Mixed Signals: Sexuality in Men’s and Women’s Lifestyle Magazines

by

Gianna Palmer
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Introduction

“One is not born, but rather becomes a woman,” Simone de Beauvoir famously writes in *The Second Sex* (1952). "Son, this world is rough /And if a man's gonna make it, he's gotta be tough,” croons Johnny Cash in his 1969 country hit “A Boy Named Sue.” Gender roles and socialization have long been linked to one another. One need not look far when searching for societal models of what makes an ideal man or woman— media sources are saturated with gendered messages that reinforce these ideals. Among these sources are men and women’s lifestyle magazines, which are “almost unavoidable in every day life” (Ménard and Kleinplatz 2008: 2). Lifestyle magazines are defined as those which “contain a wide variety of features on everything from sex and relationships to vacation ideas, fashion tips, decoration and recipes” (Krassas et al. 753). These magazines reach millions of people, including not only their subscribers, but also those people who buy the magazines in bookstores, supermarkets and gas stations, and those who pick them up in medical waiting rooms and gyms (Ménard and Kleinplatz 2).

Like television, newspaper, radio and film, magazines are part of the mass media; they are aspects of daily living that their consumers generally take for granted (Clarke 2009). Though magazines are predominantly seen as a form of superficial relaxation and pleasure, they can serve as “a possible avenue of our understanding of sexuality and its changing meanings” (Clarke 416). Indeed, there has been extensive research done regarding the role of popular magazines in constructing sexuality and clearly defined gender roles.

Ménard and Kleinplatz (2008) argue that the high circulation of these magazines suggests they act as “cultural signposts” (2). These signposts, however, don’t read the same for men and
women. Benwell (2003) explains that there is a whole ethos of men and women’s lifestyle magazines that is entirely predicated upon the assumption that men and women occupy exclusive sub-cultures which are polarized in terms of values, behaviors and styles, and that such differences, whether emotional, linguistic or lifestyle, are entirely natural and essential (Benwell 17).

It is these differences, be they bogus or valid, that this paper seeks to identify. In this essay, I examine how men and women’s lifestyle magazines present gendered distinctions, both implicit and explicit, in regards to male and female sexuality.¹ In an attempt to address this broad topic, I begin by systematically selecting a small sample of men’s and women’s magazines, and then closely examining a commonly neglected aspect of these magazines: their covers. While the covers of magazines are often what initially attract readers to these publications, the visual and editorial content of magazine covers is virtually ignored in academic literature on gendered lifestyle magazines and deserves further investigation. Within this essay, I additionally analyze the editorial content within each of these magazines, specifically articles that reference sex, love, dating and relationships.

This paper argues that each of the magazines take a different approach in their presentation of gendered messages regarding sexuality. Though sexuality is an important aspect of each magazine’s cover design and headlines, as well as its content, the messages each magazines presents are not universal and in fact vary across the magazines and even within individual magazines themselves. Though the women’s magazines analyzed in this essay (Cosmopolitan and Glamour) are more comparable to one another than the men’s magazines I studied, they still differ in important ways. For example, upon close examination, Cosmo and Glamour cover models dress and pose in consistently different manners and are surrounded by

¹ For the purposes of this essay, I will assume a correlation between sex and gender.
cover headlines that emphasize different aspects of sexuality, from pleasing a man (Cosmo) to learning from a celebrity’s successful relationship (Glamour).

This essay also concludes that the men’s magazines in this sample, Maxim and Details, differ considerably from the approach taken by Cosmo and Glamour. Though neither Maxim nor Details offer the instructional sexual advice found in each of the women’s magazines, the messages they do offer about sexuality are quite different. Maxim relies on irony, near-naked female cover models and sexually-charged interviews with starlets to address men’s (hetero)sexuality. Details, with its male celebrity cover models, contains very little explicitly sexual content, but is riddled with conflicting clues about the sexual orientation of the audience it seeks to appeal to. Beyond the broad conclusions about the nature of the sexual messages put forth by each of these magazines, this essay argues that a close analysis of each of these publications reveals conflicting ideas about gender and sexuality in contemporary American society.

Background

Men's and women’s lifestyle magazines, as we understand them today, are a relatively recent phenomenon. Though Zuckerman (1998) traces the history of women’s magazines in the United States back to the 1700s, modern lifestyle magazines for young, single women did not appear until the latter half of the 20th century. In 1964, Helen Gurley Brown— author of the best-selling Sex and the Single Girl— took over the editorship of a waning Cosmopolitan, transforming it and the women’s magazine market. Gauntlett (2008) notes that Cosmopolitan’s “assertion of women’s right to enjoy sex, and to talk about it” was radical for its time, giving voice to ideas and perspectives that were previously absent from mass culture (57-58). Gauntlett explains that Cosmo spawned many imitators and variants, including Glamour.
In contrast, modern men’s lifestyle magazines originated from the iconography of the ‘new man’ of the 1980s and the ‘new lad’ of the 1990s.\textsuperscript{2} When the idea of the ‘new man’ entered public consciousness in the 1980s, cultural conceptions of masculinity were in a state of flux, partially due to the changes brought about by feminism. Definitions of the 1980s ‘new man’ differ, but using the descriptions offered by Gill (2007) and Edwards (2003) one can piece together a tentative definition of the ‘new man’: he is a progressive, sensitive, affluent, aspiring yuppie who is preoccupied with fashion and consumption. The question of sexuality in relation to ‘the new man’ is ambiguous, as he is “potentially new age, caring and loving, or even gay” (Edwards 139). The wave of men’s magazines that came about in the 1980s, which included titles like *GQ* and *Arena*, reflected these ambiguous ‘new man’ sensibilities. The men’s lifestyle magazines market at this time can be partially understood as an outcome of “the gradual transformation of the relationships between masculinity and consumption” (Gill 2007: 206).

The ‘new lad’ of the 1990s represented a backlash to both feminism and the ‘new man.’ Lad culture has been described as part of an anti-feminist attempt to solve the ‘crisis’ of masculinity it supposedly created. Laddism made its first big splash in the UK magazine market with the release of *loaded* magazine in 1994. Crewe (2003) writes that at this time, the new lad was depicted in British men’s press as, “unashamedly heterosexual, irreverent, often self-mocking, laced with innuendo, culturally referential and generally ‘blokeish’” (6). This new masculine script also included “the unashamed sexual objectification of women” (Gill 208). Eventually, this British phenomenon of lad magazines crossed the pond to inspire the launch of many American men’s magazines, including *Maxim*.

\textsuperscript{2} Though men’s magazines such as *Esquire* and *Playboy* predate the men’s lifestyle magazines launched in the ‘80s and ‘90s, they ultimately differ considerably from contemporary women’s lifestyles magazines, such as *Cosmopolitan* and *Glamour*, in terms of readership and content. See “Magazine Selection” for further explanation.
Literature Review

In *The Gendered Society*, Michael Kimmel (2008) identifies the media as a primary institution of socialization; like all such institutions, the media is deeply gendered (238). Indeed, men and women’s lifestyle magazines are, by definition, gendered. They are also widely acknowledged as important cultural texts. As Benwell (2003) explains, men’s lifestyle magazines are “both representative site[s] and mobilizing force[s] of crucial cultural shifts in masculinity” (7). Similarly, Gauntlett (2008) affirms that women’s magazines are “all about the social construction of womanhood today” (196).

The literature on lifestyle magazines is deeply divided about the gendered messages and meanings these magazines present. Kimmel (2008) notes that it has become “virtually axiomatic” in feminist literature that women’s magazines serve as a means of women’s oppression by constructing unattainable ideals of femininity and contributing to women’s second class status (243). Early scholarship on women’s magazines supports this assertion, most notably Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) which bemoans the image of women in these magazines as “young and frivolous, almost childlike; fluffy and feminine” and notes that “the only goal a woman is permitted is the pursuit of a man” (63).

In her seminal study of British and American women’s magazines, Marjorie Ferguson (1983) likewise notes that these publications present “a very potent formula indeed for steering female attitudes, behaviour and buying along a particular path of femininity,” that is wholly

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3 Though mixed messages and gendered stereotypes were implicitly categorized as negative and damaging in much of the literature, most evidence cited was correlational in nature. Several sources note that little to no experimental research has been done on the direct impact these magazines have on their readers (Ward et al. 2006; Taylor 2005; Ménard and Kleinplatz 2001). While I agree new research is needed to determine the degree to which readers are influenced by magazine content, this essay does not attempt to assess the influence magazines have on their readers. Though the impact of magazine content should not be underestimated, my own years of experience as a magazine reader support the sources I found which argue that consumers make active, selective readings, rather than passively taking in the messages of these magazines (Currie 1999; Gauntlett 2008).
distinct from masculinity and maleness (3). This view is corroborated by much recent scholarship as well. Carolyn M. Byerly and Karen Ross (2006) explain that nowhere are women more vulnerable to gender stereotyping than in women’s magazines, which they insist present an “entirely unreal construction” of passive female beauty (48).

While very few, if any, scholars would assert that women’s magazines are entirely praiseworthy, many sources are more positive in their assessment of these publications. Naomi Wolf (1997) argues that women’s magazines are the only products in popular culture that are “mostly written by women for women about women’s issues,” take women’s concerns seriously and adapt to changes in women’s lives (71). According to this logic, the changes wrought by second wave feminism would be reflected in women’s magazines. Indeed, Rosalind Gill (2007) asserts that rather than being incongruous with women’s magazines, feminism has actually very much informed contemporary magazines. Unlike the magazines Friedan assesses in The Feminine Mystique, all contemporary women’s magazines take for granted women’s right to combine career and motherhood, to receive the same wages as men, and to have access to safe, reliable contraception. As Gill notes, these ideas are now simply part of “the common sense of magazines aimed at young women” (199).

While women’s magazines are unlikely to be read as exclusively feminist texts, Fuehrer Taylor (2009) asserts that these magazines provide “a space for feminism and popular culture to cohabit” (220). Kimmel (2008) echoes this argument, insisting that women’s magazines offer polyvocality, that is, multiple voices and differing perspectives (245).

Men’s magazines are similarly contested texts. Many scholars have criticized men’s magazines as one-dimensional and ultimately misogynistic. Kimmel (2008) asserts that men’s magazines are, in contrast to women’s magazines, “about as monotonal as you can get” and take
an “all babes all the time” approach to their content (245). Gauntlett (2008) agrees that men’s magazines “rarely turn their back on their standardised model of masculinity,” but in contrast, denies that this model is necessarily problematic (143). He asserts that even “put-downs of women…are knowingly ridiculous, based on the assumptions that it’s silly to be sexist (and therefore is funny, in a silly way), and that men are usually just as rubbish as women” (Gauntlett 177).

