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Viewing the opposite sex through lifestyle magazines: An exploratory study

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VIEWING THE OPPOSITE SEX THROUGH LIFESTYLE MAGAZINES:

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

by

Danielle M. Thorsen

Bachelor of Arts
University of San Diego
2005

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
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Examination Committee Chair

Dean of the Graduate College
ABSTRACT

Viewing the Opposite Sex Through Lifestyle Magazines: An Exploratory Study

by

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Dr. Daniel Stout, Examination Committee Chair
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This study is an exploratory study examining the use of traditional stereotypical gender roles and themes projected in the problem pages of Cosmopolitan, Redbook, Maxim, and Men's Health from 2007. This study is grounded in functionalist feminist media theory and is supplemented by normative theory. The findings show that women’s lifestyle magazine problem pages lean more heavily towards traditional gender stereotypes, whereas men’s lifestyle magazine problem pages rely on less traditional gender stereotypes. This is partially attributed to a similar formula used in both genders’ problem pages, encouraging a traditionally stereotypical female approach to both men’s and women’s problems.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Ever since their inception, magazines have been mostly women's terrain. Even more so, generalized lifestyle magazines only seemed to succeed with women, while creating the successful men's lifestyle magazine was often described as “finding the Holy Grail” (Stevenson et al, 2000, p. 368). Nevertheless, men’s lifestyle magazines, such as Maxim and Men’s Health, became highly successful in the 1990s and remain quite popular to this day. Although the overall approach differs, both men’s and women’s magazines are part of a business that aims to attract advertising in order to increase their revenue.

Winship (1987) claimed that magazines are therefore part of the following:

[A] venture involved in two disparate but intimately linked selling operations: one to women [or men, respectively], the other to advertisers. Since no magazine gains any profit at all from its cover price... it is the wooing of advertisers which is so pivotal in the competitive search for revenue. (p. 38)

Because of this, magazines must prove that they can have a successful and desirable number of readers (Winship, 1987).

Therefore, one of the key elements used in catching the interest of readers in both men’s lifestyle magazines and women’s magazines is the versatile topic of how to attract

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1 For the purpose of this study, lifestyle magazines will refer to general interest monthly magazines that “appeal to a sense of shared ‘lifestyle’ which includes … topics such as fashion, health, and relationships” (Jackson et al, 1999).
the opposite sex. Both women’s and men’s lifestyle magazines place a great deal of emphasis on the opposite sex, trying to understand and ultimately attract a member of the opposite sex. Traditional stereotypes are often reinforced through the content of lifestyle magazines, and thus the divide between men and women is deepened. In order to achieve gender equity in society, we have a responsibility to move away from these gender stereotypes and should make judgments based on an individual level. Instead, these stereotypes are frequently used to make the opposite sex seem so foreign and impossible to understand, forcing readers to rely on magazines and their advertised products to help in resolving the gender divide.

I studied two popular women’s lifestyle magazines, *Cosmopolitan* and *Redbook*, and two popular men’s lifestyle magazines, *Maxim* and *Men’s Health*, from 2007 and evaluated and compared themes regarding men and women in each magazine’s relationship advice sections to see how each gender is presented and what types of gender stereotypes are used in these magazines. Both representations of men and women are examined to provide a full gender representation analysis. In particular, I wanted to identify how men and women are directed to act in relationships and how this is or is not in line with traditional gender roles.

**Purpose of the Study**

Lifestyle magazines attempt to provide readers with advice on a range of issues from beauty to health and fitness to financial success, but all these topics tend to revolve around the ultimate goal of finding a mate of the opposite sex. For example, the relationship advice provided throughout magazines is generally not offered by
psychologists or professional counselors, but rather writers aiming to entertain and attract more readers. They are not professionally trained to take into account gender sensitivities, therefore they may possibly perpetuate traditional gender stereotypes because of their ignorance. I found it insightful to discover whether any of the problem pages have taken a progressive approach by offering a new framework to look at gender, rather than perpetually relying upon the views of men as independent creatures and women as in need of and defined by men (van Zoonen, 1994).

Unlike most content found in other articles in magazines, problem page advice columns have the unique distinction of providing a guide and recommendations on how a person is to act in a certain situation. While narrative articles and stories, whether fictional or real, are intended generally to be read for pleasure, the advice columns recommend actions that are to be imitated. Whether a reader does so is for further study, but writers for magazine problem pages can have some influence on how readers think about certain subjects. These magazines may not lead their adult readers to adopt gender stereotypes, but they have the potential to strengthen and perpetuate existing stereotypes readers may have (Basow, 1986). Those readers who turn to a magazine for relationship advice may be a more receptive audience since they are seeking advice to apply to their own lives.

Significance of Study

Second-wave feminists have fought for gender equality and social change throughout the past few decades but have faced numerous obstacles in their quest. Magazines are one form of media that play a role in gender identity formation, which contributes to how
a person views and socializes with his or her own gender as well as that of the opposite sex (Peirce, 1993). All journalists have a duty to be fair and objective, and this includes gender portrayals. Unfortunately, women’s magazines have had a history of creating and catering to traditional gender roles, challenged only by a few magazines, such as Ms., which attempted to bring the women’s liberation movement to the forefront in 1972 (Steinem, 1990). Nevertheless, money prevailed, and women’s magazines that have pandered to advertisers have flourished, while Ms. magazine had to change its entire magazine structure in the early 1990’s in order to stay true to its women’s liberation roots (Steinem, 1990).

Studying the remaining popular women’s – and now men’s—lifestyle magazines is a way to more fully examine where these magazines now stand on gender issues and whether the messages being consumed by readers are feeding into stereotypical messages or if they have transcended traditional gender roles to provide more progressive gender views.

*Journalistic Integrity*

Journalism needs to be objective about both genders. Gender bias without substantiated support is a symptom of poor journalism that does not do proper research and provides readers with inaccurate information. These traditional gender stereotypes are so ingrained in society that writers may not realize that they are perpetuating gender myths. This becomes a vicious cycle of society holding onto gender stereotypes, media reflecting society’s views, which in turn strengthens society’s stereotypical beliefs. Nevertheless, this is not an excuse for writers, and they should be required to instead
break the cycle and promote more balanced gender portrayals that look at individuals, rather than at the gender as a whole.

What makes this issue more difficult is that magazine writers do not generally aim to uphold journalistic ethics. As noted earlier, magazines are more about business, attracting readers and therefore advertisers, and far less about churning out stories that are unbiased and that can contribute to a body of learning and knowledge. Attracting readers with sensational stories and issues that directly affect the lives of readers, such as love, appearance, and money are quick and easy to create and sell without much research.

