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Jillian Taub April 7, 2017

The Politics of Women's Magazines: How Women's Magazines Set Standards of Femininity

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Abstract

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This thesis examines women's magazines, a cultural institution that prescribes femininity, using semiotics, feminist theory, and fashion theory. As a result of the hegemonic nature of the advertising industry, women's magazines set a standard of femininity that serves to reinforce women's insecurities in order for advertisers to preserve profit. Thus, advertising has a greater influence than editorial does on setting a definition of femininity for readers of women's magazines. A case study of the March and September 2016 issues of *Seventeen*, *Vogue*, and *O, The Oprah Magazine* shows the definition of femininity to be a thin, white, tall, and sexy woman. This definition, however, varies with the age of the magazine's readers. This narrow definition does not represent all women; in fact, this definition is unrealistic and unattainable for the majority of women. Advertisers have power to widen this definition of femininity by including a more diverse sample of models. Women readers can also educate themselves on the business of women's magazines to better understand how advertisers dictate the majority of women's magazines' content.

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I. Introduction

What does it mean to be feminine today? Interestingly, ideas of femininity haven't changed significantly since thousands of years ago, dating all the way back to the Biblical tale of Adam and Eve. In the book of Genesis, so the story goes, God created Adam and planted him in the Garden of Eden. God soon realized "it is not good for the man to be alone," and decided to "make a helper suitable for him" (Genesis 2:4). He assessed man's wants and needs, and in response, "the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man" (Genesis 2:4). While God gave Adam his name, Adam assigned Eve her name. Eve's role was immediately subservient, fulfilling the purpose of someone other than herself as the "mother of all the living" (Genesis 2:4). God brought Eve into being, not in her own right, but rather to cater to man's desires. In doing so, femininity became defined as being relative to men.

Scholars confirm the aforementioned interpretation of Adam and Eve's creation. In fact, this story "has historically been taken to endorse male normativity" (Gellman). These interpretations are rational given the diction and progression of the tale. The word choice of "helper" implies that "the woman is created for the sake of the success of the man's occupation" (Gellman). Adam's role of naming his wife demonstrates power over her, for "name-giving in the ancient Orient was primarily an exercise of sovereignty, of command" (Gellman). Further, some feminist thinkers even view "the story as evidencing severe patriarchy at the very heart of Western civilization" (Gellman). Thus, one can interpret this religious legend as a foreshadowing of the dynamic of men and women in later societies.

This religious myth implies that gender is constructed through social and cultural institutions, such as religion. Femininity, then, is not an innate quality but a socially constructed one. Both sex and gender are basic aspects that make up a person's identity, but there is a crucial distinction made between the two. Gender is not inherent to a person, but instead culture delineates gender. While sex is a biological trait determined by a person's 23rd pair of chromosomes, gender exists separate from biology. Because gender is produced by culture, it "cannot be said to follow from sex in any one way" (Butler 10). Therefore, a biological male can possess feminine characteristics, just as a biological female can possess masculine characteristics. In that sense, gender can be thought of as a "multiple interpretation of sex" (Butler 10). This idea of multiple interpretations of sex inevitably leads to conflict regarding prescribing gender, for every person of the same sex can feasibly possess differing gender characteristics.

Simone de Beauvoir states in her iconic feminist text, *The Second Sex*, "One is not born a woman, but rather becomes one. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature" (De Beauvoir 330). De Beauvoir supports the argument that femininity is a social construct, formed by input and expectations from the entirety of the surrounding culture. Unlike sex, gender is malleable: "gender is neither the causal result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex" (Butler 10). Culture, therefore, bridges the gap between sex and gender, making the body "a mere instrument or medium for which a set of cultural meanings are only externally related" (Butler 12). Gender is expressed through the body, though not defined by it.

In regards to the story of creation, the overt emphasis on male dominance comes after Eve ignores the serpent's warnings and eats the fruit from the tree of knowledge. God asserts to Eve that, "Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you" (Genesis 2:4). The conditional emergence of male supremacy suggests that it is not organic. Scholar Phyllis Trible insists that, "this statement is not license for male supremacy, but rather it is condemnation of that very pattern. Subjugation and supremacy are perversions of creation" (Geller). Trible strengthens the idea that gender dynamics are not innate.[1]

Through the distorting social influence of Western culture, the focus of this paper, certain characteristics have become synonymous with femininity. To reiterate, these characteristics are not feminine in their own right: "feminine characteristics are almost completely relative to the society, history, culture, and very little can be said to be 'innately masculine or feminine'" (Millum 71). According to Susan Brownmiller, "the feminine principle is composed of vulnerability, the need for protection, the formalities of compliance and the avoidance of conflict" (Brownmiller 16). Each of these qualities is one of dependence, further emphasizing women's role as secondary to men.

Western culture has infiltrated every aspect of a woman's being with the notion of aspiring for men's approval and sexual attention. A woman alters her body, hair, clothes, voice, skin, movement, and emotion all in service of "male erotic satisfaction" (Brownmiller 41). For instance, society encourages women to grow their hair long, keep themselves thin, sport sex distinctive clothing like skirts or dresses, speak in high pitched voices, spend time caring for their skin, practice polite mannerisms, and outwardly

[1] John Berger similarly references the story of Adam and Eve in the book of Genesis to make a point about women as the object of the male gaze in Renaissance paintings (Berger 47-49).

express emotion all with males' preferences in mind. Mainly, these feminine characteristics govern a women's appearance, understandably because appearance and dress are the "chief outward expression of the feminine difference" (Brownmiller 79). The physical components of femininity have power in that women who appear feminine are expected to act and function a certain way, whether they act that way or not.

In addition to presentation, feminine women are not supposed to be overly ambitious though they still possess a competitive drive. Ambition seems to impede the ability to nurture, another major feminine trait. Hence, "a professed lack of ambition, or a sacrificial willingness to set personal ambition aside is virtuous proof of the nurturant feminine nature" (Brownmiller 221). Even without outward ambition, competition springs from "the effort to attract and secure men" (Brownmiller 18). Femininity causes women to seek to impress men, while simultaneously working against other women.

While some men may reinforce the current ideas of femininity, they are part of a larger hegemonic system that oppresses women. In other words, the rigid rules of femininity don't stem from men themselves but rather from the structures that Western culture preserves. In reference to developed, Western countries, scholar bell hooks established a definition of feminism that speaks to the systemic nature of femininity. Hooks says, "Feminism is… a struggle to eradicate the ideology of dominations that permeates Western culture on various levels, as well as the commitment to reorganizing society so that the self-development of people can take precedence over imperialism, economic expansion, and material desires" (Dicker 8). This definition challenges the idea that men are at the root of defining femininity. In fact, "the notion of a universal patriarchy has been widely criticized in recent years for its failure to account for the

workings of gender oppression in the concrete cultural contexts in which it exists" (Butler 6). The present gender relations generate from a larger scale systemic problem; patriarchy perpetuates this structure.

Due to the nature of hegemony, most women in Western culture willingly accept the guidelines assigned to them. Feminist Susan Brownmiller explains that, "one works at femininity by accepting restrictions, by limiting one's sights, by choosing an indirect route, by scattering concentration and not giving one's all" (Brownmiller 15). Women have agency in deciding whether to succumb to male oppression, but evidently many give in to the system. In doing so, these women receive approval from society as a whole, specifically from men, for "femininity serves to reassure men that women need them and care about them," and "pleases men because it makes them appear more masculine by contrast" (Brownmiller 16-17). Women's noncompliance with feminine principles can lead to internal ambivalence for going against the norm, in addition to male disapproval and inattention. In effect, a "woman is more conscious of being a woman than a man is of being a man" (Millum 71). Critic John Berger argues that this difference in consciousness comes from women as the object being looked at: "Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only the relations of men to women, but the relation of women to themselves" (Wolf 58). Women are in a distinct position from men as the object of men's gaze. Overall, the taxing foundation of femininity is intrusive and omnipresent.

In this thesis, I will examine women's magazines, one cultural institution that prescribes a definition of femininity. I will argue that, as a result of the hegemonic nature of the advertising industry, women's magazines set a standard of femininity that serves to

reinforce women's insecurities in order for advertisers to preserve profit. In women's magazines, gendering of women is less a reflection of how women perceive themselves, but rather how advertisers believe women should perceive themselves. I will include content analysis of the March and September 2016 issues of *Seventeen*, *Vogue*, and *O, The Oprah Magazine* to uncover the current definition of femininity imposed by women's magazines by using semiotics, feminist theory, and fashion theory. I chose these magazines because they represent distinct target audiences, and a portion of my analysis aims to determine how women's magazines' prescriptions of femininity vary by age. I will follow similar analytical models to those of key thinkers such as Naomi Wolf and Gloria Steinem. In Chapter One I will set the groundwork for my paper by providing historical background. Chapter Two will focus on advertising's effect on editorial. In Chapter Three I will analyze the advertisements themselves, and in Chapter Four I will examine the fashion component of women's magazines.

II. Historical Background

Though cultural forces have often imposed a definition of femininity on women, women have also attempted to define femininity for themselves. From the 19th century until today, women have participated in three waves of feminism that attempted to push past the boundaries society has set for them. The first wave of feminism began with the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848 where women joined in the fight to obtain the vote, the primary focus of the first women's movement. In addition, women could not hold property in their name, keep the little money they earned, go to college, or live without the protection of a male guardian (Dicker 6). The limited education that women did have access to taught women how to be good homemakers and "to use their beauty and feminine charms to entrap men into marriage" (Dicker 24). Husbands maintained control of their wives as a result of the educational system enforcing the idea that women should use their femininity to benefit men.

Through years of hard work by women suffragists, including key contributors Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, women achieved many of the goals they set out. In the 1860s and 70s more colleges began to open their doors to women. Women's dress code shifted from restricting clothing like corsets, petticoats, and long dresses to bloomers, loose short skirts worn over ballooning trousers (Dicker 31). Women's advocate Margaret Sanger founded Planned Parenthood in 1916 and initiated dialogue about birth control and women's reproductive rights (Dicker 52). Most notably, women were granted the right to vote with the passing of the 19th amendment in 1920.

The initial women's movement came to a halt after women gained the vote and the Great Depression and World War II shifted the tone of the nation. Despite the success

of the first women's movement, there were still plenty more women's rights to fight for, such as "the right to safe and legal abortion, the right to accessible and affordable childcare, and equal opportunities in education and employment" (Dicker 58). Women temporarily filled the working roles of men while they were off at war, but were quickly relegated back to the home as soon as the men returned. Women understood that "society thought of them primarily as wives and mothers," which could be seen by their wages of 52 cents to a man's dollar and the workplace discrimination they faced (Dicker 57).

Thus grew what feminist Betty Friedan called "the problem that has no name," which she defined as "the voice within women that says: 'I want something more than my husband and my children and my home'" (Friedan 32). Her foundational book, *The Feminine Mystique*, marks the start of the second wave of feminism. Friedan discovered that increasing numbers of women were unhappy in their solely domestic role. Above all, "Friedan blamed educational institutions, women's magazines, advertisements, and Freudian psychology for their role in confining women to lives of unfulfilled domesticity" (Dicker 67). Through her attributions of what defines femininity, Friedan reinforces the fact that prescribing femininity is a systemic problem set in place by our culture.

Feminists began to address the problem that has no name through activism that resulted in legal changes. The Equal Pay Act signified the start of progress for women during the second wave women's movement. President John F. Kennedy passed this act in 1963, which "demanded equal pay for comparable work" (Dicker 68). This legislation lead to Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, both of which attempted to regulate gender discrimination in the workplace.

When women felt that these legal remedies were not doing enough for women's legal equality, they banded together in groups big and small to further advocate for women's legal rights, in groups such as the National Organization for Women, as well as the smaller West Side Group. Perhaps most notably, the Roe v. Wade court case occurred during the second wave women's movement, ruling that "A woman's 'right of personal privacy includes the abortion decision'" (Dicker 96). Women finally gained control over their bodies, increasing their overall autonomy.

These valiant strides advanced women significantly, but still there is more to be done. Currently, a third wave of feminism is in action that picks up where second-wave women left off. Women have not yet obtained equal employment rights, earning on average 77 cents to a man's dollar at present.[2] Rape culture and sexual violence against women remains prevalent. Women continue to be held to standards of appearance and dress that Western culture dictates. The newly elected 45th president of the United States, Donald Trump, has made his pro-life stance clear when he claimed he wants to overturn the ruling in Roe v. Wade, which gave women control over their bodies.

Friedan acknowledged multiple systemic sources for their role in perpetuating a certain definition of femininity. This paper will focus on one of the mechanisms Friedan mentions: women's magazines. These magazines serve to communicate and interpret Western culture, and in turn act as artifacts that outline the changing definition of femininity. By investigating women's magazines, we can "trace our sociological history, the rise and fall of fads and crazes, changing interests and tastes, in foods, clothes, amusements and vices" (Walker 8). In order to fully understand how culture defines femininity, cultural artifacts must be analyzed and their methods of creation assessed.

[2] This number is even smaller for Latina, black, and other minority women (Patten).