Though Gauntlett was alone in his assertion that it’s funny to be sexist, many scholars did agree that many of the messages delivered by men’s magazines are sexist. Ménard and Kleinplatz (2001) observe that the advice given in both men’s and women’s magazines on how to experience “great sex” is riddled with gender-role stereotypes and is presented in ways that “reinforced narrow sexual scripts” (17). Other scholars have noted the pervasive use of irony in men’s magazines, especially when presenting arguably stereotypical and offensive content.

Jackson, Stevenson and Brooks (2001) assert that irony in these contexts should be seen as a tool that has been used to escape guilt or criticism. Irony, as they see it, can allow someone (in this case, magazines) to present “an unpalatable truth in a disguised form, while claiming it is not actually what [they] meant” (Jackson et al. 103). Often times, this irony is used to disguise what Taylor (2005) describes as “broad, stereotypical perceptions of sex as androcentric”) in his analysis of articles on sex in men’s magazines (162).

Taylor also considers that what is missing from these magazines is perhaps as relevant as what is present. He finds that neglected topics included: alternative sexualities (gay men, lesbians), risks associated with sex (pregnancy, abortion, STDs, HIV/AIDS) and how to prevent these risks (safe sex, condoms, vasectomy) (Taylor 2005: 159). Thus, while this paper includes a
quantitative analysis of what sexual topics are covered and how they are addressed, it also seeks to note what information and viewpoints are lacking from both men’s and women’s publications.

Beyond the stereotypical messages present in gendered magazines and the messages that don’t make it in at all, it is important to consider the contradictory and conflicting messages within these magazines, particularly in regards to sexuality. Ménard and Kleinplatz (2001) note, for example, that magazines tell women that to have better sex they need to become as comfortable with their bodies as men are, but also advise women that they should engage in specific heteronormative pre-sex preparations such as trimming their “south-of-the-border strands” (12). In a study of adolescent sexuality as it is presented in YM and Seventeen, Durham (1998) concludes that these magazines reinscribe so-called “dilemmas of desire” in which girls are encouraged to cast themselves as objects of male desire while being admonished never to succumb to that desire or to acknowledge their own desire.

The next challenge was to decide which magazines to examine for the aforementioned sexist, contradictory and/or neglected messages. When choosing which magazines to include in my study, it quickly became clear that the literature on men’s and women’s magazines offered no clear consensus on which lifestyle magazines are most comparable to one another and why. Ménard and Kleinplatz (2007), argue that it was not until the arrival of ‘lad’ magazines in the 1990s (such as Maxim), that a breed of men’s magazines was born that was more “comparable to women’s lifestyle magazines in that [it] contained a breadth of content related to fashion, grooming, pop culture, relationships and sexuality” (3).

In contrast, Krassas, Blauwkamp and Wesselink (2001) assert that comparable men’s and women’s publications date back to at least the 1960s and compare images featured in sample pairs of Playboy and Cosmopolitan magazines from four decades. In justifying this choice, they
point to the explicit lifestyle orientation and similar chronology and subscription figures of the two publications. Breazeale (1994) offers still another opinion, moving several decades earlier and arguing that as early as the 1930s, *Esquire* magazine drew upon lifestyle components (such as advice and commentary) found in women’s magazines and generally embraced “the women’s magazine formula,” albeit in an extraordinarily misogynistic manner (8-9).

Though choices of which publications to study differ, most studies of lifestyle magazine content select a sample of one or more magazines titles and analyze individual issues of these magazines from a pre-determined time period (Durham 1998; Garner et al. 1998; Krassas et al. 2001; Baker 2005; Taylor 2005; Farvid and Braun 2006; Machin and Thornborrow 2006; Ménard and Kleinplatz 2008; Clarke 2009)

Many of these studies also opted to code various aspects of the magazines they analyzed, from the article topics represented to the race of the models featured in the magazine. Coding was often done phenomenologically, or by drawing on coding categories from previous studies (Willemsen 1998; Baker 2005; Taylor 2005; Ménard and Kleinplatz 2008; Stankiewicz and Rosselli 2008).

While magazines are certainly experienced as “packages of meaning” that are devised by publishers and experienced by readers as a whole, this essay and most sources do not examine them, as Breazeale (1994) recommends, as “a system entire” (9). Instead, virtually all journal articles about lifestyle magazines focus on a particular aspect (photos, editorial features, etc) of lifestyle magazines, which suggests that magazines can and should be broken down into parts by researchers. This breaking down is useful in that it narrows the investigator’s analysis into a manageable research question.
Ménard and Kleinplatz (2001) identify three principal sources of sexual information within magazines: advertisements, photographic layouts and editorial content (3). Detailed research has been done regarding the visual content in magazines, including the visual content of advertisements (Goffman 1979; Reichert and Lambiase 2003; Baker 2005; Stankiewicz and Rosselli 2008) and photographic layouts (Krassas et al. 2001). Thus, I have included aspects of visual analysis in discussing the twelve magazines in my study, particularly in analyzing the cover design and content of these magazines.

My decision to analyze each magazine cover in my sample differs from previous studies, which largely ignore magazines’ covers and instead focuses on the visual and/or editorial content within magazines. Though Malkin, Wornian and Chrisler (1999) offer an analysis of men’s and women’s magazine covers, they do so with the goal of identifying gendered messages related to bodily appearance and analysis. In my own more broad analysis of magazine covers, I analyze both the images and headlines featured on each cover. I did not find this type of cover analysis in other academic literature on magazines. I do, however, use previous studies to create a system for qualitatively and quantitatively examining the covers in my sample. In qualitatively analyzing how each cover model is visually presented, I draw on the language and terms Goffman (1979) created in analyzing gendered print advertisements. To quantitatively analyze the cover headlines, I drew from Willemsen’s (1998) article topic coding system.

Beyond my cover analysis, I focus much of my analysis on the editorial content of the magazines in my sample. As one source affirms, it is the features, not the advertisements that sell lifestyle magazines (Krassas et al. 752). Consumers of magazines are called readers precisely because this is the primary way magazines are understood to be digested: by reading editorial content. Therefore, the second portion of this essay is largely focused on the editorial
content of men’s and women’s lifestyle magazines. My close analysis of editorial content is similar to many of the studies previously mentioned in that I choose a particular type of article to study (those related to sex, love, dating and relationships) and read each magazine in my sample with the intention of identifying themes and patterns within these articles.

My content analysis does differ from previous literature in several ways, however. To start, this particular sample of men’s and women’s lifestyle magazines represents a unique combination of titles *Cosmopolitan, Glamour, Maxim* and *Details* have not been examined together in a single study before. Furthermore, *Details* represents a magazine that has yet to be academically analyzed, period. Additionally, the particular issues of these magazines that make up my study (two from 2009, one from 1999) are a previously unexamined combination. Finally, my decision to focus on the celebrity profiles in *Maxim* represents a new approach to analyzing sexuality in men’s magazines.

Building on the various and sometimes competing theories regarding men’s and women’s lifestyle magazines, I began my research into the following question: how do the images and content on men’s and women’s lifestyle magazine covers differ, and what gendered themes and patterns, if any, exist in these magazines’ editorial content related to sex, dating, romance and love?

**Magazine Selection**

As previously mentioned, perfectly equivalent lifestyle magazines for men and women simply do not exist. Though gendered lifestyle magazines do exhibit considerable overlap in the broad categories covered by their content (such as fashion, celebrities and sex/relationships), certain topics appear exclusively in men’s magazines (such as cars) and others appear
exclusively in women’s (such as makeup). Another imbalance between men and women’s lifestyle magazines is that the sample pools for each are not equal in size. Despite the much-noted boom in the men’s magazine industry during the 1980s and 1990s, men’s lifestyle magazines never caught up to women’s in terms of the sheer number of publications in print. As a result, there are many more women’s lifestyle magazines published in the United States than there are men’s.

With these limitations in mind, I sought to examine the most popular publications that fit into the broad category of general lifestyle magazines for men and women. In choosing which two men’s magazines and which two women’s magazine to incorporate into the study, special attention was paid to each magazine’s editorial focus, readership demographics and circulation figures. In the interest of analyzing magazines with as broad an audience as possible, gendered lifestyle magazines with more specific focuses were eliminated as possible publications for study.

Magazines eliminated included *Lucky*, with its emphasis on shopping and *Men’s Health*, with its fitness-based content, as these publications are targeted at more niche audiences and therefore cannot be considered general lifestyle magazines. In the same vein, magazines aimed specifically at racial and ethnic minorities (such as *Essence* for African American women) and those geared toward people leading so-called “alternative lifestyles” (such as *The Advocate*, the gay and lesbian newsmagazine) were also not considered for study. So-called ‘top shelf’ men’s magazines that regularly feature nudity, like Playboy, were also eliminated, as there are no similar magazines for women of comparable popularity and cultural status.

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4 Ironically, even the most “general” of lifestyle magazines are actually marketed at a certain racial and sexual demographic. As I will discuss later, the magazines in my study proved to be implicitly aimed at attracting a white, straight audiences.
These aforementioned restrictions narrowed my study to gendered magazines with a more general lifestyle focus. To narrow the selection further, magazines were selected whose targeted readers are single, between the ages of 18 and 35 and who work outside the home (*Ulrich’s International Periodical Directory* 2006, *Details*: Circulation/Demographics). Lastly, the magazines selected for study were considered to be of comparable genres as they were all listed in the “Fashion and Lifestyle” section of *Magazines for Libraries*—a definitive source on magazines and their publishers that includes circulation and publishing statistics and a brief review of each title it features.

Circulation figures are essential indicators of a periodical’s popularity and include both subscription sales and newsstand sales. Lifestyle magazines with the highest circulation figures were picked for their demonstrated prominence among their competitors. Accounting for circulation figures easily determined which two women’s magazines to study, as there are two obvious industry leaders in the women’s lifestyle magazine industry. *Cosmopolitan*, with a circulation of 2,907,436 and *Glamour*, with a circulation of 2,389,915, outsold the next most popular women’s magazine by over half a million readers and were therefore the obvious choices of women’s magazines to study (*Cosmopolitan*: Demographic Profile 2009, *Glamour*: Circulation/Demographics 2009).

Circulation figures also helped in identifying the industry leader of men’s lifestyle magazines. *Maxim*, with its circulation of 2,500,000 (*Magazines for Libraries* 2005) is by far the most popular. Though launched in the United States in 1997, *Maxim* has comparable circulation numbers to *Cosmopolitan* and *Glamour*, which were founded in 1886 and 1939, respectively (*Magazines for Libraries* 2005). Known for its scantily clad female cover models, *Maxim* is the U.S.’s most popular magazine to come out of the new genre of lad magazines that emerged out
of Britain in the 1990s. Despite its high circulation numbers, Maxim’s newsstand sales would be higher were it not for the fact that Wal-Mart banned the magazines from its stores after it was deemed too racy in the eyes of many Wal-Mart shoppers (Carr and Hays 2003). Nonetheless, Maxim remains a clear leader among men’s non-pornographic lifestyle magazines.

