

The Clarity of Gender Stereotype Generation in Popular English Media: A Comparative Analysis of Two Leading Magazines and Reality*

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This paper approaches an analysis of blatant gender stereotyping in magazine media, analyzes the nature of this stereotyping while comparing it to other modern English media, supports these findings with existing literature, and explores the nature of motivations in gender stereotyping. Magazines often claim that the reason men and women cannot get along is because of their differences in perspective and communication. In addition, popular magazines which commonly portray men and women differently among others have come to expect the stereotypes to be true. To investigate the phenomena of modern media stereotyping gender, with an emphasis on the medium of magazines, we can consider how and why the stereotypes that are unique to the genders situated in the traditional, cultural, and social settlement that are generated in the two popular magazines, *Men's Health* and *Cosmopolitan*, in question from linguistic, thematic, and commercial aspects. Because of these reasons, this analysis and discussion will outline the relevant academic topics in this area, followed by examples of how the magazines reflect these aspects. The differences in the stereotypes of gender are commonly known, and we can account for these due to the perpetuation of age-old stereotypes through magazines and other media similar to *Men's Health* and *Cosmopolitan*.

Keywords: gender stereotyping, *Men's Health*, *Cosmopolitan*, stereotype generation

Introduction

Popular media portrays men and women as being psychologically different in distinct ways. In reality, these differences are overstated while the genders have more in common with regards to personality, communication skills, choice in linguistics, mental abilities, and other traits. Multiple studies performed over the past two decades have confirmed this, including the review of 46 meta-analyses conducted by (Shibley, 2005), the analysis of sex roles and perceptions across adolescents by Bogt, Engels, Bogers, and Kloosterman (2010), the study of sexuality in advertisements conducted by Baker (2005), the recent content analysis by Collins (2011) of gender roles in media, and many more. Moreover, the exploration of the nature of these publications reveals the blatant nature of gender stereotyping, the grossly high level of their prevalence, and

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their deviations from what is a commonly acceptable version of reality based on pure statistical analysis. Numerous examples in published scholarly literature support the vast evidence of stereotypes in the mainstream publications at hand. This brings us to the motivations of the publications to take such actions to both organize and publish this orchestration of warping reality itself, leading towards the implication that such publications are supporting their own area of sales and support of the hyped lifestyle with the illusion that such prevalence is actually the social norm and standard.

Shibley's (2005) extensive analysis revealed men and women (between childhood and adulthood) possessed more shared traits than differing traits across the majority of psychological categories. Psychological differences based on gender were considered across studies that analyzed multiple psychological factors and skills, in attempt to find the extent that gender influenced an outcome. Cognition, verbal (and nonverbal) communication patterns, social and psychological traits, psychological health, and other variables were examined. While psychological variables seemed to have a shared average prevalence across gender (and gender differences observed were often believed to be dependent on the context in which they were measured), the differences were found. Studies such as this show a different reality than that is generated by the non-scholarly mass-media, meaning these publications meet the basic definition of generating a stereotype.

The images generated by "trendy" magazines geared at creating hype for products and lifestyles tend to generate the greatest exaggerations of common traits in society and stereotypes. Popular magazines often portray men and women differently, leading many subscribers and viewers (especially those with a limited perspective of the world outside of the publication) to expect the stereotypes to be true. Media often commonly claim that the reason men and women cannot get along is because of their differences in communication; best-selling books which have become famous to the point of becoming "common knowledge" are based on the claim that men and women are inherently fundamentally different (i.e., *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus* by Gray (2004) discussed this in detail, and many other similar titles have been published to achieve high sales). Shibley (2005) claimed that the misunderstandings created can create and have created enough power to inhibit functionality in some areas, such as the ability for a gender to participate and succeed in a role expected to be filled by the opposite gender.

