

ADULT EDUCATION THROUGH MASS MEDIA:
WHAT POPULAR WOMEN'S MAGAZINES TEACH WOMEN ABOUT SEX

by

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(Under the Direction of Ronald M. Cervero)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to identify messages that popular women's magazines teach women about sexuality. Fundamental questions guiding this study were:

- 1) What are the sexual messages taught to women by popular women's magazines?, and
- 2) How do sexual messages vary by race and age of magazine audiences?

Data for this qualitative document analysis were collected from 16 issues of four purposefully selected popular women's magazines – *Cosmopolitan*, *Essence*, *More* and *O The Oprah Magazine*. Magazines selected represented various targeted audiences and provided opportunities to compare and contrast identified sexual messages regarding racial differences (Black and White) and age differences (20s-30s and 40+).

In the preliminary stage of this study, 12 peer reviewers provided feedback concerning identified sexual messages to help insure validity. From hundreds of advertisements and articles initially identified to contain sexual messages, 10% were randomly selected, along with all magazine covers, for in-depth analysis. Using a foundation of critical media studies and Altheide's (1996) model of Ethnographic

Content Analysis, sexual messages within 16 covers, 24 advertisements, and 38 articles were examined.

Sexual messages across all four magazines were found to be framed by five topics. From most commonly to least commonly used, these were: 1) Appearance, 2) Entertainment, 3) Performance, 4) Relationships, and 5) Health & Well-being. Each of these topics framed 11-15 sexual messages, including messages that were common to one or more frames. A number of similarities and variations were found when comparing magazines generally read by women of different races and ages. Issues of sexism, racism, heterosexism, and ageism were recognized and discussed.

Four conclusions can be drawn from the findings of this study. First, pervasive sexual messages throughout establish popular women's magazines as significant informal adult education teaching tools. Second, popular women's magazines reinforce societal hegemony regarding gender, race, sexual-orientation and age with their explicit sexual messages. Third, popular women's magazines reinforce societal hegemony regarding gender, race, sexual-orientation and age by excluding sexual messages in conflict with hegemonic norms. And fourth, global similarities among popular women's magazines' sexual messages are more powerful than their variations based on race and age of readership.

INDEX WORDS: adult education, informal adult education, critical media studies, critical media literacy, mass media, women's magazines, sex, sexuality, qualitative study, qualitative content analysis, document analysis, ethnographic content analysis

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to Jamie, my wonderful one,
and to Kinsey, my sweet punkin...three fingers.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

“Sex is like air; it’s not important unless you aren’t getting any.” ~ Unknown

The role of sex in human relations is vital, and yet human discourse around sexuality issues is historically taboo and controversial, especially in the United States. Unfortunately, myths and misinformation regarding sex thrive because so-called conventional wisdom permeates American society. Viney (1996) stated that, “as we grow up and we grow older the culture of our society is absorbed by all of us;” through conditioning and brainwashing processes, Americans “take in ideas and attitudes and make them our own” (p. 2). Taken-for-granted anecdotal assumptions abound regarding sex, and such suppositions offer a nice place to start asking questions.

*Jamie and Laura sittin’ in a tree, K-I-S-S-I-N-G!
First comes love, then comes marriage, then comes Kinsey in a baby carriage!*

From an early age, Americans learn traditional customs regarding relationships and sex. Even this elementary school taunting chant reinforces deeply-embedded Western cultural traditions in very specific heterosexual chronological order – fall in love, get married, and procreate. In this new millennium a large majority of Americans, for better or for worse, still follow the custom of marriage clearly outlined in this sing-songy children’s mantra. According to Rouse (2002), “all but about 5 to 10 percent of the population is expected to marry at some time, and we still look to marriage and family for personal fulfillment, companionship, children, sex, good health, recreation, and economic

assistance” (p. 6). But, not all married couples remain happily K-I-S-S-I-N-G. On the contrary, over half of marriages in the United States end in divorce (Rouse).

A study by the Creighton University Center for Marriage and Family found that married couples face serious conflicts over matters of time, money, and sex (Lawler & Risch, 2001). In brief, the couples’ sexual relations were among the top three issues of greatest concern. But it is imperative to note that, while sex is often closely tied to marriage in American culture, the importance of sexual satisfaction is not limited to married men and women. Rouse (2002) stated that sex is often viewed as a central aspect of all intimate relationships, and a recent study by Sprecher (2002) revealed that sexual satisfaction is linked to intimate relationship satisfaction outside of marriage for both men and women.

“A nymphomaniac is a woman as obsessed with sex as the average man.”
~ Mignon McLaughlin

Regardless of the empirically established link between sexual satisfaction and relationship success, double standards linger in our culture regarding women and sex, and American society habitually downplays the importance of female sexual fulfillment. According to Rouse (2002), American men and women have been socialized differently; while recognized as stereotypes, there is no difficulty matching supposed traits with their associated gender: men are insatiable, always ready, willing, and easily aroused; women are submissive, choosier, teasers, and can take it or leave it.

Many women are taught fairly consistent lessons, even from a very young age, about money and time management, two of the problems found to often plague committed relationships. Pink ceramic piggy banks fill with wisely accumulated allowances, teaching the importance of saving money, and elementary school agendas list

assignments and due dates, teaching the importance of organization and time management. Typically, young girls receive equally consistent messages about sexual relations – “Don’t! is what many of us were taught about sex” (Weingarten, 2005, p. 61). It becomes evident that, although sexual fulfillment is a vital aspect of marriage and other intimate relationships, it is often preceded by parental and cultural lessons inconsistent with adult realities.

In their study of sexual satisfaction in women, Bridges, Lease, and Ellison (2004) were guardedly optimistic as they explained that research in the past few years has become somewhat more attuned to the particular needs of women and their sexual concerns. However, the authors conceded that “much of this research has focused on the description and frequency of sexual behaviors, with little attention paid to subjective aspects of sexuality such as satisfaction” (p. 158). In recent decades, the separation of sex from procreation through reliable contraception has allowed for increased sexual activity without high risk of pregnancy; however, an increase in frequency has not necessarily led to an improvement in the quality of sexual satisfaction for women (Bridges et al.).

It appears that sexual satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, and overall contentment are dominoes lined closely side-by-side, dependent on the strength and success of the previous tile to remain upright. Given this precarious situation, the high divorce rate in America, and research indicating that significant numbers of Americans (married and unmarried) are dissatisfied with their sex lives (Laumann, Gagnon, Michael, & Michaels, 1994), it seems appropriate for adults, and especially women, to become better educated regarding sex.

*“I blame my mother for my poor sex life.
All she told me was, ‘the man goes on top and the woman underneath.’
For three years my husband and I slept on bunk beds!” ~ Joan Rivers*

Many researchers bemoan the lack of open communication in American culture around issues of human sexuality (Bridges et al., 2004; Coontz, 1992; Gudelunas, 2004; Kilbourne, 1999; Rouse, 2002). Gudelunas remarked that, even in the new century, sex is still discussed very rarely, at least in an educational context. Specifically regarding sex education, the author noted there are two venues available in America for public discourse concerning sexuality. Formal curricula, typically school and community-based sex education programs, are the first. The second are informal curricula, specifically the mass media.

Gudelunas (2004) further emphasized the important role of mass media as a means of education, explaining that “more than providing us with something to talk about, television and other popular media forms actually provide us something to talk *with*” (p. 33, emphasis in original). Guy (2006) echoed these thoughts, asserting that “a major development of the presence and influence of the media is that it is becoming a significant if not primary source of information...for adults” (p. 109). He made the link between media and education clear stating that, “because they are so pervasive, these global communications networks of the mass media in effect become systems of informal adult education” (p. 96). Gudelunas observed that, “ironically, while formal discussions of sexuality are strictly regulated and often thwarted, the informal curriculum of sexuality, particularly in U.S. mass media, has become ever more vocal when it comes to talking about sex” (p. 4). According to Brown (2002), “the mass media are an increasingly accessible way for people to learn about and see sexual behavior” (p. 42).

And Kilbourne (1999) proclaimed that advertising and the media are the leading source of sex education in the United States.

Due to the admitted difficulties of sexual discourse in America – and because traditional adult education options pale in comparison to informal education opportunities regarding sex – popular culture and the mass media serve as virtual classrooms for many women regarding sexual issues. Movies, television, music, and magazines are among the most common forms of media (Berger, 2003), and a great deal of adult education occurs, both intentionally and unintentionally, as women immerse themselves in the lessons offered by these numerous displays of popular culture. Magazines as a print mass media means of informal adult education, especially those designed specifically for women, are of particular interest.

“I know nothing about sex because I was always married.” ~ Zsa Zsa Gabor

For women, talking to counselors or doctors about sexual issues can be costly. Seeking help from spiritual advisors or friends can prove embarrassing. Consulting books and talk shows is not always convenient. But popular women’s magazines are a low-cost (in fact free to peruse at many locations), anonymous, socially acceptable and easily accessible means of adult education. Over the years, numerous authors have written about the prominent position magazines hold in American culture (Fishwick, 1985; Hayes & Flannery, 2000; Hermes, 1995; McCracken, 1993; Storey, 1998; Winship, 1987; Zuckerman, 1998). Decades ago, Johnson (1960) recognized that accessibility of magazines as a means of adult education was roughly equal throughout the country, and that such publications were easily found “in supermarkets, drugstores, bus and railway stations, and other places where hardcover books are not available” (p. 318). More

recently, Hermes (1995) was mindful of the fact that television programs are not always easy to leave and return to, “whereas women’s magazines are not only easy to put down, they are also easy to pick up again” (p. 152). New technologies in the twenty-first century offer a wide array of convenient online adult learning tools, but they have not replaced nor made obsolete print options such as popular women’s magazines.

Two quantitative studies and one mixed methods study have been identified that specifically address magazines and sexual information (Bielay, 1995; Carpenter, 1998; Kim & Ward, 2004). Bielay studied popular magazines as a source of sexual information in an effort to determine which publications were read by university women and which topics regarding sexuality were consulted. The author stated that, “popular magazines are one source of information regarding issues of sexuality, yet there has been little research focused on these magazines” (p. 1). Scripts for sexuality and romance for adolescent girls in *Seventeen* magazine were the focus of Carpenter’s research. She warned that “the manner in which teen magazines create and disseminate cultural scenarios, and the content of those scenarios, may have effects that endure over individual’s lifetimes” (p. 167). Carpenter outlined the need for research including magazines with models and readers who are not overwhelmingly White. More recently, Kim and Ward focused on female college students, examining the associations between young women’s sexual attitudes and their reading of popular women’s magazines. They explained that contemporary women’s magazines are private, inexpensive, available for multiple readings, and sexually explicit. Kim and Ward specifically called for future research which includes investigating magazine’s sexual content related to women of color and women of various ages.

*“Love is the answer, but while you are waiting for the answer,
sex raises some pretty good questions.” ~ Woody Allen*

When informal adult education occurs through mass media-saturated lives, it is “highly influenced by social and cultural norms of others” (Marsick & Watkins, 2001, p. 31) that are rarely questioned. McCracken (1993) was in favor of careful scrutiny of magazine content. Convinced of the strong impact of this ubiquitous form of print mass media, the author believed that “the widely communicated messages of women’s magazines merit the same care in analysis accorded literary texts” (p. 3). While women do not always blindly or completely accept the lessons offered, mass media “can communicate biased and stereotypical messages about women’s needs and abilities” (p. 42). Mass media frame society, and “hegemony is achieved uncoercively in a cultural form such as women’s magazines, a sphere of activity that readers view as an arena of freedom, free choice, and free time” (p. 72).

Recognizing their role as a prominent pedagogical tool, it is important to closely examine contemporary women’s magazines as significant social contexts in which adult education occurs. Critical theorists would be in favor of focusing on these types of social contexts in order to “uncover oppressive forces that hinder individuals from developing their full potential” while also striving to identify “ways to empower people individually and collectively to change the oppressive conditions of their lives” (Merriam, 1993, p. 11). Brookfield (1986) implored, “if educators want to help their adult students to perceive the factors determining their behavior as culturally constructed rather than divinely ordained,...then they must encourage critical skepticism regarding the products of the mass media” (p. 151). Echoing Brookfield’s call for critical analysis of mass media, Downing, Mohammadi, and Sreberny-Mohammadi (1995) proclaimed that

“considering the multiple interconnections among power, culture, and communication is not only central to questioning the media, it has much to do with our becoming aware of the hidden assumptions that drive our lives” (p. 5).

Drawing from critical theory, essential questioning and resulting awareness are made possible through critical media studies and the acquisition of critical media literacy, providing “individuals access to understanding how the print and non-print texts that are part of everyday life help to construct their knowledge of the world” (Alvermann, Moon, & Hagood, 1999, p. 1). Popular media habitually underrepresent women and seldom offer little more than stereotypical gender portrayals (Maresh, 2006). Equally problematic is the fact that the media continue to rely on White middle class Americans as a universal standard (Kozol, 1995). It is because of these subtle and pervasive ways that the mass media perpetuate traditional gender and racial pecking orders that critical media studies are so vital (Entman & Rojecki, 2000). Tisdell and Thompson (2005) made it clear that, learners use mass media “as a medium for knowledge construction about their own and others’ identities,” and “because adult learners are large consumers of entertainment media, critical media studies/literacy have a role to play in adult education” (p. 1).

Magazine editor Cynthia Leive realized “a slew of studies [have shown] that women get their information primarily from the media and from magazines, so we know that they look to our...coverage for sexual content” (Ad Age Roundtable, 2000, p. 13). Guy (2006) emphasized that “the representation of multiple perspectives on any given issue of social consequence must be of concern when the media become the major source of information for citizens” (p. 112). Popular women’s magazines are a major source of information for women on the topic of sex. But regarding these magazines, Kilbourne

(1999) believed, “there is rarely any accurate information about sex...and certainly never any emphasis on relationships or intimacy” (p. 147). Brown (2002) explained that, although women’s magazine coverage of sexual health issues has increased over the past decade, “the majority of advertising and editorial content...remains focused on what girls and women should do to get and keep their man” (p. 42). And Macdonald (1995) claimed, even when women’s magazines represent women actively enjoying sexual pleasure, “they have also fetishized and commodified female sexuality by associating it closely with beautiful young bodies and the trappings of a glitzy lifestyle” (p. 189). Finally, perhaps most troubling is the admission of Laurie Abraham, executive editor of *Elle* magazine, about how much women’s magazines lie about sex (Featherstone, 2002).

It is for these reasons that I critically examined sexual lessons taught through popular women’s magazines, using qualitative document analysis firmly grounded on a theoretical framework of critical media studies. In doing so, my analysis was ripe for the involvement of significant themes from critical media studies literature. For example, the issue of hegemony, or the ingrained assumption that the way things *are* regarding dominant forces is the way things *should* be, emerged as a repeated theme in this analysis. Additionally, encoded messages, both in text and image formats, were revealed through the study. And finally, issues of power were exposed related to popular women’s magazines and sexual lessons. Mass media are influential instruments of adult education. It is clear that “the popular and common place ...produce knowledge, social identities, and maps of desire” (Giroux, 1996, p. 66). A qualitative study that critically analyzes this popular medium and the stereotypes regarding gender, race and age it constructs and

reproduces through sexual messages can encourage adult learners to do the same with other media forms and additional topics.

Undoubtedly, conventional wisdom exists around the topic of sex. Lessons offered in popular women's magazines may reinforce conventional wisdom regarding sex or attempt to debunk it. Levitt and Dubner (2005) recently authored *Freakonomics*, an exploration of the hidden side of everything from an economist's point of view. The authors attributed the phrase "conventional wisdom" to John Kenneth Galbraith. They explained that he did not consider it a compliment but rather an association of truth with convenience – "We adhere, as though to a raft, to those ideas which represent our understanding" (p. 90). Levitt and Dubner elaborated on this phenomenon:

The conventional wisdom in Galbraith's view must be simple, convenient, comfortable, and comforting – though not necessarily true. It would be silly to argue that the conventional wisdom is never true. But noticing where the conventional wisdom may be false...is a nice place to start asking questions.

(p. 90)

The authors professed that "conventional wisdom is often shoddily formed and devilishly difficult to see through, but it can be done" (p. 13). One way to do so is through critical media studies that question mass media constructs of sexual issues.

Rouse (2002) made the following comments about mass media and sex in America:

Sexuality continues to be highly visible outside the home, exploited by the mass media and entertainment industry, now by electronic networks as well, and we still cannot talk about it at the dinner table. Our culture remains remarkably

ambivalent about sexuality, and decades after the so-called sexual revolution of the 1960s, our society still seems both sex saturated and sex starved. (p. 270)

By critically examining the content of popular women's magazines and the sexual lessons they contain from cover to cover, this study can contribute to a healthy discourse on female sexuality issues. At least it's a good place to start asking questions.

Statement of the Problem

It has been said that in the United States it is easier to *have* sex than to *talk* about it [italics added] (Rouse, 2002). Research has established a significant link between a healthy sex life and a happy, committed relationship (Byers 2005; Sprecher, 2002; Young, Denny, Young, & Luquis, 2000). In addition to issues of time and money management, serious conflicts over sex are of greatest concern to couples (Lawler & Risch, 2001). Paradoxically, American patriarchal society customarily downplays the importance of female sexual fulfillment, resulting in stifled women and suffering unions.

Talking about sex is difficult, so teaching about it is equally problematic. Guy (2006) asserted that pervasive mass media are powerful systems of informal adult education and serve as a significant if not primary source of information for adults. This is especially true regarding traditionally taboo sexual issues. Magazines are a ubiquitous form of mass media, and according to Kim and Ward (2004), "contemporary women's magazines are replete with sexual content," and they "have a clear objective to teach female readers" (p. 48). However, these powerful pedagogical tools are often overlooked as a data source. While a small number of studies have been conducted regarding women's magazines and sexual information (Bielay, 1995; Carpenter, 1998; Kim & Ward, 2004), none has specifically examined sexual lessons in popular women's

magazines from a critical adult education perspective. A critical stance troubles fundamental assumptions, uncovers how normative behaviors are reinforced or challenged, and questions issues of power.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to identify messages that popular women's magazines teach women about sexuality. Fundamental questions guiding this study were:

1. What are the sexual messages taught to women by popular women's magazines?
2. How do sexual messages vary by race and age of magazine audiences?

Significance of the Study

It has been argued that "the entertainment media, for good or for ill, is one of the most powerful vehicles of nonformal education of postmodern life" (Tisdell & Thompson, 2005, p. 1). From a theoretical standpoint, this study contributes to the growing bodies of literature on the topics of informal adult education and critical media studies. Guy (2006) believed that "the power of the media to influence the thought and actions of people is at a level that is unprecedented in human history" (p. 96).

Recognizing the enormous influence of the mass media as an educational tool, it is imperative to examine the lessons taught. By identifying and scrutinizing sexual messages in popular women's magazines, this study expands the knowledge base that recognizes magazines as an important informal learning tool for women (Bielay, 1995; Carpenter, 1998; Kim & Ward, 2004), as well as that which encourages critical examination of mass media messages closely linked to adult education (Guy; Tisdell & Thompson). Finally, and most simply, this study expands currently lacking qualitative discourse on the subject of women and sex.

From a practical perspective, this study helps to conscientize writers, editors, and publishers involved with the production of popular women's magazines regarding their role as sex educators of adults. Conversely, it informs adult educators, counselors, and professionals involved in sex education regarding the influence of the mass media as teachers. Additionally, this critical examination of sexual messages in mainstream women's magazines impacts adult readers who learn from this medium by raising awareness and encouraging their use of critical media literacy.

Definition of Terms

Discourse: "Discourse refers to the parameters of relevant meaning that one uses to talk about things," according to Altheide (1996), and this is the definition I used when employing this term in my study.

Frames: I used Altheide's (1996) explanation of frames as broad definitions "similar to the border around a picture that separates it from the wall and from other possibilities" (p. 30). In addition, "frames focus on what will be discussed, how it will be discussed, and above all, how it will not be discussed" (p. 31). Simply put by Altheide, frames are "super themes" (p. 31).

Sexual Message: For the purposes of this study, I defined a sexual message as a written or visual text found on a magazine's front cover or in its advertisements or features/articles that included words and/or visual images regarding sexuality. Written sexual message texts included key words (e.g., sex, orgasm, intercourse, sensual, foreplay, sexy); euphemisms (e.g., fooling around, making out); and/or explicit sexual content or topics. Visual sexual message texts included photographs or drawings with various levels of nudity (e.g., revealed body parts or exposed skin, especially breasts,

buttocks or upper thighs); specific body language (e.g., suggestive poses, sexual positions); skimpy or revealing clothing; and/or specific actions (e.g., caressing, kissing).

Themes: Again, Altheide (1996) provided the definition I used for this term in my study. He preferred to consider themes general meanings or “miniframes” (p. 30).

Themes are typical theses that persistently appear throughout the texts of a mass media product (Altheide).

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to identify messages that popular women's magazines teach women about sexuality. Fundamental questions guiding this study were:

1. What are the sexual messages taught to women by popular women's magazines?
2. How do sexual messages vary by race and age of magazine audiences?

The purpose of this chapter is to outline prior related research and to review its resulting literature. In an effort to determine what research has been done, and conversely what discourse is lacking associated with my study, it is important to concentrate on the following five foundational literature areas: (1) informal adult education and mass media; (2) popular women's magazines; (3) sex in committed relationships; (4) women and sex; and (5) critical media studies. The extent of research on each of these topics varies; however, no literature could be found that links a critical examination of sexual messages in popular women's magazines, including issues of race and age, to informal adult education. It is this gap in the literature which necessitates this study.

The current knowledge base concerning topics related to this study includes disciplines such as psychology, journalism, and education. Online searches employed ERIC, PsychInfo, and Dissertation Abstracts. Descriptors such as sex, sexual satisfaction, marriage, female sexual issues, magazines, media studies, and informal education were used in various combinations. Search results, including books and journal articles, form the basis for this literature review.

Informal Adult Education and Mass Media

We don't need no education! We don't need no thought control!
~ Pink Floyd

Education is an essential element for human existence. As Lindeman (1926) declared – education is life – and because learning is a lifelong event, education can have no end. Merriam (1993) proclaimed that “for centuries, people have known that learning and living are so intricately intertwined that one cannot be separated from the other” (p. 6). Similarly, Livingstone (2001) asserted “the continuing acquisition of knowledge and skills is probably the most distinctive feature of the human species” (p. 3). And Hall (1997) explained that the ability of humans to survive, resist or prosper depends on their capacity to learn. He offered a broad definition of this vital activity:

Learning is the process by which we all make sense or give meaning to our experiences. It is the name which we give to that most creative of human activities which allows us to become conscious of our movements through life and the movements of others and other processes. (p. 15)

Informal Adult Education

So education and learning in adulthood are critical – but what counts as adult education? A middle-aged mother of three young children works diligently on her computer after her children's bedtime, participating in an online undergraduate program; she longs to complete her degree and become certified to teach. An intensive care nurse attends a professional development conference in the hope that he can better serve his patients with newly acquired information. A retired couple visits their local library to find out more about Norway; they are so looking forward to their upcoming cruise. A devoted daughter seeks solace from a community group, having recently experienced the sudden

loss of a beloved parent. A young man discovers the hard way that it is unwise to blindly thrust his hand into the toiletry bag when the cover is not on the travel razor. All of these illustrate moments of education taking place in adulthood.

Merriam, Caffarella and Baumgartner (2006) proposed that, considering the wide spectrum of educational opportunities available to adults, all arenas of learning should be acknowledged, including both highly structured and more informal means of learning. But recognizing informal educational opportunities and their significance can be difficult. In fact education and learning are “so strongly associated with formal educational activities that it takes considerable probing for an adult to identify learning apart from ‘taking a class’” (Merriam, 1993, p. 6). Pruitt (2004) explained that adults have spent most of their lives experiencing education in situations prescribed for them, either by parents or employers. However, researchers have verified that “a significant number of adults learn a great deal outside of the control and confines of formal educational institutions” (Caffarella, 1993, p. 27).

Livingstone (2001) found that over 95% of Canadian adults are involved in some form of significant informal educational activities regarding issues such as health, finances, intimate relationships, leisure and religion. Discussing informal and incidental learning, Marsick and Watkins (2001), proclaimed that “these are the most pervasive forms of adult learning” (p. 31). Describing the ubiquitous nature of informal education, Cairns (2000) asserted that it “...supplies the bulk of what matters to us in our daily lives” (p. 16). Finally, Coffield (2000) offered a helpful analogy regarding the significance of informal learning for adults:

If all learning were to be represented by an iceberg, then the section above the surface of the water would be sufficient to cover formal learning, but the submerged two thirds of the structure would be needed to convey the much greater importance of informal learning. (p. 1)

Informal education and its counterpart informal learning are inextricably linked. In *Learning in Adulthood*, Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2006) indicated that everyday living experiences from which we learn something constitute informal learning. Informal education is differentiated from formal and nonformal education by the fact that it “occurs most often in learners’ natural settings and is initiated and carried through primarily by the learners themselves” (p. 32). Livingstone (2001) offered what he refers to as a generic nominal definition of informal learning – “any activity involving the pursuit of understanding, knowledge or skill which occurs without the presence of externally imposed curricular criteria” (p. 5). Informal learning is defined by Marsick and Watkins (2001) as learning that is usually intentional, however it “is not typically classroom-based or highly structured, and control of learning rests primarily in the hands of the learner” (p. 25). And Cairns (2000) pointed out that informal adult education is not simply the residue left behind by formal education, but instead it “comes before, during and after formal education,” and it involves “learning that fulfills people’s own purposes (rather than the purposes of government, the education system or social agencies) and takes place in forms that are chosen by the learner” (p. 2).

Based on these definitions, informal education and learning are fundamentally characterized by a shift in power from teacher to learner. With informal education, the adult learner controls the location, the purpose, and the medium. Structured classrooms

and conferences employing institutionalized curricula are replaced by spontaneous coffee shops and couches using everyday life experiences as the means of adult education. According to Pruitt (2004), “the desire to be in control of making decisions regarding what to learn, how to learn it, and when to learn it, appeals to most adults’ sense of autonomy” (p. 23). Adults voluntarily participate in informal educational activities in what Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2006) referred to as an independent pursuit of learning or self-directed learning. Four decades ago, Houle, Knowles, and Tough introduced and discussed the concept of self-directed learning – “learning that is widespread, that occurs as part of adults’ everyday life, and that is systematic yet does not depend on an instructor or a classroom” (Merriam, 2001, p. 8). Livingstone (2001) reiterated that informal learning is typically self-directed, emphasizing that such adult learning is undertaken on the learner’s own terms. Some forms of self-directed learning may take place in more formal settings, but this model of adult education fits well within the definitions of informal learning and education.

Finally, informal education involves complexities that differentiate it from formal adult education in that “it is difficult to measure, both in participation and in knowledge and skills gained” (Pruitt, 2004, p. 21). Measurements typical of formal adult education endeavors – such as courses taken, grades earned, and hours accumulated – are non-existent with informal education. Perhaps for this reason adults often may not recognize that learning is taking place through informal learning activities in the office or at home, even though these activities are currently well accepted as the most prevalent form of adult learning (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2006). Marsick and Watkins (2001) recognized that informal learning is not always a highly conscious act on the part of the

learner, listing this as another characteristic. While adults are not always aware of the fact that they are learning constantly through informal education, adult educators should be – they “should stop talking about ‘people who haven’t learned for 20 years,’” (Cairns, 2000, p. 3) and instead recognize that people learn constantly through various informal means of education.

Mass Media – An Informal Adult Education Medium

For decades, many adult educators have recognized the vital link between informal education and mass media. In the *Handbook of Adult Education in the United States*, Johnson (1960) explained that the mass media, including radio, television, newspapers, popular magazines and books, comprise the major system for information circulation and intellectual stimuli in the United States. The author went on to say that “few people will question the sweeping influence of the mass media on the attitudes and behavior of the American people” (p. 319). Twenty years later, in *The AEA Handbook Series in Adult Education*, Cornish and Carpenter (1980) echoed Johnson’s argument. These authors emphasized the element of power resulting from the ability of mass media to transmit an enormous amount of information in nontraditional ways to a large number of adults. Cornish and Carpenter concluded that:

Clearly, mass and instructional media can and will play a vital role in adult education. These can assist adult educators in removing barriers to diversity, in encouraging people to take responsibility for learning, and in promoting lifelong learning. Adult educators would be remiss if they ignored these tools as they strive to serve the ever-growing body of potential and actual students. (p. 293)

Brookfield (1986) also realized the powerful connection between the mass media and adult education. He proclaimed that the media, specifically television, radio, and the press, “play a crucial role in framing our views of the world and the context within which we decide which issues and problems are significant” (p. 151). Perhaps this power in part can be attributed to the fact that “mass media is such a common part of our lives we don’t pay attention to it” (Hughes, 2003, p. 6). From the moment the newspaper hits the driveway each morning, mass media infiltrates our daily existence – in the car, at the check-out aisle of the grocery store, and throughout our homes. Finally, Guy (2006) expressed certainty that media is so ever present and influential in today’s society that it is becoming perhaps the most important informational resource for adults. He believed that the pervasive nature of mass media global networks undeniably link media and informal adult education.

While the mass media forms of film, television, radio, and the internet exert significant impact on the informal education of adults, print media is the focus of this study. Popular print media, including newspapers and magazines, “can efficiently promote learning, critical thinking, creativity and resourcefulness,” especially in adult learners (World Association of Newspapers, 1998, p. 7). In Radway’s (1984) qualitative study of women who read Harlequin Romances, the author discovered that “a genuine craving for knowledge of the world beyond the doors of their suburban homes is an important motivating factor in their decision to read rather than watch television” (p. 112). Popular literature provided a sense of adult conversation which her participants otherwise lacked. Gudelunas (2004) studied newspaper advice columns and found that the publications he examined have an audience that actively seeks information. He

proclaimed, “newspaper advice columns matter, in fact, because people read them” (p. 7). McCracken (1993) would agree; she believed, “the widely communicated messages of women’s magazines merit the same care in analysis accorded literary texts” (p. 3).

Mass Media – Teaching Women about Sex

Many researchers have lamented the fact that American culture thwarts efforts to openly communicate regarding human sexuality issues. Kilbourne (1999) was dismayed, arguing:

We have to fight to get sex education into our schools, and the government refuses to fund any program that doesn’t insist on abstinence as the only choice suitable for young people. Young people learn in school and in church that sex can hurt or kill them, but not that it can bring pleasure, joy, and connection. How can they learn to say “Yes!” in a loving and responsible way? (p. 147)

Coontz (1992) noted contradictions in American culture – in many ways Americans have been sexually liberated, but “our acceptance of sex has not become more matter-of-fact” (p. 200). Rouse (2002) acknowledged that sex is still an awkward subject for many, and Bridges et al. (2004) disclosed that even mental health professionals are reluctant to discuss sexually related issues with clients because they can be unfamiliar and anxiety producing. It is unfortunate that even in the new millennium, there is little discussion about sexual issues, especially from an educational standpoint (Gudelunas, 2004).

Gudelunas (2004) was concerned about this lack of dialogue regarding human sexuality. He outlined the situation:

The available venues for public discourse concerning sexuality in America can be separated into two broad categories. The first is formal curricula, represented

most notably by ‘official’ school and community-based sexual education program. The second is informal curricula, particularly the mass media. (p. iv)

This educational role of popular media, according to Gudelunas, is vital as it offers a much-needed means to talk about sex, especially in the United States. Other researchers have recognized that mass media provide accessibility for those who wish to learn about sexual behavior (Brown, 2002) and that popular media, especially through advertising, are the primary form of education about sexual issues in America (Kilbourne, 1999).

It is undeniable that “the debate over talk about sexuality in the U.S. is fiercely contested” (Gudelunas, 2004, p. 17). If talking about sex is difficult, then teaching about it is even more so. Because formal adult education falls sadly short in addressing sexual issues, many women use readily-available informal educational opportunities to tackle this need. Specifically, they employ the virtual classrooms provided by popular culture and the mass media, including movies, music, television, and magazines (Berger, 2003). Giroux and Simon (1989) acknowledged the preeminent position of the expert, the therapist, and the analyst, whether in an office, newspaper column, magazine, book, radio, or on television. And Douglas (1994), discussing the phenomenon of growing up female with the mass media, elaborated on its enormous influence:

Along with our parents, the mass media raised us, socialized us, entertained us, comforted us, deceived us, disciplined us, told us what we could do and told us what we couldn’t. And they played a key role in turning each of us into not one woman but several women – a pastiche of all the good women and bad women who came to us through the printing presses [and] projectors in America. (p. 13)

The impact of pop culture lessons is widely spread and undeniable as “media images help shape our view of the world and our deepest values: what we consider good or bad, positive or negative, moral or evil” (Ingraham, 1999, p. 127). Kilbourne (1999) asserted that, “we are indeed affected by the ubiquitous, graphic, and consequence-free depictions of sexual behavior that surround us in all forms of the mass media” (p. 148). The American public continues to be fascinated with radio and television talk shows, magazine sex quizzes and newspaper advice columns which all help us compare ourselves to others sexually (Rouse, 2002). Rouse seems well-aware of the enormous impact of mass media and sex education:

In addition to tips about how to improve our sex lives, we obtain feedback to reassure ourselves that we are okay, personal affirmation with less risk of shame (than if we reveal details of our sex lives to family or friends), and explanations for why we might be feeling unhappy or dissatisfied. Today the idea of knowing what is “in the ballpark” sexually seems highly salient, so we care what other people are doing. (p. 15)

Undoubtedly radio and television talk shows, numerous self-help books, and abundant internet chat rooms and web sites continue to offer women opportunities for informal sexual education; however, popular women’s magazines remain the focus of this study.

Informal education through mass media is the most readily-available means of adult education on sexual issues. Consequently, women often turn to mass media, including women’s magazines, for informal educational opportunities regarding sex – but unfortunately there is a paucity of research examining the lessons taught on this subject by this medium. It is widely known that on a clear, cold April night in 1912, the *RMS*

Titanic met with a tragic fate. While the details of her accident and subsequent sinking continue to prompt debates almost a century later, there is no question that the mighty ship fell victim to an iceberg – a danger whose existence and size were hidden by a dark, still sea. Coffield (2000) explained that a great deal of valuable and non-trivial education and learning goes on, and has always gone on, outside the realm of formal instructional programs. The author stood symbolically in the crow's nest of adult education, calling out to proponents of a learning society about the dangers of continuing to ignore the importance of informal education and learning. Those who teach and conduct research in the field of adult education should heed his warning. If adult educators fail to recognize and study the significance of informal education lessons, especially those that permeate the mass media, the profession might well suffer a similar fate as the *Titanic*. It is unwise to blindly surge full-speed ahead through the currents of adult education without being mindful of the enormous and powerful mass that lies beneath the tip of the iceberg.

Popular Women's Magazines

I know I read the right magazines; I'm Cosmopolitan, and I don't look back.

~ Joe Jackson

Magazines – one significant form of mass media – have a timeless quality in American society. Fishwick (1985) was amazed by the adaptability of old printed forms to new challenges and needs – specifically, magazines. It was his belief that:

The magazine provokes results and reactions. Much magazine material goes into reprints, books, and motion pictures. The “ripple effect” is enormous. Directly or indirectly, our entire population (including those who cannot read) is affected by magazines in ways which no one can accurately measure. (p. 121)

With paid circulations in the millions and pass-on readerships that increase these figures, magazines undoubtedly reach a broad spectrum of women (McCracken, 1993). Storey (1998) focused on the importance of women's magazines and their ability to appeal to readers by combining entertainment and useful advice. The author implied this form of mass media is a means of informal education by emphasizing the fact that women's magazines operate as survival manuals, "providing their readers with practical advice on how to survive in a patriarchal culture" (p. 162). Similarly, Zuckerman (1998) explained that women continue to value popular magazines, still wanting to "plunge into a favorite title for entertainment, fantasy and concrete information on matters of importance to them, as they always have" (p. 272). She tied the persistent popularity of women's magazines to changes in women's lifestyles:

Many females now work outside the home. But women still crave information on how to manage their lives, homes, families, and now careers. Publications focusing on fashion, beauty, health, and relationships also offer materials women want. Magazines provide an efficient and convenient way to present ideas and facts, especially to working women who are traveling, commuting, and fitting their information and entertainment needs into small pockets of time. (p. 272)

In fact, "some readers experience a pseudo sense of community noting, for example, that advice columns aid them with their problems and help to assure them that other women experience similar difficulties" (McCracken, 1993, p. 2).