Women's magazines are especially powerful products to analyze because they represent a gendered niche of media. The magazine industry as a whole includes a subset of women's magazines. The gender categorization of this print medium "makes a statement about the position of women in society as one which requires separate consideration and distinctive treatment" (Ferguson 1). The creation of women's magazines as independent from men's magazines implies that women should be gendered differently than men, reinforcing the idea that gender is culturally constructed. Other cultural influencers among media tend not to have gender distinctions. For instance, radio does not have designated channels for each gender. There are no explicitly gendered newspapers. While there are select gendered television networks such as *Lifetime*: a television for women and *WE*: Women's Entertainment, the majority of television networks target all genders. Though there is a subset of publishing devoted to the gendered genre coined "chick lit," meaning women's literature, this category contains purely fictional works. Though fiction can work to prescribe gender, the nonfiction nature of women's magazines pushes gender expectations much more overtly.

The organization of content within women's magazines mirrors the physical location of sale for the magazines, resulting in further gendering of women. Women's magazines are often found, for example, at nail and hair salons, places women may frequent to maintain the feminine ideal of beauty that Brownmiller identifies. Women's magazines can also be found in grocery stores, where some women go to perform the domestic duty of providing food for their families. Sections within these magazines generally include fashion, beauty, health, and food. These divisions imitate the feminine traits that Brownmiller pinpoints.

The origins of women's magazines can be traced to the mid 19th century. In 1860, *Godey's Lady's Book* was considered "the first important American magazine for women," proclaiming "a circulation of 150,000" (Walker 32). This women's magazine assumed its readers to be wealthy and highly educated. The book included "elaborate sketches of the latest fashions but seldom offered practical advice on everyday tasks, assuming that its readers had servants to tend to cleaning and cooking" (Walker 33). While these fashion plates indicated the social norms, they did not explicitly encourage readers to buy these products or specify brand names (Lydon). *Godey's Lady's Book*, as well as other early women's magazines such as *Pictorial Review* and *Delineator*, was classified as literary, as it featured established writers of the time such as Edith Wharton and Upton Sinclair (Nelson 40). By the late nineteenth century, women's magazines added the advice component as a result of "the increasing 'professionalization' of housework," as well as the "increased availability of products" (Walker 35). Though there were inadvertent advertisements in earlier women's magazines, editorial content dominated.

Traditional advertisements like today's were introduced into women's magazines during the Great Depression to produce income. Straightforward advertising was not yet necessary since husbands maintained overarching control over their wives and were seen to be the experts on their wives' needs**.** Once advertisers began to add to husbands' influence, they "often [took] on a paternalistic role about what best reflects [a woman's] needs, desires, and sensibilities" (Nelson 73). Women's magazines "reinforced domesticity by including information that would enable their readers to maintain a comfortable home… Ads in these magazines presented products whose use would

simplify the domestic woman's life" (Dicker 65). Advertisers were able to influence women's decisions in a much more formal way than husbands had done in the past.

World War II marked an important shift in women's magazines and the development of mass culture as a whole. When women entered the workforce while their husbands were off at war, the domestic role that women had previously filled was temporarily changed. Women's magazines reflected this switch through their images and attitudes towards women's job choices: "by the beginning of 1942, issues bristled with images of women in military and nursing uniforms, and women who remained at home were addressed not as mere housewives but as contributors to the war effort through their frugality, cooperation with restrictions, and volunteer work" (Walker 21).

This progressive stance towards women was short lived. Once the war ended, women's magazines of the 1940s and 50s set "a far narrower definition of women's role" as purely domesticated (Walker 11). Friedan noted that women's magazines of the time "[encouraged women] to confine their goals to perfecting the roles of wife and mother and abandoning the image of the self-sufficient 'New Woman' who had won the right to vote in 1920 and set her sights on education and a career" (Walker 9). Women's magazines seemed to regress with their women readers back into the home.

During the second wave women's movement, feminists took action against women's magazines as a source of their gender delineation. To combat these publications, feminists held sit-ins at the *Ladies' Home Journal* office where they demanded progressive changes in the magazine's content, advertisements, and workplace policies affecting women (Dicker 89). Feminist Gloria Steinem co-founded *Ms.* magazine with fellow feminist Dorothy Pitman Hughes as an antithesis to the typical women's

magazines of the time. *Ms.* focused on the second-wave women's movement and the rights women were still fighting for, conveying a very different picture of femininity than other women's magazines at the time.

Cosmopolitan magazine similarly began to paint a different picture of femininity during the second wave of feminism with the help of long-time editor in chief Helen Gurley Brown. Gurley Brown, Gloria Steinem's good friend, reframed the conversation about young women and sex through her book *Sex and the Single Girl*, published in 1962. Gurley Brown highlighted the idea of young, unmarried women having sex and even enjoying it, a profound idea at the time. Gurley Brown brought her views on sex and women into the pages of *Cosmo* during her 32 years there as editor-in-chief. Gurley Brown "was a fierce and lifelong supporter of birth control and a woman's right to choose," and she educated readers of *Cosmo* on these issues (Hauser 363). Both *Cosmopolitan* and *Ms.* changed how women's magazines discussed femininity.

Not only were feminists dissatisfied with their imposed domesticity, but they also resisted the beauty standards equally forced upon them by similar structural components that Friedan notes. In 1968 feminist Carol Hanisch led a protest against the Miss America pageant and the beauty ideals the competition stood for. During this event, "protesters threw 'objects of female torture'-- copies of magazines such as *Ladies' Home Journal* and *Cosmopolitan* as well as false eyelashes, makeup, hair curlers, high-heeled shoes, girdles, and bras-- into what they dubbed a 'Freedom Trash Can'" (Dicker 84). Similar to the clothing reform seen in the first wave, many women saw clothing and beauty accessories as signifying femininity.

By the mid-twentieth century women's magazines developed even more granular divisions than before. The industry "had become segmented in terms of age, social class, and interests" to resemble more modern women's magazines (Walker 11). Teenagers were one of the subsets that emerged as a "distinct market segment," paving the way for teen specific magazines like *Seventeen*. Other modern classifications include fashion, health, and homes.

Women's magazines are further worth study because they are part of a larger hegemonic patriarchal structure that has existed since long before their origins in the late 19th century. Interestingly, women's magazines up until the 1970s were "helmed mostly by men, who presumed to understand and deliver what women readers desired" (Nelson 3). This gendered leadership and its effects have become engrained in the core of the women's journalism industry, causing men to have significant power over the magazines. Women's magazines have changed in that "today, all…are helmed by female editors, and an estimated 90 percent of editorial staff and contributors are women" (Nelson 24). This shift has led to the women's magazine industry being considered part of the "pink ghetto," or any industry that attracts primarily females (Nelson 27).

Today, male dominance has shifted away from the editorial side to the advertising side of the magazine business. In a *New York Times* article from May 1st, 2016, journalist Sydney Ember interviewed women who work at advertising agencies, citing that "women now make up almost 50 percent of those working in the advertising industry, including a relatively small number…in top executive positions." Ember adds that, "In interviews with more than a dozen women, mostly executives, who work in advertising, many said they found it hard to believe how much their particular business still remained a white

man's world." On the other hand, no current women's magazines have male editor-in-chiefs.

The overwhelming presence of men within the advertising industry is impactful because an advertiser's role is that of a cultural intermediary. Advertising agencies "hold a pivotal position of mediation between corporate clients and the cultural world, and have an instrumental role in connecting and fusing corporate ideologies to the cultural discourses and national ideologies that circulate and flow within consumer culture" (Turow and McAllister 3). While the overarching goal of advertising "is to sell a brand, the system of the advertisement's creation means that the targeting of certain audiences in advertising, and the symbols used in ads, have cultural implications beyond this selling goal" (Turow and McAllister 3). Through selling products, advertisers, whether knowingly or not, influence the definition of femininity in Western culture. This definition is pervasive in that on average, one sees between 200 and 5,000 advertisements per day[3] (Johnson). This abundance of advertisements affects both our conscious and unconscious minds, meaning advertisements impact women often unknowingly. Ultimately, women cannot avoid the ubiquity of the definition of femininity that advertisements convey.

Not only do men make up the majority of the advertising industry, but some are mishandling their roles as well. The evidence for sexism in the advertising industry is extensive and current. In June 2016 British company Unilever released the results of a survey the brand conducted at the Cannes Lions festival, an annual international event bringing together advertising professionals and celebrating creative advertising work. The

[3] This extreme range results from how advertisements are defined (i.e. brand logos on apparel, billboards, television commercials, print advertisements, banners, etc.)

survey concluded that, “40% of women do not recognize the faces being reflected back at them [in advertisements]” and “of the women the ads featured, 3% were portrayed in leadership roles, 2% were intelligent, and 1% were funny.” Recognizing this discrepancy, Cindy Gallop, a British advertising consultant and industry veteran, astutely expresses that “nothing [will change] until the gender of leadership is balanced.” The makeup of the advertising industry is inevitably reflected in the advertisements themselves (Usborne).

Additionally, the advertising industry has been in the news lately for cases of workplace discrimination and harassment. A study done in June 2016 by the American Association of Advertising Agencies, which “included 375 responses from women in the advertising field,” found that “more than 50% of women in advertising have faced sexual harassment at least once in their careers.” Public scandals support these statistics, for instance, the recent case of a woman who sued the male chief executive of J. Walter Thompson advertising agency for “an unending stream of racist and sexist comments, as well as unwanted touching” (Jaramillo). Chairman of advertising agency Saatchi & Saatchi Kevin Roberts resigned “after causing anger with his claims that the debate on gender bias is ‘all over’ and women lack ‘vertical ambition’” (Davies and Obordo). These sexist behaviors result from the composition of the agencies themselves in addition to the misogynistic attitudes they hold.

Examining advertisers’ roles in women’s magazines leads to many questions worth exploring. Originally, the decision to bring in advertisers had unintentional consequences for women’s magazines because advertisers took control over the power that journalism allowed women’s magazines to have. Feminist Gloria Steinem shares in her famous “Sex, Lies & Advertising” editorial that, “freedom of the press was limited”

due to advertising (Steinem 170). She notes that though in women's magazines "the ads only average about 5 percent more than in 'Time,' 'Newsweek,' and 'U.S. News," advertising's effect can be felt throughout the publications because of "editorial pages devoted to 'complementary copy'; to text or photos that praise advertised categories, instruct their use, or generally act as extensions of ads" (Steinem 173). Advertising's effects stretched beyond the space the advertiser buys within the magazine, and instead permeated throughout the whole publication. While advertising is certainly still present in women's magazines, have these magazines found a way to bypass pressures and rules put on them by advertisers? Does editorial suffer as a result of the prominence of advertisements? If so, how much? Is there a way for women's magazines to promote an inclusive definition of femininity, which all women can relate to, while including enough advertisements within their pages to stay in business?

III. The Unethical Nature of Advertising: Advertising's Effect on Editorial

Since traditional advertisements were introduced to women's magazines in the 1930s, advertisements have been targeted towards women. Originally, advertisers considered women easy targets to sell products to. During the age of "the problem that has no name" in the first half of the 20th century, women were dissatisfied with their purpose and unsure how to find happiness. Advertisers took advantage of women's insecurity by feeding them advertisements for products that could seemingly fix their unidentified problem. Advertisers believed that "properly manipulated…American housewives [could] be given the sense of identity, purpose, creativity, the self-realization, even the sexual joy they [lacked]- by the buying of things" (Friedan 208). Many advertisers employed this technique of associating a product with a solution, for example, car companies suggested "buying a car will provide family security," and cosmetic companies implied "buying a medicated skin cream will offer peer admiration and romance" (Turow and McAllister 13). Advertisements were powerful because women were "sorely in need of a new image to help them find their identity" (Millum 74). Consumers, thus, tended to buy into the ideas the brands were subliminally sending in order to obtain the solutions they sought. Fundamentally, advertising is done with financial intentions, yet "women readers are being played in an orchestrated way by magazines, under the guise of consideration for her interests or well being" (Nelson 73). The deception of advertising is part of its unethical nature.

Younger women, specifically, were seen as more willing to surrender to buying an advertiser's products. In an attempt to accurately target consumers in the 1950s, advertisers conducted surveys, which "discovered that young wives, who had only been

to high school and had never worked, were more 'insecure,' less independent, easier to sell" (Friedan 219). In regard to fashion, author Trevor Millum quotes scholar Murray Wax who argued that "women--especially the girl in adolescence- are continually experimenting with new styles which amount to trying on 'this or that personality'" making them more likely to buy clothing and beauty products (Millum 60). With less life experience and opportunity for personal growth, younger women exhibited higher levels of insecurity. This idea of insecurity is in line with Susan Brownmiller's description of feminine principles. Femininity consists of women constantly pursuing men's approval and never truly being fully comfortable with themselves without this affirmation.

In women's magazines, the unethical nature of advertising is further highlighted by the effect of advertising on editorial. Steinem explains that in women's magazines, "it isn't just a little content that's devoted to attracting ads, it's almost all of it" (Steinem 170). Advertising is all encompassing due to advertisers' insertion orders, which dictate how and where their advertisements are placed. Insertion orders are "official policy," and if broken, the magazine must give the advertisers their money back and potentially face additional consequences. An example of an insertion order from S.C. Johnson & Son reads, ads "should not *be opposite extremely controversial features or material antithetical to the nature/copy of the advertised product*" (Steinem 177). Advertisers believe that placement next to "complementary copy" will encourage readers to buy their products more so than random placement within the publication. Steinem, however, finds "no persuasive evidence that the editorial context of an ad matters" (Steinem 176). Women's magazines are obliged to follow advertisers' rules since they depend on such

advertisers for their industry to stay afloat. As a result, editorial choices must be compromised to keep advertisers' business.