Feminist Perspective

Men and women should both be portrayed equally without reliance on generalized ideas on gender and relationships. While it may be impossible to avoid all stereotypes, an effort should be made by writers to not simply categorize all men or all women as behaving in a particular way. Relationship advice should be respectful and not provide a domineering or submissive perspective; rather a view of equality should be rendered through advice. Overarching stereotypes of women as sex objects, mothers, children or iron maidens and of men as sturdy oaks, fighters, and breadwinners need to be completely dismissed as frameworks for viewing gender (van Zoonen, 1994). Instead, the complete person needs to be examined so that people are not classified to simply one category based on their gender. Humans are multi-faceted creatures who deserve to be viewed as such.
Research Questions

Using concepts and frameworks set forth by previous studies, this study provides an exploratory analysis of the relationship advice portions of selected women’s and men’s magazines. This section is often overlooked in adult lifestyle magazine research and a preliminary study is needed to examine what type of gender issues exist in these portions of lifestyle magazines. Also, it is crucial to examine how men’s lifestyle magazines are addressing their audiences through their relationship problem pages and to compare these advice columns with those of women’s magazine problem pages. Through these comparisons, a better understanding of what messages are conveyed to readers is generated about gender roles in relationships. This research should lay a foundation for further and more intensive studies in the portrayal of gender in both sexes’ lifestyle magazines. The questions upon which this research focuses are as follows:

RQ1: How is each gender presented in women’s and men’s lifestyle magazine problem pages?

RQ1a: How are stereotypes used in describing men and women?

One of the most important questions to this study is RQ2, which attempts to understand how men and women are expected to act in relationships. This reveals societal expectations of relationship behavior and provides a basis for comparing whether men and women are expected to act in consistent ways.

RQ2: How are men and women advised to act within relationships?

While unrelated to gender stereotypes directly, the final question provides some insight on how pervasive these relationship sections are in comparison with all other text (advertising not included):
RQ3: How does each magazine address relationship advice in comparison to the rest of the magazine?
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Theoretical Traditions

Although this study analyzes the portrayals of both men and women in *Cosmopolitan, Redbook, Men's Health* and *Maxim*, the overall framework of this study is based upon a functionalist feminist media theory. According to this theory, “media reflect society’s dominant social values and symbolically denigrate women, either by not showing them at all, or by depicting them in stereotypical roles,” which in turn, bolsters and creates societal norms (van Zoonen, 1994, p.17). Lifestyle magazines rarely lack a female presence, but stereotypical role depiction can be a possibility in both women’s and men’s magazines. Male portrayal and stereotypes are also considered since stereotypes affect and can negatively impact both genders.

In addition to feminist media theory, this study encompasses normative theory in order to prescribe how editors and writers ought to portray women and men and their relational roles in magazines, particularly in advice columns. Media need to serve the public interest over business interests in order to ethically fulfill their role in distributing honest and helpful information to their audiences (McQuail, 2005). In order to ensure gender equity and to make a change in society’s perspectives of gender roles, media have the responsibility to make change since they are in a position of power where they disseminate information to the public. In this case, that change must come from the
editors and writers of women’s and men’s magazines. This should fall within journalistic ethics rather than having to enforce rules and regulations.

This functionalist theory of the media refers “primarily to the specific elements of the communication process” as follows:

<table>
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<th>Table 1</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>(Partial) model of communication in feminist media theory (van Zoonen, 1994, p.29)</strong></td>
</tr>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Sender</strong></th>
<th><strong>Process</strong></th>
<th><strong>Message</strong></th>
<th><strong>Process</strong></th>
<th><strong>Effect</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stereotypes</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Distortion</td>
<td>Stereotype</td>
<td>Socialization</td>
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When viewing media in a “sender-message-receiver” format, “research on stereotypes [finds] that children and adults learn their appropriate gender roles by a process of symbolic reinforcement and correction” (van Zoonen, 1994, p. 29). While how strong the effects are on the audience is debatable, there is no question that gender stereotyping exists in the media and should not be overlooked.

Because of this, how gender stereotypes are used within these magazines are examined since these stereotypes may hinder social development in readers, particularly in a relationship setting. Without positive behavioral models, members of each gender may feel they have to fill particular gender roles (van Zoonen, 1994). Media offer restrictive models that endanger the development of females into becoming complete human beings (van Zoonen, 1994). This could be expanded to men, as well, since models of sturdy oaks, fighters, and breadwinners prevent men from turning to others—particularly women—for help when needed and can leave men’s development stunted.
Nevertheless, the portrayal of women is often the most damaging since they are defined by their relation to men in their lives, whether their father, son, boss, or husband. Furthermore these portrayals describe women as being “passive, indecisive, submissive, dependent, etc.” (van Zoonen, 1994, p.17). By carefully examining gender stereotypes through the feminist media theory, it is useful to see whether modern lifestyle magazines popular with young adults maintain gender stereotypes and biases.

Feminist media theory provides a theoretical framework for the overall study, but normative theory supplements feminist media theory by providing resolution to the problem rather than just proclaiming that a problem does (or perhaps does not) exist. Because of this, the roles of men’s and women’s lifestyle magazine editors and writers are taken into account and what they can do to move to more progressive approaches in magazines’ problem pages. While owners and those in control of media corporations play a role in permitting and perhaps influencing the use of gender stereotypes, journalists and editors have an immediate impact by reflecting their traditional world views through their media output (van Zoonen, 1994). Unfortunately, sex articles in women’s magazines lack editorial standards and are often filled with false information (Featherstone, 2002). Sometimes this is due to deadline pressures, while other times it is just that magazine staff did not take it seriously at all and did not treat these sex sections as journalism (Featherstone, 2002). Even a top editor for *Glamour* magazine conceded that by treating these subjects as entertainment, and nothing more, is a disservice to readers who do take the magazine seriously (Featherstone, 2002). Writers need to change their attitudes towards lifestyle magazines for the sake of journalism as well as for their readers. Change must be made throughout the entire media hierarchy, but writers and
editors can have a much quicker and more meaningful impact by simply changing their writing habits and avoiding the pitfalls of trying to be entertaining rather than being factual.

Stereotypes

Since the focus of this study is on how relationship problem pages use gender stereotypes in men’s and women’s lifestyle magazines, what is meant by stereotypes must be first examined. According to Basow, “stereotypes are strongly held overgeneralizations about people in some designated social category” (1986, p. 3). Stereotypes are used as a shortcut for critical thinking when a person has limited knowledge and training in a certain area (Perkins, 1979). These stereotypes are shared and learned within a given society (Basow, 1986). The generalizations are not always true of individuals or even the group of a whole and cannot be depended upon as a predictor of one’s behavior (Basow, 1986). Stereotypes are merely misinterpretations and exaggerations of notable, and generally problematic, attributes of a group. (Perkins, 1979). Gender or sex-role stereotypes are oversimplified conceptions pertaining to behavior as males or females (Basow, 1986). Society defines these roles, apply them to the members of particular stereotyped groups, and become learned responses by individuals (Basow, 1986).

The thought patterns that lead to stereotypes encourage polarized thinking so that men and women are seen as complete opposites (Wood, 1999). Masculinity and femininity become mutually exclusive to each other, despite men and women sharing characteristics or, at the very least, being separated by degrees rather than being a mirror
opposite (Wood, 1999). Activities and feelings are classified as masculine or feminine, and when members of the other gender do not conform to their assigned roles, they become classified in negative terms (Wood, 1999).