Details was the fourth magazine included in the study. Besides Maxim, it was selected as the best example of an American’s men’s lifestyle magazine because of its varied editorial content covering common topics featured in lifestyle magazines—popular culture, sex, style and social issues. Though Details’ circulation of 440,841 is substantially lower than the other magazines in this study, this number is representative of the general status of men’s magazines, which have significantly lower circulation rates, on average, than women’s magazines (Details: Circulation/Demographics 2009).

Overall, choosing two men’s lifestyle magazines for study was significantly more difficult than selecting two women’s magazines. Though this is an intriguing finding in and of itself, and raises the question of why there is a bounty of comparable women’s magazines and not of men’s magazines, this study does not attempt to answer this question, and instead concerns itself with the cover and editorial content of Cosmopolitan, Glamour, Maxim and Details.

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5 Other men’s magazines—GQ and Esquire, for example—were not included in this study for a number of reasons. GQ, for example, has been described as “the leading fashion magazine for the American male,” which makes it more of a fashion magazine than a lifestyle magazine (Magazines for Libraries 2005). Esquire’s average reader is 43.6 years of age—considerably older than the average reader of the other magazines in this study. Additionally, Esquire was listed under “General Editorial” magazines, as opposed to “Fashion and Lifestyle” in Magazines for Libraries. This reflects the fact that Esquire’s content is broader and less lifestyle-oriented than Cosmopolitan, Glamour or Maxim.
Magazine Covers

“Nowadays, when the average time spent choosing a magazine and lifting it off the shelf is about three seconds, the covers make or break a magazine. You need lots of cover lines [- the phrases like ‘Great sex today!’ promoting articles in the magazine], and they all have to be compelling.”
– Liz Jones, editor of the UK *Marie Claire* from 1999-2001

Anyone who has ever browsed a magazine stand in the checkout line of a grocery store will not be surprised to learn that the covers of magazines are extremely important to their public image and sales (Gauntlett 197). The cover of a magazine is designed to attract readers, many of whom may not subscribe to that magazine, but may be in the position of choosing between several magazines at a newsstand. Lifestyle magazines don’t feature every article within the magazine on their covers—magazines editors instead select only a sampling of articles to highlight on the cover. In choosing which articles to feature on the cover, editors select the articles they believe will be most popular among potential readers.⁶

My study examines the content of these magazines, focusing on how they disseminate messages about gender and gender roles to their target audience of single, working men and women, age 18 to 35. To address these questions, two aspects of the magazines were investigated: the editorial content featured on covers and the language and messages implicit in actual articles themselves. My analysis begins with a quantitative investigation of topics featured on the covers of men’s and women’s lifestyle magazines.⁷

⁶ Because magazines derive most of their profit from advertising revenue, not newsstand or subscription sales, it is likely that magazine content is not solely the idiosyncratic choice of an individual editor, it also reflects assumptions about what will attract a particular audience. Indeed, editors must inform ad executives what consumer demographic their ads will reach. For these reasons, Gill (2007) sees magazine content as solely determined by ‘brute’ economic considerations (202).
⁷ See Appendix for lists of cover headlines by magazine title and issue, as well as scans of each magazine cover.
Methodology of Magazine Cover Analysis

Sample

Two relatively current issues (July and November 2009) and one older issue (November 1999) of each magazine were selected for inclusion in this investigation. The starting point of the content analysis was an examination of the photo and articles featured on the cover of each magazine. Only articles featured on the cover of each of these magazines were included in the quantitative analysis, on the grounds that the articles on a magazine’s cover should be considered of particular importance to that magazine. Because a magazine covers has limited space, the photos and articles featured on it are considered by the editor as the most likely to attract readers and convey the character of the publication. As Jackson et al. (2001) acknowledge, their research points to “the cover being the most important feature” in revealing the different identities of magazines (75).

As previously mentioned, the quantitative analysis and qualitative cover analysis that follow represent an approach that is distinct to my study.

Content Analysis

To develop the system of categorization of content, I started with the categories featured in Willemsen’s study (1998). Certain categories were modified (“Reports” became “Nonfiction Articles/Reports”) or removed (such as “Romance Fiction”) until most of the articles of the four magazines could be placed in a meaningful category. Unlike Willemsen, who used this coding scheme to do a full content analysis of the magazines in her study, I was concerned only with the articles featured on the magazine covers. Therefore, in coding I considered the raw number of
cover articles devoted to each topic, rather than the number of pages allocated to each topic as Willemsen did in her 1998 report.

When it seemed that a cover article could fit in more than one category, I turned to the actual article within the magazine to determine under what topic it best fit. I also used the table of contents of these magazines to help determine under what category contested articles fell. For example, the article “Great Skin! Your Dos & Don’ts at 20, 30, 40” in the November 2009 issue of *Glamour* was listed in the table of contents under the category of “Glamour Beauty,” so I put it under the category of “Beauty” rather than “Health and Other Information.” (Although is interesting to note that skin, the largest organ of the human body, was categorized by *Glamour* as an aesthetic concern, not a health issue.)

The results of my quantitative cover analysis are seen below in Table 1.

*Results*

**Table 1.** Number and Percentage of Cover Articles By Topic on 12 Magazine Covers *

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Women’s Magazines</th>
<th>Men’s Magazines</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex, Love, Dating, and Relationships</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>36.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Other Info</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrities, Stars</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonfiction Articles/Reports/Editorial</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beauty</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
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<td>Shopping Tips</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
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<td>44</td>
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</table>

*4 titles: *Cosmopolitan, Glamour, Details, Maxim*; 3 issues each
The results of the content analysis are presented in Table 1. It is obvious that the category of “Sex, Love Dating, and Relationships” accounts for the most important topics featured on the covers of *Glamour* and *Cosmopolitan* magazines, at nearly 40 percent of all articles. In men’s magazine’s, this was not the case, as this category was tied between the fourth and fifth most popular cover topics (at 13.1%). Instead, celebrities, nonfiction articles and hobbies (such as cars, music, food, sports and gadgets) were the most prevalent subjects featured on the covers of *Maxim* and *Details*. “Celebrities” made up 21.1% of the cover articles in these men’s magazines, while “Hobbies” edged out celebrities as the most popular topic at 23.7% of the cover articles. These findings on men’s magazines are in line with Willemsen (1998), who found that celebrities and hobbies were the most important topics in the Dutch teen boys’ magazine, *Webber* (856). Interestingly, there were zero cover articles relating to hobbies featured on the covers of either of the women’s magazines in this study. While *Cosmopolitan’s* July 2009 cover story, “How to Cut 100 Calories at Any Meal,” could arguably be placed under “Hobbies” as it relates to food, I coded it under “Health and Other Info” because weight loss, not cooking or enjoyment of food, was emphasized.8

**General Cover Observations**

Overall, the magazine covers in this sample present idealized, stereotypical images of youthful femininity and masculinity, primarily through their choice of cover models. Almost every cover pictures a slim, female celebrity shown from at least the hips up, though there were two in the case of the November 2009 *Maxim*. The notable exceptions to this are the two *Details*

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8 This could have also been coded under “Beauty,” as not all readers are motivated to cut calories (i.e. lose weight) because of health concerns; striving to be slim can also be considered an issue of vanity.
issues from 2009, which feature slim male celebrities from the shoulders up.⁹ (It should also be noted that media mogul Heidi Klum was not yet considered a true celebrity when she graced the cover of Cosmopolitan in November 1999.) In terms of editorial content, the covers in my sample feature between five and nine short headlines describing the articles inside the issue. These headlines vary in size, and tend to be larger and more prominent on the women’s magazine covers.

All female cover models are presented as normatively feminine and explicitly sexual. Their appearances are in keeping with the normative feminine look of a twenty-something ‘sex kitten,’ which differs from the maternal femininity found on the covers of Good Housekeeping, for example. Cover models in this sample display this overt sexuality primarily through their style of dress. Each female cover model has some amount of skin showing that would not be appropriate in a classroom or workplace. Most female cover models are shown in either a low-cut top or dress that showed substantial amounts of cleavage.

Both male cover models are dressed in masculine clothes and sport short, stereotypically masculine haircuts. Though cover model and singer Adam Lambert is presented in a somewhat feminine manner, as I will explain later, he still has visible facial hair, as does the other male cover model in my sample, actor Bradley Cooper.

Virtually all of the cover models, male and female, conform to the mainstream American ideal of beauty in terms of race as well. It has been documented that black women have been underrepresented in most mainstream media images (Baker 2005), and my findings support this. Most of the cover models were Caucasian, in line with Gill (2009) who claims that for the most part, these magazines, “construct an entirely white world” (200). One exception to this was

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⁹ To be fair, other Details covers from 2009 picture male celebrities from their hips up, posing with both arms relaxed at their sides. This is opposed to many of the female cover models in my sample who posed with their hands propped on their hips.
musician Mariah Carey, who is on the cover of the November 1999 issue of *Glamour*. Carey is half Irish and half African American, and has spoken openly about the difficulties she has faced as a mixed race person. It should be noted, however, that on the *Glamour* cover on which she is featured, Carey’s hair is long, straight and blond, and her overall appearance supports Baker’s (2005) hypothesis that Black women are frequently portrayed with European-like features, such as fair skin, a thin body and straight hair. Also arguably of note is *Cosmo’s* November 2009 cover model, Kim Kardashian, who is Armenian, Irish and German in heritage, but has been racialized as ‘exotic’ in the mass media. She, too, is portrayed in a commonly understood Caucasian manner. Of the six men’s magazine covers, Grace Park is the only non-Caucasian cover model. Park, a Canadian-American actress of Korean descent, is featured on the November 2009 *Maxim* cover alongside her blond *Battlestar Galactica* co-star, Tricia Helfer. It seems significant that of the men’s magazines in my sample, there is no non-white cover model pictured alone.

As Table 1 indicates, sex, dating, love and romance are consistently referenced on these covers, particularly on the covers of the women’s magazines in this sample. Often this is done explicitly (“Amazing Sex Every Time!” on the July 2009 *Glamour* cover), though sometimes non-sexual topics are presented in a sexual manner (For example, “Fashion Advice from Women? Clothes she’ll rip off you— with her teeth,” on the November 1999 *Maxim* cover).

**Cosmopolitan Cover Observations**

When asked to define the ‘Cosmo girl’, *Cosmopolitans*’ iconic longtime editor, Helen Gurley Brown, once replied, “She has always been sexy, slender and bosomy” (Rothenberg 1990). Indeed, every issue of *Cosmo* in my sample features a cover model with what Zuckerman
(1998) calls *Cosmopolitan’s* “trademark pose: a three-quarter shot of a beautiful model, showing a great deal of bosom” (226). Overall, *Cosmo* supports the stereotypical ideals of American female beauty through its covers.