More specifically, advertising impacts fashion editorial, a major focus in all women's magazines. Fashion journalism has often been criticized as weak and insubstantial, despite the fact that "to be a fashion journalist you need the same qualities as to be a regular journalist" (Turner and Orange 85). Some scholars blame advertising for influencing fashion journalism. They claim that advertiser placement of products in a magazine puts pressure on writers to speak positively of these products; if not, the magazine risks losing advertisers' business. This is applicable to trend reports, "a staple of fashion writing, which can range from a lengthy analysis complete with social, economic and cultural context to a quick couple of paragraphs surrounded by pictures of product, depending on publication" (Turner and Orange 88). Writers must advocate for trends that align with the featured designers' products and enforce the designers' preferred brand images. This is problematic since women's magazines "advocate styles, price points, and beauty ideals that don't always have the reader's best interests in mind" (Nelson 83). In turn, fashion writing can be easily read as dishonest or trivial.

The beauty ideals society endorses for strictly moneymaking purposes transform into the standard that women hold themselves to. Journalist Naomi Wolf labels this idea the "beauty myth." She argues that, "behavior that is essential for economic reasons is transformed into a social virtue" (Wolf 18). During the second wave of feminism, this social virtue was domesticity, which spread to the pages of women's magazines. Women's magazines then bombarded every woman with demeaning messages, "taunting her because she [was] not a better housewife, [did] not love her family enough, [was]

growing old" (Friedan 228). The targeting of domestic content in women's magazines was strategic in making women feel insecure about their social role in order to sell domestic products.

Today, beauty and an emphasis on appearance are the social virtues that advertisers force upon women. As Wolf states, "the beauty myth, in its modern form, arose to take the place of the Feminine Mystique, to save magazines and advertisers from the economic fallout of the women's revolution" (Wolf 14). The beauty myth is evident not only through advertisements themselves but also through editorial. Frequently, "magazines blast us with cover lines that presume we need self-improvement, that we're not good enough as it is, but we can be if we read the articles and advice within their pages" (Nelson 38). There is a stark contrast between men and women's magazines in the approach to editorial. This distinction is evident when comparing men and women's magazine covers.

Table 1: March 2017 Men's Magazine Cover Headlines

MAGAZINE TITLE	COVER HEADLINES
Men's Health	"Lose Your Gut" "Get Fit Faster"
Maxim	"Amancio Ortega- Richest Man You Don't Know"
GQ	"The Tastiest Way to Save the Planet" "The Coach We All Want To Follow"
Men's Journal	"How to Build a Stronger Core" "The Next Great Beaches"
Esquire	"Do You Have the Guts to Read About America's First Penis Transplant?"
Men's Fitness	"Make More Money" "Live Longer-Do this five-second test to add years to your life" "Build rock-hard abs! Sculpt a six-pack without doing sit-ups"

Table 2: March 2017 Women's Magazine Cover Headlines

MAGAZINE TITLE	COVER HEADLINES
Women's Health	"Snack Your Way to Weight Loss" "Top Confidence Boosters" "How a Girl Who Loves bread and bacon Got *This* Fit"
Marie Claire	"How to *Finally* Love Your Hair"
Harper's Bazaar	"Get Perfect Skin Instantly"
Cosmopolitan	"Is Your Face Aging Too Fast? Find out in The Linda Wells Skin-Care Report"
Allure	"Return of the Face-Lift"

While this brief comparison does not account for all magazine headlines, this current sample of March 2017 issues provides a glimpse into the general differences between the gendered magazines. As seen through this selection, women's magazines tailor cover headlines primarily to ways women can physically improve themselves (e.g. their skin, hair, and body). While men's fitness and health focused magazines reasonably have headlines tied to weight, the majority of men's magazines simply provide men with interesting content. In fact, women's magazines "have ten times more ads and articles promoting weight loss than men's magazines do" (Nelson 56). The concept of self-improvement plays upon women's insecurities in order to incentivize them to buy products to meet beauty standards. Women's magazines are paradoxical in the sense that they aim to empower women while dictating that women are not good enough as they are –without the products the magazine is selling.

The writing process of the editorial content fuels the creation of the "ideal" woman. Jennifer Nelson, a former magazine editor, explains that "women's magazines rely on what are called 'composite characters' to anchor some stories or put anecdotes and sidebars together. She is a distillation of a bunch of real women…refined to fit the

'ideal' woman the editor wants for that story or feature" (Nelson 45). The characters presented within editorial are unrealistic models for women to measure themselves against. Nelson reveals how "the editors invent the story- its trends and angles- then send a writer out on assignment to find people to shoehorn into their stories" (Nelson 48). For example, the April 2017 issue of *Cosmopolitan* features an article titled "Confessions of a Celeb Trainer: *Cosmo* got a Hollywood fitness pro to speak—off the record!—about the crazy stuff that happens while sculpting the bangin' bods we see on the red carpet." The author of this article is anonymous, and the celeb trainer, as well as the celebrity trainees, is never mentioned by name. There is a picture accompanying the article with a woman's face cut off at the top of the page, keeping the identity of the trainer, or more likely the model, anonymous. There is plenty of reason to suspect that this article is a compilation of interviews with many celebrity trainers, rather than simply sharing the experience of a single real person.

Fig.1 Anonymous, "Confessions of a Celeb Trainer." *Cosmopolitan* April 2017: 34. Print.

CONFESSIONS OF A...

Celeb Trainer

Cosmo got a Hollywood fitness pro to speak—off the record!—about the crazy stuff that happens while sculpting the bangin' bods we see on the red carpet.

BY ANONYMOUS

WOULD YOU KILL FOR A STAR'S SIX-PACK? I MAKE THOSE DAILY.

WHEN YOU TRAIN celebrities for a living, everyone wants to know the same thing: "What are they *really* like?" The truth is that most of them are just like you and me and face the same challenges when it comes to getting in shape. That said, I've had my share of over-the-top crazies through the years. We'll get to that.

First, let me say that I never set out to be a trainer to the stars. Years ago, I started working out and got really fit; then my friends asked me to train them. It was just my side hustle, but since I live in L.A., word got out and famous people started contacting me. It's been my full-time gig ever since. I've trained superstars in private health clubs and on movie sets all over the world. Because a lot of them have full-blown gyms in their (massive, droolworthy) homes, I usually go to their place.

My rule is always the same: No one gets special treatment when it comes to fitness. I don't care if you won an Oscar yesterday. I'm still going to bust your ass and push you to your limit.

This kind of hard work has a way of creating an intimacy

"I DON'T CARE IF YOU WON AN OSCAR YESTERDAY. I'M STILL GOING TO BUST YOUR ASS AND PUSH YOU TO YOUR LIMIT."

hooked up with any of them!) However, the close bond we share does lead to some A-listers confiding their deepest secrets and details of their relationships to me. I've heard some intense stuff over the years, but I never tell a soul. Usually, I read about it in the press months later and I think, *Huh? I already knew that!*

We all see celebs' insane bodies on the red carpet and think they must be *living* at the gym, but lots of them just get in shape for a magazine cover or a particular role, and when that's done

calls and texts the moment they book their next role.

When they wait until the last minute to get fit for a job, it's challenging. I have to design tough workout regimens tailored to each body type. Whatever the role requires, whether it's an actress who has to gain 20 pounds of muscle or an actor dropping 50 to look skinny, I'll do it. But for tall orders like that, I'll work with a registered dietitian to get the calorie counts right.

Like I said, some stars are straight-up crazy. I trained

Yet, the reader is unaware that this is likely a combination of anecdotes and will consequently view this source as factual. The reader puts faith in women's magazines, not knowing any better, which creates an issue of trust when the magazines use behind-the-scenes tactics like composite characters to produce the stories they want. One celebrity trainer may not have experienced all the moments shared in this article. As a result of the use of composite characters, the authors are not completely truthful, and the stories have the potential to be misrepresentative.

Advertising is seen to still have a drastic effect on editorial, as shown through case studies of women's magazines today. I applied Steinem and others' historical content analysis and commentary onto current women's magazines to determine that these trends still exist. In "Sex, Lies, & Advertising," Steinem performs an examination of magazine issues in which she "picked random issues, counted the number of pages (even including letters to the editors, horoscopes, and so forth) that are not ads and/or complementary to ads, and then compared that number to the total pages" (Steinem 173). I followed Steinem's model of analysis on the March and September 2016 issues of three different women's magazines: *Seventeen*, *Vogue*, and *O, The Oprah Magazine*. I counted the total number of pages as the number of pages within the magazine in addition to the inside front cover, the inside back cover, as well as the actual back cover (C2, C3, and C4 respectively). I classified ad-related pages as pages in which formal advertisements took up at least half the page and pages that featured a "sponsored" or "advertisement" tag above the content or pages that I considered complementary copy. I did not read through every editorial piece for mentions of specific products, so I did not count pages with

product mentions as ad-related. An important disclaimer is that it is impossible to tell whether my discretion in counting complementary copy is the same as Steinem's was.

I chose to look at the September issues for each magazine because September issues are the most important of the year. The significance is due in part to timing and advertisements. September marks the start of the fall season, which "evokes a fresh start, with the school year beginning and work revving up again. It also represents the start of a new fashion season" (Schiffer). Magazines strive to capitalize on these temporal changes by targeting their content and advertisements accordingly. Additionally, the September issues are a benchmark for the success of the magazine: "Every September, publications like WWD and *Ad Age* track and publish the number of ad pages in every fashion magazine as a signal of how well they're all doing" (Schiffer). Thus, advertisers are more willing to pay the amount necessary for placement in this prestigious issue. The 2009 documentary *The September Issue* focused on the creation of *Vogue*'s September issue, which further emphasized the issue's influence. I then chose to analyze the March issues of each magazine in order to gather a holistic picture of the magazines year round.

Before sharing my results, I will briefly introduce the magazines to give insight on the varying target audiences for each. *Seventeen* originated in 1944 as the first teen magazine. The founding editor-in-chief Helen Valentine "envisioned a service and fashion magazine for high school girls" (Massoni 7). Today, *Seventeen* is housed under Hearst publications and is the "largest monthly teen magazine" in the industry. Hearst boasts that, "*Seventeen* has helped generations of girls navigate the tricky terrain of adolescence, giving the confidence they need to become strong, self-assured young women" ("Magazines." *Magazines/ Hearst*). According to the database MRI,

Mediamark Research & Intelligence, the median age of *Seventeen* readers is 28.4 years old.

Vogue began as a newspaper in New York in 1892, but was bought by its current owner Condé Nast in 1909, which developed the publication to magazine form (Turner and Orange 80). Condé Nast claims on their website that, "*Vogue* places fashion in the context of culture and the world we live in- how we dress, live and socialize; what we eat, listen to and watch; who leads and inspires us" ("Condé Nast- Create. Connect. Condé Nast." *Condé Nast*). MRI Spring 2016 results show Vogue's median age reader to be 38.3 years old.

Public figure and businesswoman Oprah Winfrey founded *O, The Oprah Magazine* more recently in 2000. This newer magazine is also housed under Hearst publications. According to Hearst's website, the magazine "offers compelling stories and empowering ideas stamped with Oprah's unique vision" ("Magazines." *Magazines/ Hearst*). MRI Spring 2016 data show the median age of readers to be 51.2 years old.

Table 3: Advertisement to Non-Advertisement Related Pages (March 2016)[4]

Magazine	# Non-ad/ ad-related pages	# Total Pages (Pages+C2, C3, C4)	Percent non-ad/ ad-related content
Seventeen	69	131	53%
Vogue	166	571	29%
O, The Oprah Magazine	74	141	52%

[4] I do not have access to the advertising insertion orders like Gloria Steinem did, so there is no way of knowing whether I counted the pages of non-advertising related content in the same way she did.