Winship's (1987) book entitled *Inside Women's Magazines* is a frequently quoted text regarding this ubiquitous form of informal education. In it, the author reiterated from personal experience the value of magazines to women who sometimes feel isolated from

each other. Winship admitted that women's magazines were especially intriguing to her as she tried to understand the mysteries of sex, but she was saddened by the fact that "women's magazines and their millions of readers are perennially belittled....As TV soap opera is to news and current affairs, so women's magazines are the soaps of journalism, sadly maligned and grossly misunderstood" (p. 7). She defended this form of mass media:

I felt that to simply dismiss women's magazines was also to dismiss the lives of millions of women who read and enjoyed them each week. More than that, I still enjoyed them, found them useful and escaped with them. And I knew I couldn't be the only feminist who was a 'closet' reader. (p. xiii)

Similarly, Hermes (1995) supported women's use of this form of print media as adult education, suggesting that "it is more productive to respect the choices and uncritical acceptance of some readers of genres such as women's magazines than to foreground a distancing criticism or concern towards them all" (p. 2).

Women seeking information and education regarding sexual issues have a few choices. Counseling is an option, but the cost can be prohibitive. And Bridges et al. (2004) admitted that many mental health professionals experience a reluctance to talk about sexuality with clients due to the anxiety created by such discussions. Television, the internet, and books offer lessons, as well – but these options are not always consistently presented or conveniently available. For example, Hermes (1995) argued that television programs are often difficult to leave and revisit, but she emphasized that magazines can be put down and just as easily picked up again to meet the learner's needs. As a means of adult sex education, popular women's magazines are inexpensive or

oftentimes free; they can be consulted anonymously; and they are easy to obtain. Kim and Ward (2004) reiterated that contemporary women's magazines are private, inexpensive, available for multiple readings, and sexually explicit. And Bielay (1995) summarized the importance of this mass media education alternative:

Women's magazines are perceived as acceptable reading materials and are freely available in supermarkets. They can be read without the connotations associated with Playboy-type magazines ("sex" magazines). In addition to legitimacy, women's magazines also provide permission to be interested in and to read about sexuality topics. (p. 23)

In *Women as Learners*, Hayes and Flannery (2000) explained that a particularly powerful way women learn about gendered roles and identities is through the media, including women's magazines. Readers do not necessarily accept magazine's lessons without questioning, but it is clear that magazines as a form of mass media are capable of communicating messages about women that are biased and stereotypical. Regarding mainstream women's magazines, McCracken (1993) suggested that "the multiple mini-narrative segments that begin on the front cover and extend to the ads and features inside combine to foreground a pleasurable, appealing consensus about the feminine" (p. 3); but she elaborates that often the reality of the everyday world fights back against magazines' ideal images. Issues such as societal hegemony, framed by mass media in a cultural form as prolific as women's magazines, present opportunities ripe for research.

Some previous studies have focused on this particular form of mass media. Looking at consumer patterns, Norton (2001) explored how women's magazines were employed by women to construct and maintain feminine behavior norms and to define

womanhood. The author specifically examined content over a ten year period from *Good Housekeeping* and the *Ladies' Home Journal*. Reichert and Lambiase (2003) researched consumerism by analyzing two women's and two men's magazines to determine how sex is used in advertising to appeal to women and men. Alexander (1989) compared messages conveyed in men's and women's magazines concerning love and marriage. Nonfiction articles from *Ladies' Home Journal*, *Mademoiselle*, *Esquire*, and *Playboy* were the focus of her study. She particularly investigated the differences between advice given to men and that offered to women and if such messages change over time. Two studies examined plus-size women's magazines and their connection to body image issues in overweight women (Linn, 2003; Sarbin, 2005). Additionally, Shaulis (1998) studied exercise messages in 500 articles published in popular American magazines between 1925 and 1968. And McComas (1997) analyzed the content of *Seventeen*, *Teen*, and *YM* to explore messages offered to female adolescents that influence self-identity and socialization.

Three studies have been found which specifically explored magazine content related to sexual information (Bielay, 1995; Carpenter, 1998; Kim & Ward, 2004). Carpenter used a combination of quantitative and qualitative content analysis to evaluate articles on romance and sexuality and "examine how young women's sexual subjectivity has been depicted and shaped over two decades in *Seventeen*, a mass-circulation magazine for teen-age female readers" (p. 158). Using Altheide's (1996) model of ethnographic content-analysis, Carpenter conducted content and thematic textual analysis on 244 articles published by *Seventeen* between 1974 and 1994. She found that "the depiction of young women's sexuality...changed in a number of ways" during that time

period; “editors moved from portraying young women solely as sexual objects and victims to recognizing them as agents who experience sexual desires” (p. 162). But Carpenter revealed that these editorial shifts do not result in revolutionary content. Instead, she found that the magazine’s editors “regularly presented new [sexual] scripts as less satisfactory than established ones” (p. 162). Her study focused on a magazine designed for teen girls, but her findings were “consistent with recent investigations focusing on magazines for adult women, in which portrayals of well-adjusted women increasingly emphasize women’s independence and sexual agency, but typically resolve controversies in accordance with dominant norms” (p. 166). One admitted limitation of Carpenter’s study is the fact that *Seventeen* overwhelmingly depicts White young women; therefore, its sexual scripts may not resonate with other races.

Bielay (1995) bemoaned the fact that popular women’s magazines are an important source of sexual information, but that a scant amount of research has focused on these magazines. The author went on to say that several researchers have found that reading materials and the mass media are primary sources of sex education. “One study found that women were more likely to read popular magazines than to consult health care providers for information about menopause (Mansfield, Theisen, & Boyer, 1992)” (p. 2). Bielay’s sample was comprised of university women between the ages of 18 and 25, and his findings indicated that “female students use popular magazines, especially *Cosmopolitan*, as a major source of sex information” (p. 21). The author concluded that sex educators and sex therapists should be aware of the influence of the mass media as a dominant source of sex education, and he called for content analyses of men’s and

women's magazines in order to determine the discourses taking place regarding sex and relationships.

Most recently, Kim and Ward (2004) explored the association between magazine use (e.g., *Cosmopolitan* and *Seventeen*) and sexual attitudes among female college students, ages 17 to 24. They lamented that "little is known about connections between women's reading of contemporary women's magazines and their sexual attitudes" and were amazed by the lack of research on this subject considering the fact that "contemporary women's magazines are replete with sexual content" (p. 48). The authors went on to say that contemporary women's magazines clearly aim to teach female readers strategies for functioning in their personal lives and for maintaining heterosexual relationships. By doing so, these magazines "offer special advantages for girls seeking information about sex and dating" (p. 48). Kim and Ward were aware of the lack of diversity in their sample "in terms of both age and ethnic group membership" (p. 58). They suggested the need for additional research to investigate magazine sexual content related to women of color, older women, and additional types of magazines.

To summarize, magazines – particularly those aimed at women – provide a powerful source of information and education in the United States. Some research on this form of mass media has been conducted to date, but more is needed – especially through an adult education lens. Regarding women's magazines, McCracken (1993) warned that "the immense circulations and profits of publications suggest that the master narratives they construct succeed quite well in channeling women's desire into consumerism" (p. 301). But channeling desire is certainly not a concept reserved for magazines.

Sex in Committed Relationships

How sweet it is to be loved by you.

~ James Taylor

Loving and being loved are quite possibly the most fundamental of human actions. As James Taylor so aptly sang of love, “It’s like jelly, baby” – undeniably sweet. While not necessarily directly associated with love, sex is one arguably essential way of showing love within the context of marriage and committed relationships. Sprecher (2002) understood sexual satisfaction was a barometer for the quality of marriage. And Rouse (2002) explained that “sexuality – its promises and uncertainties, drives and consequences – is part of human striving for personal meaning and fulfillment” (p. 171). Common sense and conducted research assures us that human sexuality is a critical aspect of emotional and physical health as well as an integral piece of intimate relationships (Bridges et al., 2004).

For many Americans the “most powerful visions of traditional families derive from images that are still delivered to our homes in countless reruns of 1950s television sit-coms” (Coontz, 1992, p. 23). Over past decades, several generations had at least the presumption of “a common life course – a predictable pattern in which women fell in love, got married, had sex, and bore children” (p. 180). Coontz recognized, however, that family life in American society has never truly mirrored this *Leave It to Beaver* representation (or misrepresentation?). She elaborated on the increasing diversity of families:

Americans move in and out of a variety of family types over the course of their lives – families headed by a divorced parent, couples raising children out of

wedlock, two-earner families, same-sex couples, families with no spouse in the labor force, blended families, and empty-nest families. (p. 183)

Coontz also made the point that marriage is “no longer the major transition into adulthood” (p. 181) and that the average age for marriage is on the rise. This trend means that “nowadays, more than ever before in our nation’s history, a huge number of heterosexual women past 40...are still single” (hooks, 2000, p. 34).

Regardless of these changing demographics, traditional family structure is still typically defined in the United States as one husband and one wife joined in marriage and living together in a household with their dependent children (Rouse, 2002). In fact, approximately 90% of the American population is expected to get married at some point (Rouse). However, it is a statistical fact that at least half of first marriages and a larger number of second ones end in divorce (Rouse; Coontz, 1992). Lawler and Risch (2001) emphasized that “two of the most troubling aspects of American society today are the high rate of divorce and the fact that divorce in one generation increases the likelihood of divorce in the next” (p. 20).

Among his listing of marriage myths, McGraw (2000) included, “Myth 7: A Great Relationship Has Nothing to Do with Sex:”

Don’t you believe it for a minute. Sex provides an important time-out from the stresses and strains of a fast-paced world and adds a quality of closeness that is extremely important. For most couples, it is perhaps one item on a very short list of things that distinguish their particular relationship from all the others experienced in the world. (p. 100)

Changes in American society over several decades have resulted in a shift regarding the purpose of marriage from one of economic survival to companionship, moving sexual gratification to the foreground of relationship issues (Rouse, 2002). A study by the Creighton University Center for Marriage and Family confirmed anecdotal beliefs that sex is indeed a vital, and oftentimes problematic, part of married life (Lawler & Risch, 2001). In fact, the couples' ability to balance job and family and the frequency of their sexual relations were clearly the two greatest concerns expressed by the majority of respondents, couples in their first years of marriage (Lawler & Risch).

Realization of the importance of a healthy sex life in marriage is not new. Over 60 years ago, Everett (1943) asserted, "even though a couple may be ideally mated in other respects, if they do not learn to make their sex relations fully and mutually satisfying, their marriage is likely to prove a failure, sooner or later" (p. 122). Numerous studies have focused on this important linkage between sex and marriage. Research conducted by Huston and Vangelisti (1991), Donnelly (1993), Morokoff and Gilliland (1993), and Henderson-King and Veroff (1994) supported a strong and often complex connection between sexual satisfaction and marital satisfaction; in fact, sex and marital satisfaction were so critically linked that sexual inactivity often indicated other significant problems within the marriage (Gerhardstein, 1997). More recently, Young et al. (2000) studied sexual satisfaction among married women. Using an 11-item scale addressing various dimensions of sexual satisfaction within the context of marriage, these researchers confirmed the interdependence of overall satisfaction with the marriage and sexual satisfaction (Young et al.). They also concluded that satisfaction with one's marriage or primary relationship "tends to be a pivotal factor in overall happiness" (p. 73).

These studies focused on married participants, but the importance of sexual satisfaction is certainly not limited to men and women connected by marriage. As previously stated, it is clear that American demographic realities rarely remain constant. Rouse (2002) explained that sex is often viewed as a central aspect of all intimate relationships, and while most people still marry at some point in their lives (at least nine in ten), it is also true that Americans are single for longer periods of time than ever before, due in part to an increase in the median age at first marriage and the high divorce rate. Recognizing a trend which continues today, Coontz (1992) stated that sex is much more likely to occur outside of marriage than at any time in recent history. “By the mid-1980s, 75 percent of American women were sexually active before marriage. There are 2.9 million cohabitating couples in America today, an increase of 80 percent since 1980” (p. 182). She reports a growing singles culture beginning in the 1960s that accepted sexual activity between unmarried men and women. Indeed, “from the so-called traditional family of the United States in the 1950s to the diversity of households today, the family has proven to be a remarkably flexible and adaptable social institution” (Rouse, p. 16).

“Neither the prevalence nor the cultural acceptance of sex outside marriage is likely to be reversed” (Coontz, 1992, p. 199). Therefore, it is appropriate and understandable that recent studies focusing on the issue of sexual satisfaction reflect these shifts in American culture. Because “most couples who eventually marry begin their sexual activity prior to marriage,” Sprecher (2002, p. 190) studied the associations between love, commitment, and stability related to sexual satisfaction in premarital relationships. Using questionnaires completed by dating couples over a period of four

years, she found that sexual satisfaction is significantly linked to relationship satisfaction for both men and women. Byers (2005) also conducted a longitudinal study of men and women in long-term heterosexual relationships and found that sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction change concurrently. She concluded that, “consistent with past research, individuals with greater relationship satisfaction also reported greater sexual satisfaction” (p. 117).

In summary, years of research indicate that sex matters in committed relationships and that sexual satisfaction is correlated with marital and relationship satisfaction. Regardless of the ebb and flow of American culture related to what constitutes a couple, there appears to be no doubt from an epistemological standpoint that sexuality is a critical component of happy unions. Having established this strong connection, for this study that examined sexual messages in women’s magazines, it is appropriate to also review literature directly related to sexual issues specifically regarding women.

Women and Sex

She’s a very kinky girl...the kind you won’t take home to mother!
~ Rick James

Research has established an empirical link between sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction; however, American society constantly creates double standards regarding women and sex. Definite stereotypes exist that sexually define men and women; while the population generally realizes that not everyone embodies these stereotypical characteristics, there is an undeniable consistency associated with naming traits and their associated gender (Rouse, 2002). Rouse proffered that American men are considered initiators who are not very selective and think about it all the time. Conversely, American women are more emotional romantics who play hard to get and

want to make love not just have sex (Rouse). Similar to the conventional wisdom phenomenon, these stereotypes become part of a shared cultural script:

Social expectations...regarding what men are sexually and what women are sexually are **social facts**. Not facts in the sense that they are necessarily true descriptions of men and women but facts in the sense that they can be shown empirically to be shared beliefs about men and women. (p. 97, emphasis in original)

In her recent study of individuals in long-term relationships, Byers (2005) concluded that the causal association between relationship satisfaction and sexual satisfaction might differ for women and men due to traditional sexual scripts. Similar to Rouse's gender-based social facts, Byers explained that, "for women satisfying sex is expected to occur only within the context of a loving relationship. In contrast, men are expected to be highly motivated to engage in sexual activity both inside and outside of long term relationships" (p. 114).

Not only do messages vary by gender, but women also continue to receive incredibly mixed messages about suitable sexual behaviors, "preventing them from being clear about what they really want or need in a relationship" (Coontz, 1992, p. 199). Even in the new millennium women face conflicting sexual characterizations that are virtually impossible to balance. Rouse (2002) included among her list of social facts the belief that females are sluts if they do and frigid if they don't regarding sex. Similarly, Kilbourne (1999) explained:

Somehow girls are supposed to be both innocent and seductive, virginal and experienced, all at the same time. As they quickly learn, this is tricky. Females

have long been divided into virgins and whores, of course. What is new is that girls are now supposed to embody both within themselves. (p. 145)

She elaborated that a young woman has two choices – she can be a good girl and bury her sexual self, or she can be a rebel and flaunt her sexuality.

In her book *Feminism is for Everybody*, hooks (2000) recognized this dichotomy which she considers the result of sexist thinking that divides women “into the roles of madonnas or whores” and provides females with “no basis on which to construct a healthy sexual self” (p. 85). She proclaimed:

Before feminist movement, before sexual liberation, most women found it difficult, if not downright impossible, to assert healthy sexual agency. Sexist thinking taught to females from birth on had made it clear that the domain of sexual desire and sexual pleasure was always and only male, that only a female of little or no virtue would lay claim to sexual need or sexual hunger. (p. 85)

Sexual revolutions and the feminist movement resulted in some relief from prior sexual oppression for women; however, “we still live among generations of women who have never known sexual pleasure, women for whom sex has only ever meant loss, threat, danger, annihilation” (p. 86).

Apparently for some, little has changed since Everett’s (1943) statement that, in matters of sex, women are “...taught that it is unladylike to enter into such experiences except reluctantly” (p. 104). Certainly it is problematic to “...expect a man and woman to be companions to one another when they have had such divergent training” (p. 104). Considering the current high divorce rate, this problem still exists today. Empirical data

link sexual fulfillment and relationship success, but conflicting gendered lessons can impede progress in this area.

Reviewing the literature, it becomes clear Bridges et al. (2004) are accurate in their assertion that “although sexuality in general has been a frequent topic of empirical study, there is a paucity of research on the personal experience of female sexual satisfaction” (p. 163). In their recent article, *Predicting Sexual Satisfaction in Women: Implications for Counselor Education and Training*, Bridges et al. expressed guarded optimism regarding research that specifically addressed sexual concerns of women. But they bemoaned the fact that often studies focus on the frequency and description of sexual behaviors without speaking to satisfaction and related subjective aspects of female sexuality. Nationwide advancements in birth control, concerning both reliability and accessibility, have helped women make great progress in separating sex from procreation (Bridges et al.; Coontz, 1992; hooks, 2000); but the ability to have sex with increased frequency without risk of pregnancy does not necessarily correlate to an increase in women’s sexual satisfaction (Bridges et al.).

This section exposes a history of conflicting sexual messages as well as scant academic discourse surrounding female sexuality issues, particularly those related to women’s sexual satisfaction. Identifying a problem is the first step toward resolving it. Rouse (2002) emphasized that, “sex is entertaining and sells books, but is not necessarily talked about in a comfortable way in conventional settings” (p. 96). Sex education for adolescents and adults is undoubtedly controversial in America (Rouse); however, couples “need strategies to deal with sexual issues” (Lawler & Risch, 2001, p. 22). And

women in particular need adult education options to enjoy acquired female sexual freedom by learning “what liberatory sexual practice looks like” (hooks, 2000, p. 90). Several years ago, Freire (1970) challenged people “to become aware of the oppressive social structures in their world, to understand how those structures have influenced their own thought, and to recognize their own power to change” (p. 48). Given the educational influence of women’s magazines, it is advisable to examine and question the lessons they teach, particularly about sex. One way to do so is through Critical Media Studies.

Critical Media Studies

*Imagine there's no heaven
It's easy if you try
No hell below us
Above us only sky
Imagine all the people
Living for today...*

*Imagine there's no countries
It isn't hard to do
Nothing to kill or die for
And no religion too
Imagine all the people
Living life in peace...*

*You may say I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope someday you'll join us
And the world will be as one
~ John Lennon*

With uncanny similarity to Lennon’s lyrics (1971, www.aldielyrics.com), hooks (2000) asked readers of *Feminism is for Everybody* to envision a new reality:

Imagine living in a world where there is no domination, where females and males are not alike or even always equal, but where a vision of mutuality is the ethos

shaping our interaction. Imagine living in a world where we can all be who we are, a world of peace and possibility. (p. x)

Lennon claimed it was easy to visualize this utopia, but perhaps not – especially considering the hegemonic, patriarchal mass media messages that often mask dominant forces, reinforce traditional ideologies, and dull the imagination.

Guy (2006) argued that “the power of the media to influence the thought and actions of people is at a level that is unprecedented in human history” (p. 96). Mass media, in increasingly varied and ubiquitous forms, play a vital role in the construction of identities, including gender, race and age. Adults rarely question the content of informal mass media lessons, including those based on the highly influential social and cultural norms of others (Marsick & Watkins, 2001). Marsick and Watkins explained that adult learners need strategies to make this kind of influential learning more visible. Other researchers have implored consumers and educators to use critical skepticism towards mass media products (Brookfield, 1986) and to be mindful of and to question the hidden issues of power and culture embedded in media messages that so strongly impact our lives (Downing et al., 1995).

Critical media studies and resulting critical media literacy provide awareness and the ability to question the mass media in order to discover how its products contribute to the construction of world knowledge (Alvermann et al., 1999). For example, middle class White males continue to dominate all forms of mass media as the universal standard (Kozol, 1995; Maresh, 2006). Entman and Rojecki (2000) explained that critical media studies are essential due to the insidious manner in which the media consistently replicate racial and gender hierarchies. Finally, because adult learners are continuously taught

identity construction by the various forms of entertainment media they consume on a regular basis, the field of adult education must incorporate critical media studies into its repertoire (Tisdell & Thompson, 2005).

Two Theoretical Approaches

Louw (2001) explains that those who are interested in critical media studies, or in unraveling meanings from a critical perspective, will find two approaches to analyzing the communicative process particularly helpful – the cultural studies approach and the political economy approach.

Cultural studies approach. The cultural studies approach to media studies, explained by Guy (2006), “focuses on deconstructing texts and coding systems as a way of revealing hidden ideological orientations in messages being conveyed from producer to consumer” (p. 98). According to Durham and Kellner (2001), the cultural studies approach was “inaugurated by the University of Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in 1964” (p. 15). This group was interested in examining cultural artifacts concerning in particular “the interplay of representations and ideologies of class, gender, race, ethnicity, and nationality in cultural texts, especially concentrating on media culture. They were among the first to study the effects of...popular cultural forms on audiences” (p. 15).

Discussing the cultural studies approach, Louw (2001) metaphorically compared meanings to water, suggesting that “we are born into pools of pre-constituted meanings” and that “various communication pools have emerged as clusters or structures of meaning” (p. 2). The author elaborated on his metaphor regarding media:

In Western society the various pools have become closely associated with the production and circulation systems we now call 'the media'. As each of us internalizes the particular meaning-style that surrounds us, we are constituted as human beings and as members of various social groups/cultures. These meanings are resources that we use to generate our personas, to negotiate with others and to position ourselves within a social milieu. (p. 3)

Those who adopt a cultural studies approach are primarily concerned with the relationship among culture, knowledge, and power (Giroux, 1997). According to Giroux, Advocates of cultural studies have argued strongly that the role of media culture – including the power of the mass media, with its massive apparatuses of representation and its mediation of knowledge – is central to understanding how the dynamics of power, privilege, and social desire structure the daily life of a society. (p. 235)

The author concluded by paying homage to the important role that cultural studies has played in analyzing the power of the popular and everyday works to produce knowledge and social identities.

Additional experts have discussed critical media studies within the framework of a cultural studies approach. Curran, Gurevitch and Woollacott (1982) explained that those with a cultural studies perspective would view the media “as a powerful shaper of public consciousness and popular consent” (p. 28). Tisdell and Thompson (2005) offered the cultural studies assumption that “media images are constructions of directors, actors, and other media makers” (p. 3). Finally, the evolution of the cultural studies approach to mass media analysis is summarized by Durham and Kellner (2001):

Cultural studies...successfully appropriated emerging analysis of gender, race, sexuality, and a wide range of critical theories. They created ways to examine and critique how the established society and culture promoted sexism, racism, homophobia, and additional forms of oppression – or helped to generate resistance and struggle against domination and injustice. This approach implicitly contained political critique of all cultural forms that promoted oppression, while positively affirming texts and representations that produced a potentially more just and egalitarian social order. (p. 17)

Political economy approach. A theoretical approach to media studies sometimes considered oppositional to the cultural studies approach is the political economy approach, which “stresses the need to analyze communication contextually, or as bound to the locations where they are made” (Guy, 2006, p. 98). This alternative approach also examines meanings, but with a focus “on how meaning is made by people within a productive process” (Louw, 2001, p. 2). Such a process involves the interaction of individuals and groups with various levels of power operating within the context of institutionalized settings. Louw explained that critical media analysts employing a political economy approach explore “the social positions people occupy, the relationships between them and struggles over meaning-production within organizations” (p. 2).

Durham and Kellner (2001) also defined this approach in relation to its counterpart, cultural studies, by stating that, “a political economy approach to media and culture centers more on the production and distribution of culture than on interpreting texts or studying audiences” (p. 18). The key issues here are money and media, as well as an examination of the contexts surrounding the two. According to Durham and Kellner, a

political economy approach allows for the investigation of the well-defined rules, formulas, and conventions of the production of mass media. They explained that, in a capitalist society, “cultural production and distribution is accordingly profit- and market-oriented” (p. 18), and this reality strongly impacts popular media constructs.

Indeed, increased monopolization of the media industry, as well as issues of who owns and controls the media, are of great concern to political economists (Curran et al., 1982). In recent history, significant mergers creating enormous media conglomerates have placed power in the hands of fewer but larger organizations that are all too ready to manufacture meanings for the masses. Tisdell and Thompson (2005) succinctly stated that the underlying assumption of the political economy approach is “the media are controlled and driven by money” (p. 3). By analyzing media messages within their complex economic context, critical analysts can have a more complete view of “how media produces and reproduces social relations” (Hammer, 1995, p. 34). Regarding the political economy approach, “the key issue is that those with power, in any given context, will have a greater impact on meaning-making and meaning-circulation because they have greater access to the coding and code-circulation systems” (Louw, 2001, p. 4). According to Louw, political economists are especially interested in critically analyzing and mapping power relationships between people in order to discover why particular meanings circulate at a particular time and place.

Cultural studies is a beneficial approach to critical media studies in that it specifies “the ways that cultural forms serve either to further social control, or to enable people to resist” (Durham & Kellner, 2001, p. 16). The political economy approach is valid, as well, as it helps to analyze “the infrastructure of the media, information, and

communications industry and their effects on culture and society” (p. 21). However, it was suggested by Louw (2001) that “these two critical approaches are complementary, and can be jointly applied for maximum deconstructive effect when analyzing communication processes” (p. 2). Similarly, Durham and Kellner argued that, when it comes to critical media studies, “cultural studies and political economy viewpoints can be integrated, and that both are key parts of a more inclusive critical theory” (p. 18).

Significant Themes in the Literature

A single quote from Gurevitch, Bennett, Curran, and Woollacott (1982) seems to capture many of the underlying themes of critical media studies literature:

Ultimate control is increasingly concentrated in monopoly capital; media professionals, while enjoying the illusion of autonomy, are socialized into and internalize the norms of the dominant culture; the media taken as a whole, relay interpretive frameworks consonant with the interests of the dominant classes, and media audiences, while sometimes negotiating and contesting these frameworks, lack ready access to alternative meaning systems that would enable them to reject the definitions offered by the media in favour of consistently oppositional definitions. (p. 1)

Messages and meanings. Millions of messages are transmitted daily through mass media, and the meanings, both obvious and masked, contained within these popular culture messages are infinite. In fact, Louw (2001) clearly regarded mass media as a site in which meaning production is professionalized. Altheide (1985) stated that “the media we use in everyday life make invisible thoughts, intentions, and meanings visible. Like signs and symbols that are taken to stand for...something more abstract, media provide a

means to visualize, identify, and locate meaning” (p. 39). But not all possible meanings are necessarily made visible, underscoring the need for critical media literacy. As Kellner (1995) professes, “we are immersed from cradle to grave in a media and consumer society and thus it is important to learn how to understand, interpret, and criticize its meanings and messages” (p. xiii).

Louw (2001) argued that, if consumers of mass media messages and meanings fail to reflect on these meaning-making environments, they are much more likely to be manipulated by them. Thankfully, audiences are not completely defenseless and susceptible to mass media brainwashing; instead, according to Curran et al. (1982), consumers are often active rather than passive. Similarly, Brookfield (1986) claimed that “to view the media as monolithic transmitters of a dominant ideology uncritically assimilated by an audience of passive dupes is...misleading” (p. 154). So both the producers of mass media and those who consume its messages make meaning. Hall (1980) conceptualized these processes as encoding and decoding. He explained that “reality exists outside language, but it is constantly mediated by and through language, and what we can know and say has to be produced in and through discourse” (p. 131). But discourse through mass media involves more than the written word – messages are transmitted and meanings made through texts, including words, images, and other representations of so-called reality.

According to Steinberg and Kincheloe (1995), “to sustain their privilege, dominant groups must control representation, they must encode the world in forms that support their own power and ensure a decoding that remains mystified in its motivated social amnesia” (p. 5). But again, when it comes to issues such as gender and race, mass

media audiences can be empowered by critical media literacy – “the critical chasm opens, allowing those dissatisfied with the manipulations of power to expose the oppressive nature of accepted representations” (p. 5). Consumers must be ever mindful that “there are no innocent texts, that all artifacts of the established culture and society are laden with meaning, values, biases, and messages” (Durham & Kellner, 2001, p. 1). It is vital to recognize sexism and racism, among other biases, embedded within mass media’s representations (Durham & Kellner).

Therefore, when critically analyzing messages produced and distributed by the mass media, one must focus “on the text’s construction of meanings through visual and verbal elements (representation), and on the text’s development of...identity” (Acosta-Alzuru & Lester Roushanzamir, 2003, p. 46). It is through this type of sensitive scrutiny that powerful second-order meanings beyond those initially noted, especially those regarding gender and race, can be revealed, questioned, and unpacked (Woollacott, 1982). For example, Gray’s (2001) study of television representations revealed that even in the new millennium, “whiteness is the privileged yet unnamed place from which to see and make sense of the world” (p. 452). And Kilbourne (1999) specifically questioned messages and meanings in women’s magazines and found that female readers are dramatically affected by conflicting messages about body image, diet, and sex. She noted that magazines promise women “fulfillment both through being thin and through eating rich foods, just as they are promised fulfillment through being innocent and virginal and through wild and impulsive sex” (p. 145). Such problematic messages emphasize the need for adults to be media literate and to “develop filtering devices to sift, decode, and demythologize the content of media images” (Brookfield, 1986, p. 159).

Money. While critical media studies challenge mass media meanings influenced by hegemony, it is naïve to believe that, in a capitalist society, issues of money will not ultimately derail the efforts of some who call for systemic change. Brookfield (1986) proclaimed that “no commercially-run company or broadcasting organization dependent on public financing is going to allow its representative to call consistently for class revolution” (p. 154). In capitalist societies money directly or indirectly impacts everything, particularly the mass media.

Reilly (1995) explained that “the high cost of establishing a media enterprise restricts access to those groups [without] wealth or influence. Their points of view rarely reach a national audience. If they do, they are filtered through the lens of dominant ideological forces” (p. 211). Hence, meaning-making through media is designed to appeal to the middle classes, skewed toward those with disposable income while shunning those on the mainstream’s margins (Louw, 2001). As Guy (2006) pointed out, one of the concerns of globalization critics is, “the homogenization of culture and its attendant celebration of capitalist cultural values” (p. 106). When money rules, as it so often does, it is most profitable to insure mass desires, tastes, and behavior (Durham & Kellner, 2001) – and one of the most effective ways to do so is through advertising.

Maresh (2006) knew there is no doubt “the images conveyed by advertising have become so sophisticated and persuasive that they now organize our experiences and understanding in a significant way” (p. 187). Decades ago Hall (1980) recognized that “every visual sign in advertising connotes a quality, situation, value or inference, which is present as an implication or implied meaning” (p. 133). Perhaps the most disturbing

realization of all is the triumph of advertising in the culture industry that compels consumers to buy and use its products even when they see through them (Louw, 2001).

From cover to cover, women's magazines are filled with advertisements that reinforce hegemonic gender, race and age constructs. In fact, McCracken (1993) explained that "understanding women's magazines as business enterprises and as cultural texts reveals the crucial role of advertising in shaping the cultural content of these publications" (p. 3). The primary message of these ads is that women should purchase certain products; however, women's magazine advertisements are "encoded with numerous subtexts or secondary meaning systems that frequently induce insecurities while simultaneously creating pleasure" (p. 4). Because "advertising occupies up to 95 percent of the space in some women's magazines," (p. 4) there is no doubt that money often controls the message and the meaning in this form of mass media.

Hegemony and power. Gurevitch et al. (1982) spoke of dominant culture, and in fact it is rare to find critical media studies literature that does not mention this issue related to the mass media. Brookfield (1986) plainly stated that "the media *do* reflect the values, assumptions, and stereotypes of the dominant culture; only rarely do they present materials directly critical of the structures dominant in society" (p. 155, emphasis in original). Gurevitch et al. also explained that mass media do not merely reflect and sustain consensus in society, but they produce it. These references to dominance and consensus are aligned closely with Gramsci's notion of hegemony, defined as "the creation and maintenance of the consent of dominated groups for their domination" (Louw, 2001, p. 22). Louw contended that "all societies have dominant and dominated groups, and dominant groups necessarily prefer to remain dominant" (p. 20).

Hegemony is not static in society. In fact, Acosta-Alzuru (2003) maintained that “the hegemonic process...is fraught with contradictions because media texts are crucial sites of negotiation and friction over meanings that strive to be established as dominant, or naturalized as ‘common sense’” (p. 273). Hegemony regarding gender and race issues is certainly obvious throughout mass media, and ironically it occurs without coercion or force in popular women’s magazines, which are presumed by readers to be sites of free will (McCracken, 1993). In her discussion of women’s magazines, Winship (1987) made reference to the hegemonic dominance of males as she recognized that “women have no culture and world out there other than the one which is controlled and mediated by men” (p. 6). Similarly, fear of controversy and a desire to cleave to the conventional result in mass media messages that reinforce the mainstream culture’s racial divisions (Entman & Rojecki, 2000). Entman and Rojecki concluded that “the images we find do not arise from individuals deliberately setting out to sustain racism, but from normal institutional processes” (p. 180) – perhaps an even more frightening reality.

But the subtle and not-so-subtle continuance of dominant ideologies and status quo in mass media does not go unnoticed and unquestioned. In his study of representation of blackness in network television, Gray (2001) proclaimed that “the hegemonic terms and effects of racial representation are no longer hidden, silenced, and beyond analytic and political interrogation” (p. 456). Brookfield (1986) reminded those interested in critical media literacy that “battering against hegemonic forces is of particular importance for educators concerned with fostering critical awareness” (p. 154). And Sholle and Denski (1995) implied the need to challenge hegemony, including gender and race issues, by stating that “a critical literacy of media must focus its energies toward the opening up

of new spaces from within which traditionally marginalized and excluded voices may speak” (p. 7).

Visualize messages, meanings and money as the weft – overlapping threads and themes creating the fabric of critical media studies. Now envision the warp of hegemony and power weaving themselves vertically through the rest. An overarching theme closely associated with the issue of hegemony and often addressed by critical media studies literature is power. According to Kellner (1995), “media spectacles demonstrate who has power and who is powerless” (p. xiii). Altheide (1985) recognized the common postulate that knowledge is power, and that those who control information as knowledge (specifically the mass media) can exercise power. Finally, Jarvis (1985) succinctly stated that “the control of information results in power, so that those who control the information in an information society exercise considerable power in society” (p. 13). Undoubtedly, “the ability to use communication technologies to disseminate prescribed ways of seeing the world is a powerful tool” (Guy, 2006, p. 96).

Not only are mass media powerful, but these communication forms are quite capable of reproducing “structural power relations based on race, gender, class, and sexual orientation in their portrayals” (Tisdell & Thompson, 2005, p. 1). Banks (2003) addressed the fact that “structures of power find their play in popular communication as traditional ideals of gender and sexuality are endlessly produced and reproduced in popular texts, thus naturalizing them in public consciousness” (p. 9). For instance, Kilbourne (1999) explained that “we learn a great deal about the disparate power of males and females simply through the body language and poses of advertising” in magazines (p. 141). She went on to say that “women, especially young women, are

generally subservient to men in ads, through both size and position” (p. 141). But critical media studies/literacy offer hope for empowerment among the powerless.

My Study – Women’s Magazines and Sex

Douglas (1994) told us that “since the 1950s, women growing up in America have been indelibly imprinted by movies, television, ads, magazines, and popular music” (p. 13). The author elaborated that “the mass media continue to provide us with stories, images, and whopping rationalizations that shape how we make sense of the roles we assume in our families, our workplaces, our society” (p. 15). And McCracken (1993) highlighted the prominence of women’s magazines in popular culture – “a multi-million dollar business which presents pleasurable, value-laden, semiotic systems to immense numbers of women” (p. 1).

Editors of popular women’s magazines are definitely aware that their products serve as prominent distributors of sexual content across America (Ad Age Roundtable, 2000). Guy (2006) warned that there is reason for concern when mass media are a significant information resource, especially for social issues with multiple perspectives. Sex is one such social issue, and women’s magazines are certainly an important source of information and education regarding this topic. Some researchers have expressed concern and subsequently questioned the likelihood that popular women’s magazines include inaccurate information about sex (Kilbourne, 1999), an emphasis on getting and keeping a man (Brown, 2002), and unrealistic representations of beautiful body types and wealthy lifestyles (Macdonald, 1995).

Perhaps most disconcerting is Featherstone’s (2002) finding that women’s magazine editors are aware their publications lie about sex. According to Featherstone’s

article entitled, “Faking It: Sex, Lies, and Women’s Magazines,” many writers, editors, and fact-checkers involved with sex articles agreed that their editorial standards are abysmal:

In women’s magazines as in life, motives for lying about sex vary greatly. Many attribute the fibs to deadline pressure, and the need to produce continuously diverting copy. “It has to get out the door and it has to sell,” says one editor. Another editor, however, blames her colleagues’ “giggly, girlish attitude toward sex,” adding: “It’s not a bad thing to be playful about it. But what dismayed me was how unseriously they took journalism, and that was much more likely to happen in articles about sex. (p. 61)

Featherstone suggested that these lies in women’s magazines might be a part of a deeper social disease. “Despite the omnipresence of sex (and its proven ability to sell magazines, as well as perfume, cigars, and just about anything else), we still try to deny its importance” (p. 61). But recently, some in the magazine industry have boldly attempted to make editorial changes “in response to that lack of reality – not only the specific lies but the absence of real women, with all their perversions, cellulite, and intelligence – in mainstream women’s magazines” (p. 61).