The *Cosmo* models in my sample are shown smiling directly at the camera in short, tight dresses with their (large) breasts partially exposed. All models are thin and have straight or wavy hair that extends well past their shoulders. In contrast to other cover models in my sample, the *Cosmo* cover models’ faces are not tilted and instead face completely forward. All models also rest both of their hands somewhere on their body. This is done either by gripping their waist or hips, or by having one hand touching their thigh. The models who have one hand touching their thigh (in the case of reality TV star Lauren Conrad and model Heidi Klum), also simultaneously pull at the bottom of their dresses, thereby lifting them to reveal their inner thigh. Beyond the sexual implications of this pose, it is also a clear example of “feminine touch,” a phenomenon that Goffman (1979) observed in his analysis of over 500 advertisements. Feminine touch includes this type of self-touching, which Goffman said indicated that the body is a precious or delicate object (29-31).

In terms of editorial content, *Cosmopolitan* features by far the most sex, love, dating and relationship articles on its covers of all the magazines in this study. Correspondingly, in this sample of three issues of *Cosmopolitan*, the word “sex” or some variation of it appears in seven cover articles, as do other words related to sex or sexual desire, such as “crave” and “craving,” which appear on both the July and November 2009 issues. In general, the *Cosmopolitan* covers are more text-heavy than the men’s magazines in my sample.

Every *Cosmopolitan* issue also features at least one article on its cover that attempts to explain men’s thoughts or behavior. Examples include “What He Thinks During Sex,” “Foreplay
Men Crave” from the November 2009 issue, “4 Signs He’s Craving You” from the July 2009 issue and “The Cosmo Guy Test: 7 Simple, Sneaky Ways to Tell If He’s Falling Hard” from the November 1999 issue. This presents the idea of men as mysterious beings who need to be figured out by women. Several cover articles also focus explicitly on how to please men sexually. This is consistent with Garner, Sterk and Adam’s findings that teen magazines told girls that they should “focus primarily on understanding the ‘guy,’ and meeting or dealing with his constant sexual desire and readiness” (1998).

Lastly, in keeping with Helen Gurley Brown’s promotion of the ‘bad girl,’ the November 2009 Cosmopolitan features a stamp-like headline that says “Bad Girl Issue: For Sexy Bitches Only” at the top of its cover. This “bad girl” message is supported by a reference to cover model Kim Kardashian’s much-publicized sex tape.

Overall, these issues of Cosmopolitan support Fuehrer Taylor’s snappy observation that every Cosmo cover “features a beautiful young woman in an alluring pose and announces articles about great sex” (222).

**Glamour Cover Observations**

Like Cosmopolitan, all Glamour cover models in this sample are presented in a way that is consistent with stereotypical standards of female beauty. Every cover model is thin, attractive and exposes some amount of flesh beyond what would be considered appropriate in most public settings. The two Glamour covers in this sample from 2009 do deviate from Cosmopolitan, however, in that the cover models are neither wearing dresses nor are their breasts partially exposed. Though their sexuality is still apparent—Sandra Bullock (July 2009) is shown with her midriff exposed, while Scarlett Johansson (November 2009) wears a t-shirt with no pants—
appearance is much more casual than their *Cosmo* counterparts. Furthermore, though Mariah Carey (November 1999) wears a dress, she shows considerably less cleavage than any of the *Cosmo* cover models. Interestingly, all *Glamour* cover models are shown with their heads tilted to one side, in a pose that Goffman (1979) calls a “head cant.” According to Goffman, head canting is part of a ritualization of subordination typically seen in gendered advertisements, and can be read as an acceptance of subordination, submissiveness and appeasement (46).

In terms of editorial content, *Glamour* covers support the idea that a boyfriend or husband is the “route to happiness” and that having a man makes life complete (Gauntlett 2008). *Glamour* covers indicate that the magazine emphasizes relationships with men over sex. This fact was particularly supported by how the female cover models are described textually on the cover. Though all *Glamour* cover models in this sample are successful musical artists, actresses or both, their careers are never the sole (or even primary) focus of how they are described. Each celebrity’s relationship status is included in the written blurb about her on the cover. For example, Mariah Carey is lauded for her “New… Music, Movie, Man”, Scarlett Johansson is described as having “Hot Hair, Hot Husband, Cool New Life” and Sandra Bullock’s headline reads, “Sandra: On doing Life (and Marriage) Her Way.” *Glamour*, unlike *Cosmopolitan*, refers to each female celebrity by their first name only, in contrast to how their names appear in most professional contexts, such as in movie credits. This is presumably done to cast the celebrities in a familiar light, as if they were the reader’s “girlfriend.” By informally mentioning these celebrities by their first name only on its covers, *Glamour* ultimately deemphasizes the women’s professional accomplishments.

Though these *Glamour* covers portray heterosexual relationships with men as an essential component of women’s lives, the cover articles focus on sex and love more generally, with
articles on how to maintain healthy relationships with men and achieve female pleasure. Examples of this include articles such as, “The Best Make-It-Bliss Relationship Tips Ever” (November 1999), “Amazing Sex Every Time! Real Women’s Orgasm Secrets” (July 2009), and “Finally! Answers to All Your Questions About… sex and love” (November 2009). Headlines like these differ from the Cosmopolitan cover articles that focus on how to sexually please and/or try to understand the thoughts of men.

**Details Cover Observations**

Judging by its covers, *Details* appears to have undergone the biggest change of any of the magazines in my sample. In the late 1990s female celebrities were the typical *Details* cover models, whereas for the past several years male celebrities have dominated the covers. This shift is consistent with one of the general ambiguities of *Details*— whether or not its readership is predominantly gay or straight. In this sense, *Details* stood in contrast to the other magazines in this sample, as it does not appear to be aimed at an exclusively heterosexual audience. The November 2009 issue is a fitting example of this uncertainty. Despite featuring a gay male celebrity as the cover model, the articles headlined on the cover address explicitly heterosexual topics. These include: “Why Jealous Girlfriends Are All the Rage” and a headline that alludes to a recent ‘cougar’ convention of older women interested in younger men. *Details* (unlike *Maxim*) also has headlines that refer to fashion and style features in a non-ironic way.

Even the only cover of *Details* in my sample to feature a female model, November 1999 cover, differs from the heteronormative script followed by the other female covers in my sample. On this cover, actress Robin Tunney is presented in a distinctly more natural way than other cover models in my sample. She wears a revealing tank top without a bra. In contrast to the
other cover models in my sample, Tunney is shown looking directly at the reader, neither smiling nor giving an overtly sexual gaze. She wears minimal makeup that allows her freckles to show. Though her open mouth is somewhat sexual, her overall facial expression appears almost inquisitive. Most notably, she has very short brown hair, in contrast to the other long-haired cover models in my sample. Tunney is shown sitting on the ground (presumably outside) amidst green foliage and is not actively striking a pose (such as a hand on a hip) as all other female cover models in my samples do. By sitting on the ground, she assumes a recumbent position that Goffman (1979) would argue renders her subordinate and “very dependent on the benignness” her surroundings, as she would be unable to physically defend herself while sitting (41).

The July 2009 issue is the most heteronormative of the *Details* covers in my sample. It features Actor Bradley Cooper who is pictured looking stereotypically masculine. He is shown at close range, from the shoulders up. His appearance is relaxed and casual—he is unshaven, smiles directly at the camera and sports an unbuttoned shirt that reveals his chest hair.

As previously mentioned, the November 2009 *Details* cover is the only magazine in my sample to feature an openly gay cover model, in the form of *American Idol* Season 8 runner-up, Adam Lambert. Lambert is shown casting a ‘smoldering’ gaze into the camera. He is pictured from the shoulders up. His presentation is somewhat feminized—he cants his head considerably and sports an earring, visible hair product and even eyeliner. A hint of black nail polish is visible on one of his fingernails. In the photo, Lambert rests his face lightly on his hand, thereby self-touching in a way that is consistent with Goffman’s (1979) previously discussed notion of “feminine touch.” This feminine presentation of a gay man adds to the theory that *Details* likely has and seeks to attract a (partially) gay readership.
Maxim Cover Observations

What distinguishes *Maxim* from the other magazines in this sample was that the women on the covers reveal by far the most skin of any of the other cover models. Kimmel (2008) laments that *Maxim* makes “every magazine’s cover a wet T-shirt” contest (245). While none of the cover models in my sample appear to be at all damp, they are shown with their entire midriff and various parts of their breasts exposed. One model appears to be wearing a thong. None are smiling and all wear expressions that suggest sexual desire. The postures, facial expressions and amount of skin shown on *Maxim* covers reflect “the male gaze” (Mulvey 1975) and present these women as ‘sex objects.’ I used Stankiewicz and Rosselli’s (2008) definition of women as sex objects, which states that a woman is defined as a sex object if her sexuality is being used to sell a product. Admittedly, using this definition would mean that the female cover models from the other magazines in my sample should also be considered sex objects. However, because *Maxim* cover models are presented in the most overtly sexual way, I would argue that they are the most archetypal examples of female sex objects of all the cover models in my sample.

Judging by the November 1999 cover of *Maxim*, it would seem that the typical *Maxim* reader is virtually indistinguishable from what Gauntlett (2008) describes as the typical British ‘lad’ magazine reader—a “twentysomething, beer-drinking, football-loving, sex-obsessed male stereotype” (168). In fact, the November 1999 *Maxim* cover features a banner that says “Sex•Sports•Beer•Gadgets•Clothes.” As if this headline combined with actress Jennifer Love Hewitt in a bikini top and leather pants isn’t enough of an indication of who the intended *Maxim* readership is, directly underneath the title “MAXIM” it says “FOR MEN” in smaller, all capital print.
The *Maxim* issues from 2009 highlight the cover models more prominently by employing a relatively small, unobtrusive typeface. The November issue features actresses Park and Helfer in bikini-esque ensembles that expose their breasts from the bottom, while the July issue shows actress Olivia Wilde in a sheer, gauzy dress that showcases her nude silhouette. On these covers, Park and Helfer are described as “Battlestar Babes,” while Wilde is noted as “The HOT100 #1 Stunner.” The is consistent with what Gill (2007) observes in her analysis of a men’s magazine article: that women are not referred to as women, and readers are thereby implicated in a common ideology of sexism. This type of language invites “generalized identification” of women (214).

This ideology of sexism is complicated by the persistent use of irony as a literary device in men’s magazines, which I discuss in more depth in my textual analysis. This irony appears not only in articles, but on covers as well. Take, for example, a pair of headlines on the November 2009 *Maxim*, which read: “Auto Erotica: FIVE CARS YOU’LL NEVER Have” and “Our Usual Erotica: FIVE GIRLS YOU’LL NEVER HAVE EITHER.” On one level, it is easy to argue that these headlines are blatantly sexist. After all, they posit that it is possible to “have” (i.e. possess) the five “girls” (not “women”) in the same way that one might have the five cars. This implies male ownership over women and the commodification of the female body. On another level, the latter headline makes a joke of the unattainable nature of these women, who are presumably too attractive to see any romantic potential in the average *Maxim* reader. Gill (2009) notes that the use of this sort of “anti-heroic, self-deprecating discourse” makes critiquing any hegemonic representations of women more difficult (215). The use of irony allows *Maxim* to present ideas that might offend readers if taken non-humorously. As my close readings will reveal, this type of irony pervades the editorial content inside of *Maxim*, not just its covers.
Close Textual Readings: Sex, Love, Dating and Relationship Articles

Methodology

Articles related to Sex, Love, Dating and Relationships was the most commonly featured topic on the covers of these magazines. With 21 such cover articles in my sample of 12 magazines, I chose articles of this nature were selected for close readings. Beyond quantitative rationale, however, the choice to examine articles related to sex and relationships stems from an acknowledgement of the importance of sexuality in contemporary culture. As Gauntlett (2008) writes, “sex is at the heart of identity today” and therefore the discourses of magazines “make knowing one’s sexual identity of crucial importance to inner happiness” (133).