In spite of a range of studies describing the prevalence and problems with gender stereotyping, including Koernig and Granitz's (2006) analysis of gender (stereotype) portrayal in e-commerce advertisements, Mastin, Coe, Hamilton, and Tarr's (2004) analysis of stereotyping similar to *Cosmopolitan* as it exists in *Ladies Home Journal* studies of general stereotyping such as Miodonski's (2002), Robertson's (2010) analysis of female stereotyping and resultant perspectives, Royo-Vela, Aldas-Manzano, Kuster-Boluda, and Vila-Lopez's (2007) analysis of gender stereotyping existing in Spanish media, Smith, Pieper, Granados, and Choueiti's (2010) analysis of gender stereotyping in G-rated media, Vogel, Wester, Heesacker, and Madon's (2003) confirmation of gender stereotyping and analysis of social role perspectives, the studies outlined above, and too many other similar studies to list, many magazines will continue to create or exacerbate the nature of perspective of stereotypical roles.

The Prevalence and Role of Gender Stereotyping in Media

In further demonstration of the prevalence described in the aforementioned studies, and showing examples of gender stereotyping, *Men's Health* and *Cosmopolitan* show how magazines can cater to the generation of

stereotypes. There are many factors to consider in the area of sociolinguistics generally, while the two magazines reveal how these are portrayed in accurately by modern media. Essentially, *Cosmopolitan* is a fashion and lifestyle magazine which portrays females as stereotypes while also discussing a variety of male stereotypes; while on the other hand *Men's Health* is a fitness and lifestyle magazine which portrays men as stereotypes while discussing a number of female stereotypes. This section outlines the relevant academic topics in this area, followed by examples of how the magazines reflect these aspects. The differences in the stereotypes of gender are commonly known, and we can account for these due to the perpetuation of age-old stereotypes through magazines and other media similar to *Men's Health* and *Cosmopolitan*. These magazines effectively give life to classic gender stereotypes while assisting in their resistance to being eliminated in light of modern education, communication potential, and perspective.

As discussed in the previous section, media stereotyping commonly assume clear and major differences in language and lifestyle between genders. Women are portrayed as more prone to gossip and emotional while men are portrayed as more straight-forward and emotionless. The stereotypes in *Men's Health* and *Cosmopolitan* are examples of largest and most commercialized differences, but are no different than a large range of other commercialized popular media in this regard. In reality, as supported by the studies outlined above (among others), gender is known to be engrained deeply within the action, beliefs, needs, and desires of members of the human race that it is seemingly (to us) entirely natural (Eckert & McGonnell-Ginet, 2003). This is a motivation for the continuing research in this area. Nearly all aspects of language have been shown to have relationships with gender, in categories ranging from sound and phonetics to complex linguistic strategy (Kiesling, 2007). This supports Kinsley's conclusions that gender stereotyping can have a way of negatively impacting impressionable individuals, effectively allowing media to have power over some areas of social development. Concerned individuals therefore question the directions taken by this power, especially in terms of the messages to children. Meanwhile, while a higher percentage of women (than men) have been found to be marginalized by the ways gender is portrayed, they are also prone to have an increased interest in researching aspects in linguistics and gender studies.

Research in gender and language is a somewhat new subcategory of sociolinguistic research, and researchers are commonly concerned with the nature various mediums of media in their attempts to target various age and social groups. *Men's Health* and *Cosmopolitan* are both essentially middle- and upper-class magazines, in that they target citizens of this class. As such, sophistication plays a part in both magazines. It is evident that *Cosmopolitan* carries a certain degree of higher sophistication with it, while *Men's Health* focuses on the stereotype of men being interested in athletics and general, stereotyped masculinity. While not vulgar, crude, or even primitive, sophistication in any intellectual sense is not emphasized. In *Cosmopolitan*, however, women are effectively placed on a pedestal in the name of feminism or women being "in control" of their lifestyle, while being sophisticated creatures not limited by intelligence or anything else. *Cosmopolitan* plays emphasis on the power of women though a number of areas, while most of this emphasis is beauty, intelligence and sophistication are regarded.