Table 4: Advertisement to Non-Advertisement Related Pages (September 2016)

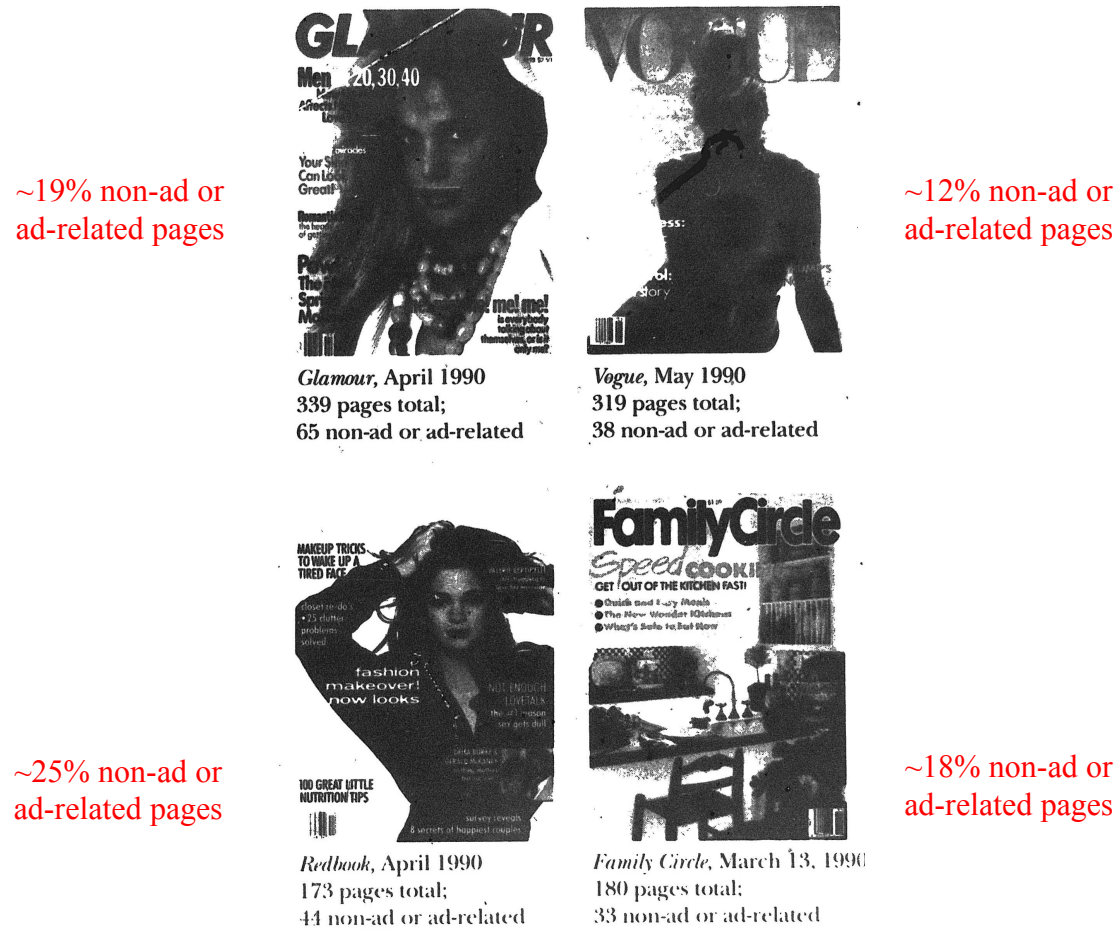
Magazine	# Non-ad/ ad-related pages	# Total Pages (Pages+C2, C3, C4)	Percent non-ad/ ad-related content
Seventeen	59	143	41%
Vogue	209	803	26%
O, The Oprah Magazine	73	157	46%

There are several key points to take away from my analysis. First, *Vogue*'s total page count across the board is significantly greater than both *Seventeen* and *O, The Oprah Magazine.* This, in addition to the fact that *Vogue* consistently had the least number of pages for strictly editorial content, suggests that *Vogue* is the most financially successful of the featured magazines. *Vogue* is not only considered a women's magazine, but also a fashion magazine. The focus on fashion and beauty provides a prime opportunity for advertisers to surround their product with related content and present their product to readers who will care. Next, all the September issues devoted significantly fewer pages to purely editorial content as compared to the March issues. This result is rational since, as previously mentioned, the number of advertisements in a September issue is an indicator of a magazine's monetary success, whereas March is not.

Lastly, and most importantly, is the fact that the percentage of pages entirely given to editorial content barely reaches higher than 50%. The September issue of *Vogue* dedicated roughly a quarter of the magazine to non-ad or ad-related content. If this number does not seem so small at first glance, imagine having to flip through 115 pages of advertisements to find the first editorial page: the table of contents. *Seventeen* and *O, The Oprah Magazine* showed slightly more promising results, though still dismal

numbers. In short, readers do not purchase or pick up magazines to engross themselves in advertisements, yet current magazines are overwhelmingly composed of them. The abundance of advertisements shifts the reader's experience from that of a reader to a consumer, due to the scarcity of editorial content.

Fig. 2: Steinem, Gloria. "Sex, Lies & Advertising." *Ms. Magazine* (1990): 173. Print. [5]



Steinem's original analysis from 1990 illuminates change in women's magazines' composition. While Steinem does not analyze the same magazines I chose, her analysis is important in determining whether women's magazines have progressed or not. Steinem's

[5] My additions are in red.

study produced substantially lower numbers of plain editorial pages than women's magazines today show, most magazines not even reaching 25%. Consistent with my results, *Vogue* has the lowest number of editorial pages.

The results of my study and comparisons to Steinem's original study suggest that advertising undoubtedly plays a larger role in prescribing femininity than editorial alone does. Interestingly, women's magazines have more editorial pages now than in 1990. Since 1990, the journalism industry has undergone transitions to digital form, putting more pressure than ever on print journalism to stay in business. Brands are no longer as willing to invest their money into placing advertisements in print journalism since this medium does not have as much reach, or total unique viewers, and will not yield as much return on investment as it has had in the past. The weight of brands' advertising today falls into the categories of digital, social, and search engine optimization (SEO), hence the diminishing number of advertisements in women's magazines today.

The dispersion of the advertisements in the magazine indicates the magazine's obedience to insertion orders. High fashion brands prefer to be in the prime real estate of the book- the front pages. In both the March and September 2016 issues of *Vogue*, the first 100 plus pages are dedicated to solely fashion, cosmetics, and jewelry advertisements. Because of this, the editorial content ends up weighing down the back end of the book. The examples of complementary copy advertisement placements are endless. Most notably, in the March 2016 issue of *Seventeen*, an editorial spread titled "Your Acne Survival Guide" is interspersed with advertisements for Unilever face washes such as Simple and St. Ives. In the September 2016 *Vogue*, a left hand page shows an article titled "In Her Eyes," and the corresponding right hand page shows an

advertisement for Olay eye cream. The *O, The Oprah Magazine* March 2016 issue is no different. A left hand page presents an article titled "Your Almost-Effortless Guide to Eating More Veggies," next to a right hand page advertisement for Weightwatchers Smart Ones meals. The featured meal is a plate of chicken, rice, and unsurprisingly, veggies like peppers and broccoli.

The selection of products advertised further demonstrates how women's magazines perceive femininity. Because of the specificities of insertion orders, women's magazines tend to feature a minimal range of products. As opposed to "'people products' used by both men and women but advertised mostly to men- cars, credit cards, insurance, sound equipment, financial services," women's magazines tend to promote "women's products" like "clothes, shampoo, fragrance, food, and so on" (Steinem 171). There is a blatant division between "people" and "women" that strengthens the idea of women's magazines as a distinctive entity.

For my research, I used the same six issues as before to count the number of total unique advertisements in each magazine. I counted a unique advertisement as a brand's advertisement pages for one of its products. For example, I would count advertisements for Burberry clothing and Burberry perfume as two unique advertisements. If an advertisement was clearly part of a multiple page series, I counted all the related pages as one unique advertisement. After I collected the total number of unique advertisements, I then classified the advertisements into categories of fashion, beauty, food and other. Fashion ads consisted of clothing, accessories (bags, eyewear, etc.), jewelry, and clothing retailers. Beauty ads meant cosmetics such as makeup, hair products, and nail products. The food category incorporated all food products, even candy and gum. All remaining

advertisements were placed in the "other" group, separated between non-gender specific and gender specific. Non-gender specific examples included cars, credit cars, insurance, etc., and feminine hygiene products and feminine health promotions were classified as gender specific.

Table 5: Categories of Advertisements (March 2016)

Magazine	# Total Unique ads	Fashion ads		Beauty ads		Food ads		Other ads- Non gender specific		Other ads- Gender specific	
		#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Seventeen	42	10	24%	17	40%	2	5%	9	21%	4	10%
Vogue	160	102	64%	37	23%	0	0%	18	11%	3	2%
O, The Oprah Magazine	44	8	18%	15	34%	9	20%	11	25%	1	2%

Table 6: Categories of Advertisements (September 2016)

Magazine	# Total Unique ads	Fashion ads		Beauty ads		Food ads		Other ads- Non gender specific		Other ads- Gender specific	
		#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Seventeen	49	10	20%	29	59%	3	6%	3	6%	4	8%
Vogue	223	126	57%	50	22%	1	0%	44	20%	2	1%
O, The Oprah Magazine	61	8	13%	18	30%	8	13%	24	39%	3	5%

The classification of advertisements reflects the target readers of each magazine. *Seventeen* includes the most beauty advertisements out of all categories. Seventeen's young audience is likely dealing with acne due to puberty as well as experimenting with makeup for the first time, hence the focus on beauty. Since *Vogue* identifies as a fashion magazine, this publication logically has more fashion advertisements out of all categories. *O, The Oprah Magazine* also has beauty as the highest advertisement group. The older readership is more likely to develop wrinkles and aging skin, concerns that beauty advertisements undeniably address. *O, The Oprah Magazine* also has the highest number of food advertisements as compared to the other magazines. The inclusion of food advertisements is reminiscent of the domestic theme of earliest women's magazines, ideals that would most resonate with older readers, who are most likely to be mothers and homemakers.

Besides the inside pages of women's magazines, advertising additionally impacts the covers of the magazines themselves. Today, almost every women's magazine displays a celebrity on its cover, but this was not always the case. In 1991, *Vogue* instigated this trend among women's magazines by putting actress Kim Basinger on its cover. Journalists theorize that *Vogue* might have been playing off of the success of *People*, a tabloid magazine that discovered this trend in 1974. Prior to this, women's magazine covers showcased models. This switch occurred permanently once "magazines discovered that putting the next hot celeb on the cover [could] crank newsstand sales when subscription and ad pages [were] falling" (Nelson 224). As with traditional advertising, celebrity integration occurred only when profit was promised. Now the

models that make covers are usually models that function more as celebrities, such as Kendall Jenner, Gigi Hadid, and Chrissy Teigen.

These celebrities act as influencers in terms of the advertising within the magazine. Kendall Jenner is on the cover of the September *Vogue* and was further seen in advertisements for both Fendi and Estee Lauder throughout the same issue. Advertisers who spotlight certain celebrities in their own campaigns or otherwise desire to be affiliated with the cover celebrity will be more eager to place their advertisements within a magazine that aligns with their interests.

O, The Oprah Magazine uses celebrities differently by having Oprah on its cover every month. Oprah has grown to be more than simply a celebrity, but rather a brand. She has hosted her own television show, written books, started a television network (OWN), created a philanthropic organization (Oprah's Angel Network), and become the spokesperson for Weight Watchers. Many facets of Oprah's brand are advertised throughout her magazine. The September 2016 issue of the publication included an advertisement for an upcoming drama series, for which Oprah is the executive producer, called "Queen Sugar," that was to appear on Oprah's television network. Similarly, the March 2016 issue contains ads for two books written by the editors of *O*, *O's Little Book of Happiness* and *O's Little Guide to Finding Your True Purpose*, as well as an advertisement promoting a 21-day meditation experience with Oprah and Deepak Chopra. *O* takes advantage of Oprah's many engagements to maximize the magazine's profits.

The challenge women's magazines face is adhering to the advertising industry's strict guidelines while still promoting an appropriate definition of femininity. Since

women look to women's magazines as a source of what composes femininity, women's magazines must portray a definition that is applicable to *all* readers. If a magazine does not follow the traditional guidelines, that magazine will eventually fold. This can be seen through Gloria Steinem's attempt to create and sustain the unconventional feminist magazine, *Ms.*. Steinem understood that advertising is essential to a magazine's survival, so instead of eliminating advertising entirely, she took a different approach to attracting advertisers. She hoped to appeal to "people products" brands as well as "add the best ads for whatever traditional 'women's products' (clothes, shampoo, fragrance, food, and so on) that surveys showed *Ms.* readers used" (Steinem 171). Ultimately, Steinem faced much backlash from advertisers of technology, cars, toy trains, alcohol, airlines, and financial services who didn't believe that women wanted to buy their products, or otherwise took issue with having their advertisements placed in *Ms.* magazine. After futile pursuits of success under multiple different owners, *Ms.* became an "ad-free" and "reader supported" publication. Today, *Ms.* magazine is a quarterly non-profit publication funded by the Feminist Majority Foundation. Though *Ms.* is in existence without advertising, its name has clearly been demoted within the magazine industry. The frequency of publication is telling of the magazine's popularity and budget, both of which have undoubtedly diminished because of advertisers' absence.

Ms. is not the only publication that struggled to comply with advertisers' wishes. Wolf notes a plethora of similar examples:

> Thirty-five thousand dollars worth of advertising was withdrawn from a British magazine the day after an editor, Carol Sarler, was quoted as saying that she found it hard to show women looking intelligent when they were plastered with makeup. A gray-haired editor for a leading women's magazine told a gray-haired writer, Mary Kay Blakely, that an article about the glories of gray hair cost her magazine the Clairol account for six months.

> An editor of *New York Woman*, a staff member told me, was informed that for financial reasons she had to put a model on the cover rather than a remarkable woman she wished to profile. (Wolf 81)

Not only would women's magazines without advertisements lose substantial amounts of money, but they would perhaps also lose the interest of their readers. Wolf theorizes that women are so hypnotized by the beauty myth that they "are not yet sure [themselves] that women are interesting without 'beauty'" (Wolf 84). Without this beauty element that advertisers have convinced women is an integral part of their femininity, women readers may not think it's worth it to pay to read such a magazine.