In my analysis of editorial content related to sex, sexual health, dating, love and relationships, the same 12 issues of Glamour, Cosmopolitan, Maxim and Details were used. However, all articles in the magazines on this topic were surveyed, not simply those featured on the cover. To support my findings, I include excerpts and analysis of articles that relate to each theme discussed. These are excerpts are included within the body of my analysis, and in the case of women’s magazines, I use Farvid and Braun’s (2006) technique of including illustrative extracts. These illustrative extracts are useful in analyzing Cosmopolitan and Glamour due to the sheer quantity of articles devoted to sex and dating in these magazines. These extracts include information about the source (Glamour or Cosmo), date of publication, title of articles and sex of author F (female), M (male) or U (unknown).

To begin, I will examine how the two women’s magazines in this study, Cosmopolitan and Glamour, approach editorial content relating to sex, sexuality, sexual health, love, dating and relationships.
Close Readings: *Cosmopolitan* and *Glamour*

On the whole, *Cosmopolitan* and *Glamour*, which are similar in terms of circulation and readership demographics, are not identical in the way their editorial content addresses sex and romance. Though both magazines devote much of their content to articles on these subjects—each issue in my sample featured at least six articles that fit under the “Sex, Love, Dating and Relationships” category established in my coding of cover articles—overall, *Cosmopolitan* features substantially more sex and love editorial content than *Glamour*, particularly in the issues from 2009. For example, the July 2009 issue of *Glamour* contains 11 pages of romance-related content, while the July 2009 issue of *Cosmo* features 38 such pages.

The actual sex and romance content (as opposed to the amount of this content) in *Glamour* and *Cosmo* was fairly similar, however, and covered topics ranging from suggested sexual positions to tips on how to get a boyfriend to forgive you in a fight. All articles assume readers to be engaged in heterosexual experiences of dating and romance, as evidenced by the frequent use of male pronouns to describe readers’ sexual partners.

Another defining attribute of these articles is the way in which they assume prior existing gender differences. *Glamour* and *Cosmopolitan* tend to posit men as having different needs and wants than women. These differences are essentialized as natural. Feminist theorist Judith Butler (1999) attributes this emphasis on the differences between men’s and women’s sexuality to “the heterosexualization of desire [which] requires and institutes the production of discrete and asymmetrical oppositions between ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’” (23).

The tone of the sex and love articles in *Glamour* and *Cosmopolitan* is striking, and stands in contrast to the ironic tone so frequently used by the men’s magazines in this study. The *Glamour* and *Cosmo* articles on sex and dating assume the voice of a friendly, sympathetic
‘girlfriend.’ Wolf (1997) asserts that the voice in women’s magazines encourages trust and has “evolved a tone of allegiance to the reader, of being on your side with superior know-how and resources” (74).

Articles on sex and dating in these magazines tend to be explicit, specific and instructional. Many of these articles also implicitly posit that sex will take place the context of an ongoing relationship. “The 1-2-3 Plan for an Amazing Orgasm” in the July 2009 issue of Glamour is an archetypal example. In this short article, ob-gyn Hilda Hutcherson, M.D. provides readers with variety of instructions for how to increase the chances of having an orgasm. These “very simple steps” include placing a heating pad on the pelvic area to stimulate blood flow “down there,” straightening legs during sex and panting to increase arousal (while making sure not to hold one’s breath). This article is exemplary in that it gives doctor-approved, step-by-step guidelines on how to achieve sexual success, which is defined as achieving an orgasm. Other ‘experts’ cited frequently in these articles include authors of pop psychology and self-help books. Reader polls and individuals’ opinions are also often presented in sex and dating articles, allowing readers to compare their sexual habits and opinions to other ‘real’ people.

Though the articles on sex and romance in Cosmopolitan and Glamour posit a man and a woman in a monogamous, committed, heterosexual relationship I also found less normative sexual scripts in every women’s magazine in my sample. Unlike Taylor (2005), I found that these magazines repeatedly mention alternative sexual practices, possible risks associated with sex and instructions on how to prevent these risks. These include passing references or entire articles devoted to: oral contraceptives, condoms, abortions, rape, HIV/AIDS, masturbation and
“taboo” sexual practices such as masturbation, casual sex, bondage and older women sleeping with younger men.

The most notable exception to these expanded sexual scripts was the absence of non-heterosexual relationships. Gay and lesbian people are rendered completely invisible the pages of these magazines, with the exception of the November 1999 issue of *Cosmo*. In this issue, two articles feature readers who are anxious about the possibility that they might be gay. One woman explains, “I secretly wear my boyfriend’s jockstrap when he's not around. Does this mean I'm gay?,” while another (male) reader asks, “My favorite sex position is doggy style. Does this mean I'm really gay?” In both instances it is implied that homosexuality is feared and less preferable to being heterosexual.

Along these lines, breaking from normative gender roles is also stigmatized in these magazines. This is very evident in a one-page feature from the July 2009 issue of *Cosmo*, “Girlie Habits Guys Keep Hidden.” Beneath the headline a subheading reads, “Sure, they watch sports, grow bad facial hair, and fix stuff — but men also tap in to their feminine side. They’d just rather die than admit it.” The rest of the page is filled with testimonials from eight different men who admit to ‘girlie habits’ such as using Lip Smack pink lemonade lip-gloss and enjoying Pilates classes. Though the tone of this feature is lighthearted and even somewhat ironic, the overall message speaks to the importance of maintaining what Butler (1999) calls “intelligible genders.” Butler asserts that intelligible genders “institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire” (23).

Beyond these basic observations, *Cosmopolitan* and *Glamour* exhibit other sexual themes, many of which seemed to clash. Within each issue in my sample — and often even within individual articles — a variety of competing views on dating and sexuality are presented.
By presenting multiple views, the magazines convey a preference for at least a limited degree of multivocality, but in doing so, they avoid offering a single, coherent conclusion about the topics they address. Gauntlett (2008) echoes this in noting that, “Close analysis of particular bits of a magazine often … come unstuck because overall the magazines are contradictory and do not convey one single message” (165). Indeed, several prominent and often conflicting themes and messages emerge in articles on sexuality and dating in Cosmo and Glamour.

One message found more often in Cosmo than in Glamour, is what Durham (1998) refers to as the idea that women be “sexually active in the service of men” (24). Cosmo headlines that exemplify this message include: “Give Him the Sex of His Dreams: The Amazing Middle Eastern Technique That Will Actually Double His Pleasure” and “Foreplay Men Crave: Touch His Secret Erotic Spot (Surprise: It Doesn’t Rhyme With Shmenis)” from the November 1999 and 2009 issues, respectively.

At the same time, sexual pleasure for women is also portrayed as critical in both Cosmo and Glamour. While Garner, Sterk and Adams (1998) argue that female sexuality as it is represented in teenage magazines leaves little space for young women who might want to learn “to please themselves or teach men how to please them” (75), this is not entirely the case with the articles in my study. Instead, my findings are consistent with those of Farvid and Braun (2006), who assert that women in magazines are represented as sexually active with “the right to desire sex and experience sexual pleasure” (299).

This was especially true in the case of the 2009 issues of Cosmo and Glamour, which posit that female sexual pleasure may come from a variety of sources, be it a man, the woman herself, or both:
...you’ll stop waiting, like some damsel in distress, for a guy to magically unchain your pleasure. Turns out, of course, that you are your very own knight in shining armor, and this is your road map to a happy ending.  
---*Glamour*, July 2009, *yes! (oh, yes!) real women tell their orgasm secrets*, F

New research shows that yoga can heighten arousal... and make it easier to orgasm. With our tips, you can skip the class and go straight to bed.  
---*Cosmo*, July 2009, *Yoga Tricks That Help You Climax* F

No matter how much you love your guy, you should never settle for action that’s less than amazing— especially since improving it is totally within your power.  
---*Cosmo*, July 2009, *Great Relationship but Sucky Sex?*, F

*Make some noise.* Men like to know they make you feel good [...] and it lets you proclaim power in your own pleasure.  

Beyond seeking sexual pleasure, readers are also encouraged in these articles to be proud of the sexual prowess they’ve already developed. Women’s power, it seems, can be attained through their sexuality. Machin and Thornborrow (2006) explain that sex in women’s magazines is often presented as “a set of skills and techniques to be learned” (185). By learning these skill sets, readers are assured they will reap pleasurable and empowering benefits. The issues of *Cosmo* and *Glamour* in my sample thereby construct “fictionalized worlds of sexual power” (Machin and Thornborrow 185). Examples of this include:

Want to blow his mind and multiply his moans? Our easy orgasm intensifiers will give him twice as many reasons to worship the ground you walk on. . . Just by showing your guy a little sure-to-wow know-how, you can double, triple, quadruple his pleasure—and his enduring appreciation.  
---*Cosmo Nov 1999, Double His Pleasure*, F

Let’s stop that double standard here: I say it’s fine to be proud of our sex appeal and share the brilliant moves we’ve developed in bed.  
---*Glamour November 2009, The Sex Thing I Do Best*, F
Despite the aforementioned examples of women as sexually confident and empowered albeit in the service of exciting and pleasing men, a competing theme emerges in Cosmo and Glamour. Women frequently are posited as insecure about everything from their appearance to their sexual performance. Several articles on sex and dating in my sample cast women as worried about being ‘normal’ with regards to sex, relationships and sexual communication, among them:

Feature: “Are You Normal About Dating?”
---Glamour, Nov. 2009, U

“How can I feel less body-conscious when I’m on top?”
“I get off on being loud in bed. How can I do it without sounding scary?
“Does a guy care if my labia aren’t a perfect pair?”
---Cosmo, July 2009, 100 Naughty Sex Questions (Answered in 20 Words Or less), F

“As a sex counsel and educator, I’ve talked to hundreds of gorgeous women who lack the confidence to initiate sex, to ask for what they want in bed, to be touched where they think they’re ‘fat’ or even leave the lights on.”
---Glamour, Nov. 2009, How to Have Confidence in Bed, F

Furthermore, many of the instructional dating articles in my sample seem to suggest that women are prone to making dating mistakes and sexual errors. These types of articles on dating seem almost encouraging of the female insecurities mentioned previously. Indeed, Farvid and Braun (2006) assert that certain types of advice in women’s magazines “situates the female readership as simultaneously potentially unknowing and as needing to know about the [mysteries of] male sexuality” (300).

