack of power and are unable to defend themselves if attacked.²⁶⁸ This presents them as passive and powerless, indicating men are still the dominant ones in society.²⁶⁹ These poses paired with the sexual appearance *Cosmopolitan* gives women implies women want to be dominated during sex, leading to violence and rape. Because women are telling men this is what they want through these images, in the real world men believe this to be true. Captions that are often associated with these images support this notion, as they continue to tell men women want to be treated as sex objects based on the caption's wording.²⁷⁰

The domination of men over women continues to be displayed in the magazine through its article content and the sexual fiction stories that appear at the end of each issue. As mentioned in the last section, women are often depicted in the magazine as engaging in heterosexual coitus. Therefore, women are seen as sexual objects being penetrated by a penis. As Dworkin stated, in pornography penetration is dehumanizing to women and reduces them

²⁶⁷ Berger, 46-47.

²⁶⁸ Jhally, *The Codes of Gender: Identity & Performance in Pop Culture*.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Kilbourne, *Killing Us Softly* 3.

to a sex object.²⁷¹ Because in *Cosmopolitan* women are mainly seen as being penetrated when engaging in sexual practices, they are in turn being reduced to sex objects and are dehumanized. Furthermore, the majority of the tips, content, and fiction pieces subordinate women to the control of men. This concept is seen both through penetration in heterosexual coitus, but also through the sexual content surrounding sexual pleasure for men. In this content, women are told they are supposed to please men sexually along with advice on how to do it the way they want them to.

Further, *Cosmopolitan* defines female sexual pleasure as being associated with the help of men and that they should ultimately be more focused on pleasing men in bed. Sigmund Freud's concept of "penis envy" demonstrates the ways *Cosmopolitan* subordinates women through its discussions about sexual pleasure. "Penis envy" is a theory that states women desire a penis because they do not have one.²⁷² Thus, this desire places them as inferior to men. This theory also states that, after they hit puberty, sexual pleasure for women is transferred from the clitoris to their vagina.²⁷³ This combined with the notion that women desire a penis, which is designed to enter a vagina, implies that women can only receive sexual pleasure through heterosexual coitus. However, the Kinsey's reports found this notion is found to be false. Much to the contrary of this Freudian belief, Kinsey found that the clitoris has a greater amount of nerves for sexual pleasure than the vagina and is the center of the female orgasm.²⁷⁴ Despite this, as found in my analysis, *Cosmopolitan* still almost always depicts women receiving sexual pleasure through heterosexual coitus. Though it does have articles that reference orgasms for women more than men, they only do so because it is

²⁷¹ Dworkin, "Speech, Equality and Harm."

²⁷² Freud, 61.

²⁷³ Freud, 87.

²⁷⁴ Gerhard, 58.

harder for women to orgasm than men, especially during the heterosexual coitus. It is expected a man will orgasm during coitus because that is the societal norm. Further, almost every time sexual pleasure for women, including reaching orgasm, is mentioned, it involves the help of a man in some way. This means that there is very little discussion of women masturbating and sexual autonomy, thus implying women need men in order to be pleased sexually, much like the belief the Freudian concept of “penis envy” perpetuates.

The absence of homosexual representation is a form of female subordination. Though it may be argued that the magazine is aimed at heterosexual women and therefore this absence is okay, the fact that the magazine was created with the intention to address the needs of all women²⁷⁵ causes this absence to be questioned. Lesbians cannot relate to the content of the magazine because all of the content is created for heterosexual women and with men in mind.²⁷⁶ Furthermore, lesbian women are seen to be out of men’s control because they do not desire a penis. This challenges Freud’s concept of “penis envy” and therefore the idea that women are inferior to men because they lack a penis. In this sense, excluding lesbian women supports the idea that women should be kept in the domain of men.

Cosmopolitan continues to subordinate female readers through its depiction of beauty, thinness, and messages about how women act in relationships. Both the images and content related to beauty included in the magazine perpetuate Wolf’s idea of “the beauty myth,” or that there is a certain ideal of women that women want to have and that men want women to have.²⁷⁷ In *Cosmopolitan*, this beauty myth includes being thin and wearing cosmetics and clothing that are designed to attract the attraction of a man. Throughout the

²⁷⁵ Scanlon, 146.