The unrealistic, unattainable, and at times untrue sexual lessons that permeate mainstream women’s magazines provided the impetus for my critical examination of this mass media form, employing a theoretical framework of critical media studies and a corresponding methodology of qualitative document analysis. My analysis necessarily included significant themes such as hegemony, meanings, and power. Banks (2003)

believed that “research on the social construction of sexuality in popular communication is important for all kinds of reasons” (p. 7). The author continued:

Sexuality is a stand-in for other issues, so that discourses about sexuality may also (or really) be about race and ethnicity, social class, upward mobility, money, gender relations, or social stratification. In this way, popular communication texts that deal with sexuality function as strategies for social control. (p. 7)

Banks proclaimed that “studying the social construction of sexuality in popular communication tells us about sexuality and a whole lot more” (p. 9). This proved to be the case with my study of popular women’s magazines’ lessons about sex – issues of sexism, racism, heterosexism, and ageism emerged (Kilbourne, 1999).

Imagine...

Mass media are powerful instruments of adult education. It is clear that “the popular and common place ...produce knowledge, social identities, and maps of desire” (Giroux, 1996, p. 66). Women read magazines, and they learn from them; this fact emphasizes the need to critically examine the lessons taught and then “to teach critical media literacy – to teach how to deconstruct and analyze entertainment media” (Tisdell & Thompson, 2005, p. 3). Women who read these magazines should be able to experience their pleasures “while simultaneously uncovering the codes and practices that work to silence or disempower them as readers, viewers, and learners in general” (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000, p. 194). If we critically analyze this popular medium and the stereotypes regarding gender, race, sexual orientation and age it constructs and reproduces, we can encourage adult learners to do the same. Then, perhaps our imagined utopia is closer than we think.

Summary of the Chapter

This chapter outlined significant research to date relative to my study of the messages that popular women's magazines teach adult females about sexuality. Literature in this review included five foundational areas: (1) informal adult education and mass media; (2) popular women's magazines; (3) sex in committed relationships; (4) women and sex; and (5) critical media studies. With the literature base firmly established, it is appropriate to next review the methodological approach employed for my study.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to identify messages that popular women's magazines teach women about sexuality. Fundamental questions guiding this study were:

1. What are the sexual messages taught to women by popular women's magazines?
2. How do sexual messages vary by race and age of magazine audiences?

This chapter describes the methodology employed to explore these research questions and is organized into the following seven sections: design of the study, sample selection, data collection, data analysis, validity and reliability, researcher bias and assumptions, and a chapter summary.

Design of the Study

*Discovery consists of seeing what everybody has seen
and thinking what nobody has thought. ~ Albert Szent-Byorgyi*

This quote summarizes both the reason for and the process of research, perhaps particularly qualitative research. In the introductory sentence of *Qualitative Research in Practice*, Merriam and Associates (2002) stated plainly that "qualitative research is a powerful tool for learning more about our lives and the sociohistorical context in which we live" (p. xv). In addition to interviews and observations, documents are one of the three major sources of data typically used in qualitative research studies (Merriam & Associates). Altheide (1996) broadly defined documents as "any symbolic representation that can be recorded or retrieved for analysis" (p. 2). He clarified that "documents are studied to understand culture – or the process and the array of objects, symbols, and

meanings that make up social reality shared by members of a society” (p. 2). Regarding mass media, Altheide provided the following rationale for document analysis: “These are the most powerful features of public information, and the study of their origins, how they change over time, and their taken-for-granted use in everyday life is essential to understanding the relevance of communication media for our lives” (p. 31).

General Use of Documents as the Sole Source

There is no doubt that entire studies can, and have been, built solely around documents, which “can be written, oral, visual (such as photographs), or cultural artifacts” (Merriam & Associates, 2002, p. 13). It is also true that, “while their use as an auxiliary is most common, increasingly, qualitative researchers are turning to documents as their primary source of data” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 64). For example, Fürsich and Lester (1996) applied a cultural framework to their analysis of the “Scientist at Work” column of *The New York Times*. Additionally, Revzin (1998) was interested in examining ideologies regarding gender roles taught to young girls through Girl Scout handbooks. Acosta-Alzuru and Lester Roushanzamir (2003) studied *American Girl* books and catalogs to uncover their renderings of girlhood, especially regarding race and gender. And specifically related to adult education, Sandlin (2002) questioned issues of inequality in the United States by analyzing the content of text passages in adult literacy educational materials.

There are several compelling reasons to use documents as the sole source of data in qualitative studies. According to Rossman and Rallis (2003), “gathering documents and other aspects of material culture is relatively unobtrusive and potentially rich in

portraying the values and beliefs in a setting or social domain” (p. 198). Also, in her discussion of documents as a data source, Merriam and Associates (2002) explained:

The strength of documents as a data source lies with the fact that they already exist in the situation; they do not intrude upon or alter the setting in ways that the presence of the investigator might. Nor are they dependent upon the whims of human beings whose cooperation is essential for collecting data through interviews and observations. (p. 13)

Documents or written texts are also referred to as “mute evidence” which “endures physically and thus can be separated across space and time from its author, producer, or user” (Hodder, 2000, p. 703). Hodder recognized the importance of documents to qualitative researchers because “access can be easy and low cost [and] because the information provided may differ from and may not be available in spoken form” (p. 704).

Use of Documents as Sole Source in My Research

My study examined how popular women’s magazines teach women about sex by identifying and analyzing sexual messages portrayed on their covers and throughout their pages. Such magazines are easily accessible, relatively inexpensive, handy to access in a variety of locations, and often consulted by women. Due to the admitted difficulties of sexual discourse in American culture, and because traditional adult education options pale in comparison to informal learning opportunities regarding sex, it is important to investigate the lessons offered through these magazines, a primary source of discourse for women surrounding sexual issues. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) specifically referred to popular culture documents, including magazines, as a method used by qualitative researchers with increasing frequency in recent years. They explained that critical

theorists have become interested in these “popular culture documents as texts because of the significant role of media in people’s meaning-making processes” (p. 138). Among other popular culture texts, women’s magazines are part of American’s “symbolic interactions” (p. 129), and studying them encourages learning about one type of influence on how women make sense of their everyday lives.

Some previous research studies have focused on this particular form of mass media, using magazines as a sole data source. Among them, Garner, Sterk, and Adams (1998) examined sexual etiquette in advice columns from magazines popular among teenage women. Looking at consumer patterns, Norton (2001) explored how women’s magazines were employed by women to construct and maintain feminine behavior norms and to define womanhood. And Reichert and Lambiase (2003) also examined consumerism, analyzing two women’s and two men’s magazines to determine how sex is used in advertising to appeal to women and men.

It is not only appropriate, but also advisable to closely and critically examine the messages and lessons offered through popular women’s magazines regarding sex – asking questions like, “Who does this text address through its words [and] images? Who is absent in this text, and what might explain that absence? Whose interests are served in this text?” (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000, p. 195). In other words, “what is said, how is it said, and what remains unsaid?” (McCormack, 2000, p. 291). Women’s magazines can serve as a logical and important sole source for this type of qualitative study and discovery – looking at something everyone has seen and thinking critically what perhaps nobody has thought.

Sample Selection

There's very little advice in men's magazines, because men think, 'I know what I'm doing. Just show me somebody naked.' ~Jerry Seinfeld

Qualitative studies are not interested in determining “how much” or “how often;” therefore, a sampling procedure must be used that aids the qualitative researcher in her quest “to understand the meaning of a phenomenon” (Merriam & Associates, 2002, p. 12). According to Merriam and Associates, such a procedure is called purposive or purposeful sampling. Discussing the type of samples specifically required for qualitative research, Patton (1990) pointed out how important it is to choose “*information-rich* cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term *purposeful* sampling” (p. 169, emphasis in original). Altheide (1996) also emphasized the importance of purposive sampling due to the fact that, in qualitative studies, “the main goal is seldom to ‘generalize’ one’s findings to an entire population” (p. 32).

Literally hundreds of magazines targeting a female audience are published each year. Based on Merriam and Associates’ (2002) assertions, random sampling of these publications would make little sense for my qualitative study. Instead, “it is important to select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 12); therefore, a purposeful sample of popular women’s magazines was used. Qualitative study samples generally consist of people, either as the focus of observations or interviews; however, the notion of purposeful sampling is also relevant for a study involving documents analysis. Essential criteria must be determined before choices can be made regarding the documents to be read and analyzed (Merriam & Associates).

The purpose of this study was to identify messages that popular women's magazines teach women about sexuality. Therefore, the first essential criterion to be considered regarding sample selection was whether or not a magazine is popular. "Popular" related to women's magazines can be defined in several ways – among them, longevity of the publication, product shelf placement, and industry publication rankings. For the purpose of this study, popular women's magazines were defined as magazines consistently read by women based on marketing readership data. Specifically, media research profiles and magazine rankings from Mediamark Research Incorporated were used to select "popular" women's magazines. Based on these rankings, it was clear that all four magazines selected for my study enjoyed high levels of popularity among women.

A second criterion necessarily involved the use of this same Mediamark Research Incorporated marketing data to determine magazines consistently read by women of different ages (20s-30s and 40+) and by women who self-identify as White/Caucasian and Black/African American. The impetus for my study was a curiosity regarding the sexual lessons taught to women through magazines including how those lessons might differ based on the age and race of the targeted female readership. This basis for the study clearly necessitated a determination of which popular women's magazines were often read by women of different races and ages.

A third criterion was magazine content. Many women's magazines focus exclusively on one of a wide variety of topics – for example, fashion, entertainment, parenting, or home and garden design. Often these publications are wildly popular; however, they would not be beneficial to this study which used a selection of women's

magazines regularly featuring sexual content, including articles that addressed sexual issues.

Finally, the fourth criterion used was magazine publication dates. I analyzed a selection of magazines published recently, over a two year period (2006-2007). I began collecting magazines for analysis in 2007, and I wanted to study the most recent publications available for this analysis. Utilizing recently published magazines insured I examined the most current sexual messages offered through magazines. Use of these four criteria resulted in the selection of a theoretically informed purposeful sample (Altheide, 1996).

It should be noted that I considered including readers' socio-economic status as a sample selection criterion in addition to age and race. I examined marketing readership data for magazines read by women with different income levels (below \$50,000 per year and above \$50,000 per year). While age and race impacted magazine selection for women, income level did not significantly influence magazine choices for readers – at least not regarding the popular women's magazines regularly featuring articles on sexual issues (reference criterion three above). For this reason, I did not include socio-economic status as a condition for purposive sampling.

Rossmann and Rallis (2003) explained that a plan regarding research methods is obviously essential when designing a study; however, the authors made it clear that design flexibility “is a hallmark of qualitative methods” (p. 134). Based on selection criteria outlined above, a purposive sample of relevant and appropriate magazines was selected. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) recognized that “while the problem with doing studies using personal and official documents as your primary resource is often...having

too few, for other projects, popular culture studies in particular, the issue is having too much” (p. 65). The major limitation to this study was the fact that I was but one person faced with the daunting task of examining numerous magazines and maintaining detailed documentation of my findings. Time was a limitation, as well, as I examined a number of content-rich documents and produced a report filled with thick, rich descriptions of data.

In order to help with these limitations, this study was delimited to a manageable sample of popular women’s magazines offering lessons on sexual issues and representing the selected demographics defined by race and age. Magazines examined were relatively current publications from 2006 and 2007. Applying sample selection criteria based on marketing data, including readers’ age and race, and magazine content, I selected four popular women’s magazines as outlined in Table 1:

Table 1: Popular Women’s Magazines Purposively Selected for Analysis		
	20s-30s	40+
White/Caucasian	<i>Cosmopolitan</i>	<i>More</i>
Black/African American	<i>Essence</i>	<i>O The Oprah Magazine</i>

Hodder (2000) explained that “the interpreter of material culture works...between different examples of material culture, making analogies between them” (p. 710).

Similarly, Altheide (1996) offered this comment regarding sampling in media studies using document analysis:

An optimum sampling strategy will permit comparisons and contrasts in that “facts” or findings by themselves may be interesting but do not provide conceptual clarity or understanding – as in, “So what?” – unless they can be

compared with something else. This must be considered in developing a sampling approach. (p. 32)

My study critically compared and contrasted sexual lessons taught to younger women and older women, as well as lessons taught to White women and Black women, in order to answer the “So what?” question regarding my analysis of this important informal education medium.

The period of engagement for analysis in this study was flexible, as well. Employing Merriam and Associates’ (2002) suggestion, I read and analyzed an adequate number of magazines for a long enough period of time that the data and emerging findings felt saturated – in other words that I began to repeatedly see the same things, and no new information surfaced. A determination for ending data collection was made as a part of the research process. I originally believed that I would study a total of 24 magazine issues, and that the number of issues analyzed might increase, depending on initial data collection. I quickly realized, however, that Bogdan and Biklen (2007) were right – I was at risk of having too much data from these popular culture documents. After reviewing four issues from each of the four selected magazines, or a total of 16 magazine issues, I believed that this purposive sample was both appropriate and manageable as a data set. To ensure a more comprehensive analysis, I included one issue from each of the four annual seasons: fall, winter, spring and summer. A list of the 16 magazines examined is found in Appendix A.

In order to determine that the selected sample would provide a useful set of data for analysis, I read all 16 magazine issues from cover to cover. As I did so, I used colored tabs to mark first the covers, next the advertisements, and finally the articles or features

that contained sexual messages. This initial step resulted in the identification of almost 600 cover items, advertisements and articles containing sexual messages within the 16 magazines; it was a beneficial preliminary task that helped me recognize the need to narrow my sample to a smaller number of selected items with sexual messages for the purpose of in-depth critical analysis. Appendix B provides a summary of the overall numerical counts of items with sexual messages identified within the 16 magazines from which a smaller sample of messages was selected. With guidance from my methodologist and major professor, I determined that analyzing all 16 magazine covers, as well as 10% of advertisements and articles identified to contain sexual messages, would be appropriate. It should be noted that magazine covers often included multiple written and visual texts containing various sexual messages, and all of these were analyzed for the purposes of this study.

I purposively selected the four magazines that would offer the most helpful data set for comparisons regarding my topic; however, it was necessary to remove myself from the final selection process and randomly determine the collection of particular items with sexual messages for detailed document analysis. In order to produce a random selection of advertisements and articles, I focused on one magazine issue at a time. First I counted the number of advertisements identified to contain sexual messages. Using pre-cut door prize tickets, I numbered each ticket to correspond with the total number of advertisements containing sexual messages in that particular magazine issue (i.e., if the magazine had 37 advertisements with sexual messages, tickets numbered 1-37 were used); I placed the set of numbered tickets into a hat. Next I asked someone to draw the appropriate number of tickets to achieve my goal of 10% (i.e., if there were 37 tickets,

four were drawn). Finally, I marked the advertisements in the magazine that corresponded to the numbers drawn. This process was repeated to randomly select 10% of advertisements and articles in all 16 magazines. The result was a total of 24 advertisements and 38 articles randomly selected from within my set of 16 purposively selected popular women's magazine issues. Along with the 16 magazine covers, these served as the focus of my study and detailed analysis (see Appendix C).

Data Collection Methods

Unlike qualitative studies involving the typical techniques of interviews and observations, my examination of popular women's magazines did not require me to negotiate access to participants or places. Instead, acquiring the documents I used as the sole source of my investigation was relatively simple; I purchased some of the magazine issues that comprised my purposive sample, and others were donated to me by friends and colleagues. Because they were current popular culture documents, these magazines were convenient to both obtain and explore. Over the course of six months, I thoroughly examined all 16 issues from cover to cover – including written and visual texts on covers and within advertisements and articles – in an effort to identify and reveal their sexual messages. Similar to the techniques used in conducting qualitative interviews with human participants, I eventually developed and used a final protocol (see Appendix D) that enabled me to ask questions of the documents (Altheide, 1996). The content of the popular women's magazines I examined provided the “answers” to my questions.

My data collection process was helped immensely through my participation in the EADU 8420: Qualitative Data Analysis course at the University of Georgia during summer semester 2007. My professor, Dr. Kathryn Roulston, encouraged me to discuss

my study with classmates and to ask their opinions regarding my original protocol and operational definition of sexual messages. A small pilot study I conducted using a sample set of magazines became the basis for a class activity; peers offered thoughtful responses to discussions and documented their reactions to sexual messages in the magazines. Their feedback was invaluable as I developed my data collection procedures.

Documentation during the study was in the form of reflective memos, data logging, and coding techniques. Wolcott's (1990) idea of using index cards while gathering data was employed as a means of keeping bits and pieces of data accessible and "testing my efforts at making sense of things" (p. 130). Segments of text relating to specific topics and themes were identified, coded, and compared and contrasted to each other in order to generate high order generalizations (Gysels, Pool, & Nyanzi, 2005). After critically analyzing the sexual messages found within this data set, I had reached the necessary saturation point – I felt that I had discovered all that I could and that my thinking of original thoughts was complete, therefore data collection ceased. Finally, findings were interpreted based on a critical media studies framework – purposively analyzing "not meanings within the text, but rather the construction of meanings through the text" (Acosta-Alzuru & Lester Roushanzamir, 2003, p. 49).

Data Analysis Methods

Typical of qualitative research, data collection and analysis were conducted simultaneously during my study. Merriam (1998) explained that the complex process of data analysis "involves moving back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, between description and interpretation" (p. 178). With an established research focus on documents, specifically

popular women's magazines, and an epistemological underpinning of critical media studies guiding my research, the methodological question remained regarding the best way to conduct a critical examination and analysis. Before this question could be answered properly, it was important to understand and consider the various methods available for document analysis. In this section, I review and explain three possible methods for this type of study: 1) Content Analysis, 2) Textual Analysis, and 3) Ethnographic Content Analysis. Next, I compare and contrast important concepts employed by the various methods. And finally, I determine which of the three methods explored was best suited to my research study of popular women's magazines and why.

Content Analysis

Brookfield (1986) explained that content analysis is one method used to help adults become media literate and that the use of document content analysis, including that of magazines, is well-established as a means of conducting qualitative research. Rossman and Rallis (2003) also spoke of the specialized approach used for analyzing documents called content analysis. The authors offer a summary of the method:

Best thought of as an overall approach, a method, and an analytic strategy, content analysis entails the systematic examination of forms of communication to objectively document patterns. A more objectivist approach than other qualitative methods, traditional content analysis allows the researcher to obtain a quantitative description. (p. 198)

Content analysis is considered a traditional method for analyzing mass communication messages; "content analysts operate by creating certain conceptual categories in relation to media content and quantitatively assessing the presence or absence of these categories"

(Woollacott, 1982, p. 92). Altheide (1996) summarized that this methodological approach to document analysis assumes that simply studying the frequency and pattern of messages will tell us what is happening.

In her study of education materials used in adult literacy classrooms, Sandlin (2002) used a method of content analysis drawn from various sources which allowed her to extract relevant text passages, code them through emerging themes, and interpret them “with reference to whether the texts ultimately reinforce or contradict the current status quo of inequality in the United States” (p. 355). Such a method goes beyond that of traditional content analysis. Silverman (2000) also differentiated between quantitative content analysis, a method used by researchers to “establish a set of categories and then count the number of instances that fall into each category,” and qualitative content analysis, a method aimed at understanding “the processes through which texts depict ‘reality’” (p. 128). And Rossman and Rallis (2003) explained that a critical approach to content analysis, one that “might construe all products of a society as text,” employs a strategy which allows the researcher to critically analyze “what is portrayed and symbolized in such textual representations and what is absent or silenced” (p. 198).

Textual Analysis

Acosta-Alzuru (2003) postulated a significant distinction between content analysis, in the traditional sense, and what she refers to as textual analysis, a more appropriate method for qualitative researchers using the critical theory epistemological assumption “that meaning is a social production, and as such is embedded in issues of power” (p. 278). According to Acosta-Alzuru, “textual analysis...considers the conditions of production and consumption of the text. Unlike content analysis, the text is

not the end in textual analysis. It is the means by which we study a signification process, a representation of reality” (p. 278). Textual analysis is Acosta-Alzuru’s preferred method for document examination “because its purpose is to analyze not meanings within the text, but rather the construction of meanings through the text” (Acosta-Alzuru & Lester Roushanzami, 2003, p. 49).

Fürsich and Lester (1996) used textual analysis in their study of science columns in *The New York Times*. They explained that textual analysis “evolved from literary-critical, linguistic and stylistic methods” (p. 29) and was prominently used as a method of examining documents by the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham and the Glasgow University Media Group in the 1970s and 1980s. Fürsich and Lester defined textual analysis as a method that “allows the researcher to discern latent meaning, but also implicit patterns and emphases of text” (p. 29). The authors emphasized the fact that more recent textual analyses have gone beyond analyzing the literal text to including additional aspects such as pictures, a move “derived from the understanding that words and images cannot be separated if one wants to understand the full dimensions of the piece under consideration” (p. 29).

Ethnographic Content Analysis

In addition to content analysis and textual analysis, Altheide (1996) proposed a third method – that of Ethnographic Content Analysis (ECA), which he defined as “the reflexive analysis of documents” (p. 14). ECA is based on the belief that “the situations, settings, styles, images, meanings, and nuances are key topics of attention” when examining documents (p. 14). Altheide continued with a description of this research process:

ECA follows a recursive and reflexive movement between concept development-sampling-data, collection-data, coding-data, and analysis-interpretation. The aim is to be systematic but not rigid. Categories and variables...are expected to emerge throughout the study, including an orientation toward *constant discovery* and *constant comparison* of relevant situations, settings, styles, images, meanings, and nuances. (p. 16, emphasis in original)

Finally, Altheide explained that the major emphasis of ECA “is to capture the meanings, emphasis, and themes of messages and to understand the organization and process of how they are presented” (p. 33).

Similarities and Differences among the Variations

Content analysis, textual analysis and ECA are terms that can be easily confused regarding research methodologies using documents. It is helpful to compare and contrast these closely-related approaches to document analysis in order to determine the most appropriate method for a particular study. As a traditional approach focusing on counting, coding and categorizing, “content analysis clearly has advantages for systematic investigation of a wide range of material;” however, this approach “has usually proved to be quite limited in conveying the meaning of specific media messages” (Woollacott, 1982, p. 92). Acosta-Alzuru and Lester Roushanzamir (2003) explained that in textual analysis “the object of analysis is the whole text, and it is not broken into smaller units, as in traditional content analysis” (p. 49). Therefore, while content analysis typically provides concise summaries of complex data, textual analysis often results in much longer and more complicated descriptions of textual evidence (Acosta-Alzuru & Lester Roushanzamir). According to Fürsich and Lester (1996), it is perhaps these lengthy

representations that yield “a rich and deep sense of media messages and an understanding of the context in which they are produced” (p. 29), further differentiating the textual analysis approach from that of content analysis.

Textual analysis and ECA seem to be more similar than they are different. Both approaches to document analysis recognize the significant role of context, which Altheide (1996) defined as “the social situations surrounding the document in question” (p. 9). And like textual analysis, ECA also involves heavy description through rich details. Contrasting ECA to content analysis, Altheide explained that “although items and topics can still be counted and put in emergent categories, it is also important to provide good descriptive information” (p. 17). Content analysis, textual analysis and ECA all involve the detection of recurring and emergent patterns and themes; however, unlike content analysis, studies employing textual analysis or ECA use these patterns and themes to uncover and describe “discursive strategies operating within texts to structure preferred messages” (Acosta-Alzuru & Lester Roushanzami, 2003, p. 49).

Variation Best Suited for My Research

Having reviewed a variety of approaches to document analysis, I believed that Altheide’s (1996) ECA was the best method of data analysis regarding my examination of popular women’s magazines with its focus on their sexual lessons; this approach therefore served as a guide for conducting my data collection and analysis processes. It is widely known that qualitative research can be a messy undertaking. It is also widely known, by those who know me, that I prefer my world to be tidy and organized. Altheide took the messy process of qualitative analysis and tidied it up somewhat with a series of research steps, making this process more doable for me.

The tasks outlined by Altheide were well-suited for my research. As the author recommended, I first became familiar with a few selected magazines and constructed a draft protocol listing items or categories to guide data collection (see Appendix E). Next, as Altheide suggested, I tested the protocol as I collected data from several documents and then revised and refined the protocol as needed. My course with Dr. Talmadge Guy during fall semester 2007, EADU 8610: Mass Media as a System of Adult Education and Learning, was beneficial at this point in the process. Activities and discussions from class and a handout we received (Media Education Foundation, 2005) enhanced my data analysis methods and protocol revisions. The final protocol is found in Appendix D.

It was important for my study to go beyond fundamentals more similar to basic content analysis. My goal was to discover the messages' meanings while also understanding the organization and the process of their presentation (Altheide, 1996). Next, as I explored selected magazines, I documented patterns and themes that were responsive to my research questions. Altheide provided a helpful discussion of how ECA can assist in discovering the overlapping concepts of frames, themes, and discourse. He explained that "themes are the recurring typical theses" that run through documents (p. 31). Defining frames, Altheide continued:

Frames are the focus, a parameter or boundary, for discussing a particular event. Frames focus on what will be discussed, how it will be discussed, and above all, how it will not be discussed. Certain themes become appropriate if particular frames are adopted. (p. 31)

Using ECA to examine themes and frames evident in popular women's magazines, I analyzed this mass medium's discourse regarding women and sex.

According to Altheide (1996), “discourse refers to the parameters of relevant meaning that one uses to talk about things” (p. 31). He explained that “messages of documents carry the discourse that reflects certain themes, which in turn are held together and given meaning by a broad frame” (p. 31). Finally, “frame, theme, and discourse are also related to *communication formats*, which, in the case of mass media, refer to the selection, organization, and presentation of information” (p. 29, emphasis in original). Altheide provided a helpful model (see Figure 1) which illustrates the overlapping concepts of format, frame, theme, and discourse within ECA.

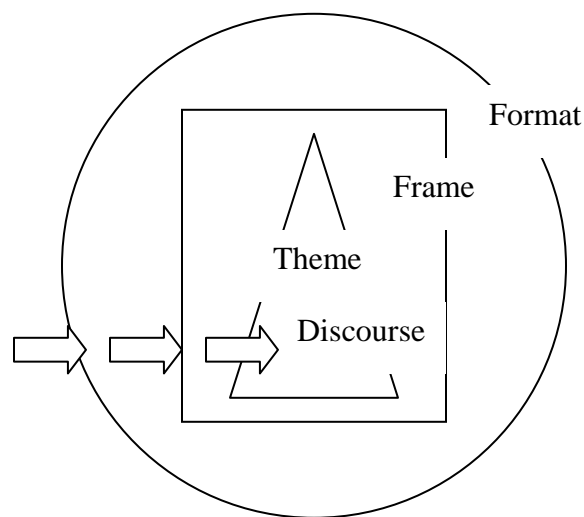


Figure 1. Ethnographic Content Analysis Model as Illustrated by Altheide

Considering my study and using this model as a point of reference, print media (specifically popular women’s magazines) served as the format for my analysis, including magazine covers, advertisements and articles. In order to answer my first research question (What are the sexual messages taught to women by popular women’s magazines?), frames and themes were identified and revised throughout the data collection and analysis process. This identification process involved noting similarities

regarding messages and listing possible categories. I constantly revised the list throughout the data collection and analysis period until I felt that five frames, along with 13 coordinating themes, completely summarized the sexual messages examined. These frames and themes served to categorize all the sexual messages or discourses that were identified and analyzed. Detailed descriptions of covers, advertisements and articles containing sexual messages are provided in Chapter Four. Each frame contained two or three themes and 11-15 sexual messages, including up to seven messages that were found to be common to one or more frame (Table 3). Sexual messages were organized by their coordinating frames and themes and are listed in Tables 4-8 under each section in Chapter Four. Sexual messages were identified as the result of reviewing my detailed descriptions of the covers, advertisements and articles gathered and analyzed through the application of my final protocol (Appendix D).

Chapter Five explains findings based on my second research question: How do sexual messages vary by race and age of magazine audience? To answer this question, I re-examined messages identified in Chapter Four, comparing and contrasting sexual messages found in magazines targeting Black readers (*Essence* and *O The Oprah Magazine*) with those targeting White audiences (*Cosmopolitan* and *More*). I also compared and contrasted sexual messages found in magazines generally read by older women (*More* and *O The Oprah Magazine*) with those from magazines generally read by younger women (*Cosmopolitan* and *Essence*). As a result, I found similarities regarding sexual messages across all four magazines regardless of audience demographics (Table 9). I also found sexual message variations based on both race and age of magazine readership (Table 10). Discourses discussed in Chapter Five are not simply restatements

of messages outlined in Chapter Four, but instead reflect commonalities and differences resulting from careful cross-references of magazine content.

Validity and Reliability

Like others, Wolcott (1990) has questioned the term “validity,” typically defined as the degree to which one is measuring whatever is supposed to be measured. The author’s discussion of validity concludes with this statement: “It is not clear to me how any of us uses the term. Or why” (p. 149). Even so, Merriam and Associates (2002) reminded us that “all researchers aspire to produce valid and reliable knowledge” and that “both producers and consumers of research want to be assured that the findings of an investigation are to be believed and trusted” (p. 22). She acknowledged the ongoing theoretical debate regarding validity from a qualitative standpoint, but it is clear that “there are immediate needs to be met regarding these issues” (p. 24) for every study. Specifically, these immediate needs involve issues of: 1) internal validity, or how congruent one’s findings are with reality; 2) reliability, or the dependability and consistency of the findings; and 3) external validity or reader/user generalizability, the degree to which a study’s findings can be applied to a different context (Merriam & Associates).

Ensuring internal validity in a study using qualitative document analysis and focusing solely on documents presented a challenge. Methods triangulation, a common strategy requiring the combination of interviews and observations along with document analysis, was not possible (Merriam & Associates, 2002). The use of investigator triangulation, “which involves more than one investigator in the research process” (Mathison, 1988, p. 14) also was not feasible for this autonomous doctoral study. But

data triangulation, defined by Mathison as the use of several data sources, was employed as I critically examined a range of multiple women's magazines over the course of several months. The strategy of reflexivity was also actively used throughout my research in order to address issues of internal validity. According to Lincoln and Guba (2000) reflexivity is "the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher, the 'human as instrument'" (p. 183). Providing a picture of myself as researcher allows the reader to better understand how I "might have arrived at the particular interpretation of the data" (Merriam & Associates, p. 26).

The strategy of member checks, in which research participants are asked to comment on the plausibility of the interpretation of data, was not an option due to the mute texts being examined (Merriam & Associates, 2002). However, internal validity was also addressed with the use of peer review methods. Merriam and Associates explained that "a thorough peer examination would involve asking a colleague to scan some of the raw data and assess whether the findings are plausible based on the data" (p. 26). To employ this method, I formed groups of volunteer peer reviewers. Drawing from friends, colleagues and strangers, I assembled four peer review groups that corresponded directly to the four demographic groups represented by my selected magazines (White, age 20s-30s; Black, age 20s-30s; White, age 40+; Black, age 40+). Each group contained three members, for a total of 12 peer reviewers. It should be noted that University of Georgia IRB (Institutional Review Board) regulations did not apply to these volunteers because they were not serving as human subjects of the study. In an effort to be mindful of ethical considerations, I did make it clear in writing to each peer

reviewer that her participation was voluntary and that her name would not be included in my dissertation.

The peer review process was very time-consuming, taking four months to complete, but I considered it an essential part of my study and an important method of ensuring internal validity – especially given the fact that the mute documents I was analyzing could not provide feedback, so my voice was the only one being heard. Given time restraints and the volunteer nature of the task, it was not feasible or appropriate to ask peer reviewers to examine multiple magazines from cover to cover. Instead, I asked each woman to review a single magazine whose primary target audience matched her race and age group. I assembled four peer review packets, one for each of the four magazines to be reviewed. These contained 1) a cover sheet listing packet contents and my contact information (Appendix F); 2) a letter explaining my study and outlining peer reviewer responsibilities (Appendix G); 3) a guide for identifying sexual messages, including my operational definition and check lists used for identifying written and visual sexual messages (Appendix H); 4) a questionnaire to complete (Appendix I); and 5) the magazine issue to be reviewed.

Although peer reviewers were given specific instructions to only review the covers, advertisements and articles marked with tabs, some made notes regarding unmarked material in the magazine, as well – evidence of the extreme care reviewers gave to this task. In order for a message to be included in my study as the focus for further analysis, at least two out of three reviewers in each peer review group had to agree that a magazine's identified written or visual text contained a sexual message. If instead two or more peer reviewers from a group disagreed with a message identified as

sexual, I removed that message from my study. Only seven (4%) of the total 164 potential sexual messages examined by peer reviewers were eliminated from analysis based on this process (one advertisement and one article from *O The Oprah Magazine*, and three advertisements and two articles from *Essence*). I employed peer review group results to guide my identification of sexual messages in the additional 12 magazines used in my study but not reviewed by peers; specifically, I excluded advertisements and articles similar to those eliminated based on peer review responses.

It should be noted that one potential peer reviewer did not complete her questionnaire as instructed. Instead of providing answers to the questions, this respondent indicated that she did not believe the magazine contained any sexual messages because she was not personally influenced by these advertisements and articles. In her words written on March 15, 2008, “I feel that none of the advertisements send [sic] a sexual message to me because I do not let advertisements influence me on the way I feel about myself.” She went on to say that, “I do not find sexual messages in any articles....I don’t live my life according to what a magazine article says. I am an individual.” Because this reviewer did not follow questionnaire instructions, her comments were not used to eliminate identified messages and another peer reviewer was identified to take her place; however, her responses were taken into consideration regarding my conclusions and are discussed further in Chapter Six. These peer review group volunteers served as an invaluable sounding board for my initial identification of items with sexual messages in selected magazines; as such, they aided in my critical thinking processes and the assurance of internal validity regarding this study.

In addition to data triangulation, reflexivity and peer review, an audit trail was established as a means of ensuring for trustworthiness, consistency and reliability (Merriam & Associates, 2002). I kept a research journal including memos with various reflections, questions, issues, and ideas I encountered while collecting data (Merriam & Associates). This written record described “in detail how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry” (p. 27). Also in an effort to increase trustworthiness I was thorough, spending six months collecting and analyzing data.

Finally, in the qualitative research tradition, I employed analysis and interpretation methods that resulted in rich, thick description – a “major strategy to ensure for external validity or generalizability in the qualitative sense” (p. 29). Due to various legal concerns, I intentionally did not include visual copies of the magazine covers, advertisements and articles examined for this study; however, detailed descriptions were provided in an effort to give the reader a mental image of the items analyzed. A recent study by Acosta-Alzuru and Lester Roushanzamir’s (2003) of *American Girl* products provides an excellent example of this strategy within the context of a qualitative document analysis. The authors explained their use of thick description:

We must note that researcher selections always remain a mere shadow of the text itself. But the selection of textual evidence is crucial to the success of the report. Unlike quantitative work, in which representations of complex data can be elegantly spare, the representation of textual evidence tends to be lengthy, even cumbersome. (p. 50)

Researcher Bias and Assumptions

It is certain that “a ‘good’ qualitative study is one that has been conducted in an ethical manner” (Merriam & Associates, 2002, p. 29). However, many traditional ethical concerns became non-existent when documents were the focus of analysis and the sole means of data collection. First, informed consent was unnecessary because no human participants were involved in the study, and the popular women’s magazines used were easily accessible public documents to which no harm could come. For the same reason, participant welfare, an important ethical issue for many qualitative researchers, was not a concern regarding this qualitative document analysis which posed no risks to human beings. Furthermore, the design of this study eliminated the need for navigating relationships with gatekeepers, building rapport with participants, working through abandonment issues, and negotiating confidentiality concerns.

The lack of many traditional ethical concerns could be considered a positive aspect of studies like this one that analyze documents exclusively. However, the fact that the researcher is the only person telling this story presented its own set of ethical challenges. As the sole voice in this study, I had to be constantly aware and reflexive when finalizing the purposeful sample selection of magazines; while reading, collecting, and documenting the data; and throughout the analysis and interpretation stages. In order to conduct this study in an ethical manner, I had to listen to and be ever mindful of the advice of researchers who came before me. Madison (2005) suggested that I “keep in mind that every project and every researcher is unique, so it is expected that you will pick and choose, select and sort, and blend and combine what is useful for you” (p. 36). Emerson, Frete, and Shaw (1995) explained that “there is no ‘natural’ or ‘correct’ way to

write about what one observes. Rather, because descriptions involve issues of perception and interpretation, different descriptions of the ‘the same’ situations...are possible” (p. 5). And finally Altheide (1996) reiterated that a key part of ethics is simply “how we account for ourselves” (p. 79).