Articles of this nature include:

Article: The Six Worst Things You Can Say to a Guy
---Cosmo, Nov. 2009, F
Article: 10 Things Guys Wish You Knew
---Cosmo, July 2009, M

So what's the trick to keeping your approach smelling sweet? Don't be so overeager that he feels ambushed, suggests Josey Vogels, author of Dating: A Survival Guide From the Frontlines.
---Cosmo, Nov. 1999, Do You Give Off Skunk to Guys?, F

The Glamour and Cosmo issues in my sample are largely consistent with the literature that argues that men are presented in lifestyle magazines as “wild, aggressive and animalistic in their sexuality” and in a state of “constant sexual desire and readiness” (Ménard and Kleinplatz 2007; Garner et. al 1998). This is particularly evident in the November 1999 issue of Cosmopolitan in my sample. While it is true that across many different studies and measures, men have been shown to have more frequent and more intense sexual desires than women (Baumeister et al. 2001), men in Cosmo and Glamour are often presented in a one-dimensional, sexually fanatic light. Examples of this include:

Though men have an intense hunger for sex, they know there's no such thing as a free lunch. There's usually a catch to any good deal, which is why even though he's thrilled to have sex with you, his mind may be otherwise occupied with visions of the dreaded postcoital C words: cuddling, clinginess, and (gulp) commitment. […] Yes, when it comes to sex, guy do have a one-track mind: We want it. […] For men, having sex is better than a steak dinner, two cigars, a bottle of Scotch, and a pay-per-view championship bout.”
---Cosmo, November 1999, What He’s Thinking During Sex, M

MORAL OF THE STORY: No man will ever turn down the chance to watch (or, better, reenact) porn.
---Glamour, July 2009, How to Talk to a Guy About Anything, F

*Hey, guys, what makes you grateful for women? “ That’s an easy question. Breasts. And the rest of the body that carries them around.” –Andrew Pullinger, 26
---Glamour, November 2009, glamour asks, men answer, U
Men are also presented on various occasions as inept at and resistant to communication. This is consistent with a longitudinal study of teen magazines that found that men are portrayed as lacking relationships skills and unable to express themselves verbally or emotionally (Garner et. al 1998). These difficulties are attributed to natural gender differences. In my sample, this was particularly true of the way men were presented as primitive people in *Cosmopolitan*:

> Unlike women, men aren’t natural communicators and are less likely to confess something intimate or embarrassing  
> ---*Cosmo*, November 2009, *What He’s Really Thinking During Sex*, M

Trying to understand a guy based on the sounds coming out of his mouth can be more baffling than analyzing an episode of *Lost*. To find out what he’s really thinking, switch our strategy to something snakier (and far more effective): reading his body language.  

Of course, that does not mean you want to confront him all of a sudden with the big Relationship Talk. Men would rather be condemned to a football season without beer and buffalo wings than be with with a surprise where-do-we stand? pop quiz.  
---*Cosmo*, November 1999, *The Cosmo Guy Test*, F

Another message these articles deliver is that of the vulnerable male ego, which women are instructed to tread carefully around. Farvid and Braun (2006) also note the presence of this message in their study of *Cleo* and *Cosmo*. “The idea of a fragile male ego and sexual sensitivity were framed as significant for men (and, by implication, for women),” they note (304). In these articles, women are instructed to avoid bruising men’s delicate self-esteem and encouraged to boost their egos whenever possible.

Examples of this include:

> …most guys tie up a huge part of their self-worth in their finances, so criticizing his money-handling abilities is, to him, the same as calling him a loser”  
> ---*Cosmo*, November 2009, *The Six Worst Things You Can Say to a Guy*, F
Men simply love to problem-solve, especially for women…it makes them feel helpful and powerful
---Cosmo, November 1999, Do You Give Off Skunk to Guys?, F

Let him know you’ve checked out his body. Unlike you, men actually tend to not mind feeling objectified.
---Glamour, July 2009, 9 Things He Wishes You’d Do on a Date, M

Despite the notion of the uncommunicative, egotistical male that is alluded to in many Cosmo and Glamour articles, a more ambiguous message about male sexuality emerges alongside it. Men are also portrayed as the mysterious, bewildering ‘Other.’ Many articles on sex and dating are offered to help readers deduce unpredictable male behavior. The Cosmo issues from 2009 include a ‘Man Manual’ section with tips on how to ‘figure out’ men. One feature in the ‘Man Manual’ was titled “The Guy Report” and offered a variety of articles including, “What his Shopping Habits Say About Your Relationship” and “Why He… Needs So Much Personal Space.” Similarly, the Glamour issues from 2009 has a feature called “glamour asks, men answer,” as well as the long standing dating column written by “real, live single guy,” Jake. Other articles devoted to decoding the male mind (and body) include:

Multi-page feature: “What He’s Really Thinking?”
Section titles include: “Your burning questions: Is he looking for just a hookup---or more?, Does he want to be exclusive?, Is he in this forever?
---Cosmo, July 2009, M

Guys’ heads are hard to crack. So Cosmo editor Ky Henderson offers some insight into his baffling gender.

Penis as “the most mysterious part of the male anatomy”
---Glamour, Nov 1999, The Glamour His Privates Poll, F

Finally, it is important to note that men were not entirely portrayed as sex-crazed, self-absorbed commitment phobes. More respectful attitudes toward women were presented in these articles as well. For example, in the November 2009 issues of Glamour several men were asked
the question, “What makes you grateful for women?” Ismael, 22, replied, “The woman in my life make sure I’m balanced and grounded. I’m so grateful for their existence.” Ismael’s response alludes to a final message presented in *Glamour* and *Cosmo* articles on sex, love, dating and relationships. Readers were encouraged to enter into mutually respectful relationships, and discouraged from jeopardizing their own health and well-being for a man. Examples of this include:

‘How to Ask Him to Put on a Condom’
…There is not a man on this earth for whom you should risk unplanned pregnancy or contract an STD.
---*Glamour*, July 2009, *How to Talk to a Guy About Anything*, F

It’s about forging a unique connection with a person you can count on and with whom you can be yourself.
---*Cosmo*, July 2009, *Can You Have More Than One Soul Mate?*, U

…don’t cut a partner too much slack. When in the name of love you try to accept and forgive what is unacceptable—violence, neglect, infidelity—you stop being in love and start being a slave.
---*Cosmo*, Nov. 1999, *Avoid Angst Irma’s 4-Point Plan. (for relationships)*, F

“There are two main components to a relationship: love and respect.”
---*Glamour*, Nov. 1999, *Sex Ethics*, F

**Close Readings: Details and Maxim**

Unlike *Cosmopolitan* and *Glamour*, the men’s lifestyle magazines in my study are distinctly different from one another in terms of their content. That two ostensibly male-oriented publications are far from interchangeable is not entirely surprising. Gauntlett (2002) affirms that, “talking about men’s magazines is made more complicated by the fact that the content of different titles varies considerably” (179). By considering the respective date that each of these
publications was launched, one can garner some clues as to why the publications’ treatment of
dating, relationships and sexuality remains very different today.

The first issue of *Details* was released in 1982, around the time the style-conscious,
slightly sexually ambiguous concept of the ‘new man’ was developing. In contrast, *Maxim* was
launched in 1997 and is in fact American spinoff of the original British *Maxim* founded in 1994.
*Maxim*, in both its American and British forms, is part of the “hedonistic, libidinous,
postfeminist” lad culture of the 1990s (Benwell 49).

The origins of these magazines are still apparent in their content today. *Maxim* features
many photos of near-naked women, as well as articles on cars, sports and entertainment. The
average issue of *Details*, in contrast, has several narrative non-fiction articles, several pages of
male style advice and fashion photo spreads, and at least one longer article about a male
celebrity. Though *Maxim* and *Details* do address a few common topics, such as food, they do so
differently. The November 2009 issue of *Detail* introduces readers to “under-the-radar red
wines” and an “upgraded” French onion soup recipe — a distinctly upscale approach. In contrast,
the July 2009 *Maxim* features an article called “How to: Grill Like a Gangsta,” with barbecue
advice from rapper Rick Ross. Ross, who is shown wielding a rack of barbecued ribs,
demonstrates expertise in one of the only cooking rituals commonly understood as masculine in
contemporary American culture — grilling.

In terms of their editorial treatment of sex, dating, love and relationships, *Maxim* and
*Details* are similar in some, though not most, respects. To start, they both eschew the type of sex
and dating articles that fill the pages of *Cosmopolitan* and *Glamour*. In general, neither the
*Details* nor *Maxim* issues in my sample feature the type of instructional sexual content found in

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10 In fact, none of the literature I read confirmed that *Details* has been commonly linked to the notion of the ‘new
man.’ However, my analysis of the magazine’s content will show that it is in fact quite representative of ‘new man’
iconography.
women’s magazines, such as articles on sexual positions and techniques, or how to have ‘the best
sex ever.’ While *Maxim* and *Details* address readers as friends to create “a sense of mediated
intimacy” between writers and readers, these magazines are simultaneously very careful to avoid
talking down to their readers (Jackson et al. 76). They thereby avoid calling into question men’s
supposedly “natural” sexual abilities. The lack of instructional articles on sex and dating is also
consistent with the ironic tone these magazines adopt. This type of irony makes straight-forward
sexual advice seem too “preachy” (Stevenson et al. 120).

Though there were articles that explicitly address sex and dating in the men’s magazines I
analyzed, particularly in the November 1999 issues, for the most part these were few and far
between. Because articles explicitly about sex and dating were so infrequent, especially as
compared to women’s magazines, I decided to scour the rest of the content in the *Details* and
*Maxim* issues in my sample. In doing so, I was able to find sexuality addressed in a wider range
of articles in both publications. Though these articles would not have been coded in my cover
analysis table as “Sex, Love, Relationship” articles, they do discuss sexuality in a number of
ways, and were therefore included in this analysis.

While *Maxim* and *Details* do, in fact, address (and allude to) sexuality in their editorial
content, they take distinctly different approaches. For example, sexuality in *Maxim* is most
consistently presented in articles that would have been coded as “Celebrities, Stars.” Generally,
this sort of article is in the form of an interview with a young, beautiful starlet. Without fail, the
interview transcript is accompanied by several photos of the celebrity in various stages of
undress. These photos are a staple of *Maxim*’s content, which is known for featuring “nearly
naked starlets, models, and other assorted hotties, all suggestively posed” (Gauntlett 244).
While these photos are the most obvious expressions of sexuality in *Maxim*, the corresponding interview with the starlet often includes questions about her sexuality and personal life. For example, in the July 2009 issue of *Maxim*, singer/actress Christina Milan is confronted with this question: “You’re in the latest *Bring It On* film. Did you use the cheerleader outfit as a turn-on for your boyfriend?” Similarly, in the November 2009 issue of *Maxim*, a feature on actress Béatrice Rosen introduces her as “Bruce Wayne’s arm candy in *The Dark Knight*” and has her share some of the “more memorable firsts” in her life. The body of the article— which is very small in comparison to the two nearly full-page sexual photos of her— is comprised of several short paragraphs where Rosen describes her “First Love Triangle”, “First Topless Scene,” ‘First Coed Shower” and “First Broken Bone” (which a fellow actress accidentally gave her while filming a scene). The Milan and Rosen articles are evidence of a larger trend in *Maxim*: starlet articles sexually objectify female celebrities not only in sexual photo shoots, but in related interviews as well.