²⁷⁶ Deline, 56.

²⁷⁷ Wolf, 12.

pages of the magazine, being extremely thin is presented to be desired and the norm. There is both content relating to exercise and size, as well as images of thin model everywhere a reader looks. This content and images tells readers that they must be thin, too. This evokes an obsession with thinness within the reader, potentially leading their own personal satisfaction of their body and potentially eating disorders.²⁷⁸ It also supports Foucault's idea about the body being docile: presenting the thin body as normal for women sends the message it is attainable for the women readers. This can lead to the disciplining of the body, including limiting intake and increasing exercise, to attain this ideal. Furthermore, the magazine presents a false notion that thinness is associated with health. This tells readers that if they are healthy, they will be thin and if they are unhealthy, they will be fat. Burgard tells us, this idea is incorrect as there is no correlation between health and weight.²⁷⁹ However, Burgard's message is not the one readers are getting. Instead, they are being told that if they are healthy, they should look as thin as the models in the magazine. Therefore, if a reader is healthy and not as thin as the models in the magazine, she will think something is wrong with her body. These feelings of self-hate keep women to be inferior and disempower them.

The content surrounding cosmetics and apparel also send messages about class and sexual desirability. The articles printed in the magazine relating to beauty are not there to make the women readers feel beautiful. Rather, they are there to tell women what to do in order to make men think they are beautiful through their clothing and cosmetics choices. This, just like with the content on relationships, tells women they are flawed in their natural state and should change themselves not for their own personal well-being, but for a man's attention. This content also relates to the concept of class. Most of the "ideal" items shown

²⁷⁸ Keel, 67.

²⁷⁹ Burgard, 42.

for reader's to buy in order to attract the attention of men are on the pricier side and are often juxtaposed with items on the cheaper side, referred to as "deals" and "steals."²⁸⁰ Though presenting items within different cost ranges does pertain to a variety of readers of different incomes, having the majority of the items shown be of a higher value and therefore the idealized items to have tells readers that, if they are unable to afford these items, they are not as "attractive" to men as the women who have the money to afford these items. This puts women on an uneven playing field and also implies that women need to be of a higher class to truly be able to attract men.

Cosmopolitan further subordinates women through their characteristic depiction. Throughout their relationship content in each issue, women are always being told how to act in order to find and keep a man. They are what to say or not say around them, along with what gestures they will or will not appreciate. This content implies that women should act and behave in ways that men prefer, not necessarily themselves. It tells readers that women are flawed if they do not act how men want them to and therefore should change themselves if need be. *Cosmopolitan* does not depict men in this manner, however. Instead, *Cosmopolitan* prints articles explaining why men act the way they do and offer ways for women to accept, adapt, and understand why men do or say certain things. Instead of implying that men need to change or act a certain way for women, these articles in a sense justify the behavior of men and expect the women to simply work around the behavior they may or may not like. Thus, *Cosmopolitan* tells readers that men should be accepted the way they are but women need to change, indicating they are the inferior beings.

²⁸⁰ Nelson, 95.

Overall, the *Cosmopolitan Magazine*, as seen in the analysis of the 72 issues from January 2007 to December 2012 continues to subordinate women. Throughout the magazines content and images, women are told they are flawed. In order to attract and keep a man, they must change both their appearance and their personality to fit what a man would like. They must be thin, wear cosmetics, dress for men, and have the money to do so. They must also accept the behaviors of men, while changing and adapting their behavior to please men. In the bedroom, women are told they should give men ultimate control and should focus on sexual pleasure for men, not themselves. Throughout this sexual content, women are reduced to pornographic sex objects that are passive and powerless, perpetuating ideas of violence and rape. Though these messages are in the magazine, women readers, like myself, do not always pick up on them. That is because all of these messages have already been conditioned in society, causing no one to question whether they are right or wrong. In order for change to be made for women, *Cosmopolitan* must do what it was originally intended to when it was revamped by Gurley Brown in 1965: it should promote ideas that sexually empower and liberate women, not men.

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