Hence, it is no surprise that the magazines that prosper are those that abide by advertisers' rules. In fact, "all four of the magazines with the largest circulations by 1940 originated in some sort of commercial impulse" (Walker 36). Similarly, "*Vogue* was initially a social gazette, but it was turned by its new owner Condé Nast from 1909 into one of the first specialist magazines targeted at a wealthy niche audience in order to deliver high-end advertising" (Turner and Orange 80). The magazines with the greatest revenues in the early 20th century (*Delineator*, *McCall's*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, *Woman's Home Companion*, *Good Housekeeping*, and *Pictorial Review*) began with "low subscription rates," but "these journals soon reached hundreds of thousands of female readers across the nation, becoming the preferred method for advertisers to market and sell products and services to women" (Nelson 6). Advertising proves to be the lifeline for women's magazines.

IV. Advertisements as Enforcers of Femininity

So far this paper has made clear that advertisements are imperative to women's magazines' survival due to their financial role. As a result, advertisements play a larger role than editorial within women's magazines, and therefore are more influential to readers.

As women's magazines adjusted to accommodate historical changes, advertisements also changed. In the 1920s, the advertising industry widely expanded and there was "a change in the way advertisers addressed consumers" (Walker 38). The invention of new products like the toaster, Band-Aid, radio, vacuum cleaner, refrigerator, washing machine, television, and dishwasher called for increased advertising to introduce these products to the market (Walker 38). The advertisements for these unfamiliar products focused on the features of the products themselves in order to educate readers on the product's purpose. In advertisements of the 1940s, there was a "[shift in emphasis] from the product and its positive qualities to the consumer who would use it" (Walker 38). Advertisements from the 1940s and onward integrated this contextual element into their campaigns to provide a more holistic setting for their products.

When women joined the workforce while their husbands were off at war in the 1940s, women's magazines seemingly embraced women's newfound confidence and labor participation. Still, the previously feminine ideals portrayed in advertisements were carefully conserved. For instance, "a Pond's cold cream ad of the time read: 'We like to feel we look feminine even though we are doing a man-sized job…so we tuck flowers and ribbons in our hair and try to keep our faces looking pretty as you please'" (Wolf 63). On the surface, advertisements were depicting women in their growing roles, but the

underlying message still promoted traditional femininity. To maintain readership, "the magazines needed to ensure that their readers would not liberate themselves out of their interest in women's magazines" (Wolf 63). Beauty and fashion advertisers thrive financially by reminding women of society's beauty ideals. Since, as seen by my own case studies, beauty and fashion advertisers make up the majority of women's magazine's advertisements, it was crucial to keep women invested in these products. The 1950s marked a peak in advertising revenues as advertisers recognized the benefits of advertising domestic products to women's magazines' niche audience. As mentioned earlier, when men returned from World War II, women who had temporarily been in the workforce were relegated back to their domestic duties. Advertisers took this transition as an opportunity to push their domestic products onto women who would be using them once again.

To reiterate, an advertiser's role is that of a cultural intermediary; advertisements are a medium to convey cultural values. French theorist Pierre Bourdieu defines cultural intermediaries in terms of occupation, listing examples of industries such as "presentation and representation (sales, marketing, advertising, public relations, fashion, decoration and so forth) and in all institutions providing symbolic goods and services. These include the various jobs in medical and social assistance…and in cultural production and organization (…radio and TV producers and presenters, magazine journalists)" (Bourdieu 359). Bourdieu includes every aspect of women's magazines addressed within this paper: journalism, advertising, and fashion. Women's magazines, therefore, not only reflect cultural change but also can influence this change: "Women's magazines for over a century have been one of the most powerful agents for changing women's roles, and

throughout that time they have consistently glamorized whatever the economy advertisers, and, during wartime, the government, needed at that moment from women" (Wolf 64). The sheer number of advertisements enforces their glamorizing power.

What are the cultural ideals that advertisements within women's magazines are glamorizing? In order to answer this, the beauty myth's origins must be examined. The beauty myth seems to have co-evolved with industrialization in the United States. As the domestic sphere grew separate from the public sphere in the early 19th century, "the middle class expanded, the standards of living and of literacy rose, the size of families shrank; a new class of literate, idle women developed, on whose submission to enforced domesticity the evolving system of industrial capitalism depended" (Wolf 14). Advanced technologies of the mid-19th century were able to reproduce "images of how women should look" such as "fashion plates, daguerreotypes, tinytypes, and rotogravures" (Wolf 15). This ability made expectations for women more widespread and inescapable.

As women gained legal rights and entered the workforce in the 1970s, women's magazines lost some of their appeal. Women became more confident about bursting out of the domestic sphere, so they were not as influenced by the images and content women's magazines presented them. Wolf provides statistics for this loss of interest:

> During [feminism's] second wave, clothing manufacturers were alarmed to find that women weren't spending much money on clothing anymore. As middle-class women abandoned their role as consuming housewives and entered the work force, their engagement with the issues of the outer world could foreseeably lead them to lose interest altogether in women's magazines' separate feminine reality. And the magazines' authority was undermined still further with the fashion upheavals that began in the late 1960s, the end of haute couture and the beginning of what fashion historians Elizabeth Wilson and Lou Taylor call 'style for all'…. Between 1965 and 1981, British women's magazine sales fell sharply from 555.3 million to 407.4 million copies a year. (Wolf 67)

Women's magazines were forced to adjust once again to preserve their business. The focus of the magazines, starting with *Vogue* in 1969, narrowed in on women's bodies. As Wolf eloquently puts it, "In a stunning move, an entire replacement culture was developed by naming a 'problem' where it had scarcely existed before, centering it on women's natural state, and elevating it to the existential female dilemma" (Wolf 67). First, magazines concentrated on the products, next the people using the products, and finally the people in their purest form.

Beauty soon stretched beyond the pages of magazines and into the public Sphere, where beauty became synonymous with femininity. In essence, beauty became "defensive proof to aggressive competitors of womanhood" (Wolf 30). In addition to the feminine connotations of beauty, women quickly saw that beauty had become entwined with status and power, similar to what money signified for men.

Since the beauty myth is financially driven, advertisers strategically take advantage of the concept. Wolf emphasizes that, "ideals didn't simply descend from heaven," but rather advertisers developed these ideals to ensure their beauty and beauty associated products would sell (Wolf 3). The beauty myth finances "the $33-billion-a-year diet industry, the $20-billion cosmetics industry, the $300-million cosmetic surgery industry" (Wolf 17). The scale of these industries requires the beauty myth to be inescapable. Luckily for advertisers, women are surround by the beauty myth from the time they are young through fairy tales and stories depicting beautiful women as heroes and leads (Wolf 61). When women outgrow princesses, models in women's magazines step in to take their place.

The beauty myth produces an ideal size, look, age, and even race for women to compare themselves to. When Wolf wrote her book in the 1990s, she identifies this ideal as "someone tall, thin, white, and blond, a face without flaws, someone wholly 'perfect'" (Wolf 1). The magazines did not embrace models of different races unless they had "virtually Caucasian features" (Wolf 6). Youth was established as an ideal, as evidenced by the lack of older women among the pages. On the rare occasion that older women were featured, digital retouching was done to ensure that the women did not look their age.

Modeling agencies allow for further investigation of ideal body size by providing dimensions of their signed models on their websites. Supermodel Adriana Lima, represented by the Society Management agency, is 5'10'' with a 24'' waist. Under the same agency, Kendall Jenner measures at 5'10. 5'' and also has a 24'' waist ("Women." *The Society Management)*. IMG models showcases Karlie Kloss who stands tall at 5'11'' and has a 23'' waist and Gigi Hadid, who is 5'10. 5'' with a 25'' waist ("Women." *IMG Models*). This brief sample of models, all of which are frequently shown in the media, demonstrates that the normative height of models is 5'11'' and a waist size of 24''. These numbers stand in stark contrast to statistics of average women. According to the Centers for Disease Control, the average woman is 5'3'' and has a waist size of 37.5''("Body Measurements." *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*). The measurements of models do not represent typical women, which indicates that the beauty myth is indeed a myth.

The body images of models presented in women's magazines are shown to have profoundly negative effects on readers. A study done by Emma Halliwell and Helga

Dittmar at the University of Sussex in 2004 tested whether the size of models affected viewers' body-focused anxiety and whether thin models were more effective in advertisements. Previous research performed similar analysis but did not account for the difference in levels of attractiveness between the models. Halliwell and Dittmar used "computer imaging software…to stretch the size of models presented in the advertisements, thereby keeping attractiveness constant" (Halliwell and Dittmar 108). Participants were asked questions from The Sociocultural Attitudes toward Appearance Questionnaire (SATAQ) to assess their anxiety and preferences. The study found that "exposure to thin models resulted in greater body-focused anxiety among woman who internalize the thin ideal than exposure to average-size models or no models" (Halliwell and Dittmar 104). Additionally, they found that "advertisements were equally effective, regardless of the model's size" (Halliwell and Dittmar 104). These conclusions suggest that the size ideal of the beauty myth is harmful, but there is potential for advertisers to make positive change while still maintaining profit.

More recent scholarly studies support Wolf's findings on how women are portrayed in women's magazines. A 2005 study done by Katherine Frith, Ping Shaw, and Hong Cheng compared advertising in women's beauty and fashion magazines across Singapore, Taiwan, and the United States. These researchers classified women in 1,236 ads as Classic, Sensual/Sex Kitten, Cute/Girl-Next-Door, or Trendy. The results showed "the Sensual/Sex Kitten beauty type, which mainly relates to women's sexual attractiveness, was used more often in the U.S. than in Singapore and Taiwan advertisements" specifically with Caucasian models (Frith, Shaw, and Cheng). In fact, Caucasian models were shown in 73% of the total ads analyzed, marking white as the

race primarily associated with beauty. This study also found that U.S. magazines contained more clothing advertisements, while Singapore and Taiwan's magazines contained more beauty advertisements. These findings, "[suggest] that in the U.S. the body is a defining factor in beauty" (Frith, Shaw, and Cheng). Decades after the second wave women's movement's shift to emphasize the body, women's magazines seem to still be employing this technique. This study is important because it shows that while white women are held as the beauty standard, women of different ethnicities are nonetheless impacted by this Caucasian image.

Advertisers' attention to the body gives greater potential for sexual objectification. Just as *Vogue* found it necessary to shift to focusing on women's bodies, "advertisers [in the early 1990s] needed to address feminist critiques of advertising and to fashion new commercial messages that took on board women's anger at constantly being addressed through representations of idealized beauty" (Gill 256). Advertisers responded to these critiques by shifting "from objectification to sexual subjectification…women are presented not as seeking men's approval but as pleasing themselves; in doing so, they just happen to win men's admiration" (Gill 257). Yet, feminist Rosalind Gill believes this type of advertising "re-sexualizes women's bodies, with the excuse of a feisty, empowered postfeminist discourse" (Gill 258). Gill quotes scholar Robert Goldman who similarly argues that this feigned empowerment still causes women to be insecure about having their bodies approved by others and about "'losing one's looks'- the quite reasonable fear that aging will deplete one's value and social power" (Gill 258). Sexual objectification, in any form, is another mechanism to preserve women's insecurities

about their bodies. The average woman is not nearly as outwardly sexual as portrayed in women's magazines, and women can't stall aging as hard as they may try.

Amanda Zimmerman and John Dahlberg show further notions of focus on the women's bodies in a 2008 study measuring sexual objectification in advertisements and viewers' attitudes towards these images. The study drew off two earlier studies: one in 1991 by Ford, LaTour, and Lundstrom that found that "young, educated women were the strongest critics of advertisements" and the other in 2000 by Mittal and Lassar that found readers were less critical of highly sexualized advertisements as a result of their liberal attitudes towards sex in advertising and the media (Zimmerman and Dahlberg). Using this information, Zimmerman and Dahlberg's study included only young and educated women. Results showed that "respondents agreed females were portrayed as sex objects in advertisements, but were less offended by these portrayals than female respondents in 1991" (Zimmerman and Dahlberg). Zimmerman and Dahlman attribute the differences in current perceptions of sexual objectification to the third wave women's movement, which "embraces sexuality" (Zimmerman and Dahlman). Zimmerman and Dahlman seem to jump to this considerable conclusion; however, I believe there are other possible explanations. Women could be ambivalent about sexually objectifying images because they are expected to conform to these standards despite the demeaning nature of the images. Because the beauty myth reflects societal standards, the increase in sexualized images may have become normalized for women and consequently have become less offensive. Additionally, this sample was not representative of all readers of women's magazines since it only included young and educated women, so it is impossible to know whether all readers held similar liberal opinions.