Accounting for myself involved being mindful of the fact that every heart, mind and soul is born into a particular body – and mine happens to be that of a White, middle-class, American, protestant, heterosexual female. I am 41 years old. I consider myself a fairly liberal democrat. The multiple roles which combine to make me the person I am include being a much-loved daughter of divorced parents; a happily married wife of 19 years to a wonderful man; a proud mother of a phenomenal teenage daughter; a loyal full-time employee of the University of Georgia; and a seemingly perpetual part-time graduate student. The happenstances of my birth and the roles I have come to fulfill have culminated in a variety of beliefs and values which undoubtedly influenced my study. For example, I assumed that:

- popular culture, including mass media, has a greater impact on education in America than most people realize, including that of adult sex education
- when it comes to sexual messages, popular women’s magazines emphasize men’s needs over women’s and glorify certain physical attributes
- sexual messages in popular women’s magazines will vary based on the magazine’s targeted audience’s race/age
- healthy, reasonable discourse involving issues of women and sex is sorely lacking in American culture

I could not predict how or in what ways, but I am certain that my inherent biases, subjectivities, and assumptions impacted my study of sexual messages in popular women’s magazines. However, I believe they positively influenced my efforts at

discovery through qualitative research methods – allowing me to see what everybody else has seen, through my particular lens, and ultimately to think what nobody else has thought.

Limitations

It has already been noted that this study centered on popular women's magazines included a large data set, necessarily creating limitations for a single researcher collecting and analyzing data and maintaining detailed records of findings. Time was an issue, as well, as I wrote thick, rich descriptions of the many sexual messages identified. In addition, I recognize that this study focused only on the marketing/production side of adult education through mass media instead of including analysis regarding the consumption end. Choosing documents as a sole source for analysis necessarily meant that no learners were involved; no readers or magazine audience members were interviewed or heard. In an effort to minimize the impact of this choice, I employed peer reviewers as discussed previously in this chapter; however, this is a notable limitation of which I was constantly aware throughout my study. Finally, the marketing data I used to determine the magazines I analyzed was somewhat limited. It provided information regarding readership gender, race, age, and socio-economic group; but no data indicating readership sexual orientation was available through the marketing source I employed. Such information would have been helpful to include, broadening the scope of my analysis.

Summary of the Chapter

This chapter presented the methodological process that enabled me to identify and analyze the messages taught to women about sexuality by popular women's magazines.

The research design, sample selection, data collection, and data analysis processes were outlined and described. A qualitative research design was employed using documents as a sole source. Based on several criteria, a collection of four popular women's magazines, each published once monthly, served as the purposeful sample to be explored (*Cosmopolitan*, *Essence*, *More*, and *O The Oprah Magazine*); 16 magazine covers and a random sample of identified advertisements and articles containing sexual messages were critically analyzed.

Content Analysis and Textual Analysis are both appropriate, established methods for analyzing documents; however, Ethnographic Content Analysis (ECA), which examines document formats, frames, themes, and discourses, served as the data analysis method of choice for this research. Methods for enhancing validity and reliability were provided – data triangulation, reflexivity and peer review strategies were used to address issues of internal validity; an audit trail was created and maintained to ensure reliability; and rich, thick descriptions produced assisted with external validity concerns. Finally, researcher biases and assumptions that form my research lens and therefore impacted this qualitative study were discussed openly and honestly. Detailed findings produced from my use of these methodological processes are described in the following two chapters.

CHAPTER FOUR

SEXUAL MESSAGES TAUGHT BY WOMEN'S MAGAZINES

This chapter presents the findings of my qualitative investigation regarding the first of two research questions guiding this study: What are the sexual messages taught to women by popular women's magazines? A total of 16 magazine issues were reviewed and the resulting data were analyzed using Altheide's (1996) Ethnographic Content Analysis (ECA) model specifically developed for research focusing on documents (Figure 1). The chapter is divided into five sections based on the five frames found to foreground sexual messages within these purposely selected magazines: 1) Appearance; 2) Entertainment; 3) Performance; 4) Relationships; and 5) Health and Well-being. Detailed narrative describing sexual messages identified on magazine covers and within advertisements and articles is provided within each of the five frames. A summary of the chapter is included, as well.

Sexual Messages Identified: Frames, Themes and Discourses

This chapter details sexual messages taught by popular women's magazines. Altheide's (1996) ECA model (see Figure 1) illustrates the overlapping concepts of frame and theme that helped to identify and organize the numerous messages regarding sex and sexuality offered by this popular form of mass media. Table 2 outlines five overarching frames (ordered from most frequently used to least frequently used) and their related themes that were found to categorize sexual messages (what Altheide referred to as discourse) on covers and within advertisements and articles in the magazines reviewed.

Table 2: Sexual Messages' Frames and Themes in Selected Women's Magazines

- I. Sex/Sexuality are framed by Appearance
 - a. Physical Attributes
 - b. Fashion/Style
 - c. Attitude/Status
- II. Sex/Sexuality are framed by Entertainment
 - a. Popular Culture/Celebrity
 - b. Humor/Anecdotes
 - c. Travel/Leisure
- III. Sex/Sexuality are framed by Performance
 - a. Tips
 - b. Behaviors
- IV. Sex/Sexuality are framed by Relationships
 - a. Marriage/Dating
 - b. Infidelity/Adultery
- V. Sex/Sexuality are framed by Health & Well-being
 - a. Medical Issues
 - b. Fitness
 - c. Safety

Sexual messages identified from the analysis of all magazine covers and randomly selected advertisements and articles were framed by these five general topics and contained one or more themes. It should be noted that seven sexual messages were common to more than one frame (Table 3). A connection between appearance and sexual appeal was found in items framed by appearance, entertainment and performance. Underlying discourses of heterosexuality, and the message that sexually active couples are assumed to be of the same race and similarly aged, were messages found across all five frames. A message that sex is permissible and commonplace outside of relationships was common to four frames (entertainment, performance, relationships and health and well-being). The importance of men's sexual needs over women's was found in items framed by entertainment, performance and relationships. A connection between sex and

secrecy was repeated in items framed by entertainment and performance. And the vital position of experts related to sex was a message found in items framed by performance, relationships and health and well-being. Sexual messages common to two or more frames are included with additional sexual messages organized by frame in Tables 4-8; evidence for these messages is provided within the context of the individual frames.

Table 3: Sexual Messages Common to Two or More Frames					
Sexual Messages	Appearance	Entertainment	Performance	Relationships	Health & Well-being
1. Appearance impacts sexual appeal.	✓	✓	✓		
2. Heterosexuality is assumed; sex occurs between a woman and a man.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3. Male/Female couples are assumed to be of the same race and similar ages.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
4. Sex is permissible and commonplace outside of marriage and dating relationships.		✓	✓	✓	✓
5. Women's sexual needs are secondary to men's.		✓	✓	✓	
6. Sex involves secrecy and mystery.		✓	✓		
7. Experts should be consulted regarding sexual issues; expert opinions increase the reliability of sexual information.			✓	✓	✓

Sexual Messages Framed by Appearance

"It's better to look good than to feel good!"

~ Billy Crystal as Fernando Lamas on SNL

Appearance was the most common frame for magazine sexual messages identified on 10 covers and in 17 advertisements and seven articles randomly selected for detailed

analysis across the four magazines (*Cosmopolitan*, *Essence*, *More* and *O The Oprah Magazine*). All 16 magazine issues analyzed contained at least one example of a sexual message framed by the topic of appearance. For a complete list of these items, refer to Appendix J. Table 4 summarizes the sexual messages found to be framed by appearance and magazines that included each message (indicated with check marks). Detailed descriptions of cover items, advertisements and articles exhibiting these messages follow.

Table 4: Sexual Messages Framed by Appearance				
Sexual messages common to two or more frames:	Essence	Oprah	Cosmo	More
1. Appearance impacts sexual appeal.	✓	✓	✓	✓
2. Heterosexuality is assumed; sex occurs between a woman and a man.			✓	✓
3. Male/female couples are assumed to be of the same race and similar ages.			✓	✓
Theme – Physical Attributes:				
4. Women want to be sexually attractive and increase their sexual opportunities; therefore women should express their sexuality and sexual appeal by adopting the dominant media conception of appearance offered in these magazines.	✓	✓	✓	✓
5. To be sexually attractive, women must exhibit certain physical attributes including a) clear, smooth skin; b) silky, long hair; c) a thin body frame with a small waist; and d) large, round breasts. These characteristics comprise a dominant media conception of what is required for women to appear sexy.	✓	✓	✓	✓
6. Women should achieve these desired physical attributes by purchasing and using a wide variety of products that increase sexual appeal and desirability (e.g., hair care products, skin care products, fragrances and cosmetics).	✓	✓	✓	✓
7. Rarely, women can appear sexy without conforming to the dominant media conception of appearance.		✓		✓
8. Women are sexually attracted to men who exhibit certain physical attributes including a) clear, smooth skin; b) silky, thick hair; c) a thin body frame with a small waist; and d) a muscular build.			✓	✓

Theme – Fashion/Style:				
9. Women should flaunt their sexuality by wearing fashionable clothing that reveals their breasts and upper thighs, accentuating media-prescribed physical attributes. Women are encouraged to appear sexually promiscuous by adopting a style that includes revealing clothes.	✓		✓	✓
Theme – Attitude/Status:				
10. Women who appear confident, youthful, happy, wealthy and strong are sexy; women who achieve a high level of professional status are also sexy.	✓	✓	✓	✓
11. Maturity and sophistication are occasionally linked to increased sexual appeal.		✓		✓

Covers

All four *Cosmopolitan* covers examined included photographs containing sexual messages framed by appearance (September 2006; December 2006; May 2006; August 2007). Each of the visual images was of young White women who exhibited physical attributes including tan, unblemished skin; long, loosely curled hair; and thin waists and voluptuous breasts escaping from low-cut clothing. All four color photographs dominated the majority of their individual magazine covers with the women's breasts at the center, serving as the visual focus. The women all faced forward and were shown from their heads to their upper thighs, a close up view that accentuated their smooth skin and hourglass figures. Each woman wore somewhat revealing fashionable clothing with manicured fingernails, make up, and understated jewelry completing the look; they all wore facial expressions exuding happiness and confidence.

Three of the four *Cosmopolitan* magazine covers also included written texts that fell under the frame of appearance. The December 2006 issue emphasized the importance of sexy fashion with the heading, "Lingerie Special" followed by the subheading, "Sultry,

Classy, Comfy Styles.” This text was highlighted inside a bright orange circle at the top right corner of the cover. A large, bold heading that read, “16 Sexy New Hairstyles” appeared on the left-hand side of the August 2007 issue, linking the physical attribute of hair to female sexuality. Finally, the May 2006 issue included a very large heading in a bold, bright orange font using all upper case letters urging readers to “GET SUMMER SEXY.”

These visual and written texts on *Cosmopolitan* covers framed sexual messages by appearance with themes of physical attributes, fashion/style, and attitude included. Female sexuality was closely associated with distinct physical attributes such as clear skin, silky hair, and small waist and large breasts (Table 4; No. 5). It was also apparent that women who have these particular physical characteristics should flaunt their sexuality by wearing fashionable and revealing clothing (Table 4; No. 9). Finally, the visual images implied that women who appear happy and confident are sexy (Table 4; No. 10). An underlying discourse here was that women should strive to exhibit this modeled dominant conception of outward appearance as an important part of expressing their sexuality (Table 4; Nos. 1 & 4).

Three issues of *Essence* magazine also included sexual messages framed by appearance on their covers. With its visual image, a color photograph of a young Black woman, the September 2006 issue of *Essence* highlighted themes of physical attributes as well as fashion and style. This picture of a young Black female filled the front cover with her unblemished skin, long curled hair, large brown eyes, and well-applied makeup and manicured nails. She was shown from the top of her head to her upper thighs in a seated pose. Most notable were her thin waist and large breasts, again positioned so they were

centered on the page as a focal point. Her stylish clothing included a blouse made of see-through fabric and covered with large rhinestones arranged in floral patterns. Her cleavage was emphasized, and the only thing covering her nipples were carefully placed rhinestone flowers. An expression exhibiting confidence beamed from her face. In addition to this cover image, both the December 2006 and the June 2007 *Essence* issues used written texts to emphasize hair as an important part of appearing sexy as a woman with large headings reading, “SEXY SHINY HAIR” and “EASY, SEXY HAIR” respectively.

Essence, with these two written texts and one visual image on its covers, also framed female sexuality under the topic of appearance, linking it directly to physical attributes, fashion/style and attitude. The messages were similar to those taught by *Cosmopolitan* – that female sexuality was inextricably tied to outward physical appearance, particularly hair in this case, and included the use of revealing clothing (Table 4; Nos. 1, 5 & 9). The importance of appearing confident with yourself and your sexuality was also emphasized (Table 4; No. 10).

It was also found that *More* magazine covers included one visual image and two written texts containing sexual messages framed by appearance. A color photograph of a White woman who appeared to be over 40 years old prominently appeared on the September 2006 issue’s cover. Her pose was similar to that of the models on covers of *Cosmopolitan* magazine – standing straight and facing forward, looking directly at the reader. Her chest was pushed slightly forward, emphasizing her large breasts and cleavage exposed by her low-cut V-neck dress. She had a very short hairstyle that included partially gray hair; she wore makeup and had manicured nails. Her figure had an

hourglass shape, but she was slightly heavier than models pictured on covers of *Cosmopolitan* and *Essence* magazines. Her facial expression was one of happiness and confidence with her appearance. In addition, “Confident Grown-Up SEXY” on the December 2006/January 2007 cover and “WE’VE NEVER BEEN SEXIER” on the June 2007 cover were two large headings used by *More* to emphasize the importance of women appearing sexy. In fact, the word “Sexy” on the winter issue was by far the largest word on the cover except for the magazine title, and it was highlighted using a bold, upper case, orange font.

More framed female sexuality by appearance on its covers, as well. Themes of physical attributes, fashionable and stylish clothing and attitude were included. However, the visual image of attractiveness differed from those featured on *Cosmopolitan* and *Essence* covers; large breasts were still emphasized, but short hair and a larger body type was shown on *More*’s cover (Table 4; Nos. 5 & 7). It was still implied that women should flaunt their sexuality with revealing clothing that partially exposed their breasts and that sexy women are happy, confident women (Table 4; Nos. 9 & 10). An underlying discourse remained, one of a close association between appearance and female sexuality, but here the point was also made that maturity increased sex appeal for woman (Table 4; Nos. 1 & 11).

Advertisements

Of the 24 total advertisements randomly selected and critically analyzed, 17 (over 70%) framed their sexual messages by appearance. Six of these advertisements were found in *Cosmopolitan* magazine. Nivea body lotion was highlighted across a two-page advertisement spread in the September 2006 issue (pp. 126-127). A large color

photograph of a man and woman filled the pages, showing the models from their heads to their chests in a close-up view. They were White with tan, smooth skin; they both appeared to be young and physically fit. Both were dressed formally as if they were ready for a special night out together – the woman in a silky black top with spaghetti straps (with one strap falling off her shoulder) and the man in a gray suit coat with a black dress shirt. Even though they were fully dressed, their pose was very sexual; the man stood behind the woman and leaned down towards her exposed left shoulder as if he planned to kiss it, reminiscent of a vampire approaching his willing prey. The woman had her eyes closed; her right arm was raised and she was touching her long, curled brown hair; her left arm was by her side with her hand out of sight. This photograph was combined with several written texts, teaching the reader about sexuality as it related to appearance. Women were encouraged to use “new Nivea Smooth Sensation” body lotion which would “leave your skin smooth and instantly ready to touch and be touched.” This tag line, “TOUCH AND BE TOUCHED,” was repeated in a large font in all uppercase letters at the bottom of the page. The largest written text on this advertisement stated that this skin care product was, “The difference between going out AND STAYING IN,” implying that these people would stay in, and based on their pose possibly have sex, rather than go out for the evening.

Another advertisement in the May 2006 *Cosmopolitan* issue also showed a man and woman in a full-page color photograph and highlighted a fragrance marketed to both males and females, Red Delicious by DKNY – Donna Karen New York (p. 49). The models were seated together on a motorcycle with a subtle view of the New York skyline behind them and a pile of apples at the bottom of the page. Both were young and White

with unblemished tan skin and physically fit, thin bodies. Their clothing was casual, and her short red dress partially exposed her breast and ended at her upper thigh. The pose again was sexual in nature – the male straddled the motorcycle seat with the female doing the same between his legs with her back to him; they touched each other’s thighs with their hands; the male’s face was close to the female’s cheek; and the woman held an apple to her chin. One written text, “a new temptation in fragrances,” combined with this photograph to emphasize the sexual messages contained in the advertisement. New York City, highlighted in this visual image, is often called the Big Apple – but the connection here was predominantly sexual, showing women as temptresses connected to apples in reference to the biblical concept of Original Sin.

These two advertisements found in *Cosmopolitan* were similar in that they both showed a man and woman together in sexual poses. Sexuality was linked to outward physical attributes as well as fashion and style (Table 4; Nos. 1, 5 & 9). One message these advertisements offered was that women who wore this lotion or this fragrance were sexually desirable to men (Table 4; No. 6). An underlying discourse of heterosexuality emerged in both advertisements and was firmly grounded in the notion of sex between a man and woman of the same race and similar ages who exhibited a media-based dominant conception of outward appearance (Table 4; Nos. 2, 3, 4 & 8).

Two additional *Cosmopolitan*-based advertisements illustrated sexual messages framed by appearance, this time with a woman as the focus without including a man. The first, found in the August 2007 issue (p. 57), included a full-page color photograph of a woman and highlighted “bebe,” which was the only written text on the page (and which means “baby” in French); according to this company’s web site, bebe is a “national

retailer of sexy, sophisticated, fashionable women's clothing" (www.bebe.com). A young White woman was shown seated on a black leather sofa against a black background. She was striking with unblemished skin, long curled blonde hair, large round breasts, long sleek legs, manicured nails and bright red lipstick. Her clothing emphasized the sexual nature of the advertisement. She wore a bright yellow trench coat with a red silk lining and nothing underneath except for exposed black panties and a garter belt attached to black thigh-high hose; black high heel shoes, black netting over her eyes, black riding gloves and a riding crop completed her seductive outfit. Her cleavage and thighs were exposed and her breasts were emphasized by the coat. Her expression included fierce eyes and parted lips, forming a slight smile.

The next, also from the August 2007 issue (p. 100), advertised "big sexy hair," a hair spray product by the "sexy hair" company (whose motto is "LIVE LIFE SEXY" according to www.sexyhair.com). Both of these written texts were emphasized on this full-page advertisement in conjunction with a large photograph of a thin but voluptuous White woman with long brown curled hair, big brown eyes, unblemished skin, makeup and manicured nails. She was pictured from the waist up, and she wore a black V-neck dress with shoulder straps. She looked forward with her head tilted slightly to the right, and she pulled on her dress, moving it down and away from her body to partially expose her cleavage and large round breasts.

Both of these advertisements clearly associated physical attributes, enhanced by fashionable clothing and trendy hair products, with female sexuality (Table 4; Nos. 5 & 6). Their message encouraged women to flaunt their sexuality by wearing revealing clothing (Table 4; No. 9). They also implied that women who appeared confident (based

on facial expressions) and strong and assertive (based on the inclusion of a riding crop), were sexy (Table 4; No. 10). The discourse found on *Cosmopolitan* magazine covers was also found here – one that closely linked a woman’s outward appearance to enhanced sexuality (Table 4; Nos. 1 & 4).

A final two advertisements from *Cosmopolitan* similarly framed female sexuality within the context of appearance. From September 2006, an advertisement for InspiredSilver.com was designed to sell imitation silver and diamond jewelry (p. 185). Dominating the page was an image of a naked White woman barely covering her nipples and large breasts with her hands and arms crossed over her chest. She wore only large rhinestone jewelry (earrings, necklace, rings, and bracelets). The color photograph showed the woman from her mouth to her navel with her breasts centered on the page; she had tan smooth skin, a manicure, long brown hair, and managed to be simultaneously thin and voluptuous. The written text located beside her read, “Who cares if they’re not real?” The advertisers used a play on words that seemed to indicate neither the jewelry nor her breasts were real. The advertisement’s sexual nature was obvious due to the woman’s posture, her slightly open mouth, and her partial nudity. The combination of the written and visual texts implied an acceptance of both imitation jewelry and breast augmentation.

An advertisement for DoctorsSayYes.net, found in *Cosmopolitan*’s May 2006 issue, also marketed a web site and included a photograph of a partially naked woman (p. 171). No written texts offered sexual messages on this one-page advertisement; instead information was included regarding doctors, surgery and available financing. However, the visual image at the top right corner of the page showed a naked female

body from the bottom of her round breasts to her waist. The woman's skin was unblemished and tan, and she was thin with an hourglass shape. This advertisement was placed within the "Love & Lust" section of the magazine within an article called, "Can You Make Love Happen?" The implication here was that perhaps you could make love happen with the assistance of surgical enhancements to achieve certain physical characteristics such as large breasts and a flat stomach.

These particular advertisements in two issues of *Cosmopolitan* magazine foregrounded sex in relation to appearance; large, presumably fake breasts and thin, flat stomachs were presented as a marketing-based ideal (Table 4; Nos. 4-6). Physical attributes of large breasts and small waists, even when achieved through unnatural means such as cosmetic surgery, were preferred to help women appear sexy. The common discourse emphasizing a particular outward appearance (which highlighted skin and body type) and its vital role regarding female sexuality was again evident (Table 4; No. 1).

All four advertisements randomly selected for analysis from *Essence* magazines were framed by appearance regarding their sexual messages. Each of these sold a different product – hair care, clothing, fragrance, and makeup – but all were intended to impact appearance and sexual appeal for women. Paul Mitchell hair care products were marketed with a full-page advertisement dominated by a color photograph of a young light-skinned Black woman in the September 2006 issue (p. 69). She was pictured from head to waist, and she had curly but controlled and silky hair, unblemished skin, dramatic eye makeup and glossy voluptuous lips. Her waist was extremely thin; her breasts were not large, but they were partially exposed. She stared at the reader with large dark brown eyes, a look of confidence across her face. Her forward posture included a slight angle of

her waist to the right with her left hand on her hip. Her clothing, a white V-neck jacket with wide lapels open to her belted waist and no shirt underneath, carefully accentuated her exposed cleavage. Due to the white clothing, white background and centered placement on the page, the model's skin and breasts were visually emphasized. No written text on this advertisement included a sexual message, allowing this visual image to speak for itself regarding female sexuality.

Similarly, *Essence's* December 2006 issue included a full-page advertisement for Roca Wear featuring a large color photograph of a young light-skinned Black woman (p. 199). She was also physically fit and thin with unblemished skin, long straight smooth black hair, and makeup. She was nude to her waist, wearing only a pair of dark denim low-rider jeans. The model's pose was somewhat artistically presented and different from typical forward-facing poses in many magazine advertisements – here the young woman faced the side of the page with her head tilted back as she looked directly up; her left arm was bent holding the back of her head, and her right arm wrapped around her body, barely covering her right breast and nipple; her back was arched so her buttocks were emphasized in the tightly fitted jeans. Again, no written text specifically sexual in nature was included, but the emphasis on female sexuality related to outward appearance was clearly evident within the photograph alone.

The third advertisement containing sexual messages in the April 2006 issue of *Essence* featured a photograph of a young White woman and marketed “euphoria” perfume by Calvin Klein (p. 15). She was shown from her head to her feet in a full body pose. The model's smooth skin was deeply tanned and glowing; she had long blonde hair, bronzed makeup and manicured nails. Her long dress made from a wispy, flowing fabric

covered her from her chest to her toes, but managed to partially expose a bit of cleavage. This advertisement primarily expressed its sexual messages through the woman's facial expression – her lips were slightly parted with one hand gingerly touching them, and her eyes were closed, as if she were euphoric – in reference to the name of the fragrance. Euphoria, a state of ecstasy, might be achieved through sex, so the largest written text on the page, “euphoria,” combined with this dramatic photograph to emphasize the sexual messages offered. Female readers were encouraged to “live the dream;” the dream presumably involved displaying sexuality through feminine physical attributes modeled here and increasing sexual attractiveness by wearing this particular fragrance.

Revlon, a makeup manufacturer, advertised in the June 2007 issue of *Essence* magazine (p. 6). Instead of including a photograph highlighting a woman's figure, this advertisement for Midnight Swirl Lip Luster featured a very close up view of a woman's mouth. The model's race was difficult to determine because the photograph was dark, but she appeared to be a light-skinned Black woman. Her skin was unblemished and her lips, coated in bright red shiny lip gloss, were plump and luscious. Her mouth was slightly open as if she were ready to give and receive a kiss. Three written texts on the page emphasized the sexual image as readers were persuaded to “put a spin on sexy,” to “illuminate your lips to sheer seduction,” and to purchase the “5 head-turning shades.” Apparently women were supposed to wear this product in order to appear sexy and to attract and seduce someone.

All four of these advertisements found in *Essence* had visual images of women and occasionally written texts that squarely placed female sexuality within the frame of appearance using themes of physical attributes and fashion/style in an effort to sell their

products to women. Females who were able to attain this dominant conception of appearance – including body type, hair, clothing, aroma, and makeup – were able to reach the assumed goal of looking sexy, and perhaps the ultimate goal of being sexually attractive (Table 4; Nos. 1 & 4-6). Two of the four advertisements also encouraged women to wear partially revealing clothing in order to increase their sexual appeal (Table 4; No. 9)

Three of the four randomly selected advertisements that contained sexual messages in *More* magazine also emphasized the importance of outward appearance regarding female sexuality. The Forth & Towne two-page advertisement spread in the December 2006/January 2007 issue (p. 3) included a color photograph of a White woman who appeared to be beyond her thirties in age – but she still managed to have unblemished and unwrinkled tan skin, an incredibly thin waist, a long thin neck and large round breasts. Instead of long, flowing, curled hair often depicted on magazine models, she had very short blonde hair that was slicked down to her head. She faced forward looking directly at the magazine reader. In a common pose for popular women's magazine models, one hand was raised toward her shoulder and the other was lowered actually behind her body; she was not smiling, but her mouth was slightly open and she appeared confident and self-assured. The store featured, Forth & Towne, was owned by Gap, Inc. and was aimed at this magazine's targeted demographics, marketing clothing to "a new generation of older women" (www.ForthandTowne.com). This model wore a black dress with a cut that emphasized her breasts, exposed her cleavage and fit tightly around her small waist. Without any coordinating written texts, this visual image offered the only sexual messages in this advertisement. Apparently older women should feel

confident about their sexuality, but perhaps only if they too can achieve the physical characteristics shown, even in maturity.

The additional two advertisements that framed female sexuality by appearance in *More* included photographs of a man and woman together. In the May 2007 issue, Gillette Daisy 3 disposable razor was marketed with a full-page color photograph of a female and male couple sitting on a tree trunk outside in a wooded area (p. 85). They were both White, and they both appeared to be young with clear skin and physically fit, thin bodies. They were fully dressed in clothes that gave the impression they retreated to these woods from some spring afternoon semi-formal event – she wore a light pink sundress with spaghetti straps, a bow at her waist, and high heel sandals; he wore a white dress shirt, a tie, khaki slacks, a belt and loafers. The image exuded a sense of innocence except for their pose: they faced each other; the man straddled the tree trunk while the woman draped her crossed legs over one of his; she held one arm around his neck and shoulders; he held her around her back and waist with one arm and placed the other hand on her upper leg as he pulled her dress up exposing her thigh; they were embraced in a kiss, but their faces were not visible because the woman held a bunch of daisies (in reference to the product being marketed).

Similarly, Nivea Q10 Gentle Spa Micro-Dermabrasion Kit was advertised in the June 2007 issue of *More* magazine (p. 49). This advertisement's design was reminiscent of the previously discussed Nivea body lotion advertisement in *Cosmopolitan's* September 2006 issue. A young White man and woman were shown together in an intimate pose: they leaned towards each other seemingly about to kiss; their eyes were closed, their lips slightly parted, and the man held the woman's face guiding her mouth to

his. The photograph was very close up with only their faces included, so no clothing was shown; however, their unblemished skin was emphasized by this view. Three written texts associated with this visual image added to the sexual content – “The difference between harsh formulas AND STRONG CHEMISTRY;” “For a youthful look that begs to be touched;” and “NIVEA. TOUCH AND BE TOUCHED.” Women who used this skin care product would look younger and more attractive, therefore increasing their sexual appeal to men and the likelihood of intimate physical encounters.

All three of the analyzed advertisements in *More* that framed female sexuality within the context of appearance did so by showing women and men who fit within a media-influenced dominant discourse of attractiveness, even for the magazine’s older readership (Table 4; Nos. 1 & 4). They marketed products intended to increase sexual appeal and enhance physical attributes by encouraging a youthful look, such as fashionable tight-fitting and revealing clothing and trendy skin care items (Table 4; Nos. 5, 6 & 9). Underlying discourses included assumed heterosexuality as well as the impact of age related to female sexuality, with looking younger offered as a goal (Table 4; Nos. 2, 8 & 10). Finally, the male/female couples portraying sexual content in two of these advertisements were of the same race and appeared to be similarly aged (Table 4; No. 3).

The frame of appearance was evident regarding all four advertisements randomly selected and analyzed from *O The Oprah Magazine*. One by Dior in the May 2007 issue highlighted a fragrance, J’adore (p. 61). A photograph of a young White woman filled the page. She had blonde hair, smooth tan skin, a long neck, fairly large round breasts, a thin body type, manicured nails and makeup. The visual image focused on a close-up view from the top of her head to the bottom of her breasts. It was difficult to tell if she wore a

strapless formal dress or a negligee, but the materials used were a combination of black lace over beige silk. Her sexuality was expressed primarily through her pose and expression – her head was tilted slightly back and to the right; her left hand was removing one of her large gemstone earrings; her right hand was pulling down on her top, exposing her breasts almost to her nipples; she had a sultry look with her eyes half shut and her lips slightly parted. The company name and name of the fragrance were written texts on the page that did not contain sexual messages; however, “J’adore” means “I adore you” in French. The advertisement used themes of outward attributes, fashion and style to imply that adoration and female sexuality were best expressed by wearing this trendy fragrance while revealing oneself (Table 4; Nos. 1, 4, 5, 6, 9 & 10).

Chanel marketed makeup on the back cover of *O The Oprah Magazine*’s December 2006 issue with a large color photograph of a product – pinkish-red lipstick emerging from its golden tube. Although this cylindrical object, a tube of lipstick standing erect, could be interpreted as a phallic symbol, the sexual messages were found specifically in the written text. “ROUGE ALLURE” was the all uppercase heading across the top of the page. Because Chanel was named for famed French designer Coco Chanel, a French interpretation of these words was appropriate – they meant powerful attractiveness through red lipstick. Below the heading was a subheading that read, “SEDUCTION IN JUST ONE CLICK,” again in an all uppercase but slightly smaller font. According to this advertisement, women could easily entice others to engage in sexual behavior simply by wearing this makeup. This was the only advertisement framed by appearance that did not feature a model but instead showed only a product. Ignoring magazine advertising standards evidenced by all other advertisements analyzed, no visual

references to race, age, or physical characteristics were offered here; however, a strong connection between outward appearance and female sexuality was still made in a powerful way (Table 4; Nos. 1, 4 & 6).

The additional two advertisements in *O The Oprah Magazine* that framed sexual messages with the topic of appearance marketed skin care products. Olay used a full-page photograph of a Black woman to highlight its body wash in the September 2006 issue (p. 74). She was shown completely naked, but her breasts, upper thighs and buttocks were covered by large purple ribbons that flowed over the page and entangled around her body. Her pose was both graceful, like a dancer, and strong, like an athlete. She faced the side of the page with one arm and leg bent in front of her and the other arm and leg extended behind her in a leaping motion. Her age was not evident, but her skin was smooth and unblemished; her hair was a bit disheveled and pulled up in a bun at the back of her head. She had a body type that emphasized being muscular and physically fit over being incredibly thin.

Similarly, Dove marketed body lotion in the June 2007 issue and defied the dominant conception of female sexual attractiveness exhibited by many visual images in popular women's magazines (p. 137). The model shown in a full-page color photograph, identified as "Julia, 26" only wore underwear. Her black bra revealed cleavage, and her black bikini briefs exposed her thighs and stomach. Her sexuality was emphasized by her partial nudity, but her appearance was noticeably different from the vast majority of models' pictures within these magazines. She sported tightly curled hair, visible moles, and laugh lines at her eyes. Her breasts were not emphasized, she was filled out at the waist, and she wore no makeup. Her hands were on her hips and a large grin flashed

across her face in a casual, relaxed pose unlike those in most advertisements. No written sexual messages were included on the page, but small type at top of the advertisement listed the company's web site – campaignforrealbeautyatdove.com.

Evidenced by these two advertisements, both Olay and Dove offered alternatives to conventional media images of female outward appearance as it related to sexuality. While a theme of enhanced physical attributes through skin care was used, attitudes such as strength, happiness and confidence were also incorporated (Table 4; Nos. 6 & 10). These two advertisements provided the only discourse that suggested women could be sexually appealing without achieving the dominant conception of appearance perpetuated by most advertisements analyzed in these popular women's magazines (Table 4; No. 7).

Articles

Three of the four magazines used in this study, *Cosmopolitan*, *More* and *O The Oprah Magazine*, contained randomly selected articles that framed sexual messages with the topic of appearance. Two articles in *Cosmopolitan*, one in *More*, and one in *O The Oprah Magazine* highlighted women's fashions and included a variety of visual and written texts associated with female sexuality. The September 2006 issue of *Cosmopolitan* featured an article called, "The Great 8" (pp. 250-257). Eight full-page photographs and their captions composed this article that highlighted essential trends for the fall season according to the magazine. Somewhat surprisingly, given *Cosmopolitan's* typically large amount of sexual content, only one of the eight photos showing fashion trends included sexual messages. On page 253, a young White female was pictured from head to toe, facing forward with her left hand on her hip and her right arm straight by her side; her left hip was pushed out slightly with her right leg slightly bent and her legs

parted. She had a thin figure and long legs, long blond hair, and unblemished skin. The clothes were the featured item in this article, and this young woman wore an extremely short dress that ended at the top of her thighs and included a low-cut V-neck design, exposing her cleavage and part of her breasts; very high heels completed the outfit. Adjacent to the photograph was the caption, “HOT-MAMA METALLIC.”

A similar fashion article called “Keep It Short” appeared in the December 2006 issue of *Cosmopolitan* (pp. 182-189). Four of the seven full-page color photographs in this article contained messages related to female sexuality associated with appearance. Each featured the same model in different clothing, and each included a street scene background placing her in a nighttime big-city context. This young White model also had long curled hair, makeup, and an extremely thin body with very long legs and emphasized breasts. The four photographs showed her either standing or seated on curbs and sidewalks, often with her legs parted and either partially revealing her cleavage and breasts or her upper thighs. In each of the four images, she wore very high heels and dresses or skirts that were extremely short and featured either satin, sequins, lace or leather. The result of the montage was the impression that this young woman was emulating a prostitute, given her flashy revealing clothes and the backdrop of nighttime city streets. Written text that emphasized the sexual imagery included the title, “KEEP IT SHORT,” as well as a “pulse-raising tip” that it was time to “hike it up.” Captions included “Sequins up to There” and “Push his buttons.”

Both of these *Cosmopolitan* articles squarely placed sexuality within a frame of appearance by highlighting female fashions that were intended to be sexually appealing. They incorporated themes of physical attributes with those of fashion/style in order to

emphasize a vital link between looking good and being sexy for women; and being sexy included wearing clothes that revealed as much as possible in public (Table 4; Nos. 1, 4-6, & 9). In fact the image of a hooker was used in one of these articles, encouraging an association between an impression of sexual promiscuity and appearance. One caption, “Push his buttons,” again assumed heterosexuality (Table 4; No. 2).

The September 2006 issue of *More* magazine featured an article entitled, “Fall Fashion 2006: What You Want Now” (pp. 113-123); and the September 2006 issue of *O The Oprah Magazine* included an article called, “Getting Dressed: The Originals” (pp. 157-166). Each had full-page color photographs of older female professionals (e.g., co-anchor, lawyer, business owner) of various races wearing new fall fashions. None of the 15 visual images in the two magazines contained sexual messages – there were no revealed upper thighs, buttocks, or breasts. However, several of the captions associated with the photographs did make sexual references. For example, *More*’s article attributed its models with the following quotes: “Leopard makes me feel sexy, youthful, and hip...,” “...a wrap that’s so sexy every woman on our shoot wanted to wear it;” and “...it’s a conservative outfit with sex appeal.” *O The Oprah Magazine*’s article also quoted the models commenting on their clothing within its captions: “...to look like a classy, sexy mom;” “The cleavage isn’t vulgar; it works;” and “There’s a line between sexy and tarty.”