Naturally, sex and gender carry some distinctions of their own, but these do not give rise to differences on par with media stereotypes. The relationship in the common terms of man versus woman, male versus

female, and masculine versus feminine alone imply a slight difference in connotation, which can be attributed to the cultural values more clearly observable in everyday media. These relationships may potentially change or overly generalize the comprehension of key issues related to gender (Coates, 2007). Fundamentally, “sex” is a distinction at the biological level, while “gender” relates to social classification. The classifications are not entirely separate as they are actually integral in a variety of ways. Gender, through continued analysis and research, has conceptually become an intricate and complex notion. Regardless of the stereotypes commonly portrayed in media, gender division is constantly questioned, changing, and integral with many other social classifications. The social classifications, which are relevant to any study considering gender, are based on elements such as roles, behavior, or anything else created by a culture and considered proper for either sex (instead of “sex”) (McCormick, 2001). This is what is evident in magazines, as these commonly exacerbate stereotypes or even integrate them with perceptions of cultural norms; examples of these occurrences in *Cosmopolitan* can be seen across the topics of the magazine, including fashion, parenting, or basic aspects of a female’s lifestyle.

The nature of stereotypes gains strength from the similar nature of portrayal that is evident in commercialized media. *Men’s Health* and *Cosmopolitan* are examples of this phenomenon as well. Women are portrayed as beings with a lot to offer and a lot to demand at the same time in *Cosmopolitan*, while women are portrayed in a similar manner in *Men’s Health*. The women portrayed in *Men’s Health* are further depicted as the simultaneous (alongside fitness) goal for men. The men in *Cosmopolitan* are portrayed as providers, sometimes for the selfish needs of women. While women are portrayed in somewhat of a similar way in *Men’s Health* the notion that men desire women physically more than women desire men is implied.

Language and Gender With Regards to Socialization

While there is no immediate and clear distinction between male and female patterns of socialization; emphasized across scholarly literature, media commonly attempt to separate the two according to their tendencies assists in the general comprehension of the types of ways which they can be and are somewhat different. Some differences are evident in brain types as well as language patterns. The human brain can be categorized according to either its processes of empathy or systemizing; scientific studies have concluded that an individual’s gender is more than a biological trait while furthermore a claim based of the gathering of statistics, qualitative data, and general observation (Baron-Cohen, 2003). Clearly, media neglect these findings in their portrayals, and seem to be motivated by commercialism and points of sale while attempting to influence their target audiences. Modern media tend to portray differences according to stereotyping rather than science.

Other gender stereotypes shown in media perpetuate still other ideas that are biased and lacking scientific support. In *Cosmopolitan*, the bulk of the female gender is shown as having clear and excellent social skills. The magazine does not account for the number of women who actually are mild mannered, do not lead stereotypical “weekend-partier” social lives, or are otherwise different from the portrayed stereotype. It is common knowledge that the average woman does not look or act like the cover models and women depicted within the magazine, yet this is still the depiction. The language of the women in the magazine is generally sophisticated, complex, and ever changing to modern trends. No such emphasis is placed on the sophistication of males in *Men’s Health*. The sophistication of language in women is occasionally implied at most.

The Nature of Differences Observed in Science vs. Examples and Evidence in Media

Some social notions generally differ between genders. The idea of having a “best” friend is apparently more often a part of the social lives of women than it is with men (Taylor, 2001). *Cosmopolitan* accurately reflects this through the portrayal of socializing, social advice, and other areas. This is likely due to an underlying contradiction within the foundation of social relationships for females, formed from abiding by a mentality of general equality and social harmony on one side with the true nature of difference mixed with problematic issues on the other side. Consequently, females adapt and learn to use their linguistic abilities to deal with issues in this area in a few different ways. One way here is to build and hold onto close and equal relationships. Another way is to offer criticism, however constructively. A third way is to deduce, correctly, the language of other women while effectively gaining social cooperation. Magazines are commonly used in such a way that women attempt to use them as a basis for which to correctly deduce the language of women; while also researching the norms to have an updated means of standard so that clear differences can be recognized accordingly.

Cosmopolitan commonly offers their reader advice on how to best make the most of or even manipulate certain situations through using social skills. Further, males have been found to form larger and more structured social groups than females. The levels within these groups are designed to best fit conflict resolution, while commonly having no sole leader. Posturing and counter-posturing are also relevant in the world of the young male, while these acts display their power, and gather and keep an audience (Taylor, 2001). It has been proposed that achievements across male groups are dependent upon their knowledge of how and when to use language to accomplish their goals. *Men’s Health* is highly objective based and commonly portrays all men as being very goal oriented, while any mentioning of ones that are not are accompanied with a combination of ridicule and motivation. Jokes, stories, arguments, and related conversations all possess such differences, while social events containing a narration have been found to be more popular with men than women. This is highly evident in *Men’s Health* and *Cosmopolitan* alike, as the structure of the magazine is different across these topics. Both offer advice and personal stories; however more personal stories and jokes seem to be emphasized in *Men’s Health*. The mentioning of narrated events is clearly more apparent in *Men’s Health* than it is in *Cosmopolitan*.