The traditional gender stereotypes can fall into the categories as defined by Wood, where women are sex objects, mothers, children or iron maidens and men are sturdy oaks, fighters, and breadwinners (1999). As sex objects, women are defined in terms of their sex and sexuality and are not viewed as anything more than their appearances and their femininity (Wood, 1999). The stereotype of women as mothers, besides the literal role of one as a mother, includes expectations of women as ones who nurture, comfort, support, and help others (Wood, 1999). In viewing women in the stereotype of child, women are depicted as “less mature, competent, and/or capable of making decisions than men” (Wood, 1999, p. 261). As an iron maiden, a woman who asserts independence, ambition, direction, competition, and toughness is viewed as unfeminine, manly, or a hard woman (Wood, 1999). The most prevalent gender stereotype is how women are emotional and relationship-oriented (Willemsen, 1998). For men viewed as the sturdy oak, they are supposed to be “tough, unshakable, in control of feelings, and unaffected by pain and problems” (Wood, 1999, p. 263). The fighter is an aggressive and brave warrior, while the breadwinner is view of men as the wage earner for their families and is a measure of success (Wood, 1999). These categories are supported by other American perspectives where masculinity is defined by aggressiveness, independence, and nonemotionality, and women are defined in relation to their family or as a sex object (Basow, 1986; Tuchman, 1979). Men find gender stereotypes to be more appropriate
than women do, making it more difficult for men to consider new gender scripts that challenge this traditional way of thinking (Basow, 1986).

Nevertheless, nontraditional stereotypes, especially the metrosexual stereotype, have emerged on the other end of the gender stereotype spectrum. The metrosexual is a new category of people that developed in the last two decades, generally referring to a metrosexual male. The metrosexual male is generally described as vain, narcissistic, and self-indulgent and is therefore concerned more about how he looks in order to attract successful women (Simpson, 2002; Bess, 2003). Men’s Health magazine, which was created in 1988, caused a stir when it aimed its magazine towards this new breed of men, telling men what they need to know in order to improve their body appearance (Bess, 2003). Additionally, Men’s Health “tackles ‘touchy-feely’ issues, such as relationship advice, that other men’s magazines had stayed away from” (Bess, 2003, para. 26). While the focus is on interests previously considered to be women’s terrain—trimming waistlines, dressing fashionably, and coloring hair—the metrosexual is more asexual than feminine (Bess, 2003). On the other hand, the female metrosexual is the complement to male metrosexuality by being active where male metrosexuality is passive. In this new stereotype, women remain dominant in the private world while also increasing their assertiveness in the public realm (Simpson, 2002).

The female metrosexual goes well with the idea of girl power, as proposed by the female pop group, Spice Girls, in the late 1990’s (Gauntlett, 2002). Girl power is about asserting a woman’s independence from men, changing the traditional gender scripts (Gauntlett, 2002). These opposing gender stereotypes will provide an important analysis
that display men and women in a new light and do not hold to archaic stereotypes that do not allow for people to grow fully.

Additionally, media perpetuate relationship myths that contribute to unrealistic views of what a normal relationship should be (Wood, 1999). For example, self-help book readers tend to have unrealistic expectations in relationships and experience greater frustration and disappoint in relationships than those who do not read self-help books (Wood, 1999). Media portray seemingly perfect men, women, and relationships, leaving many people frustrated and leading to negative consequences of “feelings of inadequacy, anorexia, cosmetic surgery, and emotional difficulties” (Wood, 199, p. 321). Even though people can differentiate between what is real and what is fantasy, it does not resolve the standards that are set by these ideals (Wood, 1999). By using media as a reference point for normalcy and desirability, people may end up feeling inferior in their relationships and about themselves (Wood, 1999).

Julia Wood has identified four themes in heterosexual relationships that “demonstrate how media reflect and promote traditional arrangements between the sexes:” (a) women’s dependence/men’s independence, where women are often portrayed as dependent upon men and subsequent children to complete women’s identities; (b) men’s authority/women’s incompetence, in which men provide solutions to women’s problems and save women from their own incompetence; (c) women as primary caregivers/men as breadwinners, which is a theme that diminishes the domestic role of women and promotes men as the ones who support the family or relationship, while discounting men’s domestic and nurturing abilities; and (d) women as victims and sex objects/men as aggressors, where men are in control and women are at the whim of men’s
sexual desires (Woods, 1999, p. 307). Magazines play a key role in promoting roles in which women's needs are secondary to the primary focus of pleasing others (Wood, 1999). Advertising, in particular, implies that "if a woman fails to look good and please, her man might leave" (Wood, 1999, p. 312). Advertisers play a large role in funding, and, therefore, shaping, the content of magazines (Winship, 1999; Steinem, 1990). Therefore, advertisers will want to encourage readers to purchase their products in order to fulfill the personal needs of readers (Winship, 1999).

Magazine Industry

Ballaster argues that in magazines there is a tension between men and women where they are always in opposition while also in pursuit of each other despite difficulties, frustration, and failure (1991). Women's magazines are targeted at the middle-class, white, heterosexual woman, but they attempt at offering a feeling of inclusion for all women by juxtaposing women with men, creating tension between desire and threat (Ballaster et al, 1991). Ballaster et. al. argue that since women's magazines' purpose is to advertise and sell commodities, providing a feminist analysis of gender relations within these magazines would counteract the push for the consumption of commodities (Ballaster et al, 1991).

Women's lifestyle magazines have a long history of upholding gender stereotypes, providing women with limited goals and aspirations that did not reach beyond the world of their husbands and children (Gauntlett, 2002). The purchase of kitchen accessories or cleaning supplies were the dream of the everyday housewives found in women's lifestyle magazine advertisements (Gauntlett, 2002). Advice offered to women did not address
how women can fulfill their own needs and potential, but focused on how to bring
happiness to their families (Gauntlett, 2002). The culture and world of women has been
to their families (Gauntlett, 2002). The culture and world of women has been
controlled and mediated by men, leaving women with no culture in which they can truly
call their own (Winship, 1987). These lifestyle magazines emphasized this by celebrating
the importance of the feminine, housewife gender stereotype, while discouraging
deviance from this norm (Gauntlett, 2002).

Scholars have attempted to eliminate gender stereotypes in the media since the late
1960s (Tuchman, 1979). In 1972 the National Organization for Women attacked sexism
in the media claiming that “the media's deleterious role models, when internalized,
prevent and impede female accomplishments. They also encourage both women and men
to define women in terms of men (as sex objects) or in the context of the family (as wives
and mothers)” (Tuchman, 1979). While concern is placed on the media for their gender
portrayals, “the very underrepresentation of women, including their stereotypic portrayal,
may symbolically capture the position of women in American society—their real lack of
power” (Tuchman, 1979, p. 533).