These two articles were very similar in their layouts and their sexual messages. They both emphasized that it was important for older, successful women to look sexy; however, they did not encourage the use of revealing clothing to achieve this goal. Instead, it was suggested that older women should be “classy” and “conservative” (as the

article mentioned) while appearing simultaneously sexy. These articles also put forth an association between wealth/status and female sexuality, given the high-priced clothing and the women's high-yield professions. While typical themes of fashion and style were used, these articles attempted to offer a new spin on female sexuality that incorporated maturity and sophistication; but an underlying discourse that emphasized the need for women to express their sexual appeal through outward appearance was still ever-present (Table 4; Nos. 1, 10 & 11).

Three additional randomly selected articles included sexual content framed by appearance. One was found in the May 2006 issue of *Cosmopolitan* (p. 130). A relatively small photograph on the top right corner of this page showed a young White woman from the top of her head to her waist. She was very thin with bones visible at her neck and shoulders, but her breasts were large. Her hair was brown and shoulder-length and her smooth skin was tan. The expression and clothing she wore emphasized the sexual nature of the photograph – her mouth was slightly parted in an inviting facial pose and her tank top barely covered her breasts, revealing a great deal of cleavage. No written texts on this page included sexual messages; the entire article was dedicated to a discussion of hair – how to color it, cut it, and care for it. However, this visual image emphasized physical attributes in a sexual context; instead of her hairstyle, the focus was on the model's partially exposed breasts (Table 4; Nos. 1, 4-6, & 9).

An article entitled, "Memoir: Time Traveler" appeared in the May 2007 issue of *More* magazine (pp. 212-217). It offered one woman's thoughts on life changes initiated by her child's departure for college; the content of the article implied that its married author was over 40, although her age was not provided. No visual image was associated

with this article except for a cartoon graphic representing the author, Marian Sandmaier (a freelance writer and editor). Included in her descriptions of life without her daughter at home were two written texts with sexual messages. The first stated, “With a new sense of buoyancy came another even more delicious experience: I felt sexy again.” She mentioned that she updated her hair style, wore lingerie again, and purchased new clothes that accentuated her somewhat shapely body type and low weight. Next she explained, “I reclaimed sexy underwear. I began to flirt with Dan again. Let’s just say he liked it.” Her comments made it clear that appearance was still very closely linked to sexuality for older women, including being thin and shapely, as well as the importance of being fashionable and stylish (Table 4; Nos. 1, 4 & 5). A sexual discourse revealed by her comments was that older women should be sexual and have sex, but they should do so within the context of heterosexual marriage (Table 4; Nos. 2 & 11).

Only one randomly selected article related sexual content specifically to male appearance, and it was found in *Cosmopolitan*’s September 2006 issue (p. 80). This regular feature was entitled, “Guy Without His Shirt;” it included a full-page color photograph of a young White male shown from his head to his upper waist. As expected based on the title, his exposed chest was the focus of the photograph. He had blonde hair, chiseled facial features, tan smooth skin lacking body hair, and a muscular physically fit build. His lips were slightly parted as he looked directly at the reader. In addition to this visual image, written texts also included sexual messages. Readers were encouraged to “Check out this month’s half-naked hunk” and to answer the question, “How hot do you think this guy is?” September dates were included in small type at the bottom of this page, indicating women should post it as a calendar. This monthly feature encouraged

women to openly lust after a partially naked man, assuming all female readers were heterosexual, and to judge him based on his physical appearance alone as it related to sexual appeal (Table 4; Nos. 1, 2 & 8).

Sexual Messages Framed by Entertainment

“Sex is the most fun you can have without laughing”

~ Woody Allen

Entertainment was found to be the second most often used frame of reference for sexual messages in the popular women’s magazines analyzed based on cover content and randomly selected advertisements and articles. Four covers, two advertisements and 13 articles foregrounded sexuality by entertainment, including themes such as popular culture, celebrity, humor and leisure. These items are listed in Appendix K. Table 5 summarizes sexual messages found to be framed by entertainment and magazines in which they appeared (indicated by check marks). Detailed descriptions of cover items, advertisements and articles exhibiting these messages follow.

Table 5: Sexual Messages Framed by Entertainment				
Sexual messages common to two or more frames:	Essence	Oprah	Cosmo	More
1. Appearance impacts sexual appeal.	✓		✓	✓
2. Heterosexuality is assumed; sex occurs between a woman and a man.	✓	✓	✓	✓
3. Male/female couples are assumed to be of the same race and similar ages.	✓	✓	✓	
4. Sex is permissible and commonplace outside of marriage and dating relationships.			✓	
5. Women’s sexual needs are secondary to men’s.			✓	
6. Sex involves secrecy and mystery.	✓		✓	
Theme – Popular Culture/Celebrity:				
7. The topic of sex is made more acceptable and approachable by linking it to popular culture (e.g., magazines, books, television) and popular male and female celebrities (e.g., singers, actors).	✓	✓	✓	✓
8. Popular culture and celebrities model that women should sexually seduce men.			✓	

9. Occasionally, female celebrities model behaviors for young women that encourage discretion regarding sex and discourage flaunting female sexuality.	✓		✓	
10. Rarely, homosexuality can be discussed within the context of popular culture.	✓			
Theme – Humor/Anecdotes:				
11. The topic of sex is made more acceptable and approachable by linking it to humor.		✓	✓	✓
12. Sex can be funny, amusing and embarrassing for women and men.			✓	
Theme – Travel/Leisure:				
13. Sex is an important part of leisure activities, including vacations.	✓		✓	

Covers

Three of the four *Cosmopolitan* covers examined contained sexual messages found in written texts framed by the topic of entertainment. On the September 2006 issue's cover was the subheading, "Brave Chicks Share Their Hysterical Sex Bloopers." The heading, "BELOW-HIS-BELT-BLOOPERS!" and its subheading, "Hilarious Tales of Inconvenient Excitement" appeared on the December 2006 issue's cover. Finally, "Their Get-Naked Fears Will Make You Laugh Out Loud" was a subheading on *Cosmopolitan*'s August 2007 cover. These similar written texts used a theme of humor to express that sex can be funny and sometimes embarrassing for women and men; each implied it was acceptable to laugh about sexual issues (Table 5; Nos. 11 & 12).

An additional written text on the September 2006 cover of *Essence* magazine framed sexuality by entertainment. One heading in all uppercase bold type read, "SECRET SEX VACATIONS." This provocative heading incorporated a theme of travel with its sexual message. The statement alone did not offer a great deal of information, but it tempted the reader to delve into this issue in order to learn more about sex linked to

leisure activities (Table 5; No. 13). It also carried with it a discourse of secrecy and perhaps mystery, confidentiality or anonymity related to sexuality (Table 5; No. 6).

Advertisements

Two of the 24 analyzed advertisements were found to frame sexuality within the context of entertainment, and both were from *Cosmopolitan* magazine. The first was featured in the December 2006 issue and used a full-page advertisement to market *Desperate Housewives* Forbidden Fruit fragrance available at Macy's (p. 31). A large color photograph highlighted the five female stars from ABC's popular television series, *Desperate Housewives*. These women were all White, they were all over 40 years of age, and they all had tan unblemished skin, long flowing curled hair, makeup, manicures, and thin physically fit bodies with large breasts. The five actresses lay next to each other on their backs looking up at the reader; their bodies formed a circle with their heads towards its center. They all wore black silky dresses with slightly different designs; all five dresses had V-necks, and three of the five generously displayed the women's cleavages. To complete the image, the women were placed on top of a huge pile of red apples; three of the five actresses each held an apple, as well.

A second smaller visual image also included a sexual reference. At the bottom of the page, a photograph of the product being sold showed a red box beside the perfume bottle. On the box was a painting of Adam and Eve, depicted as a White couple, in the Garden of Eden; they wore only fig leaves, and Eve was handing Adam an apple. Those who watched this television series would be familiar with this image because it was used each week as part of the introduction to the program. Two written texts were included that coordinated directly with these visual images. The name of the marketed fragrance,

“Forbidden Fruit,” appeared three times on the page – as a tag line, on the perfume bottle, and on the perfume box. Also, the phrase, “new seductive fragrance” ran across the bottom of the advertisement.

Even for those readers unfamiliar with the popular culture phenomenon of *Desperate Housewives*, there was nothing subtle about the sexual symbolism offered by this advertisement. Similar to the DKNY fragrance advertisement in *Cosmopolitan*’s May 2006 issue, Forbidden Fruit was marketed using references to the concept of Original Sin from the Christian bible. The product’s name specifically recalled the Genesis story of Adam and Eve pictured on the perfume box. And the women holding apples and lying on top of apples, combined with the written texts, reinforced the idea of females as sexually seductive temptresses. Those who were familiar with this popular television series would recognize additional sexual messages. For example, the two most sexually active characters in the series were shown wearing the most revealing dresses – and one of them had already taken a bite from her apple. This cleverly presented advertisement combined written texts and visual images to closely link sexuality with themes of popular culture and celebrity within the frame of entertainment (Table 5; Nos. 7 & 8). By associating sexuality with the familiarity of this popular television show and these actresses, this particular advertisement encouraged women to be sexually seductive and tempting, specifically through exhibiting a particular appearance and using this fragrance (Table 5; No. 1). Through its visual image of Adam and Eve, it also reinforced that heterosexuality and sex between a man and woman of the same race are assumed societal norms (Table 5; Nos. 2 & 3).

The December 2006 issue of *Cosmopolitan* included another example of sexuality framed by the topic of entertainment, a one-page advertisement for Boost Mobile (p. 72). A color photograph showed a vacation or leisure scene; four young people were seated together in a hot tub – one Black male was surrounded by three females; one was Black and two were White. The hot tub was on a large deck overlooking a beach and ocean. The women wore bikini tops while the man wore no visible clothing with his chest exposed. All four of these models had smooth skin and physically fit bodies. Their pose indicated physical intimacy as the male put his arms around all the women while the two White women touched his arm and chest, and the Black woman touched the arm of one of the White women. All three women looked at the man, and everyone was smiling and presumably happy with the circumstances.

The largest written text on the page contained a subtle sexual message when combined with the visual image described above; it encouraged the reader to, “PICK UP ON A PLAN THAT PAYS OFF.” Using double meanings, this tag line implied that men who used Boost Mobile prepaid cell phones could easily pick up multiple women, perhaps with the ultimate pay off of sexual intimacy in a hot tub. This advertisement framed sexuality within the context of travel with its visual image, and it gave the impression that sexual encounters with multiple women and one man should be encouraged as a fun and acceptable leisure activity (Table 5; No. 13). A heterosexual discourse was found in this advertisement and included the idea that men should be the focus of women regarding sexual pleasure (Table 5; Nos. 2 & 5). The photograph featured in this advertisement was the only depiction of sexual content related to different

racess; however, instead of including a biracial couple, a Black man with two White women was shown.

Articles

Each of the four magazines used in this study (*Cosmopolitan*, *Essence*, *More* and *O The Oprah Magazine*) contained at least one randomly selected example of an article with sexual messages framed by entertainment. A total of 13 articles were analyzed that fell under this category. Of these, three referenced the topic of entertainment by focusing on the popular culture medium in which they appeared – magazines. “You Tell Us” was the title of the letters to the editor in *Cosmopolitan* and a regular feature of this magazine. Two examples of this feature were randomly selected for analysis, one from the May 2006 issue (p. 22) and one from the August 2007 issue (p. 24). Both contained visual and written texts that provided sexual messages framed by entertainment through popular culture. The photograph associated with readers’ letters in the spring issue was fairly small at the top left corner of the page. It showed a White man and woman in bed. They appeared physically fit and thin. They wore only underwear – he sported Calvin Klein boxers, while she was dressed in a negligee made of lace that highlighted her cleavage and partially exposed breasts. Their provocative pose was nose to nose with the female leaning over the male, her hand placed on his chest. The caption for the image read, “Clothing optional: we chose bare chests!” Additional written texts containing sexual messages in *Cosmopolitan*’s May 2006 issue were included in readers’ letters to the editor. One titled “Shirtless Success” praised the recent “Shirtless Guy Issue” by exclaiming, “I was drooling so much!” Another titled “Ohno, Oh Yes!” expressed “my delight to see Apolo Anton Ohno” saying that she had been obsessing about this Olympic

athlete without his shirt. She had “enjoyed the other shirtless guys, too” and the “entire issue of half-naked hot men.” A third letter entitled “Erotic Instructions” was from a woman who had appreciated a recent article called “The Pleasure Map to His Chest.” She relayed, “I cuddled up next to my boyfriend one night...he rolled over, well, you can figure out the rest! The map really works!”

Similarly, the August 2007 issue of *Cosmopolitan* featured a small color photograph at the top left corner of its letters to the editor page. This image showed only a White male who was very muscular with smooth tan skin and a hairless exposed chest. He was in a bathroom and used a towel to dry off his face; his expression was playful as he smiled and looked to the side. He wore very little clothing – only tight gray cotton underwear that emphasized his male genitalia. Two letters in this article included sexual messages. The first entitled “Naughty is Nice” was from a reader who exclaimed, “All I have to say is sexilicious! I loved the naughty photo in ‘Cosmo Peaks Inside His Pants!’” A second was titled “Lusty List” and its author stated, “My favorite article in the June issue was ‘75 Hot Mattress Moves.’ It was a great way for me to brush up on how to satisfy my man.”

Both of these “You Tell Us” articles in *Cosmopolitan* were regular features designed to highlight the magazine itself, showcasing letters from readers in order to draw attention to past issues and increase interest in this mass media form. It was for this reason that they were framed by entertainment, using the theme of popular culture. They also indicated that sexual content was an important part of *Cosmopolitan* magazine and expressed a willingness on the part of readers to enthusiastically consume sexually-explicit material (Table 5; No. 7). Underlying discourses of heterosexuality and women’s

desire to please men sexually were included in both articles (Table 5; Nos. 2 & 5). A visual reference assuming couples engaged in sexual behavior were similarly aged and of the same race was also included (Table 5; No. 3).

The June 2007 issue of *O The Oprah Magazine* used a portion of its page titled, “This Issue: Back Story” to introduce a new column that would appear in future issues (p. 22). A bold subheading, “Let’s Get Intimate” was included above a paragraph summarizing the content of this upcoming column; it would be authored by Cindy Chupack, a “former writer and executive producer of *Sex and the City*” and would respond to “readers’ questions about sex, romance and love.” This article tempted readers, claiming “whether you’re single, married, dating, divorced or contemplating one of those states, or if you want more heat in the bedroom...” the new column would be of interest. Again, like letters to the editor in *Cosmopolitan*, the sexual messages here were framed by entertainment because they were used to market the magazine itself, a popular culture medium. Apparently *O The Oprah Magazine*’s readership was drawn to sexual content and was interested in reading about sexual issues aimed at improving their sex lives (Table 5; No. 7).

Four additional articles framed sexual messages with entertainment by focusing on the theme of popular culture in the form of novels. *Cosmopolitan*’s September 2006 issue featured an article entitled, “RED-HOT READ: Getting Randy with Mr. Rich” (pp. 300-302). It provided an excerpt from a sexually explicit romance novel, *The Kept Woman*, by Susan Donovan; the book’s tag line read, “Faking It Has Never Felt So Good.” Sexual messages were found throughout this two-page article, including the subheadings “Naked Desire,” “A Passionate Proposition” and “Taking the Lusty Leap.”

Words used included “steamy,” “arousal,” “bare-chested” and “sexy.” Sexual encounters were erotically described with such phrases as, “underneath the sheets;” “heavenly zenith between his legs – dark, swaying, mesmerizing;” “tingling warmth between her thighs;” “grow hard against her;” “more than the usual kiss fondle insert pattern;” and “best orgasm ever.” In addition to the overt written texts, two visual images were included that left little to the imagination. They both showed the same White man and woman in sexual poses and wearing little clothing. In one the man was on his back in a bed with the woman lying on top of him; in the other they were standing with the woman behind him about to kiss his neck.

Sexual messages were clear in this graphic article, the most sexually explicit one analyzed for this study. Sex was between a man and woman who were both White and appeared to be of similar ages, but they were neither married nor dating each other (Table 5; Nos. 2-4). The male’s sexual satisfaction was emphasized over the female’s; the man was in control of the situation based on the written text (Table 5; No. 5). The inclusion of this article indicated that women were interested in reading explicit sexual content; however, it was placed at the back of the magazine, indicating this material should be somewhat concealed (Table 5; Nos. 6 & 7).

A book entitled *Once You Go Black* by Robert Reid-Pharr was highlighted in the “Books” section of *Essence*’s June 2007 issue (p. 83). This article was titled “The Invisible Man,” and it included sexual messages within its visual image and written texts. A small color photograph at the center of the page showed a Black man from his head to his waist. He wore no clothing, and his exposed chest was muscular and thin; he had no chest hair, but instead smooth and glowing skin (Table 5; No. 1). In an artistic pose, he

looked down at his chest and covered his heart with his hand. The featured interview with the author explained that he was “an openly gay brother.” According to Reid-Pharr, “we have to understand that it’s difficult for Black people to speak about sexuality. We only talk about it when it’s about HIV and AIDS, teen pregnancy, or someone’s being gay. We’re complex. We’re spiritual, cultural, political and yes, sexual.” Messages related to homosexuality and specifically connecting race to sexual issues were briefly addressed in this short article; within the context of entertainment through a book review, *Essence* encouraged a discussion of sexuality from a gay male perspective – one that was not typically included within the medium of popular women’s magazines based on this analysis (Table 5; Nos. 7 & 10). In fact, this article was the only one of 38 analyzed that used the term “gay.”

The June 2007 issue of *More* magazine featured an article titled “In Praise of Women My Age” (p. 118-122), an excerpt from Steven Rinehart’s book *Over the Hill & Between the Sheets: Sex, Love & Lust In Middle Age*. As was often the case for popular women’s magazines targeting older readers (based on analysis of randomly selected items), no visual image with sexual messages was included; however the written text of this article was heavily laden with sexual content. The author, noted to be an adjunct professor at a prestigious private university, incorporated sophisticated language and references with humorous personal anecdotes to offer a male’s perspective of various sexual issues related to academia. His tales of male professors and female students used phrases such as “dry-hump our way to sweaty torpor;” “big bawdy books filled with transgressive sex;” and “lust globally, but love locally.” He discussed his wife and his reluctance to cheat on her, accrediting it not to his “superior morals,” but instead to the

fact that she maintained her “undergraduate figure. She is a perfect size 6. That’s tremendously helpful.” In humorous reference to his recent vasectomy, he proclaimed that the effect was, “my wife and I can both fake orgasms.” Like *Essence*’s article framed by entertainment and highlighting a book, this excerpt offered a male’s viewpoint within a magazine targeted to women. The author expressed praise for older women regarding sexual issues, but he also plainly stated that sexual appeal and outward appearance (specifically a thin body type) were directly related (Table 5; Nos. 1, 2, 7 & 11).

A final article framing sexual messages by entertainment related to popular culture and books was found in the May 2007 issue of *O The Oprah Magazine*. “Reading Room” was a regular feature article appearing in *O The Oprah Magazine*, and this particular issue included a short description of a new book entitled *Bad Sex!* by cartoonist Danny Shanahan (p. 268). A sample cartoon showed a black and white drawing of a woman and man in bed together. Both were White and appeared to be similarly middle-aged (Table 5; No. 3). They were under the covers in a sexual missionary position with the man on top of the woman. The man looked at the woman as she spoke; the cartoon’s caption read, “Maybe you should stop and ask for directions.” A brief review of the book described it as hilarious and offered additional sexual messages – “Face it. Where sex is concerned, we’re animals.” and “As the tortoise bedding the hare points out, ‘Hey, it’s not a race.’” It was acceptable for this magazine to show men and women in a sexual pose if a drawing was used instead of a photograph. This article emphasized the amusing nature of sex and encouraged readers to read about sex and to laugh at sexual content. A heterosexual discourse was included with the understanding that both popular culture and humor made sex a more approachable topic for women (Table 5; Nos. 2, 7 & 11).

Four articles, two from *Cosmopolitan* and two from *Essence*, were framed by entertainment because they specifically related sexual messages to celebrities. The first, in the September 2006 issue of *Cosmopolitan*, offered an interview with popular singer, John Mayer, entitled “Man on Fire” (p. 98). Questions and answers were included on various topics in this one-page article. The final question asked, “Are there any rumors about yourself that you’d like to clear up?” The singer’s answer provided the only reference to sex on the page – “I don’t walk into Hollywood parties and immediately get laid.” Apparently it was important to this pop idol to debunk conventional wisdom regarding celebrities and sex. The reference was brief, but it was emphasized as the final comment in the interview. A message highlighting an association between rumor and sex was apparent here, especially regarding popular culture and celebrities (Table 5; No. 7).

In a similar article, popular actress and singer Mandy Moore was featured in *Cosmopolitan*’s May 2006 “Cosmo News Interview” called “American Dream Girl” (pp. 44-47). Several photographs of the actress were included within the article; however none of them contained sexual messages through revealing clothing or sexually explicit poses. One caption, “Class act: She personifies the sexy sophisticate” made reference to looking sexy. An additional written text in the Cosmo Quiz presumably completed by Mandy Moore stated, “I feel sexiest in: Jeans and a cute top.” The small amount of sexual content in this article made it noticeably different from many in *Cosmopolitan* magazine, based on this analysis. Instead of flaunting her sexuality with tight-fitting clothing that partially exposed her breasts or thighs, this celebrity was fashionably dressed, but covered. Sexuality was still referenced, but only with two brief written texts. A discourse oppositional to many analyzed in *Cosmopolitan* was offered here, encouraging young

women to be discrete regarding their sexuality – with the added impact of a female celebrity providing this message (Table 5; Nos. 7 & 9).

Essence's June 2007 issue featured an article titled "Notes on a Scandal" (pp. 176-181 & p. 198). It documented Andrea Kelly's story related to her estranged husband, singer R. Kelly – who according to the article was "currently facing 14 counts of child pornography charges for allegedly videotaping himself having sex with an underage girl." The author explained that, "when the videotape that shows a man resembling R. Kelly appearing to have sex with a young girl and urinating on her surfaced in 2002, the scandal rocked the music world and briefly cast Kelly as the villain." These two sexual references found in written texts provided background information. Additional texts focused on Andrea Kelly; she was a professional dancer, but was perhaps most famous for her marriage to this Grammy-winning popular singer. Under a section with the subheading "SEX, LIES AND THAT VIDEO" the author stated that, "ironically, while Kelly drips sex and scandal, his wife is simultaneously trying to school little Black girls. Follow your dream, she tells them, but remember, beautiful doesn't mean naked." Apparently Andrea had some regrets about her former clothing choices: "Today she says you couldn't pay her enough...to wear those booty shorts." One photograph included in the article showed the shorts, picturing Andrea Kelly in a pose as her "professional dance persona." She was scantily clad in tight clothing that emphasized her breasts and thighs; however, the written messages contradicted this visual image. Within the context of celebrity, sexual issues were highlighted in this article – but in defiance of typical discourses offered that glorified sex and encouraged sexually revealing clothing for young women, this article suggested women should be more

discrete about displaying their sexuality (Table 5; Nos. 7 & 9). Heterosexuality and same-race couples were assumed norms displayed by this article (Table 5; Nos. 2 & 3).

In the December 2006 article titled “Say What?” *Essence* magazine highlighted celebrities who “were better seen than heard” that year (p. 72). This one-page article was a collection of quotes by celebrities under the heading, “The Best & Worst of 2006.” Included was the following quote: “‘She raped me, I mean, you know, that may sound like bullsh - -. No man has ever been...you know what I mean, like never? Is that the only thing in the world that’s not possible?’” It was attributed to “Rapper DMX claiming that his recent child with a Washington, D.C. woman was the product of her raping him. She’s suing him for \$2 million for defamation.” The tone of this article was somewhat sarcastic, emphasizing the absurdity of this celebrity’s comment by including it among one of the worst spoken moments of the year. The popular rapper quoted was not portrayed as a sympathetic victim of sexual assault, but instead as a ridiculous bully. Gender impacted his comment; it was apparently unbelievable that a man could be raped by a woman, at least not in this situation. The article was able to discuss the serious issue of rape within the context of celebrity (Table 5; No. 7).

Two additional articles from *Cosmopolitan* magazine framed their sexual messages by entertainment. One was found in the December 2006 issue, and it was entitled “Cosmo News – HOT SHEET: What’s New & Buzz-Worthy” (pp. 34-35). It included a color photograph of a young White woman and man about to kiss. The close-up angle highlighted their smooth skin and gave the impression that they were naked. They were shown from the side; they faced each other and were both smiling. Adjacent to this photograph was the phrase, “Slump-buster” in bold black font placed inside a white

text bubble that pointed to the man's mouth, attributing these words to him. The subheading under the text bubble read "SECRET LANGUAGE OF GUYS." A definition for "Slump-buster" was provided nearby inside a black text box with white lettering that highlighted the message: "A girl a dude sleeps with – possibly out of desperation, not attraction – to put an end to a sex drought." This information was included as a humorous explanation of this popular slang or lingo. The woman in the photograph associated with this written text seemed happy. Nothing on the page indicated that this slang term should be considered negative, but instead offered it as a funny phrase (Table 5; No. 11). Heterosexuality was assumed, the male/female couple shown were both White and young, and the indifferent and somewhat disturbing tone of this sexual message implied that men who need sex on a regular basis should be serviced by women happily willing to provide them sexual satisfaction outside of any relationship and regardless of the man's nonchalant attitude (Table 5; Nos. 2-5).

Cosmopolitan's May 2006 issue featured an article called "Your Work Life" that contained a sexual message framed by entertainment with the use of a humorous anecdote (p. 244). One of the page's four "mortifying mishaps" in women's work settings was described by "Robyn, 25." She was a reporter who interviewed a Senator at a costume party while she was dressed as a mermaid. Later in the evening she exchanged phone numbers with a "hot guy." She texted him after the party saying, "Hey sexy, it's ur blue nymph." Shortly thereafter the Senator called her; she had texted him by mistake. This written message assumed heterosexuality and used humor to serve as a low-key warning to other young women to be careful regarding cell phone communications and sexual content (Table 5; Nos. 2 & 11). There was no shame in this young woman being

sexually assertive towards a man she hardly knew, only in being accidentally caught within the context of a professional situation (Table 5; No. 4). Permission was also given to women to laugh at themselves regarding sexual blunders (Table 5; No. 12).

Sexual Messages Framed by Performance

*“There’s nothing better than good sex. But bad sex?
A peanut butter and jelly sandwich is better than bad sex. ”*
~ Billy Joel

The category of performance was a particularly popular frame for sexual messages found in *Cosmopolitan* magazine, associated with all four of its analyzed covers as well as eight of its randomly selected advertisements and articles. Examples of this frame of reference were found in *Essence* magazine, as well, on one cover and in one randomly selected article. Items analyzed in this section are listed in Appendix L. Table 6 summarizes the sexual messages found to be framed by performance and the magazines in which they appeared (indicated by check marks). Detailed descriptions of cover items, advertisements and articles exhibiting these messages follow.

Table 6: Sexual Messages Framed by Performance				
Sexual messages common to two or more frames:	Essence	Oprah	Cosmo	More
1. Appearance impacts sexual appeal.	✓		✓	
2. Heterosexuality is assumed; sex occurs between a woman and a man.	✓		✓	
3. Male/female couples are assumed to be of the same race and similar ages.	✓		✓	
4. Sex is permissible and commonplace outside of marriage and dating relationships.	✓		✓	
5. Women’s sexual needs are secondary to men’s.	✓		✓	
6. Sex involves secrecy and mystery.			✓	
7. Experts should be consulted regarding sexual issues; expert opinions increase the reliability of sexual information.	✓		✓	
Theme – Tips:				
8. Women are sexually active and want to improve their sex lives.	✓		✓	

9. Men and women can and should be taught to perform better sexually. Good sex requires work from both women and men			✓	
10. Women should be seductive and employ sexual techniques that excite men.	✓		✓	
11. Women should communicate their sexual needs to their male partners to increase female sexual satisfaction. Men should be mindful of women's sexual needs.			✓	
12. Mutual sexual satisfaction is important.			✓	
Theme – Behaviors:				
13. Women and men are different regarding sex; women should be respectful of men's sexual behaviors, especially when in conflict with their own.			✓	
14. Women want to attract men sexually; they should alter their behaviors to do so.	✓		✓	
15. Sex is not acceptable in social settings.			✓	

Covers

All four *Cosmopolitan* covers analyzed contained sexual references framed by performance using themes of either tips or behaviors. Highlighting procedural tips promised within the magazine, the September 2006 issue included its largest heading on the page in yellow bold font and a smaller subheading at the top left corner which read: “101 SEX TRICKS TO TRY BEFORE YOU DIE!” Similarly, *Cosmopolitan*'s December 2006 issue emphasized “NAUGHTY SEX: 8 Hot New Positions We've Never Published Before” and “How To Keep Your Guy Totally Turned On By You.” Three additional headings from the May 2006 issue promised tips for performance, as well: “Orgasms Unlimited: How to Achieve a Feel-Good Explosion...and Then Another...and Another;” “TOUCH HIM THERE! We Show You the M-Shaped Moan Zone That'll Send Your Guy to the Moon;” and “8 NEW PLACES TO HAVE SEX.” In equally graphic nature, the August 2007 issue of *Cosmopolitan* highlighted tips for “Erotic SEX: 7 Boundary-Pushing Moves All Men Secretly Crave (and You'll Get Off On Too).”

Regarding sexual behaviors, *Cosmopolitan*'s September 2006 issue included a heading, "The Certain Kind of Sex He's Thinking About 24/7;" its December 2006 issue promised to discuss "THE SEXIEST THINGS TO DO AFTER SEX;" and the May 2006 cover included the heading "4 Things You Do That Turn Him Off." Only one additional cover from *Essence*'s April 2006 issue featured a sexual message framed by performance. Its heading, "5 Sexy Ways to Reignite Passion," promised sexual procedure tips would be found inside this issue.

A discourse running through these covers' messages was that women could and should be taught how to perform better sexually (Table 6; No. 9). The sexually explicit headings and subheadings found on *Cosmopolitan*'s covers indicated a belief that sexual content was important to this magazine's readership, predominantly young White women, and implied that there were still many new sexual lessons to be taught to this demographic (Table 6; No. 8). Sexual issues were characterized as naughty and secretive, perhaps to increase interest in the magazines (Table 6; No. 6). All four issues of *Cosmopolitan* emphasized a heterosexual perspective including the notion that women should please men sexually and that women's sexual satisfaction was secondary to that of men (Table 6; Nos. 2, 5 & 10). The sexual reference from *Essence*'s cover was the only one that implied sexual interest might wane and therefore need to be "reignited."

Advertisements

Both advertisements that framed sexual issues with performance were found in *Cosmopolitan*. The magazine's September 2006 issue featured explicit sexual content in an advertisement that marketed the "BetterSex™ Advanced Techniques Video Series 2" (p. 317). Two graphic photographs were included on this page. Both showed the same

White woman and man; they were young with physically fit, thin bodies and tan unblemished skin. They wore very little clothing in both pictures – a bathing suit and towel on the man, and a bikini and lacy bra and panties on the woman. Their poses were extremely provocative. In the photograph at the top of the page, the couple was in a bathroom near the sink; the female straddled the male who was seated on the counter as they faced each other with entwined bodies; she had one leg between his two legs and the other hiked up so their thighs touched; she caressed his neck and arm with her hands; he touched her waist with one hand; they were both smiling. The photograph at the bottom of the page showed the couple seated perhaps on a beach; the female was on top of the male, straddling his waist with her legs wrapped around him; he held her thigh, and she held his chest, touching it with her breasts, as well; he kissed her neck, and she put her head back, wearing an expression indicating ecstasy.

Equally graphic written texts covered this one-page advertisement. The marketed video series provided tips for “MORE SEX! BETTER SEX! MORE OFTEN!” based on headings across this page. Subheadings proclaimed that “Advanced Sexual Techniques 2 Video Series Arouses!” and promised women who used this product would “Be the Best Lover He’s Ever Had! Guaranteed.” Explicit sexual content included phrases like, “positions that SIZZLE;” “shows you how to score the multiple orgasm time and again;” “thrill every inch of her for a ‘sex-plosion’ of pleasure for both of you;” and “where adventuresome lovers turn to rev up their sexual power!” Specific products mentioned on the page included “Advanced Oral Sex Techniques Part 2” and “Great Sex 7 Days a Week.” A warning was made in the smallest font on the advertisement: “The Better Sex Video Series: Advanced Techniques is highly explicit and is intended for adults over the

age of 18 only.” And in small bold type at the bottom of the page, potential customers were assured that all orders would be shipped “in plain packaging.”

This example framed sex by performance and contained the most sexually explicit material of all the advertisements analyzed for this study. With both its visual and written texts, it emphasized the importance of sex for women and men in a heterosexual context, as well as the belief that both men and women could and should be taught how to improve their sexual performance with procedural tips (Table 6; Nos. 2, 8 & 9). Neither marriage nor other committed relationships were mentioned here as a required context for sex, but the visual image indicated that men and women who have sex should be of the same race and ages (Table 6; Nos. 3 & 4). It was indicated that women should please men sexually, but it was also stated that men should be concerned with women’s sexual needs; mutual sexual satisfaction was encouraged with visual images and written messages (Table 6; Nos. 10-12). This advertisement was placed at the back of the magazine, and purchased items were shipped in packaging that did not include the company or product name – incongruous with the explicit nature of this advertisement were these messages indicating secrecy, discretion and perhaps shame associated with sexual content (Table 6; No. 6). Finally, the visual images provided highlighted the importance of physical appearance for women and men based on a dominant media construction of sexual attractiveness (Table 6; No. 1).

The second advertisement with sexual references framed by performance was found in the December 2006 issue of *Cosmopolitan* and marketed TAG Body Spray for Men (p. 107). A color photograph covered this page showing a family scene in a living room at Christmastime. Six White people were included – a grandmother, father, mother,

young son, and an older daughter with her boyfriend. They were all dressed in festive clothing as if ready for a holiday gathering or family dinner. The father stood by the Christmas tree in the process of decorating it; the mother entered the room carrying a tray of Christmas goodies, and the grandmother was up and about with her walker. Forming the focal point at the center of the picture was the boyfriend being straddled by the young woman. She had climbed on top of him and was seated across his waist as she kissed him on the lips and tugged on his shirt in an effort to remove it.

Based on this advertisement, sexual activity outside of marriage but in a dating relationship was permissible (Table 6; No. 4). An underlying discourse here, in addition to heterosexuality and similarly aged/same race couples, was that sexual activities should be private and hidden from polite society (Table 6; Nos. 2, 3, 6 & 15). Everyone's appalled expressions and body language indicated disapproval of this young woman's sexual behavior in a family context. The grandmother stared aghast; the father wore a look of disgust while he covered the eyes of his young son who stood beside him; the mother had a shocked expression with her mouth wide open; and the boyfriend who was being pursued by this sexually aggressive female seemed appalled also as he pulled away from her, looking surprised. The written text included on the page stated "WARNING – The makers of Tag Body Spray will not be held liable should your attraction to your Tag-wearing boyfriend cause you to engage in behaviors that Grandma may consider 'unladylike.'" This advertisement marketed a body spray made for men to its female readers using a visual image and written text with sexual references based on the theme of behavior. Apparently it was not acceptable for women to be openly aggressive towards

men in this type of setting, and it was inappropriate for women to express sexual desires in front of family members.

Articles

Seven randomly selected articles framed sexual references by performance; six of these were from issues of *Cosmopolitan* magazine, while one was from *Essence*. A slight majority of these articles, four out of the seven, addressed sexual issues from a male perspective, offering explanations for male sexual behaviors or tips for increasing sexual satisfaction for men. The other three provided descriptions of female sexual behaviors and tips for meeting women's sexual needs.

The September 2006 issue of *Cosmopolitan* presented an article called "Decode His Post-Passion Position" within the regularly featured "Man Manual" section of the magazine (pp. 74-77). This article was comprised of four full-page color photographs of four different young men, one Black male and three White males. Each was shown lying on a bed, and they were all shirtless, exposing muscular chests and smooth skin. They demonstrated four different body languages presumably after sexual encounters with women: 1) lying on his stomach with his left arm on the pillow beside him; 2) lying on his back with his left arm out on a nearby pillow; 3) lying on his right side with his left arm across his body; and 4) lying back on the bed with his arms both angled behind his head. Written texts throughout the article used sexual references to describe meanings attributed to these four poses; however, the word "sex" was only used once – euphemisms for sex were employed instead, including "post-passion;" "knocking boots;" "after-nooky;" and "post booty." The article claimed that men's body positions after sex were directly related to their feelings for their female sexual partners. For example, a

“half-hugger” knew that women craved contact after sex and was making an effort to provide it, whereas a “spooner” was perhaps a possessive and dominant type.