Some universal tendencies have been located across the genders. Five major sociolinguistic properties have been found to be true of both genders (Holmes, 1998). These tendencies are that both genders develop different patterns in their use of language; women tend to focus on affective processes in activities more than men. Women are prone to employ elements of language which focus on solidarity more than men. They are more likely to interact in such a way that retains or increases solidarity, and they are generally more flexible with regards to style than men. While modern media commonly do not focus on any specific element here, it has not portrayed women or men in such a way that it is not in agreement with any of these statements. Women are, however, commonly portrayed to have their own form of dialect or “genderlect” as it is sometimes called. Affectionate language is more evident in *Cosmopolitan* to the point of exaggeration, while the absence of this in *Men’s Health* is also to the point of exaggeration. Regarding style, the opposite is true in the magazines, while women are shown as more obligated to norms. It is the men that have the room for flexibility, as they are portrayed as stereotypical stubborn beings that are focused on the ends rather than the means.

A distinction between the male and female linguistics is not unique to only modern Western culture. In

egalitarian culture, it is apparent that women are more prone to discuss relationships, use unique language patterns to better communicate relationships, enjoy conversation in regards the feelings or general character of others, and consider the community or family with regards to specific social connections. Women are still considered objects and in that sense slightly submissive in *Men's Health*, while *Cosmopolitan* has more of a feminist approach. Despite this approach the magazine yet is based on the concept that women should look, dress, and act in a certain way based on cultural demands rather than feminism. While the publications do not generate overwhelming falsehoods, and the inclusion of genuine content, accurate elements of portrayals, and aspects of genders which are only partially warped rather than purely fabricated and integrated with stereotypes, the publications can avoid being accused of thorough and blatant falsehoods. Meanwhile, the popularity of fundamental elements of exercise and health and beauty create an interest that overwhelms distaste for even offensive stereotyping, similar to television programs retaining popularity despite the presence of advertisements that are considered unpleasant.

Men's Health and Cosmopolitan: Stereotyping Through Mass Media

While reality is naturally defined as subjective, it is commonly filtered by culture before being considered by the average person. People commonly form their ideas and world perspectives based on what appears to be effective and accurate collaboration, such as through the media. Currently, *Men's Health* and *Cosmopolitan* are two powerful components in media which are stereotyping and even degrading genders. Men and women alike are encouraged to ignore their unique and individual qualities and instead view themselves as an extension of the magazines' predetermined stereotyping in literature such as Vogel et al. (2003), Smith et al. (2010), Collins (2011), and other researchers dissecting the nature of stereotyping and impact.

The negative consequences of stereotyping, though only assumed to be most influential among influential individuals (but often assumed to encompass a majority of the population of children under the age of 18), are unanimously supported across research confirming the presence of media stereotyping (Bogt et al., 2010; Baker, 2005; EOC (Equal Opportunities Commission), 2009; Lauzen, Dozier, and Horan, 2008; Miodonski, 2002). Such encouragement and perspectives generated through stereotyping effectively encourage genders to view life in accordance to the terms of the opposing stereotype; as both magazines stereotype both sexes while typically suggesting ways in which to act solely for the purpose of the opposite gender. Ultimately, this asks the reader to live through the warped perspective of a stereotype, while living life in a balance of this with acting in ways which satisfy the needs of the opposite gender also acting as a stereotype. The misinformation is thus two-fold for either magazine.