Although professional settings are not what create stereotypes, professionalism is
what keeps radical voices from eliminating gender stereotypes (Tuchman, 1979).
Professionalism often includes not offending networks or publishers, which may require
males to dominate the workplace (Tuchman, 1979). While television has been slow to
change its representation of women, women’s magazines have been more progressive by
addressing early on the changing and dual roles of women in society (Tuchman, 1979).
Beginning in the 1970s and 1980s, women’s lifestyle magazines began to reflect the
changing roles of women in society and became less dependent on stereotypes (Gauntlett, 2002).

One of the earliest magazines to challenge the traditional stereotypes of women is *Cosmopolitan* magazine, which revamped its image in 1964 as a magazine for a new generation that “owed a lot to feminism, but... was unlikely to identify with it” (Gauntlett, 2002, p. 53). In the 1960s and 1970s, *Cosmo* began to embrace the “sexual liberation,” and challenged existing feminine codes, empowering women through diminishing men (Winship, 1987). The “*Cosmo* girl” created by the magazine focused on independence and women’s right to sexual pleasure (Gauntlett, 2002). Nevertheless, *Cosmo*’s extent of feminism revolves around resolving sexual problems, which they use as the panacea to achieving women’s equality (Winship, 1987). Winship claims that the use of masculine voices and the portrayal of scantily-clad men in *Cosmo* make it part of an effort to transform masculinity (1987).

The modern *Cosmopolitan* covers “sex, relationships, fashion and beauty, health, celebrities, careers, more sex,” while *Redbook*, another women’s lifestyle magazine, is also about sex, but includes balancing family, work, love, and time for the reader (Gauntlett, 2002, p. 184). Unlike *Cosmopolitan*, *Redbook* includes sections on sex and marriage as well as information on parenthood, making it “disappointingly housewifey on the whole” (Gauntlett, 2002, p. 184). Gauntlett claims that “the American *Redbook*, despite its youthful and sexy outlook, seems to assume that women will be doing the cooking in a relationship” (Gauntlett, 2002, p. 193). While women’s magazines continue to reinforce the need to look “glamorous,” they do offer some non-traditional messages of “popular feminism,” such as objectifying men as sex objects, seeking success in work
and relationships, and finally, promoting empowerment through positive self-image and confidence (Gauntlett, 2002).

*Cosmopolitan* also provides contradictory messages to its readers, such as an article encouraging readers to be happy with their bodies while another article in that same issue might provide tips on how readers can slim down (Gauntlett, 2002). "[I]f there is a key to *Cosmo*’s commercial success it is in embracing that contradiction to offer a pluralism of opinions, voicing what are potentially mutually exclusive views on the subject of women" (Winship, 1987, p. 100). Editors of *Cosmopolitan* urged that this was in order to keep *Cosmopolitan* edgy and surprising, but this led the way for other media outlets to adopt this same contradictory behavior (Gauntlett, 2002).

While the gender stereotypes conveyed through lifestyle magazines may be taken for granted, Janice Winship argued “that to simply dismiss women’s magazines [is] also to dismiss the lives of millions of women who read and [enjoy] them each week” (Winship, 1987, p. xiii). How these magazines have infiltrated the lives of women, and now men, provides credence for studying what messages are sent to readers.

As for men’s general interest magazines, they are relatively new since publishers thought men would not want to read glossy magazines that were viewed as feminine products. Additionally, Gauntlett notes that “‘real men’ didn’t need a magazine to tell them how to live” (2002, p. 154). Prior to the launch of the modern lad magazines, “men’s magazines seem[ed] to settle for one or the other: ‘entertainment’ (‘girlie’ magazines) or ‘information’ (all the hobby journals)” (Winship, 1987, p. 13). This compartmentalization was attributed to men’s lives tending to be more clearly compartmentalized since women’s labor was hidden in domestic roles, while men were
"singular about their activities: they [we]re at work or at leisure; they [we]re watching TV or engaged in their hobby" (Winship, 1987, p.13). On the other hand, women’s activities were seen as multi-tasking where several activities were carried out at once with several roles at once as mothers, hostesses, and confidants (Winship, 1987). The general interest nature of women’s magazines reflected a lifestyle of many roles and served as self-indulgences in which women could treat themselves to a variety of interests of romance, exotic dreams and fictions (Winship, 1987).

With the change in society produced by the feminist movements, the landscape of men’s lives changed as well, which modern men’s magazines began to recognize. The modern men’s market took off in the UK with the “lad magazine” Loaded, a general interest magazine targeted at the “twenty-something, beer-drinking, football-loving, sex-obsessed male stereotype” (Gauntlett, 2002, p.155).

Maxim and FHM (For Him Magazine) crossed the pond to America in the late 1990s, where they launched a strong men’s lifestyle magazine market in the United States (Gauntlett, 2002). Maxim became an instant success when it first launched in the U.S. in 1997, becoming a best-selling men’s lifestyle title (Gauntlett, 2002). Despite the relationship advice provided in the U.S. Maxim, women are portrayed throughout the magazine as a different species trying to trap men into relationships (Gauntlett, 2002). On the other end of the spectrum is Men’s Health, “which most closely parallels women’s lifestyle magazines” (Gauntlett, 2002, p. 163). It is “a clever ‘masculine’ packaging of everything that women’s magazines are expected to be about – looks, sex, relationships, diets, psychology, lifestyle” (Gauntlett, 2002, p. 163).
Modern men’s lifestyle magazines address a range of issues affecting men’s lives today that were not addressed by the hobby and special-interest magazines of the past (Gauntlett, 2002). Men’s magazines address their readers as equals and offer their advice with a hint of irony throughout the magazines so as to not make the magazines so serious (Gauntlett, 2002). The men’s magazines are best understood as attempting to understand gender roles in a world in which the sexes are more similar than different (Gauntlett, 2002). Although men’s magazines discuss men and women as foreign to one another, this is just how they make sense of reality (Gauntlett, 2002).

The problem page portions of lifestyle magazines are carefully constructed, where submitted problems are edited for grammar and to highlight the main problem at hand (Winship, 1987). Responses from women’s lifestyle magazines on their problem pages range from maternal to witty, and some almost encourage a bionic woman approach to life to handle all of life’s problems. Readers enjoy these sections because they either identify with the problems presented or it satisfies a voyeuristic pleasure, “observing problems which are blessedly not yours” (Winship, 1987, p. 77). Nevertheless, readers are not alone with their problems, and they have support.