This article educated women regarding their sexual partners’ needs. It encouraged female readers to be in tune with a man’s body language and behaviors and to be sensitive to them as an important and telling part of sexual encounters (Table 6; Nos. 5 & 10). Three people were quoted who contributed to the content of the article, two communications experts with PhDs and one professional speaker on issues of nonverbal communication (Table 6; No. 7). Women apparently should “decode” what men were communicating through body language regarding sexual issues, implying that sex included secrets and mysteries to be discovered (Table 6; No. 6). This article attributed different behaviors to men and women regarding sexual intimacy: women desired physical contact, emotion and closeness; men were instead “spent” and tired after sex and wanted space (Table 6; No. 13). Women were expected to be respectful of men’s feelings, even if they only verbalized them with their unspoken body language. And again, visual images emphasized a dominant media concept of male sexual attractiveness based on physical appearance (Table 6; No. 1).

Cosmopolitan’s December 2006 issue had a small section entitled “His and Hers” on a page called “Your Body” (p. 220). Instead of focusing on the female body, as the page’s title indicated it would, this article sought to answer the question of whether a male’s nipples were as sensitive as a female’s. The expert who answered this question was Patti Britton, PhD, author of *The Complete Idiot’s Guide to Sensual Massage* (Table 6; No. 7). She explained that men “have the ability to derive just as much pleasure from having them touched” but that “nipple play may not float his boat.” She stated, “sexual

sensitivity is as psychological as it is physical” and that a man simply may not think of “his headlights as erogenous zones.” A single visual image accompanied this text; it was a cartoon-type drawing instead of a photograph, and it showed a White woman and man naked from the waist up facing each other; the woman touched the man’s nipple with her right hand, and her bent right arm covered her own exposed chest. Even these cartoon characters in *Cosmopolitan* were thin and physically fit; the man was depicted as muscular, and the woman had large breasts and a small waistline; they were also heterosexual and of the same race (Table 6; Nos. 1-3). A caption below this drawing read, “Yep, they’re a hot spot on him too.” This article taught female readers about men’s sexual needs and encouraged women to consider ways of meeting them (Table 6; No. 13).

The “Cosmo Quiz,” a regularly featured article in *Cosmopolitan*, was called “Do Guys Find You Intriguing?” in the August 2007 issue (p. 244). No visual images were included, but several written texts were directly related to sexual issues. The second question posed by the quiz offered a sexual situation, “You have a hot night planned for your man’s birthday.” One of the possible responses was, “Increase his anticipation – send him a text that reads ‘Better rest up. U won’t get much sleep 2morrow.’” The fifth question asked, “When hooking up with a new guy for the first time, what’s your mattress MO?” All three possible answers included sexual references: “a) Work a couple of your signature moves but leave him wondering what else you have in your bag of tricks; b) Let him take the lead; and c) Whip out all your best, sexiest skills to impress him.” After completing the quiz, readers were offered three possible female types based on their answers. The first was an “Open Book Babe” who used all of her “sexy secrets

off the bat” therefore diminishing mystery and perhaps turning off a man. The second was a “Spellbinding Seductress” who gradually showed men her “sack skills” thereby increasing her allure regarding men. The last was a “Clandestine Chick” who drew guys to her by revealing a little bit of “the real you (including a fab mattress move).”

This article also used experts to add weight to its sexual messages. Jeffery Singer, PhD, a professor and Darlene Mininni, PhD, an author both contributed to the three descriptions of possible female types offered (Table 6; No. 7). It was evident that being sexually intriguing was a goal for women; drawing men in was positive, while turning them off was negative (Table 6; No. 10). Based on their answers on this quiz, women should alter their behaviors to fulfill men’s desires and to attract men sexually; sex could be considered a device women used to attract and keep men (Table 6; No. 14). Being mesmerizing or mysterious were traits preferred over being open and honest regarding sexuality and sex acts (Table 6; No. 6).

A fourth and final article framed sex by performance and offered tips to women regarding sexual procedures that were generally intended to increase sexual satisfaction for men; it was found in *Essence*’s April 2006 issue (p. 116). A somewhat misleading title and visual image were used. The article was on a page called “Your Sex Life” and it had the heading “Keep the Spark Alive: 5 simple ways to heat things up between the sheets.” The photograph pictured a young Black woman with a thin, muscular body and a noticeably flat stomach. She had smooth skin and was dressed in a pink bra and panties under a pink T-shirt, which she was in the process of removing. She stood on a bed with her feet and legs on either side of a man who lay beneath her. Her head was tilted back, and she laughed while the man looked up at her. A clever caption was associated with

this photograph – “Take a stand to get what you want in bed.” However, while the title of the page and the image and related caption emphasized female sexual needs, the content of this article often focused instead on what women could do to please men sexually.

Five tips were provided to help “get your toes curling again;” they were offered by two expert sources, one sex therapist and one medical doctor (Table 6; Nos. 7 & 8). The first suggested that women should “be unpredictable because men love spontaneity.” In graphic detail, the article said women should put their “hands down his pants” and provide “unexpected manual stimulation.” They should also “go down on him while he’s sleeping.” Another tip told women to “ditch your undies.” It was suggested that women should “leave your panties behind,” “wear a skirt” and “let it ‘accidentally’ ride up in the car.” This sexual seduction would result in the man not being “able to wait until you get back home.” One additional tip called “Shake it Off” told readers to striptease for the man in order to “heat things up.” Women should “have him clap every time he wants you to take off an item of clothing.” These male-centered tips were incongruous with women standing up for their sexual needs, as the photograph and its caption indicated. Instead of teaching women how to increase their own sexual satisfaction, the content of this article emphasized increasing sexual satisfaction for their male partners (Table 6; Nos. 5, 10 & 14). The article’s visual image also highlighted a woman who exhibited a media-based conception of the ideal body type regarding sexual appeal, as well as a heterosexual couple of the same race (Table 6; Nos. 1-3); however, no references to dating or marriage were included (Table 6; No. 4).

Providing somewhat different messages, three articles from *Cosmopolitan* magazine paid homage to women’s sexual desires instead of men’s. The December 2006

issue included the “Myth of the Month” within a regularly featured article called “Cosmo for Your Guy” (p. 70). Written texts provided the sexual references here. The featured myth was, “Women want a marathon lover.” Quotes were given by three women who were not shown; only their first names were provided, and they were ages 28, 29 and 31. All three women indicated that, regarding sex, men did not have to take a long time to please women: “I like my sex short & sweet;” “What the hell is he waiting for?” and “I’m happy with 20 minutes or less.” Inclusion of this article indicated that women’s voices should be heard regarding their sexual needs (Table 6; No. 8 & 12). The article encouraged women to show this page to men, teaching that they should speak openly with their sexual partners about what men could do to increase female sexual satisfaction (Table 6; No. 11).

A portion of a page called “Pleasures” was titled “Have Sweeter Dreams,” also from *Cosmopolitan’s* December 2006 issue (p. 163). This article suggested women watch a television show featuring an actor they found attractive and “snuggle up to some delish eye candy” before going to bed. For “Sexy Extra Credit” women and men should take turns stripping every time something happened in the show, like an actor talked on a cell phone. The written text in this article focused on what women could do to sleep more soundly, but it included these sexual references as options to be incorporated for better sleep. They focused on the woman’s needs, suggesting visual fantasies that would be appealing for females, and on mutual pleasure derived through dual stripping intended to be beneficial to women and men (Table 6; Nos. 8, 9 & 12).

Cosmopolitan’s August 2007 issue framed its sexual messages with performance by focusing on women’s sexual behaviors and “Things Guys Learn In Cosmo” (p. 180).

Written sexual references were found throughout this article which documented various “sexy lessons” men had learned from reading *Cosmopolitan* magazine. Ten of the seventeen lessons highlighted included references to sex. Men had learned lessons like “girls like being on top;” “women think about sex;” “suggesting kinky things won’t always make her roll her eyes;” “girls like to see guys topless as much as we like to see chicks that way;” and “if she brings a vibrator into the sack, it won’t replace me.” The article included a photograph of a male with a thin but muscular build and dark smooth skin. His unbuttoned shirt revealed his chest, and he pulled down on his jeans as if to tease the reader, partially unveiling his underwear. This particular article specifically addressed the importance of teaching men what pleased women sexually by increasing their awareness of women’s sexual behaviors (Table 6; Nos. 9 & 11).

A strong heterosexual discourse ran throughout all seven of these randomly selected articles, but no particular emphasis was given to committed relationships including marriage (Table 6; Nos. 2 & 4). The dominant media concept of physical appearance related to sexual appeal of both men and women was often shown (Table 6; No. 1). Written texts within the first four examples explained that good sex required lots of work, particularly on the part of women – whose primary focus should be on men and their sexual satisfaction (Table 6; Nos. 5 & 9). It was incumbent upon the female participant to understand the male’s sexual needs, even when they went unspoken. She should be aware and respectful of actions that might turn men on or off regarding sex (Table 6; No. 13). In addition, women should be simultaneously seductive and mysterious while also being mindful of incorporating sexual techniques especially exciting for the man (Table 6; No. 10). These messages were supported by medical and

academic experts (Table 6; No. 7). Changing perspective, the next group of articles included three focused instead on female sexual behaviors and tips for helping women achieve sexual satisfaction. Building awareness regarding women's particular sexual desires was instrumental; conventional wisdom was discounted and suggestions were provided to men and women for improving female sex lives (Table 6; Nos. 9, 11 & 12).

Sexual Messages Framed by Relationships

"Sex is emotion in motion."

~ Mae West

The second least used frame for sexual messages in the popular women's magazines analyzed was relationships. Three covers, one randomly selected advertisement and seven randomly selected articles incorporated themes focused on love and committed relationships, such as marriage and dating, or issues of infidelity and adultery. A complete listing of these items can be found in Appendix M. Table 7 summarizes the sexual messages found to be framed by relationships and the magazines in which they appeared (indicated by check marks). Detailed descriptions of cover items, advertisements and articles exhibiting these messages follow.

Table 7: Sexual Messages Framed by Relationships				
Sexual messages common to two or more frames:	Essence	Oprah	Cosmo	More
1. Heterosexuality is assumed; sex occurs between a woman and a man.	✓	✓	✓	✓
2. Male/female couples are assumed to be of the same race and similar ages.	✓			
3. Sex is permissible and commonplace outside of marriage and dating relationships.		✓	✓	
4. Women's sexual needs are secondary to men's.			✓	✓
5. Experts should be consulted regarding sexual issues; expert opinions increase the reliability of sexual information.	✓			✓
Theme – Marriage/Dating:				
6. Sex is a vital aspect of marriage and other committed relationships.	✓		✓	✓

7. Sex is a married woman's chore; wives must fulfill their husband's sexual needs.				✓
8. Married couples should address sexual problems; open communication is important regarding sexual issues. Sexual problems in marriage can be solved, especially with the help of a sex therapist or expert.	✓			✓
9. It is customary for sex to occur early and often between dating women and men.			✓	
10. Committed relationships are not necessary for sex. Casual sex is acceptable for men and women.			✓	
11. Bisexual/homosexual relationships exist, but they should not be named.	✓			
Theme – Infidelity/Adultery:				
12. Infidelity and adultery are commonplace in American society. Monogamous relationships are difficult to maintain.	✓	✓		
13. Cheating on a spouse is wrong.	✓	✓		
14. Infidelity is not always wrong; sometimes infidelity can be acceptable depending on the circumstances.		✓		

Covers

Two of the sexual references found on magazine covers were concerned with the potential pitfalls of relationships. *Essence's* December 2006 issue included a heading previewing an interview in which a heterosexual couple would "Talk About the Pain of His Infidelity" (Table 7; Nos. 1 & 13). Similarly, the September 2006 cover of *O The Oprah Magazine* included a heading in a prominent position of the top right corner that warned, "Cheaters Beware!" These headings both emphasized the issue of cheating in relationships – *Essence's* highlighted an article about a couple that survived the man's affair outside the relationship, while *O The Oprah Magazine's* was more concerned with catching partners who were not being faithful (Table 7; No. 12). On the cover of *More* magazine's December 2006/January 2007 issue, a heading promised an article that would offer help to those in a relationship by teaching readers "How to Desire the Man You

Love,” incorporating the theme of commitment and encouraging women to focus on sexual desire within loving relationships (Table 7; No. 6).

Advertisements

Only one of the 24 randomly selected advertisements analyzed used the category of relationships as a frame for its sexual messages, and it appeared in the September 2006 issue of *More* magazine. This particular advertisement marketed FDS Intimate Lubricants (p. 109). The visual image included was a small picture of the product, a spray bottle, superimposed over a lightly drawn graphic representing a to-do list, a piece of paper with a large check mark. Above this visual image was the most prominent written text on the page, “Put your husband back on your ‘to do’ list.” At the bottom of the advertisement written in light purple font only slightly darker than the background was a text that read, “Don’t let changes in hormones change your love life.” These visual and written texts were subtle and clever, containing sexual references specifically aimed at *More*’s older female readership and framed by relationship issues. Based on the inclusion of the “to do” list, sex was a chore for married women that must be completed and subsequently checked off (Table 7; No. 7). The product’s tag line emphasized male sexual satisfaction by encouraging women to “do” their husbands (Table 7; No. 4). Often silences say more about lessons taught than do loudly, regularly repeated messages. Unlike the topic of appearance, which framed over 70% of the advertisements analyzed, the topic of relationships was found to frame this single advertisement. FDS was noticeably the only product marketed that placed sex within the context of marriage (Table 7; No. 6). Sex sells, but loving committed relationships apparently do not.

Articles

Two articles from *Cosmopolitan* magazine discussed sexuality within the context of dating relationships. The August 2007 issue included “His Point of View: New Love Freak-outs Men Have” within the magazine’s regular section, “The Man Manual” (p. 58). Men discussed both fears and perks associated with their new dating relationships with women. Among them it was stated that “after a period of being single, most guys are psyched about getting sex on a consistent basis.” However, men expressed some sexual concern and “worry about how his skills stack up.” One man said, “When I start sleeping with a woman, I don’t know what she likes and get paranoid she’s not enjoying herself.” The perks of new love included a male’s belief that when “first dating a girl” they “like sex in public.” Another man mentioned that it was exciting when first entering into a relationship with a girl who was also a best friend, because “this one you actually want to hook up with.” These male perspectives specifically addressed dating, and all assumed that sex would be an integral part of new relationships. One reference did include concern for female sexual satisfaction, but most were personally pleased with the idea of having sex regularly and in new ways (Table 7; No. 4).

The “Bedroom Blog” article in *Cosmopolitan*’s August 2007 issue provided a female’s voice regarding dating and sex (p. 134). The subtitle explained that in this article, within the magazine’s “Love & Lust” section, “one woman dishes about her sexy (sometimes dramatic) dating adventure.” The author referred to one man as a “delicious distraction” – Evan was her “superhot ex-boyfriend and occasional bed buddy.” She mentioned that “he doesn’t live here, so it’s pretty easy to love him and leave him. No muss. No fuss.” Debating whether or not she should sleep with him again, she proclaimed

“it would sure be a nice distraction – and by nice I mean absolutely incredible distraction.” Still undecided, the blogger opted to “make a trip to Victoria’s Secret, just in case.” This regularly featured article offered the fictional dating and sexual adventures of a young, single woman, providing a slice-of-life using a diary format. Messages were supposedly related to dating, but instead implied that this woman was happy with casual sex without love or commitment, and she was comfortable using a former boyfriend to meet her sexual needs without concern for his needs or feelings.

Both of these articles in *Cosmopolitan* indicated that sex did and should occur outside of marriage (Table 7; No. 3). It was also apparent that having sex early and often in dating relationships was customary and that casual sex was permissible for men and women, as well, without the context of a loving, committed relationship (Table 7; Nos. 9 & 10). Both articles assumed heterosexuality and professed that sex was important to women and men in a dating context (Table 7; Nos. 1 & 6).

Two articles were found to discuss sexual messages within the context of marriage. The first, “Relationship Rescue: Our Threesome Is Ruining Our Marriage,” was in *Essence*’s September 2006 issue inside the “Black Men, Sex & Intimacy” section of the magazine (pp. 152-155). A color photograph filled almost one-half of the article’s first page. It depicted two Black women and one Black man in a bedroom scene. One woman wore a pink lacy negligee and was seated on the edge of the bed, and her body language and facial expression indicated she was unhappy with the situation – her back was to the others in the room, her shoulders were hunched, her legs were closed together, and her mouth was straight, not smiling. Another woman lay barely visible in the bed, but she could be seen reaching up to touch the zipper area of the man’s jeans. The man wore

unzipped jeans and a white tank top and stood beside the woman in the bed, smiling at her and readying to remove his shirt. Combined with the article's title, the photograph implied a woman was unhappy about her husband's desire to have another woman in their bed. However, the written text of the article painted a completely different picture.

This article told the story of a married couple who “kept sparks flying by inviting other people into their bedroom.” They often had “casual flings with other couples and single women.” Recently they met Erika with whom they began having a “threesome.” Both sides provided their perceptions of the situation. The husband realized that there was a “passionate relationship between Erika and his wife.” He saw that “instant chemistry between the two women sparked sexual desires” and believed that they were “friends then lovers.” He was not happy about the women's relationship. The wife admitted to “intense physical attraction” for Erika that “wasn't just about sex this time.” Apparently “this affair is different” because the wife had “feelings for her.” Regarding Erika, the wife proclaimed that there was the “perfect amount of sexual chemistry between us.” An expert offered her suggestions for rescuing this relationship; Dr. Gail Wyatt, PhD, was introduced as a sex therapist and professor at UCLA and Director of the UCLA AIDS Institute. She advised the wife to “stop having sex with her husband and the other woman” in order to sort out her feelings. She also made it clear that “threesomes just don't work in loving committed relationships.”

The photograph associated with this story illustrated that a woman in a sexual threesome was feeling dejected; however, the narrative indicated that the man was the excluded party in this ménage à trios. The article presented both the male and female perspectives followed by an expert's opinion (Table 7; No. 5). While the written text

contained an open discussion of sexual topics including two women involved in an intimate sexual relationship with each other, no specific reference to homosexuality or bisexuality was made (Table 7; No. 11). This article placed sexual issues within the context of marriage and indicated that sexual problems within relationships could be solved if addressed properly, particularly with help from an expert (Table 7; Nos. 6 & 8). The visual image also showed sexually active couples were assumed to be of the same race and similar ages (Table 7; No. 2).

The article “Reinventing Desire” from *More*’s December 2006/January 2007 issue placed its sexual messages squarely in the context of long-term heterosexual relationships, specifically marriage (p. 158-162). The written text was sexually explicit throughout and encouraged older women to engage in sex that was fulfilling to them as women, not simply in relation to pleasing their male partners. It revealed the “dirty little secret of many long-term relationships – intimacy is great, but the sex is a chore.” It bemoaned the fact that “eroticism is conspicuously absent from our idea of marriage.” The article then went on to offer suggestions for “what couples can do so married sex doesn’t become an oxymoron” so that “committed couples could have sex and even enjoy it.” The quoted expert, Esther Perel (a licensed marriage and family therapist) invited “women to fantasize” and to “welcome their own sexual imaginings.” She also suggested they “read erotica and come home already turned on,” “have a quickie with your husband in your office” or “meet for a rendezvous in a motel.” The article included an anecdote of a woman who gave her husband a “blow job.” She told him, “You can have the basic or the special” and then afterwards proclaimed, “That’ll be a hundred bucks!” The stated

message here was, let your husband know that “if you are stuck in the Madonna-whore split – you are not the Madonna!”

Also intriguing regarding this article was the single visual image included. The caption read, “Is your sex life too squeaky-clean?” and the large photograph on the first page was of a clothes line filled with shirts and a pair of shorts hanging above a white picket fence, symbolizing domesticity. A black negligee, one that would only fit a slim body type, hung in the center of the line and presented the only sexual message implied in the photograph. It was permissible to write about sex within the context of an older married couple; however, it was not acceptable to show a couple representative of this demographic in a sexual pose. Similar to *Essence*’s article, this one from *More* magazine emphasized the importance of sex in marriage and was clearly in favor of openly discussing sexual issues related to married couples; it also indicated that sexual problems could be solved by employing advice from an expert (Table 7; Nos. 1, 5, 6 & 8).

Finally, three randomly selected articles from *O The Oprah Magazine* framed sexual references by relationships, and all three addressed sexual issues themed by infidelity or adultery. The December 2006 issue included an article titled “What Do You Do If...” (pp. 297-303). Numerous problematic situations were presented with suggested appropriate responses offered. Only one of these contained a sexual message, and it had the heading “ACCESSORY to INFIDELITY?” It posed the question “What do you do when someone asks you to cover for them?” Carolyn Roehm, “a former fashion designer and author of *A Passion for Parties*,” provided the answer:

If someone is cheating on her spouse all the time, I’d say, “You’ve got to cover for yourself.” If, on the other hand, she was very unhappy and I felt that her

husband was controlling, and I thought it could help her to go off and see what life is like some place else, well then I might be tempted to cover for her.

This article included a question regarding infidelity within a committed heterosexual relationship that was answered by a party planner/clothing designer, indicating the issue was not seriously addressed. Based on her response, infidelity was not always wrong – instead it could be acceptable within certain circumstances (Table 7; Nos. 1, 12 & 14).

Issues of infidelity and adultery were casually discussed in the June 2007 issue of *O The Oprah Magazine* in an article called “The States of Love” (pp. 222-223). No visual image contained sexual messages here; only a map of the United States of America was shown. One section called “Infidelity” related this topic to average couples, saying “There’s a possibility of spouse’s infidelity with a coworker” and to celebrity couples, saying “There’s a possibility that spouse’s sex scene with a costar was real.” It was reported that “according to Michigan law, adultery could be considered a felony, punishable by life in prison.” It was also mentioned that “in 2003 a web site for married people looking to have an affair had 50,000 members. In 2007, it has more than 1.2 million.” A sarcastic and humorous tone was used in this article, and these facts regarding cheating in monogamous relationships were presented simply as interesting trivia. The written texts made it clear that sex often occurred outside of marriage, even when married people were involved (Table 7; No. 3). The point was made that infidelity and adultery were commonplace, maybe even acceptable, in American society (Table 7; No. 12).

One additional article from *O The Oprah Magazine* that focused on issues of infidelity and adultery was called “You Got Nailed!,” in the September 2006 issue

(pp. 352-355; pp. 377-382). The photograph associated with this article was of a computer on a desk; the monitor pictured a female and male kissing; in the hazy foreground of the photograph a woman stood staring at the monitor with a shocked expression, her hand to her mouth. The written texts throughout stemmed from interviews with lawyers, wives and investigators who had personal experiences regarding computer-based infidelity. Comments included, “nasty little pictures of men and women doing things;” “infidelity business had gone high tech;” “monogamy seems to malfunction with alarming frequency;” “people having affairs inevitably email;” “virtually everyone who cheats will do it electronically;” and “every naughty impulse has become searchable.” The focus here was on infidelity within the context of marriage, and only men who were unfaithful to their wives were discussed from the wives’ perspectives. Reports confirmed that infidelity was commonplace, but regardless of its frequency, the article implied that cheating on one’s spouse was wrong (Table 7; Nos. 12 & 13).

Sexual Messages Framed by Health & Well-being

“Sex without love is merely healthy exercise.”

~ Robert Heinlein

The least utilized of the five frames of reference for sexual messages in the popular women’s magazines analyzed was health and well-being based on cover content and randomly selected advertisements and articles. Only two covers, two advertisements and four articles discussed sexual issues within the context of health and well-being, including themes of medical issues, fitness and safety. A list of these items can be found in Appendix N. Table 8 summarizes sexual messages found to be framed by health and well-being and the magazines in which they appeared (indicated by check marks).

Detailed descriptions of cover items, advertisements and articles exhibiting these messages follow.

Table 8: Sexual Messages Framed by Health & Well-being				
Sexual messages common to two or more frames:	Essence	Oprah	Cosmo	More
1. Heterosexuality is assumed; sex occurs between a woman and a man.	✓	✓	✓	
2. Male/female couples are assumed to be of the same race and similar ages.			✓	
3. Sex is permissible and commonplace outside of marriage and dating relationships.			✓	
4. Experts should be consulted regarding sexual issues; expert opinions increase the reliability of sexual information.	✓	✓	✓	
Theme – Medical Issues:				
5. Women are sexually active and should be taught about sexual health issues; women should take responsibility for their sexual health.	✓	✓	✓	
6. Medical experts should be consulted by women regarding sexual health issues; women should feel free to talk with health care professionals about sex.	✓	✓	✓	
7. Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are common in women; women should be educated to take precautions that prevent them.	✓		✓	
8. Women should use birth control to protect against unwanted pregnancies and STDs. Birth control options empower women regarding sexual freedoms; women have a right to have sex without fear of pregnancy or disease.			✓	
Theme – Fitness:				
9. Physically fit women who exercise have better sex lives.	✓			
Theme – Safety:				
10. Sex can involve fear and danger; women should be concerned and apprehensive regarding sexual health and well-being issues.			✓	
11. Rarely, issues of rape and sexual assault are addressed by popular women's magazines.			✓	

Covers

The only two sexual references involving health and well-being on magazine covers were from *Cosmopolitan*. The September 2006 issue included a medium-sized

heading on its cover that highlighted “A Shocking Tactic Rapists Use to Snare Women.” The heading appeared at the bottom right corner of the page in a yellow font. Rape, one form of sexual assault, was mentioned here as a safety issue that women should be aware of and avoid, perhaps using tips from this article. A message of fear and danger associated with sexual assault was included here in a sensationalized manner, apparently to increase interest in this magazine issue. Another heading, on the December 2006 cover of *Cosmopolitan*, foregrounded sex with the topic of health and well-being, this time using a medical issue as its theme. In bold black font at the bottom right corner of the cover appeared the heading, “Your Sexual Health;” below it the subheading read, “The STD 80% of Women Now Get.” This message also used fear and danger to draw attention to the magazine and encouraged readers’ awareness of an important sexual issue regarding health and affecting a significant percentage of women. Both magazine issues emphasized the importance of sexual issues from a different frame of reference from the typical appearance and entertainment values usually attributed to female sexuality in this popular medium based on my analysis. A discourse revolving around the significance of sex from a health and safety standpoint was included, and it was presented with tones that encouraged women’s apprehension and concern (Table 8; Nos. 5, 7, 10 & 11).

Advertisements

Both randomly selected advertisements featuring a frame of health and well-being were also found in *Cosmopolitan* magazines, and both marketed birth control products. One from the December 2006 issue advertised a product called NuvaRing (p. 217). The visual image on this page was not sexual in nature; instead it simply showed a White female hand holding the birth control device marketed – a clear plastic ring. Various

written texts made reference to the product. Differentiating this device from daily birth control pills was the heading, “Birth control every day? Not now, no way.” The largest text used a play on words related to the product and female sexuality – “Let Freedom Ring.” A smaller written text found in a paragraph of copy at the lower right section of the advertisement claimed that this product provided “A little bit of freedom a lot of women are loving.” In small type at the bottom of the page was the following disclaimer: “NuvaRing does not protect against HIV infection and other sexually transmitted diseases.” These written texts encouraged women to use birth control, but to employ a method that first and foremost made sex, perhaps even promiscuity, convenient; they also emphasized protection from pregnancy over disease protection. The clever phrase, “Let Freedom Ring” implied that sex was a woman’s right and one that should be enjoyed without this risk of becoming pregnant.

The second randomly selected advertisement that fell under the category of health and well-being was from *Cosmopolitan*’s August 2007 issue; this page highlighted Trojan brand condoms (p. 153). While this advertisement also marketed a birth control product, it took a different approach from NuvaRing. Instead of visually distancing the product from sex (as NuvaRing did by only showing a photograph of the product), Trojan included an image that contained sexual references. A full-page color photograph of a bar scene formed this advertisement. It was eye-catching because various pigs sat around the bar; nine were shown acting in human ways, for example drinking beer or using a Blackberry. Three young women sat in various locations around the room, and all three were approached by different pigs. These three women each wore a dismayed expression, indicating their disgust at the pigs. The only human couple in the room was a White man

and woman seated at the bar. They were both thin; they were casually dressed, and they appeared happy. Facing each other, they expressed mutual attraction with their smiling, laughing faces and their pose; she affectionately touched his chest. At the bottom of the page was the word “evolve” and the tag line “choose the one who uses a condom every time.” This advertisement used wit and humor to make the serious point that men who did not use condoms were figuratively immature pigs whose sexual advances should be shunned by women. Condoms, worn by men, were marketed directly to women here, emphasizing the fact that women were empowered to use a birth control method that protected them from both pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.

An underlying discourse of heterosexuality remained ever-present in both of these *Cosmopolitan* advertisements; it was assumed that young women had sex with men, but no mention of marriage or committed relationships was made in either advertisement (Table 8; Nos. 1 & 3). The visual image used to market Trojan condoms highlighted a same-race and similarly aged couple related to sexual content (Table 8; No. 2). There was an emphasis on the importance of open dialogue regarding women’s sexual needs from a health and well-being standpoint – women should be educated regarding safe sex methods and should take personal responsibility for their medical safety by using birth control when having sex (Table 8; No. 5). These advertisements for two different birth control options indicated that young women in our society should be free to have sex without fear of disease or pregnancy (Table 8; Nos. 7 & 8).

Articles

Four randomly selected articles framed their sexual references within a context of health and well-being. Three of these addressed the theme of medical issues with advice

from doctors regarding sexual health. A regular feature article entitled “Cosmo Gyno” from the May 2006 issue of *Cosmopolitan* magazine contained several written texts that revolved around sex (p. 300). One of the four strategies offered for making a woman’s period more manageable had the heading “Don’t Skip Sex.” Detailed advice followed:

Though no studies prove that sex prevents cramps and bloating, some women report that it lessens discomfort and boosts their mood. One theory why: Booty causes feel-good brain chemicals to be released into your bloodstream, giving you a natural high that overrides menstrual side effects.

The question “Why Do I Get a Headache After Orgasm” appeared on this page, as well. The answer given called this phenomenon a “coital headache” that happened when some women climaxed. It was suggested that women who experienced this affliction should “slow down your lovemaking” and that “having lots of foreplay” and getting “turned on gradually” could help, as well; taking ibuprofen before sex was offered as another option. No visual images containing sexual references accompanied these written texts; perhaps framing sex within the context of health made sexually explicit photographs unnecessary or inappropriate. However, the caption under one photograph of a medicine bottle associated with the question and answer detailed above read, “X-tra foreplay – Now that’s a cure!”

Another article that foregrounded sex in relation to health and well-being was called “Black Doctor’s Best Health Advice” and was found in the December 2006 issue of *Essence* (pp. 119-120). The article’s subheading read “Nine tips for us on everything from sexual health to strokes,” but while sexual health was highlighted in this written text, only two of the nine tips included a small amount of information related to sex. As a

brief part of tip number seven, it was mentioned that “depressed individuals may be more likely to engage in risky behavior like driving dangerously or even having unprotected sex.” And in tip number eight, women were advised to “Take the rapid HIV test” stating that “one reason the spread of HIV is so rampant in our community is that many of us don’t get tested.” While this tip did not specifically discuss sex, it was included as a sexual message because of the connection between sexual activity and the spread of HIV (Table 8; No. 7). As was the case with the medical feature in *Cosmopolitan*, no visual images that contained sexual references were associated with this *Essence* article highlighting medical issues.

A third article under the category of health and well-being was found in *O The Oprah Magazine*’s May 2007 issue and was titled “The Way to Eat” (pp. 240-242). This article was written in question and answer format with various questions attributed to women from across the country answered by David L. Katz, M.D., a professor with Yale School of Medicine. In response to one woman’s concern for her weight gain after marriage, the doctor suggested, “Physical activity will be good for everything from your waistlines to your cholesterol to your sex lives.” It was unexpected to find a sexual message embedded within an article focused on healthy food and eating practices. This article in *O The Oprah Magazine* was the only one of these three that specifically tied a sexual wellness issue to marriage.

All three of these articles discussed women’s health issues regarding sex; *Cosmopolitan*’s and *O The Oprah Magazine*’s focused on helping women enjoy sex (by emphasizing its positive effects and by advising how to eliminate sexual problems), while *Essence*’s was interested in reducing the negative behavior of having unprotected sex (by

pointing out the risks involved). All three cited medical doctors as their sources, adding reliability to the messages offered (Table 8; No. 4). Underlying discourses in addition to assumed heterosexuality included encouraging women to openly discuss sexual issues related to health, particularly with health care professionals, as well as the idea that sex played a vital role in women's health and wellness (Table 8; Nos. 1, 5 & 6).

One final article from these popular women's magazines used health and well-being as the frame for its sexual messages. This one-page article from the September 2006 issue of *Essence* was entitled "Fitness: SEX-ERCISE," and offered several detailed exercises explicitly aimed at helping women "pump up the passion" (p. 146). It linked exercise and sexual activity, explaining that "shaping up is like having sex – to keep it fun, you've got to be creative." The article offered the goal for women of "enhancing your body's ability to lengthen and strengthen pleasurable episodes." Three different exercises were outlined, and each had a "payoff" directly associated with better sex: 1) "flexibility during sex;" 2) "get the bonus of more intense orgasms;" and 3) toned muscles that "hold you up when you want to take charge and be on top." The visual images included were not sexual in nature but instead showed a Black woman dressed in fitness clothing and performing the exercises discussed. No references to men or their sexual needs were made, but it was evident that women were sexually active and had a desire to increase their own level of sexual satisfaction. By addressing women's sexual issues using the theme of fitness, this article directly linked female sexuality with health and wellness and emphasized the importance of improving the sex lives of women (Table 8; Nos. 5 & 9).

Summary of the Chapter

This chapter answered the first of two research questions guiding this qualitative study employing document analysis: What are the sexual messages taught to women by popular women's magazines? Using Altheide's (1996) model of Ethnographic Content Analysis as a guide, five frames and their coordinating themes were found to categorize sexual messages in the 16 magazines analyzed; frames and themes were identified and outlined in Table 2. The five sections that followed were based on these five sexual message frames: 1) Appearance, 2) Entertainment, 3) Performance, 4) Relationships and 5) Health and Well-being.

Each section began with a table that summarized the sexual messages found within that particular frame followed by detailed descriptions of the visual and written texts from magazine covers, advertisements and articles containing these sexual messages. All 16 magazine covers as well as 24 randomly selected advertisements and 38 randomly selected articles were described within the narrative of this chapter in order to identify and categorize the sexual messages taught by four popular women's magazines – *Cosmopolitan*, *Essence*, *More* and *O The Oprah Magazine*. The next chapter reviews additional findings based on the second research question addressed by this study: How do sexual messages vary by race and age of magazine audiences?

CHAPTER FIVE

IMPACT OF RACE AND AGE ON MAGAZINES' SEXUAL MESSAGES

This chapter presents the findings of my qualitative investigation regarding the second of two research questions guiding this study: How do sexual messages vary by race and age of magazine audiences? The magazines purposefully selected for this study enabled me to compare and contrast sexual messages taught to audiences of different races (Black and White) and different ages (20s-30s and 40+). Like Chapter Four, this chapter divides findings into five sections based on the five frames found to foreground the magazines' sexual messages: 1) Appearance; 2) Entertainment; 3) Performance; 4) Relationships; and 5) Health and Well-being. Similarities and differences based on race and age are reviewed under each sexual message frame. A summary of the chapter is also included.

Sexual Messages: Variations Based on Race and Age

In order to find variations based on race and age of magazine readership, I re-examined the sexual messages identified in cover items and randomly selected advertisements and articles described in Chapter Four. While searching for contrasting sexual messages, I found similarities that provided a context for identified variations. First I reviewed messages common to more than one frame (Table 3). I found that five of these messages were also common to all four magazines used in this study. Next I looked at sexual messages specific to individual frames (Tables 4-8), and I found that three of these were common to all four magazines, as well. These eight commonalities were

exhibited across this study's purposeful sample, regardless of magazine audience race and age, and are listed in Table 9.

Table 9: Common Sexual Messages Regardless of Audience Race and Age
1. Appearance impacts sexual appeal.
2. Heterosexuality is assumed; sex occurs between a woman and a man.
3. Male/female couples are assumed to be of the same race and similar ages.
4. Women's sexual needs are secondary to men's.
5. Experts should be consulted regarding sexual issues; expert opinions increase the reliability of sexual information.
6. Women should achieve desired physical attributes by purchasing and using a wide-variety of products that increase sexual appeal and desirability.
7. Women who appear youthful are sexy.
8. Popular culture and humor make discussions of sexual topics more acceptable.