Gender stereotyping in media is designed in such a way that they reflect the stereotypes through images, language, and even advertisements. One key difference, however also indicative of stereotyping, is the range of content in these magazines. *Men's Health* offers its readers with a large range of article content while keeping the main emphasis on living a body-builder lifestyle while advertising mostly towards this specific area. *Cosmopolitan*, however, does not even have a range in its content while all facets of the magazine focus on beauty and living a life of glamour. While the target audience are young middle to upper-class women (arguably mostly white women based on the contents, but this stance will not be argued and only proposed) while the advertisements include expensive designer products for beauty and fashion. Thin and average or

better-looking women are also major traits in the target audience. The articles are mostly concerned with beauty, fashion, the opposite sex, sexual intercourse, and occasionally first-person account of these issues and related ones. Article titles include “The Four Ways to Fall in Love”, “What to Wear Now”, and “The Six Signs Your Guy Is Hooked”, while fashion and beauty are highly regarded that the magazine differentiates trends not only according to the most recent cultural styles but even according to its predetermined trends according to every season. This of course would not be realized by anyone not following up through extensive research, even in highly social lifestyles.

Men's Health, on the other hand, focuses on stereotypical areas of bodybuilder images, sports, cars, and even alcohol (despite its obvious contradictions towards health itself). Titles of articles include “Jump Start Your Sex Life”, “Psuedo-Jailbait”, “In Bed With Tara Reid”, and “The 100 Worst Ideas Ever”, while the publication also carries the general overtone of stereotyping and objectifying women; both magazines commonly portray the average women as extremely thin, toned, and beautiful. The articles for men convey that women are objects which enjoy stereotypical male actions, but the articles for women emphasize understanding the stereotypical male mind. *Cosmopolitan* serves as a guide for women to live in the stereotypical masculine fantasy world while *Men's Health* reinforces male and female stereotypes in how it portrays women alone.

The overlying themes are as evident in the articles here as they are in the imagery throughout the magazines. Interviews of famous people in the imagery are always presented in a different context, serving to further idolize the individual with regards to their glorified stereotypical qualities. The subjects normally revolve around stereotypical traits or issues, as it is evident in the statement “everyone’s favorite funny girl spills about her new movies, hunky co-star, and the recent discovery she’s made about men” (Mitchell & Richardson, 2006, p. 172). Such an introduction, though more subtle than some material, implies shallow and stereotypical lifestyles. The male idealization is also evident in “When I met her... that was the first time I ever felt blown away by a person who was really genetically designed for the big screen” (Mitchell & Richardson, 2006, p. 174). *Men's Health* is written in a similar fashion, objectifying the opposite sex while giving life to stereotypes. Such examples include (which will not be mentioned directly due to their coarse nature) whether it is acceptable to have sexual relations with friends, ex-boyfriends, temporary acquaintances, and other related areas. Women are often used to perpetuate the idea that women enjoy stereotypical male behavior while enjoying following their role as designed by the media.

Varying Approaches to Analyzing Gender and Language

While gender and language have been combined into a specific category for research within what is now known as sociolinguistics, a variety of methods in researching the area have been considered. It has been suggested that modern research is prone to place emphasis on topics related to how men and women employ their linguistic resources to create their own sense of masculinity or femininity. Furthermore, the differences within these areas reveal how language elements do not implicitly integrate social themes such as ethnic background of gender, but instead reflect these traits according to individual roles, activities, and other social agendas. Gender is regarded as a critical contextual factor which is formulated dynamically while reacting to defined cultural elements (Holmes, 2008). Masculine and feminine speech patterns are evident even in magazines, likely because of exaggeration through stereotyping and otherwise as discussed.

According to Coates (2007), there are four primary ways which have been put into practice for the purpose of defining linguistics and gender: the deficit approach, the dominance approach, the difference approach, and the social constructionist approach. In the deficit approach, the language of women is considered passive and weak. This is not something evident in modern media, where women may be portrayed in more of a feminist light. The deficit approach would be soon criticized as it suggests there was a natural problem with women's speech and thus; women should look to men for the correct way to speak and they should ever desire to be regarded with any degree of seriousness. Early studies of linguistics likely regarded the language of women to be generally inferior (Lakoff, 1975). The dominance approach views women as oppressed, while experts employing this model are concerned with showing how male dominance is practiced linguistically. Women have been found to cater to their own oppression in many society-based scenarios, such as the modern workplace (Holmes, 2008).