It is necessary to look to current women's magazines to assess whether the beauty myth has changed over the years. Current magazines show that sexual objectification in advertisements still exists. Figures 3, 4, and 5 show three strong examples. In the Burberry perfume advertisement, the woman is clothed only in her underwear and poses submissively with her arms crossing her chest. She leans on the perfume bottle which has a bow tied around its neck, resembling a typically feminine hair accessory or clothing detail. The woman's lips are seductively parted as she leans on the perfume bottle, and her hair is tousled in a way that hints at sexual activity. She is sitting on a Burberry plaid fabric, drawing the viewer's eyes to her bottom. The woman in the forefront of the image is much more noticeable than the perfume bottle that blends in with the background. These aesthetic choices lead readers to associate femininity with sex appeal. The Stuart Weitzman advertisement features three naked women standing pressed up against one another in a homoerotic position. The advertisement is for Stuart Weitzman shoes, but there is a little emphasis on the actual product. The models are all wearing the same pair of shoes, which are barely noticeable at the bottom of the page, especially since the image is in black and white. The plain white background of the image highlights the women's bodies as the focus of the ad. The only text on the image is the brand name, which falls directly across the women's behinds, calling more attention to their bodies. Again, advertisers illustrate a feminine product essentially through women's bodies alone, linking femininity and sex. Lastly, the Kohler advertisement is a direct portrayal of objectification as it equates a woman with the physical object of a faucet. The woman is sitting in an appealing position on the table in a revealing dress and a suggestive pout on her face. The caption of the advertisement "NEVER TOO WANTED" implies the man's

desire for this woman. The man is clearly in a position of power, as he is standing in his police uniform staring straight at the woman, while she is portrayed as weaker through her clothing, downcast gaze, and crossing of her legs. The woman sitting on the table makes herself even physically lower than the man. The man standing in the shadows evokes the essence of a predator, while the woman sitting directly under the harsh light emphasizes her as the object of the male gaze. The caption of the advertisement says, "Embrace the irresistible beauty of modern, minimal design," implying that this woman's sexuality is irresistible. Because of the prevalence of objectified women in advertisements, women may develop unrealistic expectations of sexual expression and assume femininity to be synonymous with sex.

Fig. 3. My Burberry. Advertisement. *Vogue* September 2016. 549. Print.

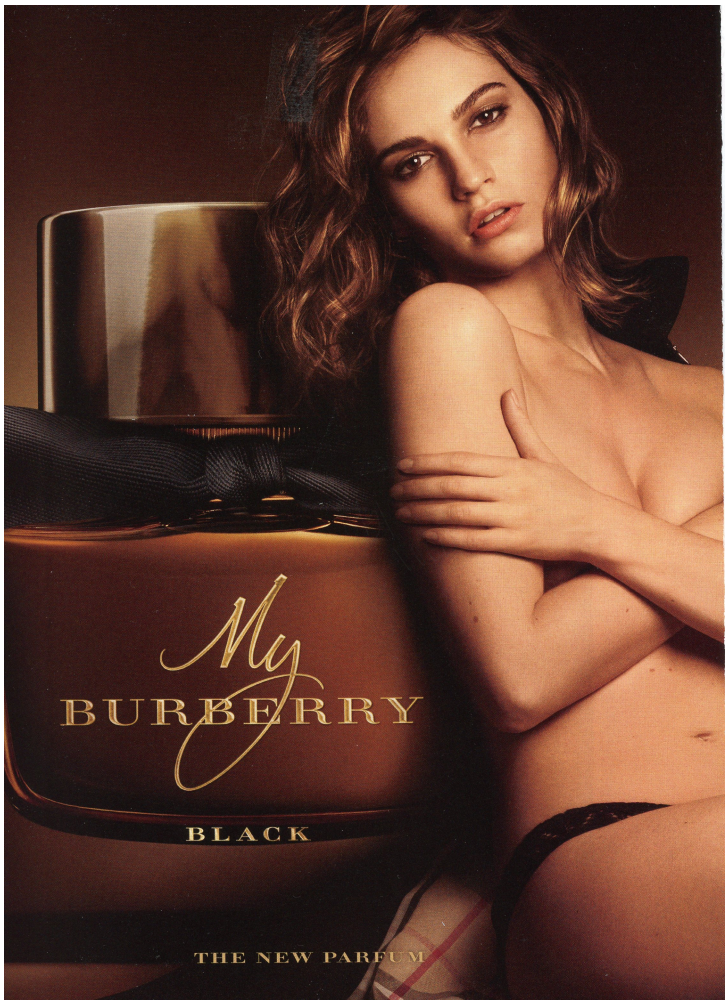


Fig. 4. Stuart Weitzman. Advertisement. *Vogue* March 2016. Print.

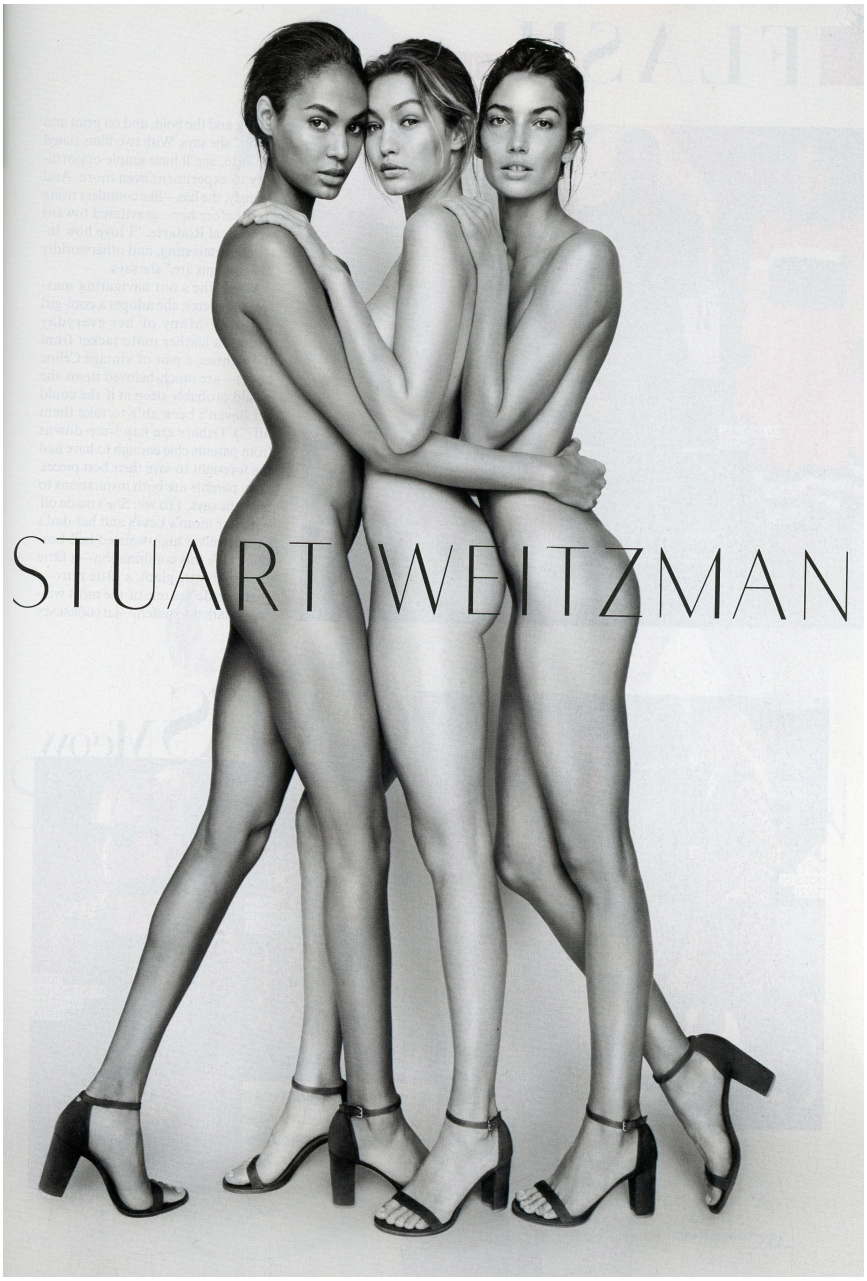


Fig. 5. Kohler. Advertisement. *Vogue* September 2016. 360-361. Print

There is evidence that the beauty myth is attempting to reflect current cultural change by being more inclusive of the types of women chosen to appear in women's magazines. In January 2017, plus size model and body activist Ashley Graham was featured on the cover of *British Vogue*. Graham wore Coach clothing on the cover, thanks to the brand providing clothes outside their sample size range (generally size 2 or 4 at most). A plus size woman on the cover of a magazine as profound as *Vogue* is certainly progressive and significantly helps redefine beauty norms to readers. *British Vogue* editor in chief Alexandra Shulman, however, "expressed her disappointment that of the many (many) brands Vogue works so closely with, others were not able to make this

collaboration happen" (Marinelli). Schulman reflects on this in her editor's letter of Graham's issue, saying, "It seems strange to me that while the rest of the world is desperate for fashion to embrace broader definitions of physical beauty, some of our most famous fashion brands appear to be traveling in the opposite -- and, in my opinion, unwise -- direction" (Marinelli). Schulman observes a disparity between the editorial and advertising perspectives on beauty. Yet, a Coach advertisement in the September 2016 issue of American *Vogue* still shows the typical thin models despite Coach's supposed openness to plus size models.

Fig. 6. Coach. Advertisement. *Vogue* September 2016. 144-151. Print.

Only a couple months later in the March 2017 issue of American *Vogue* Ashley Graham takes the cover again with a diverse range of models: Liu Wen, Kendall Jenner, Gigi Hadid, Imaan Hammam, Adwoa Aboah, and Vittoria Ceretti. The cover story

discusses this diversity as a changing trend: “Each of these cover girls proudly inhabits her own particular gorgeousness in her own particular way. Together they represent a seismic social shift: The new beauty norm is no norm” (Singer 438). Designers showed support for these new norms. Models in Michael Kors’ Spring 2017 show, for instance, “ran a gamut of age, shape, ethnicity, and relationship to conventional femininity” (Singer 438). Kors believes that “what feels fresh and modern is a sense of surprise like when you’re in the city watching all kinds of people go by on the street” (Singer 438). Stella McCartney echoes Kors, saying, “when we cast, we’re after interesting individuals that our customers can see themselves in” (Singer 438). The March 2017 cover is meant to reflect this new attitude, but this attempt at inclusion was poorly executed. While the race of the cover models varied, the size, heights, and skin tone of the models were more or less the same. Readers agree that the cover is hypocritical in that “Graham is the only plus-size model” (Larkin). In fact, “Vogue has been accused of altering Hadid’s hand in the photo to cover up Graham’s stomach” (Larkin). The cover is trying to make a statement that *Vogue* is accepting of all women, but including one plus size model does not signify acceptance.

Fig. 7. *Vogue*. March 2017. C1. Print.

O, The Oprah Magazine defies the common cover model by featuring Oprah, a black, curvier woman, as the face of the magazine. Oprah sets a different definition of femininity because readers are aware that she is a real person, not a model. Having Oprah on the cover each month gives readers a more realistic sense of what actual women look like, widening the standards of femininity. Still, *O* does not fully embrace diversity since Oprah is on the cover of every issue of the magazine. While having Oprah on the cover each month is understandable since she is the founder and face of the magazine, if *O*

featured an array of black, curvier women on each cover the beauty myth could further be altered.

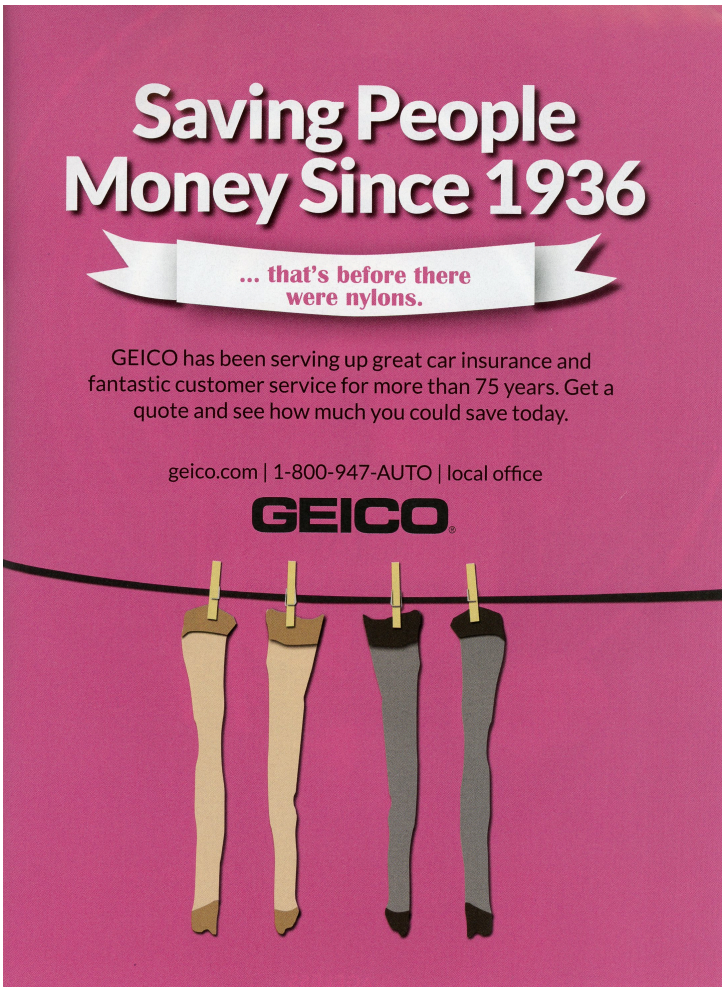
Fig. 8. *O, The Oprah Magazine*. September 2016. C1. Print.