These *Maxim* articles also frequently offer dating advice by asking female celebrities what they are looking for in a boyfriend. A November 1999 *Maxim* article on model/actress Lorri Bagley concludes with her addressing potential suitors: “Make me laugh and be honest. Just be comfortable with your own masculinity. Open the door for me, pay for dinner, and tell me I’m beautiful—if you really believe it.” Though this dating advice was woven into a formally written article on Bagley, the transcript-style articles in *Maxim* achieved the same effect by directly asking female celebrities for dating dos and don’ts. In an interview in the November 2009 *Maxim*, actress Navi Rawat is asked: “Can you educate us about approaches that absolutely would not work on a beauty such as yourself?” In the same vein, the November 1999 *Maxim* cover model, actress Jennifer Love Hewitt, is asked: “Is there a pick-up line that would work on
In the July and November 2009 issues of Maxim there is also an “Ask a Hot Bartender” feature, in which a young, attractive female bartender is pictured and asked questions such as, “What’s the best way to hit on a girl at the bar?” Their bartenders’ replies are instructive and specific.

In contrast with the male writers who author the majority of Maxim’s editorial content, women tended to author Maxim articles specifically about sex and dating. In a July 2009 Maxim feature called “Ask the Dating Gamer,” readers wrote in with their relationship quandaries to “video game vixen” Jessica Chabot. Chabot's answers to the questions she receives are biting and self-consciously comical. In one reply, for example, she writes, “Grow some man-meat under that Johnson of yours, stand up, and ask that damn chick out!” Chabot’s responses are consistent with the “semi-humorous, ironic tone” typical of advice given in men’s magazines (Jackson et al. 130).

The July and November 2009 issues of Maxim also feature a regular column known simply as “Sex.” In each of these issues, a female author writes “Sex”. In July 2009, the column is called “Riding Out the Recession” and the author writes the upside of the economic downturn is that “women are horny as hell” and “are sleeping with men they wouldn’t have looked at twice before.” In November 2009, “Sex” is titled “Have Condom, Will Travel” and extols the sexually adventurous spirit that comes with being on vacation.

Overall, by offering sexual and dating opinions, advice and reassurance from women—both in interviews and in editorial content written by women—Maxim effectively avoids the ‘too preachy’ route of offering sexual advice from male writers to its readers. Gauntlett (2008) notes

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11 As if to add to the hedonism associated with Maxim’s ‘laddish’ ways, there are also columns with the same style of headers that are called “Food” and “Sports.”
12 This is one of the few times contraceptives were mentioned in any of the men’s magazines in my study, albeit playfully.
that writers anticipate that many men may reject serious articles on relationships or advice about sex and dating. However, this does not mean they do not want advice about these areas—otherwise, why would magazines continue to publish features on sex? Proving men’s interest in these areas is difficult to prove, he notes, as men are not eager to admit their curiosity on these matters. Receiving sexual advice risks leaving men feeling patronized or inadequate (Gauntlett 177).

Whereas openly addressing insecurities is the status quo in women’s magazines, doing so in men’s magazines could pose a threat to readers’ masculinity. As Hörschelmann (2005) explains it, there is a “demand on men to be rational and unemotional” (139). Furthermore, Potts (2002) notes that heterosexual men are commonly positioned as ‘naturally’ knowing “sexperts-the masters of technique- in sexual encounters (91). In other words, men are simply expected to perform sexually, not spend time gathering advice from other men. By allowing beautiful women to do most of the talking about sexual matters within its pages, Maxim has found a loophole that allows it to ironically address male insecurities.

Women’s voices and sexuality are also employed in Maxim to address other subjects that are traditionally in opposition to masculinity, such as careful grooming. Grooming, as Edwards (2003) asserts, “remains in essence a phenomenon more associated with the feminine and femininity than the masculine and masculinity” (141-142). A November 2009 article in Maxim on personal hygiene features a prominent photo of a blond singer/actress gazing seductively at the reader while applying shaving cream with a brush onto her bare legs. She is shown sitting in a shower as water pours onto her. Beneath the title, “Smooth Moves,” a subheading reads: “Aubrey O’Day takes a break from ‘Peepshow’ — her sextravaganza burlesque revue at Planet
Hollywood in Vegas— to be your wet, naked guide to all things grooming. Get ready to moisturize!”

This tongue-in-cheek blurb is accompanied by multiple pages of sexual photos of O’Day accompanied by step-by-step instructions on shaving and applying aftershave, cologne and moisturizer. The article also recommends “Maxim-Approved” brands of these products. While selecting the perfect scent is not typically seen as the manliest of activities, the accompanying photos and advice from O’Day offer a way for Maxim readers to ‘safely’ learn more about grooming— that is, from a seductive woman.

Overall, Maxim’s laddish embrace of females as sex objects can be understood an attempt to navigate the changing terrain of modern masculinity. Beck (1997) explains that counter-modernity is that which absorbs, demonizes and dismisses the questions raised by modernity, positing a constructed certitude in its place. Because certitude is not a feature of modernity, it must be constructed. I would argue that Maxim’s lad culture constructs certitude in not by dismissing, but by circumscribing contemporary challenges to hegemonic masculinity. By actively avoiding these challenges (such as homosexuality, feminism, etc.) Maxim still, in a sense, acknowledges them. Consider this analogy: a driver who swerves to avoid oncoming traffic may not get hit, but the force of the sudden swerve is still proof of the threat. To avoid making any real changes to hegemonic, patriarchal scripts, Maxim relies on a constructed certitude of objectifying women and adopting an ironic attitude. Nevertheless, the underlying insecurities created by contemporary challenges to masculinity can still be gleaned through this constructed certitude.

Details, in contrast to Maxim, offers a relatively sparse selection of articles on sex, dating and relationships, particularly in the issues in my sample from 2009. Though the November
1999 issue has a multi-page article that surveys 100 women to see how their sex lives compare to *Sex and the City* characters, this seems evident of an earlier period in *Details*’s lifespan, the same period when women were still featured on the cover.\(^1\) In the issues from 2009, the *Details* articles rarely addresses sex directly, and never in a graphic manner. As compared to *Maxim*, the female celebrities that are interviewed in *Details* are more clothed and asked more questions about their music and acting careers.

Dating and sexuality are most commonly addressed in a handful of articles that I would code as Nonfiction Articles/Reports. In “Old Girls Gone Wild,” in the November 2009 issue, the author goes to a national ‘cougar’ convention, where he interviews older women who find themselves continually interested in dating younger men. In “The Greatest Virginity Story Ever Told” in the July 2009 issue, the author follows a sociable 21-year-old man with Down Syndrome to Las Vegas where he attempts (and fails) to lose his virginity. The November 1999 *Details* features an article on “Modern Love” in which the author accompanies five male and female Silicon Valley singletons— “whose social skills never quite made it to the prom”— on a group blind date arranged by dating service. These articles are all written in a similar style as the many other human-interest stories featured in *Details*. Though they address issues of sexuality or dating within them, they in the same vein as the *Maxim* articles’ graphic sexual imagery and references.

*Details*’ most distinctive quality, by far, is the sexually ambiguous nature of its content. Unlike *Maxim* (or *Glamour* or *Cosmo*) homosexuality is expressed repeatedly in its content, both subtly and explicitly. An article about personal finances contains an interview with 43-year-old

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\(^1\) The November 1999 issue of *Details* was published during the unsuccessful eight-month tenure of Mark Golin as Editor-in-Chief. Quite notably, Golin previously served as Editor-in-Chief of *Maxim*. *The New York Times* reported that Golin was dismissed from *Details* because he “did not mesh with the more rarified tastes of the Conde Nast culture” (Kuczynski C13).
Paul, who discussing his spending habits and explicitly references Paul’s [homosexual] ‘partner’ on three occasions.

The same issue of Details also interviews singer Adam Lambert, who discusses his experience as one of the only openly gay men in entertainment. Though nowhere does Details editorial content discuss same sex dating and relationships in an instructional manner, the Lambert interview is a good example of Details’ approach to non-normative sexual scripts. Lambert, who discusses being gay throughout the interview, is also touted for his apparent success in the heterosexual realm. The article opens with the question, “Why does every woman in America want to sleep with Adam Lambert?” It goes on to describe Lambert’s overwhelmingly enthusiastic fan base, particularly women who like to throw their bras at him on stage. Later, 15-year-old Jennifer is interviewed and sighs, “Adam Lambert is the perfect man.” In several of the photos that accompany the article Lambert is pictured with a naked female model, the only nude female in any of the Details issues in my sample. In one photo, Lambert and the model touch tongues; in another he grabs her breast and rests his head near her groin. In the last photo of the article he appears to be licking her nipple. “Yeah I am gay,” Lambert says. “But I like kissing women sometimes. Women are pretty.” Later in the article, Lambert’s road manager pokes fun of him for being ‘on girl time’ and taking a long time to get ready. “I like to get real pretty,” Lambert says. Lambert is presented as a sexual anomaly, as he is lauded for his appeal to women and his younger Cajun boyfriend.

The Lambert piece is exemplary of the way that Details content plays with sexuality — it is both presumably gay and reflexively heterosexual. Though in one article headline jealous girlfriends are called “the ultimate turn-on” (November 2009), and in another President Obama is said to have changed “the way we relate to our wives” (July 2009), these heteronormative
headlines seem almost humorous when considered alongside the homoerotic photos on the pages surrounding them. Though many of the advertisement pages feature effeminate-looking male models, a July 2009 clothing photo spread arranged by Details has a male and female model acting out the part of a young professional couple. In a less heteronormative turn, the same issue contains articles about designer shoes and lifeguard-inspired style. Yet in an article in which J. Crew’s creative director is interviewed, she addresses a distinctly heterosexual audience: “Women want a man who looks like he takes care of himself but doesn’t look like he thinks about it more than she does,” she says.

Though women are largely absent from the pages of the magazine, a November 2009 piece on male fertility makes them the butt of a sexist joke: “[T]he proverbial biological clock? That’s for the opposite sex to worry about — you know, like periods, frizz, and whether Mr. Big will dump Carrie in the Sex and the City sequel.” This hegemonically masculine remark is contained within the same issue as a six-part feature on the retail opportunities of the Lower East Side — which is praised for having “some of the most impressive French-terry-cloth hoodies this side of St. Tropez.” Thus, in numerous instances, Details very much disrupts the “relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice and desire” that Butler describes (1999:23).