Stereotype Generation in Gender and Language

While the media commonly portray stereotypes of gender through speech and other areas, these are partially true in some regards. For example, research in gender and language has found that the linguistic strategies of women commonly emulate the passive stereotype common in Western culture. Males have also been found to be more prone to using vulgar language. Many studies in the area of sociolinguistics have implied that both linguistic structure and use reveal power status and relationships across gender-specific roles. Furthermore, men have been found to be more likely to conceal their boundaries so that they can assume power, and they do this through not fully expressing themselves (Holmes, 2008). The stereotype that associates masculinity with power and authority is well known, and research mostly confirms this stereotype. The authoritative and power differences between men and women are more likely to be experienced by women. Men are obligated to be masculine and physically powerful as it is clearly evident in *Men's Health* and somewhat in *Cosmopolitan* according to modern media. *Men's Health* does not place emphasis on social power or status, however implies that money and power are keys to opportunity in dating. *Cosmopolitan* also implies that women should seek men of status, referring to those with power as "keepers" who are allowed to have negative qualities that would disqualify men of a lower status in dating. Here, the truth is exaggerated through stereotyping.

It has been proposed that linguistic elements are used by people to comprise their social identity, rather than reflect them (Meyerhoff, 2006). *Cosmopolitan* portrays women in a more feminine light with the traditional stereotypes applying, and the same for the men portrayed in *Men's Health* instances. Despite the fact that women generally seem to be more prone to speak in a sophisticated and complex manner implied in the conclusions of studies such as Meyerhoff (2006), any claim that men and women are proven to be fundamentally different in the way that they speak because of innate gender-based variations is ultimately untrue (Cameron, 2007). Cultural standards and stereotyping account for the majority of any perceived differences, while the remaining differences are nowhere nearly significant enough to warrant the sales and hyped lifestyle-based motivations that drive the exaggerated stereotypes generated and exacerbated by modern media. *Men's Health* and *Cosmopolitan* are examples of media which insist on routinely contributing to key areas of stereotyping known to be untrue and criticized by numerous scholars supporting these arguments such as Baker (2005), Bogt et al. (2010), Cameron (2007), Collins (2011), EOC (2009), Koernig and Granitz (2006), Lauzen et al. (2008), Mastin et al. (2004), Miodonski (2002), Robertson (2010), Royo-Vela et al. (2007), Smith et al. (2010), Vogel et al. (2003), and many

others. Research supports the key arguments of this discussion, and the details of the discussion explain how the gender stereotypes differ from reality in both common knowledge and more specific aspects, the motivations of creating and exacerbating these stereotypes, and the potential damage of these actions.

Conclusions

Stereotyping is undoubtedly evident in the media, while the media provide the basis for it in most cases. The stereotypes portrayed in these magazines ultimately prolong the potential for them to exist despite the continuing accumulation of research and growing social perspectives against gender stereotypes. While research has found some variations between genders; they are not as distinct as the stereotypes while the underlying reasons for the differences between genders are commonly the result of culture rather than an inherent difference. In reality, the differences between men and women have been found to be less significant than once assumed, revealing the power of stereotyping in all areas. As the information in the research findings becomes more evident, perhaps the stereotyping will be removed for the media. There is almost a sense of a “fun” feeling in the nature of stereotyping as evident in *Men’s Health* and *Cosmopolitan*. As the differences in gender and reality of the majority of stereotypes have been found to be largely untrue, they continue to be portrayed and enjoyed despite this apparent lack in truth. There are two immediate probable explanations for this phenomena; either the deception of stereotyping is not instinctive apparent, or the resultant social support of popular media creates a sense of correctness despite personal feelings. There is a lot of social power in popular media, and perhaps the hype of such magazines as *Men’s Health* and *Cosmopolitan* allows them to portray stereotypes and ideals proven to be unrealistic in research.

There is no immediate foreseeable end to gender stereotyping, in any facet, including language. While modern media arguable contributes to this factor, it could also be used to better employ a medium for a truer situation. As there is now scientific research revealing the lack of difference that is evident in stereotyping, the stereotyping may now slowly disappear. However, it would seem improbable that magazines such as *Men’s Health* and *Cosmopolitan* will change their methods in light of these studies alone; while more drastic information and social pressure will be the only phenomena which will alter such powerful processes. Until then, the stereotypes will continue to be portrayed.

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