Similarities and differences based on race were evident from a comparison of sexual messages found in *Essence* and *O The Oprah Magazine* (magazines often read by Black women) to those found in *Cosmopolitan* and *More* (magazines often read by White women). Comparisons and contrasts based on age were evident from an evaluation of sexual messages found in *More* and *O The Oprah Magazine* (magazines often read by women age 40+) and those found in *Cosmopolitan* and *Essence* (magazines often read by women in their 20s and 30s). Variations found do not directly align with sexual messages outlined in Chapter Four. Instead, differences identified are separate findings resulting from cross-references of magazines analyzed in this study. Table 10 summarizes sexual message variations regarding race and age.

Table 10: Summary of Sexual Message Variations by Race and Age
Racial Variations:
1. Magazines targeted to White audiences rarely feature Black models while magazines targeted to Black audiences regularly feature White models in items with sexual messages framed by appearance.

2. Magazines targeted to White audiences often link sexual messages framed by appearance to men while magazines targeted to Black audiences highlight female sexuality framed by appearance without a direct link to men.
3. Magazines targeted to Black audiences include rare discussions of sexual issues related to race and homosexuality, but magazines targeted to White audiences do not discuss these topics.
4. Magazines targeted to Black audiences contain fewer sexual messages with explicit sexual tips and behaviors than magazines targeted to White audiences.
5. Magazines targeted to White audiences blatantly communicate that women's sexual needs are secondary to men's while magazines targeted to Black audiences communicate this message more surreptitiously.
6. Magazines targeted to Black audiences include infidelity and adultery as important sexual topics, but magazines targeted to White audiences do not include these topics.
7. Magazines targeted to White audiences highlight birth control to prevent pregnancies and disease more often than magazines targeted to Black audiences.
Age Variations:
8. Magazines targeted to younger audiences teach women to have long, silky hair that is loosely curled for a sexy appearance while magazines targeted to older audiences give women permission to appear sexy with short, gray, tightly curled hair.
9. Magazines targeted to younger audiences profess it is appropriate for women to wear sexually revealing clothing, but magazines targeted to older audiences discourage wearing clothes that are sexually revealing.
10. Magazines targeted to younger audiences teach that women must have thin body types with small waists and large breasts to appear sexy while magazines targeted to older audiences suggest that occasionally slightly larger women can appear sexy.
11. Magazines targeted to older audiences do not link sexual messages to entertainment through popular culture and celebrities while magazines targeted to younger audiences often associate sexual messages with entertainment themes.
12. Magazines targeted to younger audiences often express sexual messages through photographic images of young women and men in a sexual context; magazines targeted to older audiences exclude sexually explicit photographs.
13. Magazines targeted to older audiences exclude sexual lessons for improving the sex lives of women, but magazines targeted to younger audiences emphasize sexual performance lessons for women.
14. Magazines targeted to older audiences discuss sex only in the context of marriage while magazines targeted to younger audiences discuss sex in the context of dating and outside the context of committed relationships.
15. Magazines targeted to younger audiences emphasized the importance of women's sexual health issues more than magazines targeted to older audiences.

Similarities and Variations Framed by Appearance

Appearance was a popular topic used to frame sexual messages in all four magazines examined, indicating the media emphasis placed on appearance related to sex and sexuality, regardless of age or race of readership. Of the analyzed items framed by appearance, 14 were from *Cosmopolitan*, seven from *Essence*, eight from *More* and five from *O The Oprah Magazine*, confirming a general focus on sexual message themes framed by appearance – such as physical attributes, fashion/style, and attitude/status.

Three similarities were found regarding appearance and sexual messages (Table 9; Nos. 1, 6 & 7). Magazines targeting Black, White, younger and older readers consistently portrayed the dominant media conception of looking sexy with visual images on covers and/or within advertisements and articles. Several advertisements in all four magazines featured models with clear smooth skin, silky long hair, and thin body types including small waists and large breasts. These popular women's magazines also equally illustrated that sex sells, despite race or age of magazine audiences. Appearance-framed advertisements comprised the majority of advertisements analyzed (17 out of 24, or 71%); they were common across all four magazines, emphasizing women regardless of their age or race should purchase products to help them achieve this dominant media conception of female sexuality based on appearance. Most sexual messages framed by appearance in all four magazines were dominated by a preference for looking young, as well – even in *More* and *O The Oprah Magazine*, with readerships comprised of many women over 40 years old. Two of *More*'s covers (December 2006/January 2007, June 2007) included written texts linking maturity to sexiness, but several advertisements in *More* and *O The Oprah Magazine* featured products aimed at achieving a younger look,

particularly through the use of skin care products (e.g., *More*, Nivea Q10 Gentle Spa, June 2007; *O The Oprah Magazine*, Dove Body Lotion, June 2007).

Appearance: Racial Variations

While appearance-framed sexual messages were found to be common to all four magazines, there were two significant differences regarding this frame in relation to race (Table 10; Nos. 1 & 2). The first was linked to models in popular women's magazines. Looking at *Cosmopolitan* and *More*, the two magazines often read by White women, 21 of 22 items containing sexual messages framed by appearance (95%) featured White women as models on covers and in advertisements and articles. Only one article framed by appearance in *More* included Black models; the article entitled "What You Want Now" from the September 2006 issue of *More* had 10 models – eight were White and two were Black. Black models were completely absent from randomly selected covers, advertisements and articles with appearance-framed sexual messages in *Cosmopolitan*.

In contrast, *Essence* and *O The Oprah Magazine*, the two magazines often read by Black women, included White models in four of their 12 items framed by appearance (33%). One advertisement in *Essence* (Euphoria, April 2006), and two advertisements in *O the Oprah Magazine* (Dior J'adore, May 2007; Dove Body Lotion, June 2007) featured White models exclusively. In addition, one article in *O The Oprah Magazine* ("The Originals," September 2006) included five models – three were White and two were Black. Based on this analysis, magazines targeting White women rarely featured Black models in content that included sexual messages framed by appearance, but magazines targeting Black women included White models in one-third of their appearance-framed sexual messages. This finding illustrated that popular women's magazines served to

perpetuate the hegemonic assumption in our society that White is the dominant and preferable race regarding appearance related to enhanced female sexual appeal.

The second variation found regarding these magazines' appearance-framed sexual messages and race involved males. Men were noticeably absent from the items framed by appearance found in magazines targeting Black readers (*Essence* and *O The Oprah Magazine*). The focus of these magazines' covers, advertisements and articles and their sexual messages highlighting appearance was solely on women. However, male models were featured in magazines often read by White readers. Two advertisements in *Cosmopolitan* (Nivea body lotion, September 2006; DKNY fragrance, May 2006) and two from *More* (Gillette Daisy razor, May 2007; Nivea Q10 Gentle Spa, June 2007) included men in sexual poses with women and were framed by appearance. In addition, one article in the September 2006 issue of *Cosmopolitan*, "Guy Without His Shirt," was the only example of a male model shown without a female counterpart, encouraging women to be sexually attracted to this man based on his appearance. The absence of men in analyzed appearance-based sexual messages from magazines often read by Black women did not offer any named alternative to heterosexuality, but it did highlight female sexuality without a direct connection to males. In contrast, magazines generally read by White women clearly linked sexual messages framed by appearance to the hegemonic assumption of heterosexuality dominant in our society.

Appearance: Age Variations

Three differences were found regarding age related to sexual messages framed by appearance (Table 10; Nos. 8-10). All the female models featured in magazines aimed at younger audiences (*Cosmopolitan* and *Essence*) that exhibited appearance-based sexual

messages had long hair that fell below the shoulders and was typically loosely curled; red, blonde, black and brunette hair were all included. Both of these magazines also emphasized the importance of women having sexy hair with written texts on their covers (*Cosmopolitan*, May 2006; *Essence*, December 2006 and June 2007), and in their advertisements (*Cosmopolitan*, Big Sexy Hair, August 2007; *Essence*, Paul Mitchell hair care, September 2006). In contrast, magazines often read by older women offered different lessons regarding the appearance of a woman's hair linked to her sexuality. Covers and advertisements in *More* and *O The Oprah Magazine* featured sexual messages through visual images of models with short hair, gray hair and tightly curled hair (*More*, cover, September 2006; *More*, Forth & Towne, December 2006/January 2007; *O The Oprah Magazine*, Olay body wash, September 2006; *O The Oprah Magazine*, Dove body lotion; June 2007). Based on these texts, young women must conform to a prescribed hairstyle in order to appear sexy, but it was permissible for older women to have wider varieties of hairstyles while maintaining a sexually attractive appearance.

These four magazines also provided different sexual messages framed by appearance associated with clothing. Young women wore clothes that partially revealed their breasts and/or upper thighs in virtually every appearance-based sexual message on covers and in advertisements and articles from *Cosmopolitan* and *Essence* magazines. For example, one randomly selected article from *Cosmopolitan* specifically addressed fashion ("Keep It Short," December 2006); it highlighted skirts and dresses that were particularly short with its visual and written texts and encouraged young women to emulate this style. However, *More* and *O The Oprah Magazine* rarely showed older women in revealing

clothing. The two articles randomly selected that emphasized fashion for women over 40 (*More*, “What You Want Now,” September 2006; *O The Oprah Magazine*, “The Originals,” September 2006) did not contain sexual messages in their visual images. Written texts mentioned “sex” and “sex appeal” repeatedly in relation to the clothing shown, but none of the models wore revealing clothes. Women over 40 years of age were generally discouraged from partially exposing their breasts and/or upper thighs; instead, they were encouraged to wear fashions that flattered their figures and covered their bodies. It was appropriate for young women to flaunt their sexuality through revealing clothing, but such behavior was inappropriate regarding older women’s appearance.

Body type was another appearance issue linked to sexual messages in these four magazines. Based on the items analyzed, in order for young women to be sexually attractive they had to possess thin body frames with small waists and large breasts. No alternatives to this dominant media conception of body type related to female sexuality were provided through appearance-based sexual messages’ visual or written texts in *Cosmopolitan* or *Essence* magazines, aimed at readers in their 20s and 30s.

A similar body type was glorified in magazines for older women, but rarely oppositional messages were found. For example, the cover of *More*’s September 2006 issue featured a photograph of a woman with a larger body frame than typically shown; she appeared to weigh more than any other model featured on these magazines’ covers, and she had a wider waist and hips than other models, as well. But she was portrayed as a sexually confident, attractive woman on this cover. In addition, the advertisement for Dove body lotion in *O The Oprah Magazine*’s June 2007 issue included a model who wore only underwear (a bra and panties). She also had a fairly large waist by popular

women's magazine standards, and she exhibited confidence with her female sexuality in this advertisement. While sexual messages in all four magazines encouraged women to be thin, older women's magazines occasionally gave permission for women over 40 years old to happily display their sexuality with a slightly larger body type.

Similarities and Variations Framed by Entertainment

A total of 19 items with sexual messages framed by entertainment were analyzed for this study. These items shared two similarities across the four magazines aimed at female readers of different races and ages (Table 9; Nos. 2 & 8). A heterosexual discourse was evident in all four magazines reviewed, either assumed through silence or deliberately highlighted with visual and written texts in all but one of the items analyzed among the sexual messages framed by entertainment. In addition, items from *Cosmopolitan*, *Essence*, *More* and *O The Oprah Magazine* all referenced books as a popular culture medium related to sexual messages, including excerpts from novels and/or book reviews. All four magazines in this study also incorporated sexual messages that were humorous in nature. Couching sexual topics within themes of popular culture or humor apparently made them more admissible in these magazines.

Entertainment: Race Variations

One noticeable difference was found regarding race and entertainment-based sexual messages (Table 10; No. 3). *Essence*'s article titled "The Invisible Man" from the June 2007 issue specifically, albeit briefly, addressed both race and homosexuality in its written texts. Perhaps the fact that entertainment, in the context of popular culture through this book review, framed these seldom mentioned sexual messages made them more permissible. The author frankly stated that it was "difficult for Black people to

speak about sexuality,” and he self-identified as “an openly gay brother.” Out of 78 total items analyzed for this study (including those on covers and in advertisements and articles), this short article from *Essence* was the only one that named homosexuality and gave a voice to someone who was gay; it was also the only analyzed example that directly spoke to race related to sexual issues. In contrast, *Cosmopolitan* and *More*, both read often by White audiences, completely silenced discussions regarding race or homosexuality related to sex; instead White, heterosexual discourses dominated the sexual messages expressed through their visual and written texts.

Entertainment: Age Variations

Two variations based on age of magazine readership were found regarding sexual messages framed by entertainment (Table 10; Nos. 11 & 12). Overall, it was evident that entertainment was a much more popular category used to foreground sexual topics in magazines for younger audiences than those for older readers. A total of 16 entertainment-based items were found in *Cosmopolitan* and *Essence* magazines, while only three items with entertainment-framed sexual messages were from *More* and *O The Oprah Magazine*. This difference highlighted an assumption on the part of these magazines that younger women were more interested in sexual content related to themes such as popular culture and celebrities than were older women. This assumption was reiterated by the fact that magazines for younger audiences often associated celebrities, including actors and singers, with sexual lessons. One advertisement (Forbidden Fruit fragrance, December 2006) and two articles (“Man on Fire,” September 2006; “American Dream Girl, May 2006) in *Cosmopolitan* featured celebrities with their sexual messages; two articles from *Essence* (“Say What?,” December 2006; “Notes on a Scandal,” June

2007) did the same. However, none of the three items from *More* or *O The Oprah Magazine* framed by entertainment linked celebrities to their sexual messages.

Entertainment-based sexual messages also revealed a difference based on age of magazine readership regarding acceptable visual images. Half of the items with entertainment-based sexual messages analyzed from *Cosmopolitan* and *Essence* magazines included photographs of young women and/or men expressing their sexuality or engaged in sexual poses. In contrast, none of the three items framed by entertainment in *More* and *O The Oprah Magazine* included a photograph with sexual content. One article in *O The Oprah Magazine* featured a visual image with a sexual message (“Reading Room,” May 2007); however it was a black and white cartoon drawing, not a photograph. This variation among magazines aimed at different age groups indicated that it was permissible to include written texts with sexual content for older women to read, but it was not appropriate to show photographic images related to older women and sex in magazines. This difference prevented older women from seeing like images of themselves within the pages of these magazines and perpetuated a hegemonic discourse emphasizing a correlation between youth and sex.

Similarities and Variations Framed by Performance

There were 14 total items analyzed in this study found to contain sexual messages framed by performance (five covers, two advertisements and seven articles); all were from either *Cosmopolitan* or *Essence* magazine issues, and they exhibited three similarities (Table 9; Nos. 2, 4 & 5). For example, 13 of these performance-based items included messages that were explicitly heterosexual through either written or visual texts. The only exception was a single heading on *Essence*’s April 2006 cover that was not

gender-specific, “5 Sexy Ways to Reignite Passion.” The decisive assumption of the sexual messages from these items was that sex was between a man and a woman; however, only one advertisement from *Cosmopolitan* mentioned the term “boyfriend,” therefore alluding to sex in the context of a committed relationship (Tag Body Spray for Men, December 2006). Otherwise, there was no clear focus on sex within marriage or dating relationships related to these performance-framed messages. Items in both magazines exhibited a slight emphasis on male sexual satisfaction over the sexual satisfaction of females. Finally, all seven articles examined referenced academic or medical experts, emphasizing the trustworthiness of these sexual messages related to performance.

Performance: Race Variations

Two differences were found related to race among performance-framed sexual messages (Table 10; Nos. 4 & 5). First, only two of the 14 items containing sexual messages framed by performance were from *Essence* magazine, indicating that producers of these magazines believed sexual topics categorized by performance were less important to Black women than they were to White women. All four *Cosmopolitan* covers analyzed included explicit sexual messages related to performance; for example, the August 2007 issue highlighted “Erotic SEX” as a heading, and the December 2006 issue featured a heading that read, “NAUGHTY SEX.” In contrast, the cover heading framed by performance on *Essence*’s April 2006 cover spoke more discretely of reigniting “passion.” Sexual messages framed by performance were more blatant and numerous on covers of magazines targeting White readers, again demonstrating a belief that White women were more influenced by such messages.

In addition, both magazines contained performance-based sexual messages that encouraged women to please men sexually and to consider their own sexual needs secondary to those of their male partners. However, while *Cosmopolitan* openly expressed this view in articles like “Decode His Post-Passion Position” (September 2006), *Essence* magazine was less forthcoming about its focus on male sexual satisfaction. The article entitled “Your Sex Life” from *Essence*’s April 2006 issue seemed to focus on women’s sexual satisfaction based on its title, as well as its photograph of a woman standing on a bed over a man with the caption, “Take a stand to get what you want in bed.” But incongruous with these texts, the majority of the tips offered stressed procedures that would pleasure men. Apparently this magazine often read by Black women was more concerned with at least giving the appearance of catering to women’s sexual needs over men’s, even if they mislead their readers based on actual content.

Performance: Age Variations

One significant difference related to age and performance-based sexual messages was found through this analysis (Table 10; No. 13). No items with sexual messages framed by performance were found in *More* or *O The Oprah Magazine* – not on covers, in advertisements or in articles. This silence was significant. The absence of any performance-based sexual messages indicated that producers of these two magazines believed older female audiences were less interested in tips and behaviors regarding sexual performance than their younger female counterparts. Sexual messages emphasizing the importance of female sexuality and sex in the context of older women’s relationships were found in this study; however, an absence of any messages related to specific sexual tips and behaviors presumed that older women were not interested in

procedural lessons or could not be taught sexual lessons later in life. Silencing performance-framed sexual messages concerned with improving the sex lives of older women was consistent with these magazines' assumption that good sex was directly linked to youth.

Similarities and Variations Framed by Relationships

The penultimate frame for sexual messages was that of relationships. This frame was represented in items containing sexual messages within all four magazines examined. A total of 11 items with relationship-based sexual messages were analyzed; of these, four were in magazines with younger audiences, and seven were in magazines with older audiences. In addition, six were in magazines often read by Black women while five were in magazines often read by White women. These comparisons signified that sexual messages framed by relationships were somewhat equally distributed across this purposeful magazine sample, regardless of age or race of readership.

Two sexual messages framed by the topic of relationships were common to all magazines regardless of age or race of targeted audience (Table 9; Nos. 2 & 3). First, all 11 items in this category perpetuated a heterosexual discourse with their written and/or visual texts, indicating heterosexual relationships were assumed contexts for sexual messages across both racial groups and both age groups in this study. Secondly, none of the relationship-framed sexual messages analyzed recognized biracial couples or couples that were differently aged with written or visual texts.

Relationships: Race Variations

This analysis illuminated two differences among sexual messages framed by the topic of relationships based on readership race (Table 10; Nos. 3 & 6). First, while all 11

items analyzed under this frame exhibited an assumption of heterosexuality, one article from *Essence* (“Our Threesome Is Ruining Our Marriage,” September 2006) alluded to bisexuality and homosexuality, as well. It told the story of a married couple who invited another woman to have sex with them to improve their sex lives within the marriage. The two women eventually entered into a sexual relationship with each other that excluded the husband. The wife spoke frankly of her feelings for the other woman, stating that there was the “perfect amount of sexual chemistry between us.” Again in this case, similar to sexual messages framed by entertainment from *Essence* magazine (“The Invisible Man,” June 2007), a magazine often read by Black women mentioned sex without the context of a heterosexual relationship. Two women having sex together was discussed, giving voice to a homosexual relationship. Only heterosexual relationships were included in lessons taught by magazines often read by White women, but this article indicated that Black women’s magazines were at least rarely willing to feature a discourse that included additional sexual identities.

Additionally, *Essence* and *O The Oprah Magazine* contained several relationship-framed sexual messages on covers and in articles that specifically focused on infidelity or adultery. A heading on *Essence*’s December 2006 cover highlighted a cover story involving a couple that would “Talk About the Pain of His Infidelity.” And one heading on the cover of *O The Oprah Magazine* (September 2006) shouted, “Cheaters Beware!” In addition, one article from *Essence* (“Our Threesome Is Ruining Our Marriage,” September 2006) and three articles from *O The Oprah Magazine* (“You Got Nailed!,” September 2006; “What Do You Do If...,” December 2006; “The States of Love,” June 2007) featured discussions of marital sexual problems related to infidelity. In contrast, no

items analyzed with sexual messages framed by relationships were found to include content related to infidelity or adultery in *Cosmopolitan* or *More*. Magazines often read by Black women provided discussions of monogamous relationship violations, while those often read by White women ignored these issues completely based on this study.

Relationships: Age Variations

One noticeable difference based on age of magazine audiences was evident in sexual messages framed by relationships (Table 10; No. 14). The majority of the relationship-based items analyzed from magazines targeting younger readers discussed sex within the context of dating; three of these four items (75%) specifically addressed dating, not marriage (*Essence*, cover, December 2006; *Cosmopolitan*, “His Point of View,” August 2007; and *Cosmopolitan*, “Bedroom Blog,” August 2007). Conversely, five of the seven items (71%) containing sexual messages framed by relationships in magazines generally read by older women focused on sexual issues directly related to marriage. Sex and marriage were discussed in one advertisement (FDS Intimate Lubricants, September 2006) and one article (“Reinventing Desire,” December 2006/January 2007) in *More*, as well as three articles in *O The Oprah Magazine* (“You Got Nailed,” September 2006; “What Do You Do If...,” December 2006; “The State of Love,” June 2007). This variation related to readership age indicated that younger women engaged in sexual activity outside of marriage, but that such behavior was not appropriate or should not be discussed regarding older women. Silencing messages related to dating and sex in older women’s magazines implied it was only permissible for older women to have sex within marriage.

Similarities and Variations Framed by Health & Well-being

The least common frame for sexual messages within these popular women's magazines was health and well-being; only eight total items contained lessons categorized by this topic. One commonality was found across all four magazines related to health-based sexual messages (Table 9; No. 5). All four articles analyzed included advice from medical doctors or other experts from related fields, indicating that producers of these magazines considered sexual messages framed by health and well-being more credible when associated directly with professional opinions.

Health & Well-being: Race Variations

One variation was found by contrasting health and well-being sexual messages related to audience race (Table 10; No. 7). Topics of Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) and birth control were found in several randomly selected items from *Cosmopolitan*, a magazine often read by White women (cover, December 2006; NuvaRing birth control, December 2006; Trojan condoms, August 2007). These analyzed items, especially the two advertisements, unambiguously addressed women's rights and responsibilities regarding protection from disease and unwanted pregnancies. In contrast, *Essence* magazine, often read by Black women, only mentioned issues related to birth control and STDs in brief, subtle terms within the written text of one article titled "Black Doctor's Best Health Advice" (December 2006). This article included the phrase "having unprotected sex" and characterized this behavior as risky without providing further information; it also mentioned HIV and described it as "rampant in our community" without offering additional details. Based on my analysis of these randomly selected items framed by health and well-being, it was found that magazines often read by White

women addressed issues of birth control and STDs more directly than did magazines often read by Black women.

Health & Well-being: Age Variations

Sexual messages framed by the topic of health and well-being were evident of one variation based on readership age (Table 10; No. 15). Of the eight total items found to contain sexual messages framed by health and well-being in this study, seven were from magazines targeting younger readers while only one was from a magazine generally read by older audiences. *Cosmopolitan* included health-related sexual messages on two covers (September 2006, December 2006), in two advertisements (NuvaRing birth control, December 2006; Trojan condoms, August 2007) and in one article (“Cosmo Gyno,” May 2006). In addition, *Essence* had two articles that highlighted health and well-being issues associated with sexual content (“Sex-ercise,” September 2006; “Black Doctor’s Best Health Advice,” December 2006). However, *O The Oprah Magazine* included only one randomly selected article that mentioned sex in relation to women’s health (“The Way to Eat,” May 2007), and the sexual reference included in this article was found in a single, brief statement – regarding weight gain after marriage, a medical expert suggested physical activity would help women lose weight and improve their sex lives. No sexual messages framed by health and well-being were randomly selected for analysis from *More*, also aimed at older women. This variation in magazine content implied that sexual health was a topic reserved for younger women.

Summary of the Chapter

This chapter answered the second of two research questions guiding my qualitative study employing document analysis: How do sexual messages vary by race

and age of magazine audiences? The sections that followed related to identified sexual message frames: 1) Appearance, 2) Entertainment, 3) Performance, 4) Relationships, and 5) Health and Well-being. Similarities and variations in sexual content regarding race were found by comparing messages from *Essence* and *O The Oprah Magazine* (magazines often read by Black women) with messages from *Cosmopolitan* and *More* (magazines often read by White women). Similarities and variations in sexual content regarding age were found by comparing messages from *Essence* and *Cosmopolitan* (magazines with a younger readership) with messages from *O The Oprah Magazine* and *More* (magazines with an older readership). Table 9 summarized similarities found across the purposive sample regardless of race and age of magazine audiences. A summary of variations organized by race and age was provided in Table 10. The following chapter completes this study by providing conclusions, discussions and recommendations based on findings in Chapters Four and Five.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

Sex is an important aspect of intimate relationships and ultimately vital to human existence, but discourse surrounding sex and sexuality is often prohibited in American society. With many educational avenues traditionally hindered regarding the discussion of human sexuality issues, the mass media have become powerful systems of informal adult education on this topic. Specifically, mainstream women's magazines are saturated with sexual lessons clearly designed to teach their readers (Kim & Ward, 2004). This study identified and critically examined sexual messages offered by popular women's magazines in order to increase awareness of this medium's potential impact as a method of adult education concerning female sexuality. A summary of this qualitative study is presented, followed by a discussion of findings related to literature from previously completed research. The chapter concludes with implications for future research and practice based on these findings, as well as some final thoughts.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify messages that popular women's magazines teach women about sexuality. Fundamental questions guiding this study were:

1. What are the sexual messages taught to women by popular women's magazines?
2. How do sexual messages vary by race and age of magazine audiences?

To answer these research questions, an ethnographic content analysis (ECA) of four purposively selected popular women's magazines was conducted (Altheide, 1996).

Cosmopolitan, *Essence*, *More* and *O the Oprah Magazine* were chosen, representing four demographic sets based on race and age of readership (see Table 1). Documents served as the sole source of data collection for this qualitative study. A total of 16 magazine issues were examined from cover to cover in order to initially identify over 600 items containing sexual messages, including front covers, advertisements and articles.

Next, four groups of three peer reviewers (a total of 12 women) who represented the four different demographic sets were asked to confirm or challenge magazine items initially identified to contain sexual messages. Minor revisions were made based on these peer reviews. In order to assemble a manageable data set, 10% of advertisements (24 total) and 10 % of articles (38 total) were randomly selected. These items, along with all 16 magazine issues' front covers, served as the data set used for detailed critical analysis. Data collection and analysis took place simultaneously, an occurrence common to qualitative research, as I moved back and forth between data and concepts as well as description and interpretation (Merriam, 1998). Using Altheide's model for ECA (see Figure 1) and my protocol developed for gathering details from the documents (Appendix D), I spent six months collecting and analyzing data for this study.

Several findings resulted from the data collection and analysis processes. Initial findings answered the research question: What are the sexual messages taught to women by popular women's magazines? Altheide's ECA model (1996) highlights the importance of identifying topics or categories that frame messages in documents, and I found five of these related to sexual messages in popular women's magazines. From most widely to least widely used, these frames were: 1) Appearance, 2) Entertainment, 3) Performance, 4) Relationships, and 5) Health and Well-being. Again following Altheide's model, themes

within each frame were also found. For example, messages framed by the topic of entertainment included one or more of the following three themes: 1) Popular culture/Celebrity, 2) Humor/Anecdotes, and 3) Travel/Leisure. Table 2 provides a complete listing of magazines' sexual message frames and their coordinating themes.

In addition to frames and themes, actual messages or discourses were found within the documents' 16 covers, 24 advertisements and 38 articles (Altheide, 1996). Critical examination of these items revealed that each frame was found to foreground a total of 11 to 15 sexual messages. Complete listings of these messages are outlined in Tables 4-8. One example of a sexual message framed by appearance was that women should exhibit certain physical attributes that comprise a dominant media conception of what is required for women to appear sexy: clear, smooth skin; silky, long hair; a thin body frame with a small waist; and large, round breasts. Additionally, revealing fashions and attitudes exuding confidence, happiness and strength were often included in sexual messages regarding appearance. Sexual messages specific to the frame of entertainment included the idea that the topic of sex was made more approachable by linking it to popular culture, celebrities or humor. Messages framed by performance often promoted tips for improving sex lives or described sexual behaviors. For example, some performance-based sexual messages made it clear that women should be seductive and employ sexual techniques that excite men, while others on occasion emphasized the importance of mutual sexual satisfaction. Regarding the frame of relationships, sexual messages were found that highlighted the importance of open communication related to sexual problems, as well as an assumption that sex is an integral part of dating relationships. Finally, sexual messages framed by health and well-being addressed issues

such as birth control, sexually transmitted diseases and exercise for the betterment of women's sex lives.

Seven sexual messages were found to be common to two or more frames. A heterosexual assumption that sex only occurs between a woman and a man of the same race and similar ages were messages relayed across all five frames. Sexual messages framed by four different categories reiterated that sex is permissible outside of marriage or dating relationships. Three frames contained the messages that appearance impacts sexual appeal, that sexual information provided by experts (medical or academic) is reliable and trustworthy, and that the sexual needs of women are secondary to those of men. Finally, a message emphasizing aspects of secrecy and mystery related to sex was found across two sexual message frames. Table 3 includes a complete listing of sexual messages common to two or more frames; these are also included in Tables 4-8.

Additional findings generated by this study answered the second research question: How do sexual messages vary by race and age of magazine audiences? Comparing and contrasting sexual messages found in *Essence* and *O The Oprah Magazine* versus those found in *Cosmopolitan* and *More* produced a total of seven sexual message variations based on readership race. For example, magazines often read by Black women regularly featured White models while magazines often read by White women rarely featured Black models in items with sexual messages framed by appearance. Eight sexual message variations based on audience age were found by comparing and contrasting sexual messages from *Essence* and *Cosmopolitan* with those from *O The Oprah Magazine* and *More*. One variation was that younger audiences were encouraged to flaunt their physical sexuality by wearing revealing clothes while older

audiences were discouraged from wearing clothing that partially revealed their breasts or upper thighs. Table 10 summarizes all 15 racial and age variations found among magazine sexual messages.

While searching for variations in sexual messages offered to magazine audiences of different races and ages, several similarities were found across all four magazines that provided a context for contrasting messages. For instance, it was found that regardless of age or race of magazine readership, sexual messages emphasized the vital importance of appearance related to female sexuality. Heterosexuality was an assumed context for sexual intimacy, and female sexual satisfaction was often considered secondary to male sexual satisfaction. Additionally, men and women in relationships were assumed to belong to the same race and to be similarly aged. Table 9 provides a complete list of the eight sexual messages found to be common to these women's magazines regardless of race and age of audience.

Conclusions and Discussion

Four conclusions can be drawn from the findings of this study. First, pervasive sexual messages throughout establish popular women's magazines as significant informal adult education teaching tools. Second, popular women's magazines reinforce societal hegemony regarding gender, race, sexual orientation and age with their explicit sexual messages. Third, popular women's magazines reinforce societal hegemony regarding gender, race, sexual orientation and age by excluding sexual messages in conflict with hegemonic norms. And fourth, global similarities among popular women's magazines' sexual messages are more powerful than their variations based on race and age of readership. A discussion of these four conclusions follows.

Pervasive sexual messages throughout establish popular women's magazines as significant informal adult education teaching tools.

Discussing the wide spectrum of learning opportunities, Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2006) emphasized that all arenas for adult education should be acknowledged, from highly structured to informal means; and Marsick and Watkins (2001) recognized that informal and incidental forms of education are the most pervasive ways that adults learn. All four magazines in this study offered sexual lessons in messages found on their covers and in numerous advertisements and articles. In fact, almost 600 items containing sexual messages were identified in the 16 magazine issues examined. The sheer number of messages relayed to audiences through popular women's magazines makes their sexual lessons pervasive across their formats and virtually inescapable to readers, establishing this medium as a significant informal adult education teaching tool.

Informal adult education opportunities are typically characterized by a shift in power from teacher to learner – the adult learner controls the location, the purpose and the medium (Cairns, 2000; Marsick & Watkins, 2001). Magazine audiences control where they read magazines, why they read magazines and which magazines they read, but the lessons being taught – in this case the sexual messages offered – are directly controlled by the writers, editors and publishers. Lessons provided cannot be negotiated between the reader and the magazine, a static teacher. This medium controls its messages, so a shift in power traditionally attributed to informal education is not possible when mass media, specifically women's magazines, serve as educators.

The ubiquitous and sometimes subtle nature of popular women's magazines' sexual messages adds to their power. Characterizing informal adult education, Marsick and Watkins (2001) indicated that informal learning is not always a conscious act by the learner and that adults are at times unaware they are learning while they engage in informal adult education activities. This concept was evident in my study based on comments made by a potential peer reviewer. She refused to complete the questionnaire as instructed because she felt that magazine sexual content did not impact her. Perhaps this reader is indeed immune from sexual messages embedded in advertisements and articles; or perhaps, and I would argue more likely, she is unaware of the ways in which her world is constructed for her by these magazines regarding female sexuality issues. Research has repeatedly shown that powerful mass media forms frame our views of the world by being an ever present and common part of everyday life – to the point that we do not notice their enormous influence (Brookfield, 1986; Guy, 2006; Hughes, 2003).

The findings of this study support previously published literature that emphasized the important role of mass media regarding informal sex education (Berger, 2003; Brown, 2002; Gudelunas, 2004; Kilbourne, 1999). Sex remains an awkward subject for many (Rouse, 2002), and sexual messages identified throughout mainstream magazines fill a void created by the lack of communication regarding human sexuality issues. My findings also confirm the preeminent position of the expert acknowledged by Giroux and Simon (1989). Numerous articles containing sexual messages in the magazines examined referenced medical and academic experts, ostensibly to add trustworthiness and reliability to sexual information offered. Experts were often quoted in items with sexual messages

framed by performance, relationships and health and well-being, but absent from items with sexual lessons framed by appearance and entertainment.

This study's findings also support the idea proposed by Rouse (2002) that mass media greatly impact sex education by helping us compare ourselves to others sexually, teaching us what is "'in the ballpark' sexually" (p. 15). For example, one article in *Cosmopolitan* ("Cosmo for Your Guy," December 2006) offered women's reactions to men who are marathon lovers and allowed readers to relate these to their own experiences. In addition, *Essence* included an article that described sexual problems within a marriage resulting from their recent threesome, providing messages to readers who might share similar problems ("*Our Threesome Is Ruining Our Marriage*," September 2006). Finally, the ubiquitous nature of sexual message found within popular women's magazines reiterates Bielay's (1995) notion that women's magazines give women "permission to be interested in and to read about sexuality topics" (p. 23). By offering a number of sexual messages to their audiences, popular periodicals provide an accessible informal adult education avenue to women regarding sex.

Popular women's magazines reinforce societal hegemony regarding gender, race, sexual orientation and age with their explicit sexual messages.

This study's findings support Brookfield's (1986) statement that the values, assumptions and stereotypes of the dominant culture are reflected by the media and only rarely are messages included that directly criticize society's dominant structures. Louw (2001) elaborated upon Gramsci's notion of hegemony originally defined as "the creation and maintenance of the consent of dominated groups for their domination" (p. 22), explaining that "all societies have dominant and dominated groups, and dominant groups

necessarily prefer to remain dominant” (p. 20). It is evident through my findings that mainstream magazines not only reflect societal consensus, but also produce it (Gurevitch, 1982). Explicit sexual messages found in this study extend the literature that proposed adult women’s magazines “increasingly emphasize women’s independence and sexual agency, but typically resolve controversies in accordance with dominant norms” (Carpenter, 1998, p. 166). Related to this study, these hegemonic norms include sexism (male dominant over female); racism (White dominant over Black); heterosexism (heterosexuality dominant over all other sexual identifications); and ageism (younger people dominant over older people). Instead of challenging these dominant norms, sexual messages in popular women’s magazines consistently serve to maintain the established status quo.

Sexism. Findings from sexual messages identified and examined for this study support and extend previously published literature that recognized traditional gender portrayals and stereotypical generalizations made regarding women and men, as well as an established and perpetuated dominance of males over females in mass media. Norton (2001) looked at consumer patterns in order to explore how women’s magazines constructed and maintained feminine behavior norms. Advertisements containing sexual messages throughout the mainstream women’s magazines I examined habitually constructed female norms that encouraged women to purchase and use specific products intended to increase their sexual appeal and make them more sexually attractive to men. Skin care products, fragrances, clothing, hair care products and cosmetics were repeatedly framed by appearance-based sexual messages that emphasized a woman’s responsibility to look sexy for her man.