Overall, of the two men’s magazines in my study, Maxim sits precariously in the anti-modernity of constructed certitude, while Details seems to delight in toying with gendered and sexually normative scripts.

Conclusion

Each of these magazines — Cosmopolitan, Glamour, Maxim and Details — offers many, often conflicting messages in relation to sex, dating, relationships and gender. Though these
publications are designed to entertain their readers, when examined carefully, they offer a great deal of cultural insight. As Gauntlett (2008) explains it, “the nuances of modern identity-seeking are being played out subtly in their contradictory and imperfect pages” (184).

As my cover analysis reveals, the contradictory and imperfect messages begin to play out before readers turn to the first page. While women are encouraged by _Cosmo_ covers to be “gutsy” and “fierce,” they are also assumed not to know the “things guys notice instantly” or what foreplay they “crave.” Likewise, _Details_ may feature a gay male celebrity on its cover, but it will just as soon mention its readers’ girlfriends and the strange appeal of older women who seek out sex with younger men. As Gauntlett asserts, the messages within these magazines’ pages tend to be complicated, and often conflicting.

With pages upon pages of sexual advice and instructions, _Cosmopolitan_ and _Glamour_ make it clear that women today must work hard at establishing their (hetero)sexual identities. As my quantitative analysis reveals, these women’s magazines devote much more of their content to sexual topics than _Maxim_ or _Details_ do. Though both _Cosmo_ and _Glamour_ encourage their readers to be confident and seek pleasure, they also offer countless instructional articles that implicitly suggest women are always at risk of doing something “wrong” in their loves lives.

Though he may not seem so at first, the _Maxim_ man is perhaps just as insecure as the average _Cosmo_ or _Glamour_ reader. _Maxim_, with its countless images of near-nude female celebrities, constructs a hegemonic model of masculinity that is surprisingly easy to unravel. _Maxim_ readers, much like the women who read _Cosmo_ and _Glamour_, are in fact curious and potentially unsure about what the opposite sex thinks. Though male _Maxim_ writers would risk deflating the male ego if they were to give straight-forward sex and dating advice, women (be they ordinary bartenders or lingerie-clad starlets) offer non-threatening opinions about
everything from how men should dress to how to ask a woman out. Maxim’s ironic tone allows the magazine to side-step many of the demands of second and third-wave feminism.

Details, the clear outlier in the magazines I studied, both in terms of circulation figures and content, is also the most ambiguous of all the magazines. To start, it is the only magazine in my sample that seems aware that heterosexuality is not the only type of sexuality there is. Though Details falls short of offering editorial content explicitly addressing gay men, its ads are often homoerotic, and it offers non-ironic style advice that would be shunned by typical macho publications, such as Maxim. Overall, Details’ covers and editorial content are sexually ambiguous to the core.

Despite their differing approaches, Cosmopolitan, Glamour, Maxim and Details each offer a valuable, albeit conflicting, perspective on what it means to be an American man or woman. In truth, if these magazines attempted to offer a single, unwavering perspective of gender or sexuality, they would fail to reflect the very real complexity of these subjects.
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Appendix
Cover stories featured in 12 magazines studied, as they appear on the cover.

A. Cosmopolitan Cover Stories

November 1999:
- Give Him the Sex of His Dreams: The Amazing Middle Eastern Technique That Will Actually Double His Pleasure
- The Cosmo Guy Test: 7 Simple, Snaky Ways to Tell If He’s Falling Hard
- Looking Sexier in Clothes: Take Our Tear-Our Color Cards Shopping and (Finally) Find the Perfect Hues for You
- Your Sexual Health: The Biggest Mistake Gynos Make With Young Women and How to Protect Yourself Now
- The Agony Issue!! Readers Confess Their Most Twisted, Titillating, Tawdry Problems—and We come to the Rescue
- Are You a Dating Disaster? 5 Habits That Can Drive Him Away
- Cosmo’s Confidence Course: How to Be the Fearless Babe Who Never Flinches

July 2009:
- Naughty Q&A: 100 SEX QUESTIONS: We Answer Every Dirty Thing You Want to Know—in 20 Words or Less
- VIRGINS IN COSMO! (We Though This Day Would Never Come)
- PLUS: Cut 100 Calorie at Any Meal
- 50 Summer Beauty Tips
- Lauren Conrad: The Real Reason She Left The Hills
- YOU ON TOP: The Fierce New Secret to Success
- 4 Signs He's Craving You

November 2009:
- WHAT HE THINKS DURING SEX: The Crazy, Dirty, Worried, and yes, Sweet Stuff That Goes Through His Head When You Two Get Naked
- 8 Things Guys Notice Instantly
- Mind Tricks That Melt Pounds
- Hot New Party Dresses
- Killer Cocktail: How a Popular Drink Could Kill You in Your Sleep
- The Silent Clue Men Give Off When They’re in Love
- Kim Kardashian: The Mistake that Still Haunts Her (No, Not the Sex Tape)
- Foreplay Men Crave: Touch His Secret Erotic Spot (Surprise: It Doesn’t Rhyme With Shmenis)
- 26 Gutsy Way to Make A Fresh Start
B. Glamour Cover Stories

November 1999:
- Bedroom Binoculars, Anyone? What You Can Learn from Peeking into Other Couples’ Sex Lives
- 105 Holiday Beauty Dos: You can Get Sexy, Gorgeous for Going Out (plus Don’ts)
- You 2000 Holy Horoscopes!: You’re Not Going to Believe What’s Brewing in Your New Year
- Exclusive Book Excerpt: Don’t Sweat the Small Stuff in Love: The Best Make-It-Bliss Relationship Tips Ever
- Psssst…12,878 Men & Women Respond to Our Secret Cyber His-Private-Parts Poll
- “I Faced Down My Rapist”: One Woman’s Brave Confrontation
- Down-There Health Scares: Doctors Eliminate Your Every Below-the-Belt Panic
- Mariah’s New…Music, Movie, Man

July 2009:
- GREAT HAIR! (In Under 5 Minutes) You Don’t Even Need a Blow Dryer!
- 356 Style Steals & Deals: Life Your Whole Life for Less—Save on Beauty, Fashion, Vacation, Even Your Bills!
- Sandra: On Doing Life (and Marriage) Her Way
- The Perfect Bra for Your Body: From AA to DD and Beyond...
- AMAZING SEX EVERY TIME! Real Women’s Orgasm Secrets [...
- 10 Things That’ll Put you in a Good Mood :)

November 2009:
- Great Skin! Your Dos & Don’ts at 20, 30, 40
- Finally! Answers to All Yours Questions About… sex and love
- We’ll Teach You to Be Rich: Any Woman Can Do It
- Scarlett: Hot Hair, Hot Husband, Cool New Life
- 50 Little Ways to Dress Your Body Sexier
- What Size Should Models Be? The Beauty Revolution Starts on Page 198
- plus: “The Thing I Do Best in Bed”: Naughty Ideas From our Favorite Experts—You!
C. Details Cover Stories

November 1999:
- 100 Women take an ex to Sex and the City (and tell you what really goes down in their beds)
- Where’s Kato? And what’s he doing with that bottle of shampoo? **
- Kill They Neighbor: Meet men who live and die by a 15th-century rule book
- HELL’S ANGEL: Satan’s got a crush on Robin Tunney in End of Days.
- You’ve got to get a Lomo… the camera that takes the world’s weirdest pictures: p. 140

July 2009:
- Bradley Cooper: That Guy From Wedding Crashers is About to Have Hollywood by the Balls
- The Sandwich You Have to Try
- How Internet Gambling is Keeping Wall Street Rich
- The Greatest Virginity Story Ever Told
- Summer Clothes You Can’t Live Without
- The Perfect Pair of Jeans
- The True Story of Teen Assassins
- Can Obama Make You Better in Bed?

November 2009:
- Adam Lambert: Idol Worship
- Why Jealous Girlfriends Are All the Rage
- The Second Coming of Pee-Wee Herman
- Check out the New Details.com
- We Went to A Cougar Convention [So You Don’t Have To]
- Are You Living Beyond Your Means? You’re Not Alone
- The Return of the Corduroy Suit
D. Maxim Cover Stories

November 1999:
• Special Section! Maxim’s 25 Coolest Cars
• THE ALL-SEX WORKOUT: Never go to the gym again!
• ESCAPE FROM DEATH ROW: Six men, one desperate plan
• FASHION ADVICE FROM WOMEN?: Clothes she’ll rip off you— with her teeth
• PLUS! Basketball fights, trick pool shots & the Bad Sex Award
• #1 Readers’ Choice: HOT LOVE!: Jennifer Love Hewitt’s exclusive Maxim shoot
• See her sizzle! p. 168 [next to Hewitt’s head, separate from the rest of article description]

July 2009:
• The Hot 100 #1 Stunner: Year One’s Olivia Wilde
• America’s Best Bikini Beaches
• The Real Stimulus Package: The Rise of Recession Sex
• The United States of Awesome!
  o Explosive 4th of July Fun
  o Ultimate Summer Concert Guide
  o Muscle Car Face-Off
  o Hot Grill on Grill Action

November 2009:
• $30 Million Ticket to Palookaville: The Biggest Blunders in Sports
• GUARANTEED! 10 Insanely Hot Girls Who Totally want You! (WELL, YOUR VOT, P. 36)
• Battlestar Babes Tricia Helfer & Grace Park Set Phasers to Sexy
• Auto Erotica: Five Cars You’ll Never Have
• Our Usual Erotica: Five Girls You’ll Never Have Either
Great Skin! Your Dos & Don’ts at 20, 30, 40

Finally! Answers to All Your Questions About...

sex and love

We’ll Teach You to Be Rich

What Size Should Models Be? The Beauty Revolution Starts on Page 198

plus

“The Thing I Do Best in Bed” Naughty Ideas From Our Favorite Experts—You!

Scarlett
Hot Hair, Hot Husband, Cool New Life

50 Little Ways to Dress Your Body Sexier

Glamour November 2009
Details November 1999

100 WOMEN
take an ax to
Sex and the City
(and tell you what
really goes down
in their beds)

WHERE’S
KATO?
And what’s
he doing with
that bottle
of shampoo?

KILL THY
NEIGHBOR
Meet men who
live and die by
a 15th-century
rule book

HELL’S
ANGEL
Satan’s got a crush on Robin Tunney in End of Days
Maxim November 1999

THE ALL-SEX WORKOUT
Never go to the gym again!

ESCAPE FROM DEATH ROW
Six desperate men, one desperate plan

FASHION ADVICE FROM WOMEN?
Clothes she’ll rip off you — with her teeth

PLUS!
Basketball fights, trick pool shots & the Bad Sex Awards

#1 Readers’ Choice
HOT LOVE!
Jennifer Love Hewitt’s exclusive Maxim shoot