Like the seemingly diverse *Vogue* cover, some advertisements function under the guise of being non-gendered when in reality they are subtly gendered. Advertisements for what Steinem terms "people products," products used by both men and women, are nonetheless often still gendered towards women where they appear in women's magazines**.** Referring back to my study of types of advertisements within current magazines (see tables 5 and 6), it appears there are more non-gender specific

advertisements overall as compared to gender-specific advertisements. This seems progressive on the surface, but in reality, many of these non-gender specific advertisements take a gendered approach to presenting people products. Figures 9 and 10 are a couple of the strongest examples from my selection of current issues:

Fig. 9 Therealcost.gov. Advertisement. *Seventeen* March 2016. 81. Print.

Fig. 10 Geico. Advertisement. *Vogue* March 2016. 415. Print.



The first is an advertisement for a website called therealcost.gov which exposes the risks of smoking. There are endless consequences related to smoking including, according to the CDC, lung cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, coronary heart disease, stroke, birth defects, teeth and gum problems ("Health Effects of Cigarette Smoking." *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*). These risks are drastic and life changing, yet this advertisement still tries to appeal to the feminine aspects of beauty by emphasizing the wrinkles produced from smoking. The second advertisement is for Geico car insurance. There is no separate insurance for men and women, however, this advertisement is bright pink and claims that Geico has been "saving people money since

1936…that's before there were nylons." This advertisement is for car insurance but drives the consumer to purchase by presenting an image of hosiery, a women's product that is completely unrelated to cars. These advertisements resemble advertisements of the 1940s. When women entered the workforce during World War II advertisements strived to keep notions of femininity throughout their campaigns. Today, as more women are in the workforce than ever before, advertisements still do the same.

Advertisements in women's magazines act as enforcers of traditional femininity by imposing unrealistic and limiting beauty standards on women readers. Advertisers are in a position of power since their creations reflect societal norms and adjust to historical change. Because advertisements make up the majority of women's magazines, women can't escape the images of nearly uniform models and sexually objectified women. Even advertisements for people products serve to remind women of their expected femininity. Advertisers intentionally concentrate on women's bodies in advertisements to convey a definition of femininity focused on appearance.

V. Fashion and Femininity

As discussed in Chapter 4, society undoubtedly imposes codes of femininity on women's bodies. Susan Brownmiller rightly acknowledged that appearance and dress are the "chief outward expression of the feminine difference." Psychologist J.C. Flugel supports that "[gender] differences are nowhere more apparent than in the field of fashion" (Flugel 144). Fashion theorists believe that fashion has meaning beyond the physical realm, but the meaning behind fashion choices is subjective and ultimately controversial. Can clothes themselves communicate a definition of femininity? If so, what is it that women's magazines are trying to communicate through the clothing selections they present to their readers?

While fashion is an external declaration, fashion theorists believe that this expression is an interpretation of internal motivation. Fashion can be thought of as "the idea that something going on inside someone's head, individual intention, is somehow externalized and made present in a garment or an ensemble" (Barnard 174). According to this theory, adornment communicates an array of intentions such as one's mood, as well as serving to reinforce one's beliefs and values.

A concrete example of attire for a job interview demonstrates a communal understanding of fashion's capacity to communicate: "Wearing a skimpy dress to an interview 'sends out all the wrong messages.' The English phrase again appears to give away an entire culture's implicit understanding of fashion's communicative form" (Barnard 170). The unanimous ability to recognize inappropriate job attire highlights the fact that fashion does indeed have some comprehensive underlying meaning. Critic John Berger theorizes that a "man's presence is dependent upon the promise of power which

he embodies," while "a woman's presence expresses her own attitude of herself" (Berger 45, 46). Due to this difference, a woman's "presence is manifest in her gestures, voice, opinions, expressions, clothes, chosen surroundings, [and] taste" (Berger 46). This manifestation suggests that the messages that a woman's fashion choices communicate are perhaps more expressive than a man's fashion choices would be.

While fashion choices undeniably convey some level of meaning, the meaning itself is difficult to decode. Fashion theorist Fred Davis compares this dilemma to watching a play without hearing the dialogue. He explains that, "Although we are likely to come away with some sense of what is going on…we would have only the vaguest idea of the whys and the wherefores" (Davis 149). As with any visual art, fashion is always open to interpretation, so there is no absolute way to construct meaning from clothing. In the absence of such a formula, onlookers can use clues to determine meaning, a method known as undercoding. Undercoding "occurs when in the absence of reliable interpretative rules persons presume or infer, often unwittingly, on the basis of such hard-to-specify cues as gesture, inflection, pace, facial expression, context, and setting, certain molar meanings in a text, score, performance, or other communication" (Davis 153). In women's magazines, the cues are diminished by the fact that the fashion image is static. Therefore, the most sensible cue to utilize is that which stands outside the magazine itself: cultural context.

The meaning of fashion relies on culture, hence it is understandable that fashion itself is at the core of the defining femininity in women's magazines. Among these determinants are "environmental resources, technical developments, and cultural standards for judging what is fine or beautiful" (Roach and Eicher 109). The beauty myth

is integral still as it drives the fashion of the times. Psychologist J.C. Flugel theorizes that, "new fashions, if they are to be successful, must be in accordance with certain ideals current at the time they are launched. Women must see in the new fashion a symbol of an ideal that is before them" (Flugel 152). Women's magazines help publicize the relevant fashion, with the aforementioned input from advertisers, serving to impose cultural ideals on clothing.

The fashion spreads in my chosen magazines further indicate differences in prescriptions of femininity by age. *Seventeen*'s fashion spreads appeal to young women: the models appear to be teenagers, and the clothes presented are not revealing (Fig. 11). Figure 11 is a back-to-school spread that gives readers advice on outfit ideas for their different personalities. This spread plays on the idea that younger readers may be unsure about who they are and are still in the stage of trying on different identities. There are childish doodles on the background of the page, further relating to young women. The featured clothing with stars, floral prints, and ruffles mirrors the doodles in the background. The models are in innocent poses; they are facing the camera straight on and their body positions are sure and confident. The models appear to have minimal makeup on, proudly exhibiting a fresh-faced look. The notion of innocence is heightened by the text on the spread. One of the presented looks is titled "cutest wallflower," suggesting that society expects feminine young women to be cute. Similarly, the phrasing "whimsical sweaters" in Figure 12 also signifies a playful disposition associated with youth. Other *Seventeen* spreads choose not to show models at all, but rather focus on the clothing as seen in Figure 12. Interestingly, the clothing off the models is more revealing than the clothes presented on models. For instance, the slip dresses shown all have thin

spaghetti straps and plunging necklines. Slip dresses resemble lingerie, and therefore people tend to relate this article of clothing with sex. This fashion spread sets the contradicting standard for young women to be both innocent and sexual. The complex definition of femininity provided could be confusing for young women who are in the process of shaping their identities and personal style. While *Seventeen* seems to be drawing less attention to women's bodies by showing clothing off models, the magazine is nonetheless pushing a covert definition of femininity.

Fig. 11. *Seventeen*. March 2016. 30-31. Print.

Fig. 12. *Seventeen*. September 2016. 36. Print.

In contrast, *Vogue* fashion spreads are artistic with models in diverse poses and in interesting settings. *Vogue* spreads emphasize the body much more, perhaps as a result of artistic freedom. Clothing is consistently shown on models, though this clothing is suggestive at times. For instance, in Figure 15, the left hand model wears a shirt where her stomach and shoulders peak through cutouts. The right hand page shows a woman with her bra constituting a shirt and a skirt with zippers on her sides that are unzipped to the top of her thighs. Her arm is linked around a man's neck while she is leaning against him. The models in both these images appear against a plain background, highlighting the directed focus on the models themselves. In other spreads, the fashion is integrated into a scene, telling more of a story than simply showing the garments off a body as *Seventeen* does. The background of the spread in Figure 14 is bright, busy, and indicates movement.

Still, the models are in the forefront of the image, allowing the readers to tune in to the bodies more than the background. The left-hand female model's arm is draped around the male's shoulder and her raised eyebrows imply a sexual relationship with this man. Furthermore, the right-hand female model's parted lips show possible sexual interest in the men that surround her. Ultimately, *Vogue* proposes a more sexual definition of femininity than *Seventeen*, which is enhanced by primarily showing clothing on women's bodies.

Fig. 13. *Vogue*. March 2016. 470-471. Print.

Fig. 14. *Vogue*. March 2016. 486-487. Print.

Lastly, *O, The Oprah Magazine* more closely resembles *Seventeen* in that the majority of the fashion spreads focus on the clothing itself and not the women wearing it. The pictures of women in the clothing are either taken from a runway show, or they are racially diverse models. In this sense, *O* diverts from the traditional use of mainly white models. In both examples, these pictures are tiny in proportion to the full spread and the pages are crowded in a way to distract the reader from narrowing in on the models. Older women have likely already established their personal style so may not need to see what this style looks like on models. The title of the Figure 16 spread is "comfort zone," implying that the older women readers of *O* are more concerned with comfort than with excessiveness or impracticality as seen in *Vogue*.

Fig. 15. *O, The Oprah Magazine*. March 2016. 62-63. Print.

Fig. 16. *O, The Oprah Magazine*. September 2016. 64-65. Print.

These three magazines have distinctly different age readers, so it is reasonable that the fashion spreads communicate varying feminine ideals. From these examples, I can presume that *Seventeen* organizes fashion spreads to pertain to young women's quest for individuality. *O* seems to treat fashion spreads as a more practical shopping guide as *O* readers feasibly have developed a personal style. While the needs of *Seventeen* and *O* readers are undoubtedly different, the magazines' approaches to the readers are similar in that both display clothing isolated from models. *Vogue*, on the other hand, has the greatest use of models sporting clothing, hinting that women in their 30s could be the prime targets of the beauty myth. *Vogue* spreads take more artistic liberty through their photography and storylines, drawing more attention to women's bodies in the process. The concluding definitions of femininity in all three magazines range from innocent, to sexual, to comfortable with age and body type.

Fashion theorists agree that fashion is based in competition. Flugel ascertains that "it is a fundamental human trait to imitate those who are admired or envied" (Flugel 138). Lower classes have copied the looks of the classes above them, leaving the upper classes no choice but to "[adopt] a new form of dress which shall re-establish the desired distinction" (Flugel 139). Class status is entwined in fashion distinction as fashion works to "construct people as members, or non-members, of cultural groups" (Barnard). Fashion is ever changing, according to this theory, to insure status divisions. In ancient times, "many societies passed decrees known as sumptuary laws to prescribe or forbid the wearing of specific styles by specific classes of persons" (Lurie 115). For example, in ancient Egypt only the elite group was allowed to wear sandals. For the ancient Greeks and Romans, the number of garments worn signified higher status. When the sumptuary

laws lessened in the eighteenth century, status markers took on a different form. Today, the wealthy display their position by wearing "more garments at a time, be they vests, silk scarves, wraps, or bathing-suit cover ups. The infrequency with which people repeat wardrobe choices is another class marker" (Schor 37). When the lower classes eventually embrace a certain fashion, the upper class unanimously alters their dress. This alteration requires a new "in" fashion to come about, continuing the cycle of emulation.

Women primarily read women's magazine to aspire to purchase products, regardless of the socioeconomic class of the readers. Former women's magazine editor Jennifer Nelson pinpoints this fantasizing aspect as "one of the biggest allures of fashion magazines. Being transported out of the conventional, appreciating the artistry, or flinching at the vulgarity of fashion has been a favorite pastime, whether we can afford to buy into them or not." According to Nelson, it is not the act of physically attaining the fashions themselves but rather the aspiration, which drives women to consume fashion content in women's magazines**.** Early women's magazine editors "assumed their readers to be middle class," and in turn "the editors also assumed that these readers aspired to improve their class standing, largely by improving their material surrounding" (Walker 37). For instance, *Ladies' Home Journal* typically "[featured] houses and clothing somewhat beyond those that *Ladies' Home Journal* readers could readily afford," which "tapped into the desire of Depression-weary Americans to dream of the more affluent lives they hoped someday to live" (Walker 38). Referring back to the fashion spreads in Figures 11-16, the price points support the idea of readers aspiring for more affluent lives. The Fig. 14 *Vogue* spread shows an Emilio Pucci skirt costing $1,390 while the Fig. 15. *O* spread features a Gucci bag costing $3,980. *Seventeen*, on the other hand, has

significantly lower price points, the highest around $250. This price, however, is still a reach for teenagers, who are typically not yet making their own money, to spend on clothing. These price points demonstrate that readers are not always reading women's magazines to purchase the featured clothing, but rather to fantasize about the purchase.

Today, women's magazines still acknowledge their readers as being of middle socioeconomic class, most obviously seen through "Designer Look for Less" type editorials. For instance, the March 2016 issue of *Seventeen* featured pages titled "$50 & Under: It's time to update your SPRING ESSENTIALS! These fresh picks won't wilt your budget," and "Cheap Thrills: Babes on a budget, you'll <3 these finds – just $10 and under!" The September 2016 issue shows a similar editorial page: "Cute Backpacks $50 & Under. Facts: You're on a budget, you need a bag for all of your stuff, and you want to look good." The "Designer Look for Less" type editorials allow readers to conform to the proposed definition of femininity without having to spend an unreasonable amount of money.