While in a different genre, but along similar lines of relationship advice portions of magazines, self-help books for men have been found to focus on “men’s emotional tardiness, insecurity and screwed-up inner life,” while women’s self-help books “generally encourage readers to feel that they have no problems... as long as they can be confident; with self-assurance and a positive approach, they suggest, anything can be achieved.” (Gauntlett, 2002, p. 241). All of these approaches to gender are considered within the analysis of the problem pages found in the selected magazines for 2007.
With the recent emergence of men’s lifestyle magazines, a new set of gender definitions is being created and relayed to men via men’s magazines, in addition to the revised gender definitions and stereotypes perpetuated by women’s magazines. While predecessors such as *Esquire* and *Playboy* opened the field during the Great Depression in the 1930s and during the post-World War II era in the 1950s, respectively, the late 1980s and early 1990s marked the first time in publishing history that men’s lifestyle magazines succeeded in a predominantly female-based field (Stevenson et al, 2000; Jackson et al, 2001). *Esquire* “launched in the United States in the 1930s for a predominantly male readership” and was “a vehicle for advertising men’s apparel,” while clinging to a persona as a literary magazine (Jackson et al, 2001, p.25-26). *Playboy* celebrated the liberal sexual mores of the 1950s America, and even though it “was more than merely a soft porn title, it was not perceived within the publishing industry as a general interest title” (Jackson et al, 2001; Crewe, 2003). Therefore, it was not until the late 1980s and early 1990s that men’s lifestyle magazines emerged for the “new man” with the traits of a metrosexual, and transformed into “lad magazines,” which focused on humor, fun, and sex (Stevenson et al, 2000). These lad magazines do not take themselves seriously and are more about entertaining than providing any content of substance, but these magazines did provide a rare vehicle for exploring the intricacies and changing definitions of masculinity (Stevenson et al, 2000). Although the movement from the “new man” to the “lad magazine,” might seem a vast change, Bess argues that lad magazines are metrosexual in their approach to various topics, but just have denied that this is the case (2002). No matter whether a magazine is considered a “new man” or
a lad magazine, they all attempt to cover general interests, while encouraging a consumer culture, much like women’s magazines.

These magazines aimed at an adult audience are not readers’ first encounters with general-interest gender-focused magazines. Readers may have graduated from the adolescent magazine industry to the young adult lifestyle magazines. Teenage girls’ magazines, such as Seventeen, introduce readers to the style and structure of women’s lifestyle magazines. Some ideas that “teenage magazine articles focus on [include] romantic attachment, dependency on men, and physical beauty” (Schlenker, Caron, Halteman, 1998, p. 136). The subject matter in recent decades has transformed to embrace more adult themes, such as moving from a stance on sexual morality to one of sexual quality (Schlenker, Caron, Halteman, 1998). Nevertheless, one constant in the adolescent girls’ magazine industry is the continued focus on external appearance and how to please men (Schlenker, Caron, Halteman, 1998). In addition, the role of the agony aunt providing relationship advice through problem pages becomes a constant in young women’s lives and through relationships.

Although men may start reading men’s lifestyle magazines in their teens, men have fewer early models of lifestyle magazines. Therefore, men are introduced to this new medium later in life after having many of their gender perspectives already shaped by their own lives and experiences, including experiences with other media. The few adolescent male general interest magazines have been found to use gender stereotypes throughout the magazines (Willemsen, 1998). Besides basic differences between men and women, such as beauty and fashion, adolescent magazines present varying relationship advice for each gender; young women’s magazines focus more on how to
keep or get a man, while young men’s magazines focus more on how to dump a woman afterwards (Willemsen, 1998). These different relationship approaches are signs of underlying gender stereotypes that reinforce particular gender roles, especially within relationships. If these perspectives are continued or maintained by adult men’s magazines, a gender gap in handling relationships will be strengthened.

The varying relational views propagated by teen magazines are not isolated to just those publications. As noted by Sprecher and Toro-Morn, popular literature generally exaggerates the attitudinal and belief differences about romantic relationships found between males and females (2002). For example, “gender alone is assumed to explain the complexities of emotions, feelings, and views that men and women hold about relationships” (Sprecher and Toro-Morn, 2002, p.131-132). In reality, culture plays a much greater role in determining beliefs and attitudes on romantic relationships (Sprecher and Toro-Morn, 2002). Nevertheless, magazines have the ability to promote gender stereotypes to create a crisis among the genders on how to approach the dangerous territory of romantic relationships (Sprecher and Toro-Morn, 2002).

Conflict is ideal for magazines because this creates an environment where advertisers can offer products to resolve problems and improve one’s situation. Lifestyle magazines present a fantasy world in which the ideal reader can have it all: love, successful career, health, and happiness with a few speed bumps along the way. That is where both articles and advertising come to the rescue of readers. “Much of the advertising in this respect is seamless with the magazines’ editorial content” (Jackson et al, 2001, p. 97). Articles and advertisements provide resolution to avoid stress and wasting time, but they increase feelings of stress and inadequacy (Jackson et al, 2001).
Editors are constantly trying to balance the didactic struggle between enticing readers and attracting advertisers, and this is where their priority lies (Jackson et al, 2001).

In “Agony Aunt” sections, magazine sections in which writers respond to readers in need of advice, the Agony Aunts tend to rely upon the use of gender stereotypes when dispensing advice. “[T]he Agony Aunt's advice to women is based on her own stereotypical perceptions about men” (Chang, 2000, para. 86). Because of this, traditional gender stereotypes are reproduced through the voices of these Agony Aunts (Chang, 2000). How the Agony Aunt approach translates to men’s magazines is difficult to detect since men’s general interest magazines are a relatively new genre and very little research has been done on their problem pages.

Especially due to their susceptibility to influence from advertisers, magazines create an environment ripe for perpetuating traditional gender stereotypes. With the developing and changing industry for men’s magazines and the ever-popular industry for women’s magazines, magazines play an important mediated role in society. Advice columns, such as those in problem pages, have been found in the past to rely upon gender stereotypes and is an area where further research can be beneficial to understand what role these problem pages play in current men’s and women’s lifestyle magazines.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Collection of Data

*Overall Approach & Rationale*

Since the purpose of this study is to explore how lifestyle magazines portray both genders, the four most highly circulated lifestyle magazines were carefully selected. Every issue from 2007 was examined, and the contents were recorded for each relationship advice column summarizing THEMATICALLY how gender is portrayed in each instance. After completing this for all magazines, the themes were analyzed to explore the differences among the magazines. Then these results were compared and contrasted to information gathered from the other magazines in regard to gender. Based on the results gleaned from this study, readers should have an understanding of how women's and men's lifestyle magazines differ in their use of gender stereotypes and how they approach their respective gendered audiences.

*Text Selection*

For the purpose of this study, two women's and two men's lifestyle magazines were selected: *Cosmopolitan, Redbook, Maxim,* and *Men's Health.* These magazines were chosen since they have the highest circulation rankings for younger adult lifestyle magazines based on the Magazine Publishers of America's statistics. For the year 2006

Originally I had hoped to compare *Maxim* with another men’s lifestyle magazine, such as *FHM* or *Stuff*, but during 2007 both of these men’s lifestyle magazines ceased publication, leaving the popular *Maxim* to remain at the forefront in men’s lifestyle magazines with *Men’s Health* as the lone competitor. *Maxim* is often referred to as the male *Cosmopolitan*, and should provide equal comparison to *Cosmopolitan*, which is the reigning women’s lifestyle magazine. Since *Men’s Health* and *Redbook* remain in the shadows of their respective gender’s lifestyle magazine leaders, they provide some interesting comparisons with *Maxim* and *Cosmopolitan*.