In addition, Rouse (2002) was aware of stereotypes that define men and women in our society; she described male initiators who lack selectivity and constantly think about sex versus female emotional romantics who often play hard to get and prefer to make love rather than simply have sex. Rouse referred to these easily recognized gender generalizations as “social facts” that are not necessarily true but “can be shown empirically to be shared beliefs about men and women” (p. 97). Sexual messages identified in my study often reiterated these shared beliefs, but a few were found to debunk them. For example, one article from *Cosmopolitan*’s August 2007 issue focused on female sexual behaviors that were less romantic than they were erotic (“Things Guys Learn In Cosmo”), while another article from the same issue described a woman who happily participated in casual sex in order to meet her own sexual needs without concern for her male partner (“Bedroom Blog”).

Previous research emphasized mass media’s commonplace mixed messages for women that are nonexistent for men regarding suitable sexual behaviors. A dichotomy was often found to characterize women as sluts if they have sex or frigid if they don’t (Rouse, 2002); innocent and virginal versus seductive and experienced (Kilbourne, 1999); and Madonnas or whores (hooks, 2000). Simultaneously achieving both virtue and sexual assertiveness is an unattainable goal reserved solely for women in mass media. However, several of the sexual messages offered in the magazines I examined suggested women should be seductive, experienced whores and sluts – especially messages found in the magazines aimed at younger audiences. Advertisements featured models posing as female seductresses, sometimes including references to the concept of Original Sin (*Cosmopolitan*, DKNY fragrance, May 2006; *Cosmopolitan*, Desperate Housewives

fragrance, December 2006). One article highlighted revealing clothes worn by models emulating prostitutes (*Cosmopolitan*, “Keep It Short,” December 2006). And *More* magazine, targeting older readers, included an article that plainly stated women should let their husbands know they are not the Madonna in the Madonna-whore split (“Reinventing Desire,” December 2006/January 2007).

Encouraging seductive, slutty behavior over innocent, virginal conduct may empower women to achieve unprecedented sexual agency, but it seems that these sexual messages are instead primarily aimed at increasing male sexual satisfaction and fulfilling male sexual fantasies. Although some messages were found on covers and in advertisements and articles that recognized the importance of female and mutual sexual satisfaction, a slight majority of magazine items instead emphasized male sexual needs and the female’s responsibility to understand and fulfill them. Previously, Storey (1998) described women’s magazines as survival manuals that provided readers with “practical advice on how to survive in a patriarchal culture” (p. 162). Perhaps in some ways they do, but this study found that survival techniques provided generally paid homage to an understood dominance of male needs over female’s regarding sexuality.

Racism. Discussing mass media, Kozol (1995) asserted that White middle class Americans continue to be portrayed as the universal standard. Similarly, Entman and Rojecki (2000) believed critical examinations of media are vital because of traditional racial pecking orders that are perpetuated in subtle and pervasive ways through mass media. This study supports these assertions from previous literature regarding racism in mainstream media; a racial pecking order that subtly and pervasively favors Whites over Blacks was evident from my study.

It was rare for magazines often read by White women (*Cosmopolitan* and *More*) to feature Black models. Regarding sexual messages framed by appearance, no Black women or men were included on these magazine's covers or in advertisements from my data set, and only one article was found to feature Black models. *More*'s September 2006 issue showcased 10 women modeling fall fashions, and two of them were Black ("What You Want Now"). Magazines often read by Black women (*Essence* and *O The Oprah Magazine*) featured White models in one-third of their items containing sexual messages framed by appearance. For example, similar to *More*'s fall fashion article, *O The Oprah Magazine* included a section called "The Originals" in the September 2006 issue; the majority of models shown, three out of five, were White while two were Black.

This imbalance of representation achieves a hegemonic preference for White over Black related to appearance and female sexuality. Entman and Rojecki (2000) suggested that mainstream culture's racial divides are reinforced through media messages in an effort to cleave to the conventional and avoid controversy. These authors concluded that individuals responsible for media images do not deliberately sustain racism but simply succumb to "normal institutional processes" (p. 80). Calculated or unintended, sexual messages found in my analysis extend literature recognizing conventional racial dominance of Whites in mass media; popular magazines fail to challenge this status quo.

It should be noted that I was mindful of the issue of colorism in my data analysis. Colorism is the concept that lighter-skinned Blacks receive preferential treatment over darker-skinned Blacks (Thompson & Keith, 2001). Harrison (2005) noted that the "dichotomy between Blacks and Whites has been extended into a stratification system within the Black race itself," where light-skinned Blacks are attributed positive

characteristics often used to describe Whites and “dark-skinned Blacks are ascribed the negative features commonly associated with Blackness” (p. 2). Neither the covers nor the randomly selected articles and advertisements used for my analysis offered conclusive evidence of colorism in these magazines. An equal number of darker-skinned and lighter-skinned Black models were highlighted in items containing sexual messages.

Heterosexism. Previously published literature has emphasized the importance of sex for married couples (Donnelly, 1993; Henderson-King & Veroff, 1994; Huston & Vangelisti, 1991; Lawler & Risch, 2001; Morokoff & Gilliland, 1993; Young et al., 2000). More recently, additional literature has recognized that sexual satisfaction is a vital part of heterosexual intimate relationships outside of marriage (Byers, 2005; Rouse, 2002; Sprecher, 2002). Messages found throughout the four magazines I examined placed their sexual messages on a firm foundation of heterosexuality. Most included messages specific to sex as a part of marriage between a man and woman (*Essence*, *More*, and *O The Oprah Magazine*), while sex related to co-habiting, dating or casual female/male relationships was often discussed by two of the magazines (*Cosmopolitan* and *Essence*).

Within my data set, only two items were found to include sexual messages that challenged the overarching assumption of heterosexuality throughout this mass medium. Both were articles from *Essence* magazine (“The Invisible Man,” June 2007; “Our Threesome is Ruining Our Marriage,” September 2006). One used the word “gay” in its review of a book that openly discusses homosexuality from a Black gay male perspective. The second provided a married woman’s tale of her intimate sexual relationship with another woman, but no written text in the article named homosexuality, bisexuality, or lesbians. Based on my study, written text discourses involving any sexual identity other

than the heterosexual standard were extremely rare, and visual images of homosexuality were non-existent. Sexual messages found across all four magazines took for granted a norm of heterosexuality and situated male/female sexual relationships in a definitively dominant position over all other sexual orientations.

Ageism. Youth is glorified throughout popular women's magazines regarding female sexuality. Macdonald (1995) recognized a close link between sex and youth in women's magazines, stating that they "fetishized and commodified female sexuality by associating it closely with beautiful young bodies" (p. 189). With very few exceptions from magazines often read by older women (*More* and *O The Oprah Magazine*), models on covers and in advertisements and articles throughout the data set exhibited a youthful appearance. *More* magazine issues included an advertisement for a skin care product that promised a "youthful look that begs to be touched," (Nivea, June 2007) and an article highlighting fall fashions described as "sexy, youthful and hip" ("What You Want Now," September 2006). Even an article entitled, "In Praise of Women My Age," based on the book *Over the Hill and Between the Sheets: Sex, Love and Lust in Middle Age*, put youth on a pedestal regarding sex; the author admitted that his faithfulness to his wife was based less on superior morals and more on the fact that she still had the figure of an undergraduate (*More*, June 2007).

Indeed my study supports the concept that popular women's magazines are generally absent of real women (Featherstone, 2002). It is understandable that magazines specifically targeting younger audiences, like *Cosmopolitan* and *Essence*, include messages that link sex with youth, but the hegemonic dominance of youthful women over older women is consistently perpetuated across all four magazines' sexual messages in

this study. In fact, no items examined in magazines generally read by women over 40 year of age (*More* and *O The Oprah Magazine*) included visual images that contained sexual messages, evident of a conventional belief that it is acceptable to discuss sex and older people, but it is unacceptable to show older women in sexually explicit poses.

Popular women's magazines reinforce societal hegemony regarding gender, race, sexual orientation and age by excluding sexual messages in conflict with hegemonic norms.

Discussing a critical approach to content analysis, Rossman and Rallis (2003) emphasized the importance of analyzing not only the portrayals and symbolism that are present, but also the voices that are nonexistent in texts. This study's findings indicated explicit sexual messages in popular women's magazines at times perpetuated hegemony based on issues of gender, race, sexual identity and age. It was also found that existing realities involving these same issues were repeatedly silenced across these magazines as they refrained from including sexual messages in conflict with hegemonic norms.

Throughout our lives, we are immersed in virtually inescapable media messages (Kellner, 1995), making absences less easily recognized – it is difficult to notice something is missing when one is not accustomed to seeing it. During my study, I continually reminded myself to seek what was not there. Women who did not conform to the media-based consensus for sexual attractiveness were not there. Black models in magazines generally read by White women were not there. Biracial and differently aged couples were not there. Women and men who self-identified as homosexual, bisexual, transgender, lesbian, gay or queer were not there. Older women visually represented to be sexually active were not there. Tisdell and Thompson (2005) warned that mass media communication forms often reproduce power relations related to race, gender and sexual

orientation; popular magazines do so not only with what they say, but more insidiously with what they do not say.

By silencing alternative discourses and existing realities, all four magazines in this study perpetuated an assumption that sex should be between a male/female couple who were sexually attractive based on a conventional media construct, and who were of the same race, typically White, and similar youthful ages. Studies like this one that critically examine mass media and the messages they teach from an adult education perspective help to reveal and critique dominant ideologies. As Gray (2001) suggested, hegemonic representations cannot be hidden or silenced when they are analyzed and interrogated. By identifying popular women's magazines' missing messages regarding sexuality, this study challenges societal hegemony and helps to open up "new spaces from within which traditionally marginalized and excluded voices may speak" (Sholle & Denski, 1995, p. 7).

Global similarities among popular women's magazines' sexual messages are more powerful than their variations based on race and age of readership.

The impetus for this study was in part a call for future research put forth by Kim and Ward (2004). These researchers investigated an association between sexual attitudes among female college students and two magazines, *Cosmopolitan* and *Seventeen*. Aware that their sample lacked diversity, they encouraged future studies to address this gap in the literature by investigating sexual content in additional magazines related to women of color and older women. This study extends previous literature by answering their call.

By contrasting sexual messages from magazines with targeted audiences of different races and ages, several dissimilarities were found. With regard to magazines'

sexual lessons, seven racial variations and eight age variations are outlined in Table 10. I was predisposed to believe that magazine sexual content would vary significantly based on the age and race of audiences; however, it was often a struggle to identify differences among these publications' sexual messages. The variations I found were at times seemingly benign – for example, infidelity and adultery were topics discussed more by magazines read by Black women, and magazines read by younger women encouraged longer hair styles related to female sexuality than did magazines targeting older women. It is also possible that a different random selection of advertisements and articles might have negated some of the noted differences.

While several racial and age variations were found through my analysis, a number of commonalities were recognized across all four magazines, as well (see Table 9). More powerful than identified variations, these global similarities among magazines' sexual messages serve as additional evidence of oppressive forces related to female sexuality. Many of the common sexual messages regardless of audience race and age reflected dominant ideologies previously discussed in this chapter. Generally male sexual satisfaction was valued over female sexual satisfaction, indicative of gender bias. Women and men in dating or married relationships were assumed to belong to the same race, suggesting a racial bias. Heterosexuality was assumed as the cultural norm, reflecting a bias towards sexual identity. And youth was portrayed to increase female sexual appeal, revealing a bias against older women.

Additional similarities emphasized a fundamental link between a woman's appearance and her sexuality. All four magazines analyzed contained sexual messages in advertisements, encouraging women to purchase products designed to help them attain a

dominant media conception of sexual attractiveness, often focused on skin, hair and body type. Such messages support Guy's (2006) critique of homogenized culture and its "celebration of capitalist cultural values" (p. 106). Durham and Kellner (2001) asserted that it is most profitable to insure mass desires and tastes, and popular women's magazines' advertisements do so through universal sexual messages related to female appearance – emphasizing the importance to spend money in order to achieve sexual attractiveness.

Open communication around issues of human sexuality in American culture is sorely lacking (Bridges et al., 2004; Coontz, 1992; Gudelunas, 2004; Kilbourne, 1999; Rouse, 2002). In the United States, due in part to this lack of discourse around sexuality topics, mass media outlets have become more vocal about sex, providing access to sexual education that might otherwise be unavailable to men and women (Gudelunas, Brown, 2002). Overarching sexual messages found to be common across all four magazines regardless of readership race and age indicated two means of increasing the acceptance of sexual topics. First, partnering sexual topics with popular culture and humor made it more permissible to include these messages in popular women's magazines. Second, providing expert opinions in articles with sexual information, either medical doctors or academics from related fields of study, was a widespread practice. Both of these strategies were used consistently by mainstream magazines to increase acceptance of a topic that is rarely discussed, at least in an educational context (Gudelunas).

Implications for Practice and Research

Implications for practice resulting from this study are focused on two entities – educators and learners. First, it has been established that popular women's magazines

have numerous sexual messages, both explicit and embedded, within their publications. This finding supports Hayes and Flannery's (2000) assertion that media, including women's magazines, provide a particular powerful way for women to learn. It is vital for the producers of sexual messages – journalists, writers, consultants, editors, advertising executives, and publishers – to recognize their roles as adult educators.

This study, with its theoretical foundation of critical media literacy, encourages professionals to be reflective and to increase their own awareness of magazines as important pedagogical tools and social contexts in which adult learning takes place (Merriam, 1993). Specifically, my study helps to conscientize those who contribute to the construction of popular women's magazines regarding their pivotal position as educators on the vital topic of female sexuality and the social obligations embedded in this role – particularly the need to provide women with sexual messages that reflect diverse realities and that give voice to groups who are often silenced in mass media. A willingness to reflectively analyze magazine content is even more critical with sexual messages related to factors such as gender, race, sexual orientation and age. As educators, magazine producers should remain ever mindful of McCracken's (1993) contention that there is an “immensely unequal power relation” between magazine publishers' and their readers who “have little input into the monthly representations that claim to be about their lives” (p. 301).

These readers, or learners, form the second group who benefit practically from this study. Past research indicates that adults rarely question the content of informal mass media lessons; Marsick and Watkins (2001) called for strategies to assist adult learners in making this type of influential mainstream media learning more visible. Additional

literature has encouraged critical skepticism on the part of consumers (Brookfield, 1986) and suggested that audiences need to increasingly become mindful of and question hidden issues of power and culture embedded in media messages that strongly impact our lives (Downing et al., 1995).

More recently, Tisdell and Thompson (2005) implored the field of adult education to incorporate critical media studies into its repertoire to increase awareness of adult learners who are continuously taught identity construction by a variety of entertainment media. The findings of this study serve to enlighten those who read popular women's magazines, increasing their awareness of the repetitive hegemonic discourses this medium employs regarding the construction of female sexuality. Enhanced awareness can influence women of various ages and races to question their mass media educational resources and to boost their critical media skills, allowing them to begin the process of challenging examples of sexism, racism, heterosexism and ageism they encounter.

But increased awareness of oppressive meanings in mass media through heightened critical media literacy is not enough. It is time for the masses to be mobilized – both the learners and the educators. Responsibility exists on three levels. First, the consumer must demand other messages through communication with publishers and by refusing to purchase media products that do not offer them. Second, writers and advertisers must exercise their social obligation to create and offer alternative messages. And lastly, editors and owners must dare to increase consumer options that move beyond stereotypical media portrayals.

Opportunities exist for future research that would build upon this study. Additional document analysis studies could be conducted employing Altheide's (1996)

concept of Ethnographic Content Analysis or other models and using a different data set.

The purposeful sample for this analysis included four magazines generally read by women of different ages and races. Future studies should investigate sexual messages taught by men's magazines or by other forms of mass media and popular culture. How sexual messages have evolved over time would be a beneficial analysis, as well.

Addressing a limitation of this study, it would be of interest to examine these heterosexual-presumed sexual messages from a gay/lesbian perspective. It would also be advisable to address the issue of colorism in more detail through a focused analysis of magazine messages on this subject. And an analysis of sexual messages in mass media from a postmodern viewpoint would add to the lacking literature on this subject.

My data collection and analysis procedures were designed to investigate the messages taught to women regarding sex – a marketing/production study. A logical continuation of this study would be to qualitatively focus on what women learn from media-based sexual messages – a consumption study. Future researchers may interview women of various races and ages to determine what is learned from ever-present sexual messages in mainstream magazines, television programs, music and movies. In order to more fully understand the impact of sexual messages found in mass media's written and visual texts, a follow-up study might analyze how messages are incorporated by audiences, both male and female, to construct sexuality. It would also be of interest to study the producers of media-based sexual lessons in order to gauge their awareness levels regarding the hegemonic discourses they perpetuate.

Concluding Thoughts

“A powerful idea communicates some of its strength to him who challenges it.”

~ Marcel Proust

Durham and Kellner (2001) professed that no texts are innocent but are instead “laden with meaning, values, biases and messages” (p. 48). The popular women’s magazines which served as the basis of this study proved to be no exception, especially regarding their sexual messages. Identification of these messages combined with a critical analysis of their dominant ideologies is the first step towards shifting discourses regarding women and sex. Ideas communicated by all forms of mass media are indeed powerful. But those of us who challenge them are made stronger by the process, and strength – combined with will – begets change.

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Appendix A: Purposeful Sample of 16 Magazines Used for Data Collection

Four Cosmopolitan Issues:

1. *Cosmopolitan*; September 2006; Volume 241, No. 3
2. *Cosmopolitan*; December 2006; Volume 241, No. 6
3. *Cosmopolitan*; May 2006; Volume 240, No. 5
4. *Cosmopolitan*; August 2007; Volume 243, No. 2

Four Essence Issues:

5. *Essence*; September 2006; Volume 37, No. 5
6. *Essence*; December 2006; Volume 37, No. 8
7. *Essence*; April 2006; Volume 36, No. 12
8. *Essence*; June 2007; Volume 38, No. 2

Four More Issues:

9. *More*; September 2006; Volume 9, No. 7
10. *More*; December 2006/January 2007; Volume 9, No. 10
11. *More*; May 2007; Volume 10, No. 4
12. *More*; June 2007; Volume 10, No. 5

Four O The Oprah Magazine Issues:

13. *O The Oprah Magazine*; September 2006; Volume 7, No. 9
14. *O The Oprah Magazine*; December 2006; Volume 7, No. 12
15. *O The Oprah Magazine*; May 2007; Volume 8, No. 5
16. *O The Oprah Magazine*; June 2007; Volume 8, No. 6

Appendix B: Initial Numerical Counts of Identified Items with Sexual Messages

	FRONT COVER No. of cover items with sexual messages	ADVERTISEMENTS No. of one-page+ ads with sexual messages	ARTICLES No. of articles with sexual messages	TOTALS: Items w/ sexual messages
<i>Cosmo</i> Fall	5	31	47	83
<i>Cosmo</i> Winter	11	38	50	99
<i>Cosmo</i> Spring	8	24	46	78
<i>Cosmo</i> Summer	6	28	48	82
<i>Essence</i> Fall	2	6	20	28
<i>Essence</i> Winter	3	11	16	30
<i>Essence</i> Spring	1	10	14	25
<i>Essence</i> Summer	1	7	15	23
<i>More</i> Fall	1	5	12	18
<i>More</i> Winter	2	4	11	17
<i>More</i> Spring	0	5	5	10
<i>More</i> Summer	1	5	8	14
<i>O The Oprah Magazine</i> Fall	1	6	19	26
<i>O The Oprah Magazine</i> Winter	0	5	13	18
<i>O The Oprah Magazine</i> Spring	0	9	15	24
<i>O The Oprah Magazine</i> Summer	0	6	18	24
TOTALS: Items with sexual messages	42 Cover Items	200 Advertisements	357 Articles	599

Appendix C: Randomly Selected Items Used for In-depth Analysis
 [All magazine front covers; 10% of ads w/ sexual messages; 10% of articles w/ sexual messages]

	<i>Cosmopolitan</i>	<i>Essence</i>	<i>More</i>	<i>O The Oprah Magazine</i>	TOTALS
Fall	1 Cover 3 Ads (17, 21, 31) 5 Articles (11, 12, 16, 38, 44)	1 Cover 1 Ad (2) 2 Articles (9, 12)	1 Cover 1 Ad (3) 1 Article (9)	1 Cover 1 Ad (4) 2 Articles (9, 17)	4 Covers 6 Ads 10 Articles
Winter	1 Cover 4 Ads (8, 16, 22, 32) 5 Articles (6, 16, 34, 40, 47)	1 Cover 1 Ad (10) 2 Articles (5, 8)	1 Cover 1 Ad (1) 1 Article (11)	1 Cover 1 Ad (5) 1 Article (10)	4 Covers 7 Ads 9 Articles
Spring	1 Cover 2 Ads (7, 18) 5 Articles (3, 7, 20, 35, 42)	1 Cover 1 Ad (1) 1 Article (10)	1 Cover 1 Ad (4) 1 Article (7)	1 Cover 1 Ad (2) 2 Articles (8, 10)	4 Covers 5 Ads 9 Articles
Summer	1 Cover 3 Ads (5, 10, 15) 5 Articles (4, 14, 31, 39, 50)	1 Cover 1 Ad (1) 2 Articles (8, 15)	1 Cover 1 Ad (1) 1 Article (8)	1 Cover 1 Ad (4) 2 Articles (3, 16)	4 Covers 6 Ads 10 Articles
TOTALS	4 Covers 12 Ads 20 Articles	4 Covers 4 Ads 7 Articles	4 Covers 4 Ads 4 Articles	4 Covers 4 Ads 7 Articles	16 Covers TOTAL 24 Ads TOTAL 38 Articles TOTAL

NOTE: Numbers listed beside ads and articles in table above indicate randomly selected numbers used to determine ads and articles identified for detailed analysis, not page numbers in magazines.

Appendix D: Final Protocol Used for Data Collection

Date/Time of Analysis: _____

Magazine title: _____ Date of publication: _____

Primary race/age of magazine audience: Black White 20s-30s 40s+

Item: Cover Ad Article Page # _____ Title: _____

1. Describe visual text(s) or image(s) containing sexual messages including placement in magazine/on page(s).
2. Describe the written text(s) containing sexual messages including placement in magazine/on page(s).
3. If Ad, include company information. If Article, include author information.
4. What is there? What is not there? What is said? What is unsaid? What voices are heard? What voices are silenced?
5. What frame and themes are addressed regarding sex or sexuality?
6. What are the possible sexual messages present?
7. How are they conveyed?

Appendix E: Draft Protocol Used for Initial Data Collection

Magazine title: _____

Date of publication: _____

Length of publication (no. of pages): _____

Primary race of magazine audience (circle one): Black White

Primary age range of magazine audience (circle one): 20s-30s 40s+

1. What, if any, sexual messages are found on the front cover? Examine images and text.
Discuss placement of text.

2. What, if any, sexual messages are found in the table of contents? Examine images and text.

3. What, if any, sexual messages are found in articles? Examine images and content.
Provide author's name and biographical information if available. Discuss placement of articles.

4. What, if any, sexual messages are found in advertisements? Examine images and text.
Provide advertising company name. Discuss placement of advertisements.

PEER REVIEW PACKET

February 2008

Contents:

- ☒ Letter of explanation
- ☒ Guide: definition & check list
- ☒ Questionnaire
- ☒ Magazine
- ☒ Pencil

Questions? Contact Laura Clark
Phone: 706.542.4778 or 706.340.4425
Email: lclark@uga.edu

THANK YOU!

Appendix G: Peer Review Packet Letter

Hello,

February 2008

Thank you so much for agreeing to serve as a peer reviewer for my study. I anticipate that the time required by you in this capacity will be **approximately one hour or less**.

Your participation as a peer reviewer is **completely voluntary**. If for any reason you decide not to participate, please just let me know as soon as possible so I might find a replacement. Please also note that University of Georgia IRB (Institutional Review Board) approval is not required for this activity because you are simply reviewing previously collected data instead of helping to generate data through your participation. You are not serving as a subject of my study, and your name will not be included.

As we have discussed, I am working towards my PhD in Adult Education at the University of Georgia. The purpose of my dissertation study is to **identify messages that popular women's magazines teach women about sexuality**. I am conducting a qualitative document analysis, and my research data will stem from four mainstream women's magazines with general readership among two age groups (20s/30s or 40s+) and two races (Black or White):

	20s-30s	40+
White/Caucasian	<i>Cosmopolitan</i>	<i>More</i>
Black/African American	<i>Essence</i>	<i>O The Oprah Magazine</i>

The initial research question I must address is, “**What are the sexual messages taught to women by popular women's magazines?**” For reliability purposes, I must make sure the written texts and visual images I have primarily identified to contain sexual messages in the magazines are consistently agreed upon by other women. That's how you can help! Specifically, here is what I am asking you to do:

- Review the attached guide with my operational definition of a sexual message.
- Examine identified sexual messages in one volume of a magazine that matches your age/race demographic from the choices above (magazine volume enclosed).
- Complete the attached one-page questionnaire based on your examination of the magazine. ***Please do not make any marks on the magazine.***
- Return the magazine (***this is my only copy!***) and completed questionnaire to me within one week of the date you receive it. I will be happy to pick up these items from you if that would be more convenient.

That's it! I realize your time is valuable, and I appreciate you agreeing to volunteer some of it towards the completion of my study. Please call or email me anytime with questions. Thank you!

Laura Clark

Phone: 706.542.4778 or 706.340.4425

Email: lclark@uga.edu

Identifying Sexual Messages: A Guide

Please use the information below as a guide while evaluating your magazine's previously identified sexual messages. The following operational definition and check lists are the guidelines I used while identifying the sexual messages marked for your review.

Sexual Message Defined:

For the purpose of my study, a sexual message is defined as a written or visual text found on a magazine's front cover or in its advertisements or features/articles that includes words and/or visual images regarding sexuality. These sexual messages are presented in relation to a variety of themes, such as physical appearance (e.g., beauty), health (e.g., disease prevention), physical procedures (e.g., "how to's"), or emotional relationships (e.g., romance).

Check Lists:

Written texts as sexual messages include one or more of the following:

- key words (e.g., sex, orgasm, intercourse, sensual, foreplay, sexy)
- euphemisms (e.g., living together, fooling around, making out)
- explicit sexual content or topics

Visual texts as sexual messages (photos and/or drawings) include one or more of the following:

- various levels of nudity (e.g., revealed body parts or exposed skin, especially breasts, buttocks, or upper leg)
- specific body language (e.g., suggestive poses, sexual positions)
- dress that is skimpy or revealing
- specific actions or expressions (e.g., flirting, caressing, sexy looks)

Revised 1/23/08

Appendix I: Peer Review Packet Sample Questionnaire

PEER REVIEWER QUESTIONNAIRE **Date Completed:** _____

Magazine Title: **Cosmopolitan**
Date of Publication: **December 2006**
Issue Information: **Volume 241, Number 6**

Key to tabs (**PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE TABS FROM MAGAZINE!**):

- **GREEN TABS** = Advertisements 1 pg. or more w/ identified sexual message(s)
- **PINK TABS** = Cover/Features/Articles with identified sexual message(s)

1. Look at the advertisements marked with **GREEN TABS**. Are there advertisements marked with a green tab that you believe do NOT contain a sexual message as defined in the attached guide? If so, which one(s)? Feel free to elaborate.

2. Look at the Cover/Features/Articles marked with **PINK TABS**. Are there items identified with a pink tab that you believe do NOT contain a sexual message as defined in the attached guide? If so, which one(s)? Feel free to elaborate.

*Please contact Laura Clark when you have completed this questionnaire.
Phone: 706.542.4778 or 706.340.4425 Email: lclark@uga.edu*

Thank you!

Revised 1/25/08

Appendix J: Analyzed Items Framed by Appearance

No.	Magazine Title	Magazine Issue	Item Analyzed
1	<i>Cosmopolitan</i>	September 2006; Vol. 241, No. 3	Cover
2	<i>Cosmopolitan</i>	December 2006; Vol. 241, No. 6	Cover
3	<i>Cosmopolitan</i>	May 2006; Vol. 240, No. 5	Cover
4	<i>Cosmopolitan</i>	August 2007; Vol. 243, No. 2	Cover
5	<i>Essence</i>	September 2006; Vol. 37, No. 5	Cover
6	<i>Essence</i>	December 2006; Vol. 37, No. 8	Cover
7	<i>Essence</i>	June 2007; Vol. 38, No. 2	Cover
8	<i>More</i>	September 2006; Vol. 9, No. 7	Cover
9	<i>More</i>	Dec. 2006/Jan. 2007; Vol. 9, No. 10	Cover
10	<i>More</i>	June 2007; Vol. 10, No. 5	Cover
11	<i>Cosmopolitan</i>	September 2006; Vol. 241, No. 3	Ad: Nivea Body Lotion
12	<i>Cosmopolitan</i>	September 2006; Vol. 241, No. 3	Ad: InspiredSilver.com
13	<i>Cosmopolitan</i>	May 2006; Vol. 240, No. 5	Ad: DKNY fragrance
14	<i>Cosmopolitan</i>	May 2006; Vol. 240, No. 5	Ad: DoctorsSayYes.net
15	<i>Cosmopolitan</i>	August 2007; Vol. 243, No. 2	Ad: Bebe clothes
16	<i>Cosmopolitan</i>	August 2007; Vol. 243, No. 2	Ad: Big Sexy Hair
17	<i>Essence</i>	September 2006; Vol. 37, No. 5	Ad: Paul Mitchell hair care
18	<i>Essence</i>	December 2006; Vol. 37, No. 8	Ad: Roca Wear clothes
19	<i>Essence</i>	April 2006; Vol. 36, No. 12	Ad: Euphoria fragrance
20	<i>Essence</i>	June 2007; Vol. 38, No. 2	Ad: Revlon Lip Luster
21	<i>More</i>	Dec. 2006/Jan. 2007; Vol. 9, No. 10	Ad: Forth & Towne clothes
22	<i>More</i>	May 2007; Vol. 10, No. 4	Ad: Gillette Daisy razor
23	<i>More</i>	June 2007; Vol. 10, No. 5	Ad: Nivea Q10 Gentle Spa
24	<i>Oprah</i>	September 2006; Vol. 7, No. 9	Ad: Olay Body Wash
25	<i>Oprah</i>	December 2006; Vol. 7, No. 12	Ad: Chanel lip stick
26	<i>Oprah</i>	May 2007; Vol. 8, No. 5	Ad: Dior J'adore fragrance
27	<i>Oprah</i>	June 2007; Vol. 8, No. 6	Ad: Dove Body Lotion
28	<i>Cosmopolitan</i>	September 2006; Vol. 241, No. 3	Article: Guy Without His Shirt
29	<i>Cosmopolitan</i>	September 2006; Vol. 241, No. 3	Article: The Great 8
30	<i>Cosmopolitan</i>	December 2006; Vol. 241, No. 6	Article: Keep It Short
31	<i>Cosmopolitan</i>	May 2006; Vol. 240, No. 5	Article: Cosmo Hair
32	<i>More</i>	September 2006; Vol. 9, No. 7	Article: What You Want Now
33	<i>More</i>	May 2007; Vol. 10, No. 4	Article: Time Traveler
34	<i>Oprah</i>	September 2006; Vol. 7, No. 9	Article: The Originals

Appendix K: Analyzed Items Framed by Entertainment

No.	Magazine Title	Magazine Issue	Item Analyzed
1	<i>Cosmopolitan</i>	September 2006; Vol. 241, No. 3	Cover
2	<i>Cosmopolitan</i>	December 2006; Vol. 241, No. 6	Cover
3	<i>Cosmopolitan</i>	August 2007; Vol. 243, No. 2	Cover
4	<i>Essence</i>	September 2006; Vol. 37, No. 5	Cover
5	<i>Cosmopolitan</i>	December 2006; Vol. 241, No. 6	Ad: Desperate Housewives Forbidden Fruit fragrance
6	<i>Cosmopolitan</i>	December 2006; Vol. 241, No. 6	Ad: Boost Mobile
7	<i>Cosmopolitan</i>	September 2006; Vol. 241, No. 3	Article: Man On Fire
8	<i>Cosmopolitan</i>	September 2006; Vol. 241, No. 3	Article: Red-Hot Read
9	<i>Cosmopolitan</i>	December 2006; Vol. 241, No. 6	Article: Cosmo News Hot Sheet
10	<i>Cosmopolitan</i>	May 2006; Vol. 240, No. 5	Article: You Tell Us
11	<i>Cosmopolitan</i>	May 2006; Vol. 240, No. 5	Article: American Dream Girl
12	<i>Cosmopolitan</i>	May 2006; Vol. 240, No. 5	Article: Your Work Life
13	<i>Cosmopolitan</i>	August 2007; Vol. 243, No. 2	Article: You Tell Us
14	<i>Essence</i>	December 2006; Vol. 37, No. 8	Article: Say What?
15	<i>Essence</i>	June 2007; Vol. 38, No. 2	Article: The Invisible Man
16	<i>Essence</i>	June 2007; Vol. 38, No. 2	Article: Notes on a Scandal
17	<i>More</i>	June 2007; Vol. 10, No. 5	Article: In Praise of Women My Age
18	<i>Oprah</i>	May 2007; Vol. 8, No. 5	Article: Reading Room
19	<i>Oprah</i>	June 2007; Vol. 8, No. 6	Article: This Issue Back Story

Appendix L: Analyzed Items Framed by Performance

No.	Magazine Title	Magazine Issue	Item Analyzed
1	<i>Cosmopolitan</i>	September 2006; Vol. 241, No. 3	Cover
2	<i>Cosmopolitan</i>	December 2006; Vol. 241, No. 6	Cover
3	<i>Cosmopolitan</i>	May 2006; Vol. 240, No. 5	Cover
4	<i>Cosmopolitan</i>	August 2007; Vol. 243, No. 2	Cover
5	<i>Essence</i>	April 2006; Vol. 36, No. 12	Cover
6	<i>Cosmopolitan</i>	September 2006; Vol. 241, No. 3	Ad: Better Sex Advanced Techniques Video Series 2
7	<i>Cosmopolitan</i>	December 2006; Vol. 241, No. 6	Ad: Tag Body Spray for Men
8	<i>Cosmopolitan</i>	September 2006; Vol. 241, No. 3	Article: Decode His Post-Passion Position
9	<i>Cosmopolitan</i>	December 2006; Vol. 241, No. 6	Article: Cosmo for Your Guy
10	<i>Cosmopolitan</i>	December 2006; Vol. 241, No. 6	Article: Pleasures
11	<i>Cosmopolitan</i>	December 2006; Vol. 241, No. 6	Article: His & Hers
12	<i>Cosmopolitan</i>	August 2007; Vol. 243, No. 2	Article: Things Guys Learn In Cosmo
13	<i>Cosmopolitan</i>	August 2007; Vol. 243, No. 2	Article: Cosmo Quiz
14	<i>Essence</i>	April 2006; Vol. 36, No. 12	Article: Your Sex Life

Appendix M: Analyzed Items Framed by Relationships

No.	Magazine Title	Magazine Issue	Item Analyzed
1	<i>Essence</i>	December 2006; Vol. 37, No. 8	Cover
2	<i>More</i>	Dec. 2006/Jan. 2007; Vol. 9, No. 10	Cover
3	<i>Oprah</i>	September 2006; Vol. 7, No. 9	Cover
4	<i>More</i>	September 2006; Vol. 9, No. 7	Ad: FDS Intimate Lubricants
5	<i>Cosmopolitan</i>	August 2007; Vol. 243, No. 2	Article: His Point of View
6	<i>Cosmopolitan</i>	August 2007; Vol. 243, No. 2	Article: Bedroom Blog
7	<i>Essence</i>	September 2006; Vol. 37, No. 5	Article: Our Threesome Is Ruining Our Marriage
8	<i>More</i>	Dec. 2006/Jan. 2007; Vol. 9, No. 10	Article: Reinventing Desire
9	<i>Oprah</i>	September 2006; Vol. 7, No. 9	Article: You Got Nailed!
10	<i>Oprah</i>	December 2006; Vol. 7, No. 12	Article: What Do You Do If...
11	<i>Oprah</i>	June 2007; Vol. 8, No. 6	Article: The States of Love

Appendix N: Analyzed Items Framed by Health & Well-being

No.	Magazine Title	Magazine Issue	Item Analyzed
1	<i>Cosmopolitan</i>	September 2006; Vol. 241, No. 3	Cover
2	<i>Cosmopolitan</i>	December 2006; Vol. 241, No. 6	Cover
3	<i>Cosmopolitan</i>	December 2006; Vol. 241, No. 6	Ad: NuvaRing birth control
4	<i>Cosmopolitan</i>	August 2007; Vol. 243, No. 2	Ad: Trojan condoms
5	<i>Cosmopolitan</i>	May 2006; Vol. 240, No. 5	Article: Cosmo Gyno
6	<i>Essence</i>	September 2006; Vol. 37, No. 5	Article: Sex-ercise
7	<i>Essence</i>	December 2006; Vol. 37, No. 8	Article: Black Doctor's Best Health Advice
8	<i>Oprah</i>	May 2007; Vol. 8, No. 5	Article: The Way to Eat