Regarding the fashion cycle, theorists also conclude that ever-developing fashion works to distract from our bodily concerns. Fashion theorist Elizabeth Wilson argues that, "the very way in which fashion constantly changes actually serves to fix the idea of the body as unchanging and eternal," or in other words "fashion [protects us] from reminders of decay" (Wilson 23). Fashion then cannot be separated from the body for they act in tandem. Therefore, a focus on fashion implies a focus on the body.

The impracticality of fashion has been identified as feminine, and it is a historical, rather than a new, phenomenon. For instance, the trend of the hoopskirt in the 1860s was physically intrusive in women's lives. In fact, "sometimes the hoops were removable, if

the width of a carriage or a door did not allow enough room to accommodate the full circumference" (Cremers-van der Does 90). Hoopskirts were also dangerous as they could easily catch on fire (Cremers-van der Does 91). During fashion reform in the 1890s, women wore corsets that were meant to accentuate their curves "through tight lacing and padding of the body" (Cremers-van der Does 99). The tight lacing and suffocating lifestyle caused health problems as the garment affected women's breathing capacities. During World War II, a system of utility was in place for fashion, meaning, "clothing had to be practical and durable and this led to forms of dress from women being based on menswear" (Wright 199). This fashion fit the brief change in femininity at the time of women in the workforce. After the war, women's fashion became more differentiated, as scholar Lee Wright argues, because "expression of femininity [was] the prime motivating force in shaping the fashion of the time" (Wright 198). This began with the introduction of the stiletto heel and unraveled into an entire "New Look," which emphasized femininity. Hence, a return to impracticality was essential in mirroring the restoration of traditional femininity.

Below are examples of fashion impracticality from my selection of current issues. The Versace advertisement shows models in insufficient clothing and heels lounging on a snow bank. One model appears to be sunbathing in a bikini while a male model is topless, neither of which would take place in a winter environment. One would never dare to ruin their expensive clothing by lying down in the snow. The high heels that the women are wearing are reminiscent of the "New Look" created post World War II to exaggerate femininity. Feminist Deborah Orr agrees that, "the enduring attraction of heels is in part to do with ideas about femininity and vulnerability" (Orr). Orr quotes the author of the

book *How to Be a Woman*, Caitlin Moran, who argued that "heels [make] women less able to run away from assailants" (Orr). Similar to hoopskirts of the 1860s, high heels threaten women's safety.

The Oscar De La Renta advertisement, part of a larger spread for Neiman Marcus, shows a woman dramatically painting a piece of art while wearing an extravagant gown. This outfit is entirely inappropriate since her project is bound to be a messy one. In reality, people tend to wear clothes that they don't mind getting dirty when painting. The final fashion spread features a mother whose whole body is painted silver, in a cape and heels resembling a super hero while attending to her child in a chaotic kitchen. The high silver heels are not conducive to running around a house caring for a baby, and the silver painted skin is unnatural. All of the clothing shown is not functional in the environments they are presented in, but the essence of fashion's femininity lies in this unlikelihood. Again, women's magazines present readers an unrealistic and unattainable image of femininity that readers will nonetheless measure themselves against.

Fig. 17. Versace. Advertisement. *Vogue* March 2016. 162-163. Print.

Fig. 18. Oscar De La Renta (Neiman Marcus) Advertisement. *Vogue* March 2016. 343. Print.

Fig. 19. *Vogue.* September 2016. 618. Print.

To conclude, while women's fashion undeniably makes a statement about their femininity, it is especially difficult to identify what that fashion is communicating due to the interpretative nature of any visual presentation. Still, there are obvious differentiations among women's magazines with different aged readers. *Seventeen* defines femininity through fashion as innocence with a sexual undertone, while *Vogue* sees femininity as overtly sexual. *O* gives the most accepting definition of femininity by using diverse models and understanding that its readers most likely have cultivated unique personal styles of their own. The layouts of the fashion spreads in each magazine reflect the corresponding definitions.

VI. Conclusion

In summary, this paper shows that advertising has a greater effect than editorial in women's magazines because these magazines continue to be beholden to advertisers' insertion orders. Advertisers' insertion orders call for ads to be placed next to complementary copy such that editorial content in women's magazines is tailored to help promote surrounding brands. These surrounding brands rely on women's insecurities about their appearance in order to sell their products, especially beauty and fashion products (Tables 5 and 6). Ultimately, strict editorial content makes up a significantly smaller proportion of the magazine than advertisements or advertisement-related content, leading many to view women's magazines as trivial.

The standard of femininity promoted within women's magazines thus comes primarily from the advertisements and is supported by editorial. These advertisements perpetuate what Wolf calls the beauty myth, or the set of beauty standards that maximize advertisers' profits. My magazine sample suggests the current beauty standard requires a woman to be tall, white, thin, and sexy. This beauty standard creates a homogenous representation of women. The women shown in women's magazines do not represent the way women look in reality, but nonetheless, these images embody societal norms and; therefore, have power over their readers. Some magazines have tried to diversify representation, but, as the *Vogue* example illustrates, they are often unsuccessful and create considerable controversy.

It is no coincidence that the majority of women don't resemble the ideal appearance the beauty myth presents. The beauty myth exists to perpetuate women's insecurities. Advertisers must maintain women's insecurities in order to preserve profit.

Hence, the problem becomes systemic because advertisers' core motives are economic, as opposed to straightforwardly patriarchal. The solution, then, involves not just changing minds of people in the advertising industry but rather making large-scale changes to women's magazines' business model. Women's magazines are intrinsically part of this systemic problem and have no choice but to adhere to advertisers' rules or else they risk the chance of folding.

Although definitions of femininity may seem monolithic, they actually differ by age of the audience, as my case study of *Seventeen*, *Vogue*, and *O, The Oprah Magazine* shows. Advertisers target advertisements to each age group of readers with the intentions of maximizing their profit. Teens see the most beauty products, for they are presumed to be most self-conscious about the bodily changes of puberty. *Vogue* readers see the most fashion advertisements to complement *Vogue* as a fashion magazine, and *O* contains the most food advertisements, since the older readers are likelier to have to cook for their families. The most frequent types of advertisements show femininity to be concerned mainly with the body and slightly with the traditional domesticated feminine ideals that grow out of the 1950s through food advertisements.

While fashion choices may be difficult to interpret due to the visual nature of clothing, there are nonetheless differing portrayals of fashion in women's magazines by age. *Seventeen* organizes its fashion spreads into looks by personality to appeal to its young readers who are still developing their personalities and sense of style. *Seventeen* provides an overarching innocent definition of femininity but counteracts this idea by also hinting at expected sexiness. *O* highlights comfort and the qualities of the clothes themselves, a factor that older women readers value highly, while acknowledging that *O*

readers have an established sense of style by showing clothing off the body. *O* has the most inclusive definition of femininity out of the three magazines in my sample because the magazine focuses the least on the body and appearance of models and instead understands that readers will choose the clothing articles that best fit their own personal style. Lastly, *Vogue* imposes the most sexual definition of femininity on its readers that likely stems from the aesthetic photography efforts and creativity in telling stories through fashion images.

This paper shows that women's magazines reflect cultural change regarding women's roles and attitudes. Now, during the third wave women's movement, cultural change is inevitably occurring. The March 2017 issue of *Vogue* indicates that this change is already underway as evidenced by the push for diversity in the fashion industry. Designers share reasons why they think this change is occurring:

> [Michael] Kors acknowledges the influence of urbanism, [Stella] McCartney that of feminism. And Alexander Wang speaks for much of the fashion industry when he observes that 'at a time when the notion of what it means to be 'American' is being hotly contested, it's more important than ever for us to represent values of pluralism in our casting.' But the main force driving the great beauty shake-up is the rise of a generation of millennials who take these and other progressive 'isms' for granted, and who, rejecting the divisive rhetoric in the current political discourse, are resolutely shaping the Zeigeist to suit their inclusive spirit. (Singer)

The generational difference Wang speaks of builds on the different waves of feminism that have already greatly affected women's magazine content and success. Following this trend, the current generation of women is bound to affect women's magazines in a similar way.

Still there is the issue of the beauty myth. Despite women making strides in the past, the beauty myth still transforms women's perceptions of themselves. In regards to

the question proposed earlier (Is there a way for women's magazines to promote an inclusive standard of femininity while including enough advertisements within their pages to stay in business?) the answer is, potentially, yes. Studies have shown that thinness of models does not make a difference in the effectiveness of advertisements. This is not to say that all models shown in women's magazines must be plus size if advertisers are to fix the omnipresent beauty myth. What seems to be more important is that women have the opportunity to see themselves in advertisements. Referring back to the June 2016 Unilever survey, "40% of women do not recognize the faces being reflected back at them [in advertisements]." In order for more women to identify with the women on these pages, curvier, or even just healthy-sized models must be included. As Ashley Graham notes, "Sixty-seven percent of the women in America wear a size 14 or larger" (Singer). In addition to different sized women, advertisers must include colored women, disabled women, and lesbian women to account for every reader. Advertisers must consciously address their entire audience.

Yet, there are no guarantees that advertisers will make these changes. As readers, however, women can combat the beauty myth through education. Wolf argues that she supports, "a woman's right to choose what she wants to look like and what she wants to be, rather than obeying what market forces and a multi-billion-dollar advertising industry dictate" (Wolf 2). In order to make this choice, women must educate themselves on the business model of women's magazines and look at all advertising with a critical eye. Texts like "Sex, Lies, & Advertising" and *The Beauty Myth* help inform average readers of these mechanisms. Women's magazines themselves can do a better job at educating their readers. The January 2017 issue of *British Vogue* is a perfect example of this.

Editor-in-chief Schulman took the opportunity in her editor's letter, one of the rare pages that advertisers generally do not influence, to share the difficulty in getting brands to dress cover model Ashley Graham. Sharing this difficulty opens reader's eyes to the obstacles women's magazines face if they wish to promote diverse images of women while still satisfying advertisers and designers.

Not every woman will take the initiative to educate themselves on the beauty myth at play in women's magazines. Social media, however, is an accessible outlet for women to learn what real women actually look like. Social media invites diversity for "scrolling through Instagram only to see endless iterations of the same basic thing would make for a dry pastime" (Singer). Increased visibility due to social media has inevitably informed women about the different ways women are beautiful. As Graham says, "Maybe you could ignore those consumers before, but now, thanks to social media, they're making their voices heard" (Singer). Chinese model Liu Wen believes increasing diversity in fashion is to some extent a result of "the rise of social media, which is connecting societies in new, intricate ways, and changing all our perspectives" (Singer). Social media naturally represents all women because the majority of users are real people, not models hired to sell a product. This diversity lends itself to increased body positivity and acceptance among social media users. In fact, there are even social media accounts devoted to body positivity on platforms such as Instagram, for instance accounts like @honorcurves and @fullerfigurefullerbust (Baxter). While women's magazines are still distinct in that they separate the gendering of men from that of women, social media serves as an additional source that shapes women's attitudes and consumption.

If I were to do further research, I would look into the ways that social media affects women's magazines. I'm interested to see how social media users critique both women's magazines and advertisers. Through qualitative analysis of comments on social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook, I could get a sense of how social media users understand the women's magazine business. Are they mainly critiquing the advertisers, or the magazines themselves? I suspect that most of the users critique the magazines because they lack education on the women's magazine business. I would also like to apply the concepts in this paper to women's magazines' digital platforms, such as social media accounts and websites, to investigate whether the same definition of femininity holds true.

Through my research I showed how the advertising industry greatly influences women's magazines and the definitions of femininity they provide, however, I recognize the limitations to my work. Though the three magazines I chose to analyze in my case studies all have women readers, *Seventeen* is technically regarded as a teen magazine. I still believe *Seventeen* is appropriate to include in my study because the median age of readers is about 28, which breaks out of the teenage range. *Vogue* is as much a fashion magazine as it is a women's magazine, which explains the high presence of fashion advertisements, and a significant portion of the magazine is devoted to complementary fashion copy.

Additionally, my imitation of Steinem's study in Tables 3 and 4 is inevitably somewhat inaccurate. There is no way to know what Steinem identified as non-advertising related pages. Since I do not have actual insertion orders from all the advertisers in my six issues, I could not possibly know the exact rules for complementary

copy by brand. Steinem would have had access to this information because she was working in the magazine industry, making her study more exact. Nonetheless, I was able to use knowledge from my intern experience at a media agency to infer which pages were most likely complementary copy requested by advertisers.

If I were going to do further research for this paper, I would add the element of reader response theory, specifically for my chosen magazine issues. I could get a better sense of how women interpret women's magazine's prescriptions of femininity through reader response theory. Though I did not perform reader response theory analysis on my own case studies, I cited many studies that expressed readers' reactions to images in magazines. Additionally, while I performed quantitative analysis on the percentage of editorial to advertising related content as well as categorizing the types of advertisements, there is potential for quantitative analysis in regards to race and size of the models. Due to the scope of this paper, I chose to use other scholars' studies instead of completing my own, which was just as effective in proving my points.

By analyzing current issues of women's magazines, I've found that the modern feminine ideal is a tall, thin, white, innocent, and sexy woman. While women's magazines homogenously present this archetype, the average reader does not fit this mold. Women look to women's magazines as the Bible of femininity. Yet, in reality women's magazines propose unrealistic, unattainable, and contradicting definitions of femininity. The conclusive definitions of femininity show that women's magazine must revise their business model for all women to feel accepted by society and the institutions that perpetuate societal norms.

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