When possible, the American version of the magazine (e.g. American *Maxim* as opposed to the British version) was selected. Since the MPA does not classify its magazines by genre, what is meant by “American men’s and women’s lifestyle magazines” had to be defined. For the purpose of this study, I defined this as any monthly glossy magazine published in America focused on a variety of general lifestyle subjects, including fashion, health, and relationships, classified by gender and aimed at adults. Based on this definition, the field of potential magazines was further narrowed based on which had the highest circulations and could be truly considered a “lifestyle magazine.” All of the issues from 2007 were analyzed in order to study the most recent

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2 *FHM*, considered a leader in the lad magazine genre, was among the top 100 circulated magazines in 2005, but in early 2006, it pulled “out of the North American market after its publisher, Emap PLC, said the U.S. market for its magazine was tanking without an imminent chance of recovery” (Deveau, 2007). *Stuff*, on the other hand, fared even worse in profits and was integrated with *Maxim*, its sibling magazine (Perez-Pena, 2007, Deveau, 2007).

3 *Redbook* is only published in America and does not have a foreign counterpart, unlike the other magazines.
of these magazines. Because of the short amount of time lad magazines have been in existence and since two popular men’s lifestyle magazines, Stuff and FHM, ended their American run in 2007, this is a transitional period for men’s magazines with little longitudinal comparison available. Every issue was examined to avoid any anomalies in selecting fewer random issues.

The relationship problem pages in each magazine were the focus of my investigation. Only the textual portion of the problem pages was studied to gain a more concrete analysis than evaluating the more abstract images that may appear in the problem pages. These problem pages are advice columns that contain a question or other type of reader submission that the magazine staff responds to with solutions. For the sake of consistency with each magazine, other formats of relationship advice columns or narratives that were not in a problem-and-solution format were not examined. Furthermore, problem pages or individual problem-and-solutions unrelated to relationship advice (e.g. fashion, work, and health advice) are not included. Besides focusing on relationships and gender issues, a focus on relationship advice problem pages is paramount to this study since they directly address and attempt to analyze the opposite sex, as well as the same sex. Additionally, it aims to instruct the reader on how to behave in a romantic relationship.

In addition, these problem pages are related to some aspect of relationships, not solely sex advice that does not have any relationship component considered (e.g. focus on sexual performance or sexual health without relating it to how this is a component of dating and the effects on the partner). Relationship advice dealing with non-romantic

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4 While magazines purport that readers submit the questions, some magazine staff members have claimed to have rephrased reader submissions, changed advice seekers’ ages, and have made up or changed facts to fit the demographics and feel of the magazine (Featherstone, 2002).
partners (e.g. friends and family) is included since these sections provide insight on how
to deal with same-sex relationships and provide a deeper comparison with romantic
relationships.

To verify that the selected texts were appropriate, a pilot study was conducted of the
four magazines. These four magazines were found to be the best choices for this study
with each magazine’s problem page or pages providing a variety of subject matters and
approaches to relationship advice.

Treatment of Data

With the assistance of one other coder in order to establish reliability, every
relationship advice column of every issue of Maxim, Men’s Health, Redbook, and
Cosmopolitan from 2007 was thematically analyzed. Using similar methods as outlined
by Richard E. Boyatzis for developing inductively, thematically analyzed data for an
exploratory study, raw data was collected from each magazine and this information was
summarized. Then, the data was systematically analyzed and compared with the research
questions in mind and reviewed for patterns and similarities (Boyatzis, 1998). Themes
emerged and were sorted into various categories. Once the themes were reduced to the
simplest set of text possible, my coder, a graduate student classmate, compared the
summaries with the themes to see if she found the same themes or if any themes needed
to be recategorized (Boyatzis, 1998).

In order to classify the unit of coding, a method similar to the one used by Firminger
was used, where she analyzed “the smallest number of sentences that contained a
complete thought, experience, or response, ranging from one sentence to a paragraph”
This was useful to insure that the meaning and context of a statement was not lost in coding, but information that might contain contradictory and/or multiple themes was not included (Firminger, 2006). For every unit coded, a theme was developed. These themes were later categorized with similar themes to develop a list of main themes addressed by each problem page. Using these main theme categories, metathemes were then developed from all of themes across the problem pages.

To further classify the themes found through the thematic analysis, various resources were used to determine whether a theme could be classified as a traditional gender stereotype. A key source was the use of the gender stereotype adjective list provided by Williams and Best’s 1977 study to assist in identifying certain themes as feminine or masculine (see Appendix A). Additional resources for traditional stereotype themes include Julia T. Wood’s relationship themes of women’s dependence/ men’s independence, men’s authority/ women’s incompetence, women as primary caregivers/men as breadwinners, and women as victims and sex objects/ men as aggressors (1999). The last set of traditional gender role references that assisted in the coding are those mentioned by van Zoonen: women as sex objects, mothers, children or iron maidens, and men as sturdy oaks, fighters, and breadwinners (1994). All of these references of traditional stereotypes aided in determining whether these problem pages employed traditional gender stereotypes or if they have become more progressive.

For RQ1, themes were identified to understand whether gender is portrayed in a traditional stereotypical fashion or in a nontraditional stereotypical way. Also, compared

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5 The unit of coding is defined as “the most basic segment... of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 63), whereas the unit of analysis for thematic analysis is defined as “the entity on which the interpretation of the study will focus” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 62). Therefore, the unit of coding is the smaller set of data that will be coded and analyzed, while the unit of analysis will be the problem pages in general.
and contrasted were the themes directed at men versus women. To build upon RQ1, the subquestion, RQ1a, looked at what themes were present in relation to each gender's lifestyle magazines. These themes were compared and contrasted to develop and identify the differences and/or similarities in reference to men and women.

In looking at RQ2, the themes found throughout the analysis played an important role in understanding how these relationship advisors prescribe men and women to act within relationships. The themes that were revealed through this question provide a strong foundation for comparing how men and women are expected to act in their relationships, showing the expectation of traditional stereotypical roles to be fulfilled.

Lastly, for RQ3 the magazines were analyzed to see how magazines promote relationship advice as opposed to other magazine sections. Each magazine section as noted in the table of contents was reviewed and analyzed to get an idea of the type of information and articles provided by these magazines in comparison with the problem pages and similar relationship sections.

Data Analysis Procedures

The thematic analysis in which I relied on themes that emerged from my research was compared to previous research on what constitutes traditional stereotypes. It also contributed to understanding the construct of lifestyle magazines in general. The identified themes were categorized into larger themes that address the overall research and can be used for future research.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Analysis of Data

The problem pages of the lifestyle magazines of *Redbook, Men's Health, Cosmopolitan*, and *Maxim* were analyzed in order to develop a number of themes. In *Redbook*’s problem page, “The Hard Stuff,” respondent Karen Karbo addresses dating, work and marital relationships. *Men's Health* has three relationship advice columns that vary in approach: “Jimmy the Bartender” gives *Men's Health* readers straight-forward answers to a range of life’s problems, such as problems at work, with friends, and in romantic relations; “Ask the Girl Next Door” provides advice supposedly from a New York woman who will tell men what women really want, no matter how embarrassing; and “Ask the Sex Professor,” which gives a range of relationship and sex advice. *Cosmopolitan* offers an “Ask Him Anything” column in its “Love and Lust” section monthly as well as “Paging the Love Doctor,” which is a problem page that examines celebrity relationship issues. *Maxim* provides a sex advice column that varies monthly with some months providing question-and-answer sections, while others instead elaborate on a particular sexual topic. For the purpose of this study, only the question-and-answer sections were the focus for a more consistent comparison with the other magazines scenarios and plans of action for the advice seeker.
Examination of the problem pages of each magazine generally yielded several themes that were identified within each problem. These themes were separated into one of three main divisions: question, explanation, or instruction. The question portion of each problem includes all of the text written by the advice seeker, including background information and the question asked by the advice seeker. The themes found in the response portion were then divided into either category of explanation or instruction. Explanation includes the part of the response that explained reasoning or provided support, but did not instruct the advice seeker to take any action or make any changes. The instruction category, on the other hand, included themes that told advice seekers how to behave or even how to feel.

In Table 2 below, all of the themes discovered from the analysis of the problem pages are organized to visually aid in examining what themes resulted from this study. The themes are explained in detail with examples later in this chapter. As can be seen from examining this table, many of the themes are repeated in other problem pages. Women’s and men’s magazines did not differ greatly in the themes employed. Since many of these themes from both genders’ lifestyle magazines promote traditionally feminine ways of approaching and resolving a problem, women’s magazine problem pages reinforce female stereotypes while men’s magazines challenge traditional stereotypes by encouraging men to handle relationship issues in a traditionally female fashion.
Table 2

**Theme Compilation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem Pages</th>
<th>Question Themes</th>
<th>Explanation Themes</th>
<th>Instruction Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Redbook</em></td>
<td>Self-Pain</td>
<td>Reassurance/Encouragement</td>
<td>Outside help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;You've Got</td>
<td>Concern about</td>
<td>Negative/Warning</td>
<td>Accept/Wait</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions?</td>
<td>affecting others</td>
<td>Needs Improvement</td>
<td>Communicate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She's Got</td>
<td>Upset by others</td>
<td>Helping Others</td>
<td>Stop/Change Own</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answers&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td>Others' Feelings</td>
<td>Behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Other Has Problem</td>
<td>Empower/Respect Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Relationship Warnings</td>
<td>Evaluate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Leave/Avoid Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Change Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Men's Health</em></td>
<td>Etiquette</td>
<td>Female Preferences/Desires</td>
<td>Male Change Behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Ask the Girl&quot;</td>
<td>How to communicate</td>
<td>Female Concerns</td>
<td>Communicate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Next Door&quot;</td>
<td>How to compromise</td>
<td>Female Thought</td>
<td>Compromise/Sacrifice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How to change female</td>
<td>Processes/Behaviors</td>
<td>Change other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How to deal with</td>
<td>Reassurance/Encouragement</td>
<td>Accept/Wait</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>female's issues</td>
<td>Warning</td>
<td>Understand/Encourage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Understanding females</td>
<td></td>
<td>Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How to please impress</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>female</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Pages</td>
<td>Question Themes</td>
<td>Explanation Themes</td>
<td>Instruction Themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Men's Health</em></td>
<td>How to handle other</td>
<td>Benefits</td>
<td>Joking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Jimmy the Bartender”</td>
<td>Concerned about self-perception</td>
<td>Warning</td>
<td>Male should not change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How to communicate</td>
<td>Understanding males</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How to respect others' feelings</td>
<td>Male's responsibilities</td>
<td>Male needs to change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Understanding others</td>
<td>Understanding others</td>
<td>Helping/Impressing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How to handle emotions/situations</td>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Men's Health</em></td>
<td>How to please female</td>
<td>Sexual Functioning</td>
<td>Accept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Ask the Sex Professor”</td>
<td>Understanding sexual behavior</td>
<td>Reassurance</td>
<td>Satisfy female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Cosmopolitan</em></td>
<td>Confusion</td>
<td>Reassurance</td>
<td>Accept/Avoid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Ask Him Anything”</td>
<td>Concerns</td>
<td>Male beliefs</td>
<td>Leave/Avoid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Upset by others</td>
<td>Female beliefs</td>
<td>Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Change</td>
<td>Female Error</td>
<td>Evaluate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Warning</td>
<td></td>
<td>Change/Improve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Change other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Communicate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem Pages</th>
<th>Question Themes</th>
<th>Explanation Themes</th>
<th>Instruction Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Cosmopolitan</em></td>
<td>Personal issues</td>
<td>Gender-neutral</td>
<td>Accept/Wait</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Paging the&quot;</td>
<td>Understanding</td>
<td>Warning</td>
<td>Avoid/Leave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love</td>
<td>behaviors</td>
<td>Fears/problems</td>
<td>Communicate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctor”</td>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td>Relationship creation/advice</td>
<td>Evaluate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>issues/successes</td>
<td>Understanding Females</td>
<td>Change/Improve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Etiquette/Proper</td>
<td>Understandings Males</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>behavior</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Maxim:*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Maxim:</th>
<th>Uncertainty</th>
<th>Positive Outlook</th>
<th>Sacrifice/Compromise</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Ask Maxim&quot; &amp; Sex</td>
<td>Female inquiry</td>
<td>Reassurance</td>
<td>Change other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert</td>
<td>Out of male’s control</td>
<td>Warning</td>
<td>Change self/Take action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Technical</td>
<td></td>
<td>Communicate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What stands out the most from this study is not whether stereotypes were necessarily reinforced, but rather how a similar formula was used for all of the problem pages. Since the question, explanation, and instruction portions in all of the problem pages tended to encourage traditional female ways of thinking and acting—for both men and women—problem pages seem to be skewed in a female-oriented way of addressing problems. By comparing the discovered themes, the formula used in these problem pages becomes apparent in metathemes, or overarching themes that encompass the main themes from the various problem pages. Nine metathemes were discovered in all with three metathemes from each division: question, explanation, and instruction.
The discovered themes from Table 2 were further reduced into metathemes for each portion of the problem (i.e. question, explanation, and instruction), as displayed in Tables 3-5. While some of the themes classified in the metathemes could overlap with another metatheme, the themes were best organized as to what the main message seemed to be. Each of the themes that were discovered in this study and found in Table 2 can be found classified under its corresponding metatheme in Tables 3-5. If a theme is repeated (e.g. "communicate"), only one instance of that theme will be found in the metatheme tables for brevity. The metathemes are discussed in more detail in the summary in this chapter.

Table 3

*Question Metathemes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feelings &amp; Understanding</th>
<th>Effect on Others</th>
<th>Reacting to Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understanding females</td>
<td>Concern about affecting others</td>
<td>Self-Pain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding others</td>
<td>Etiquette/Proper behavior</td>
<td>Upset by others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding sexual behavior</td>
<td>How to communicate</td>
<td>How to deal with female’s issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confusion</td>
<td>How to compromise</td>
<td>Concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal issues</td>
<td>How to change female</td>
<td>Upset by others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding behaviors</td>
<td>How to please/impress female</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship issues/successes</td>
<td>How to handle other</td>
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**Instruction Metathemes**

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*Redbook: “The Hard Stuff”*

Redbook’s advice columnist, Karen Karbo, tackles readers’ questions in “The Hard Stuff.” While several themes emerge in this study, most of the problems as a whole in “The Hard Stuff” address life problems that require repair of the overall situation or other times of just the advice seeker, such as through empowerment or better understanding.

**Question Themes**

In addition to the typical romantic and sexual relationship issues, Redbook touched on the relationship issues of work, friends, and family. On the subject of parenthood, Redbook discussed concerns about handling stepchildren and the choices of entering motherhood. Redbook readers fret over the difficulties and complexities of raising children and carefully premeditate entering the realm of motherhood, making
motherhood seem perilous and complex with women uncertain they can handle such a responsibility in devoting themselves to the lives of their children and stepchildren. In the workplace, *Redbook* advice seekers tend to portray women mostly as homemakers with the occasional example of a businesswoman. As for friendship, *Redbook* advice seekers expressed concern for friends and the state of their friendships. One example highlights a woman's struggle with loneliness and rejection from friends throughout her life and her fear that she would lose her current group of friends because of a perceived malicious member of the group. A sense of desperation for belonging was strong in this example and lends itself to the idea of women being needy.

Female advice seekers express concerns about males' behaviors and seek a way to change that behavior, revealing women as wanting to control men. Unlike men's problem pages, females also express the pain and hurt they have experienced because of men, including feelings of rejection and not being treated fairly. These concerns align similarly with traditional stereotypes of women as sensitive and emotionally fragile. While men were concerned about their perception by others, women in *Redbook*'s problem pages outright state their emotional pain they are experiencing. Question themes were sorted into three categories:

*Self-pain.* The female advice seeker wants to know how to relieve or fix a problem in which she is feeling hurt, rejected, or having received unfair treatment. The advice seeker is generally looking to overcome this pain or to find what is best for herself:

"Now I keep beating myself up for deciding to leave [my job]. How can I forgive myself and move on?" (May 2007)

"I feel it's not fair for my ex to drop in just for ‘fun time’ [with my cat]. Am I being immature?" (March 2007)
“...why can’t I find a man--or at least love myself enough to accept the fact that I’m single?” (May 2007)

“I can't get past the way my parents spend money on [my sister’s family] and not on my hardworking family... I think it's really unfair!” (April 2007)

*Concern about affecting others.* Female advice seekers are cognizant of how their actions will affect friends and family, and the relationship between self and other takes the main focus with general concern that the advice seeker does not want to hurt or upset others. This is quite similar to the traditional female stereotype of women as mothers, taking care of and concerned about the feelings and needs of others. With lesser severity is concern on proper etiquette or just simply how to handle or treat other people:

“How can I break free from my controlling family and live my life without worrying about hurting feelings?” (November 2007)

“I know my boss will have a panic attack when I tell her [I’m leaving]. How can I break the news?” (January 2007)

“Would it be wrong of me to wear the same [wedding dress] again?” (July 2007)

*Concerned about or upset by others.* Female advice seekers are worried about others’ behaviors and actions, or they are upset by how others act, especially in their treatment of the female advice seeker. These questions generally ask how to change others and are less concerned with the advice seekers’ own actions or behaviors. Most commonly sought was change in their husbands, ranging from changing appearance to equal partnerships in marriage to improving sex life, although husbands are not the only targets of this desire for change:

“I get tired of [my husband’s] cockiness and of hearing the same stories over and over. How can I get him to stop without shattering his confidence?” (April 2007)

“...sometimes, [my husband] seems unappreciative of what I do...I’d like some extra help from him! Any advice?” (March 2007)
"I understand that [my mom] only wants the best for [me], but her remarks are straining my relationship with her. How can I handle this?" (July 2007)

Explanation Themes

As David Gauntlett noted about Redbook, the magazine is very “housewifey,” and places a high value on domestic roles and undercuts the value of work outside the home. Motherhood is held on a high pedestal by Redbook’s advice columnist, Karbo, informing one woman that she may be too selfish to be a mother and often equating success and happiness with motherhood and family. For romantic relationships, Karbo does not seem to be as supportive of traditional stereotypical roles as she does with women’s roles as mother and in the family.

The themes in the explanation portion for Redbook that focused on the female included the following:

Reassurance/encouragement. These themes assure females that they are normal and doing their best. The feelings of the female are often acknowledged and females are encouraged to take care of the situation; family and motherhood were often promoted as signs of success:

"The point is, it's natural for you to grieve a bit as you go from "number two" in your boss's life to "number one" in the life of your son." (January 2007)

"And in the end, your dad has to let you go, because you're doing what children always do, eventually. They leave. They make their own lives. And so, good luck with yours!" (November 2007)

"First off, I want to say that I can hear your heart breaking all the way over here on the other side of the country. You have been on the receiving end of words that no one ever wants to hear." (August 2007)

Warning/negative. As for the negative explanations and warnings, Karbo responded with warnings on what potential problems could befall the advice seeker or explained
what was wrong with the situation at the moment, placing warnings about the sanctity of
motherhood and the difficulties of achieving recognition for domestic labor. Some of
these responses were very blunt in informing the female that she was selfish, replaceable
at work, or that she is lacking control in her life. This range of explanations provided a
more pessimistic outlook and was not uplifting like the reassuring and encouraging
themes:

“After the heady days of new romance are over, he’ll be just another human being
with flaws, and you’ll be stuck again with your discontent.” (May 2007)

“...perhaps you're not meant to have children. Have you considered that? Not
everyone is.” (October 2007)

Needs improvement. Building upon these previous two themes, the last theme in
direct reference to the female advice seeker provides explanations on areas in need of
improvement for women. Karbo discourages desperation and neediness and encourages
women to be realistic and explains why the female’s attitude and behavior may have lead
to initial problems:

“Be grateful that you have long-distance relatives who are thoughtful enough to send
presents.” (November 2007)

Helping others. Karbo explains that others need guidance from female or that others
can be self-sufficient. This theme is less traditionally stereotypical of women since she
encourages the female to not fix every situation nor always help others. Those not close
to the female or those who would not appreciate the help were not in need of help,
whereas those close to the female were noted as needing help:

“Soon, it will become a habit; your husband will know that when you say it's time to
go, you mean it.” (June 2007)

“If your acquaintance is anorexic, no one will be able to help her until she's ready to
accept help.” (April 2007)
Others' feelings. As for others' feelings, the themes mostly reflected male behaviors and feelings. Males' feelings were described in a stereotypical fashion, noting that men will make their feelings clear to women, men want a "chase" with women, and that men do not care about the wedding etiquette. In particular, Karbo claims that males make their feelings clear for females, are not attracted to needy women, and are correct in their reasoning. Men are displayed as being very clear and rational in what they want in relationships and do not bother with silly things like wedding etiquette. Only once does Karbo claim that men can be insecure.

Other person having problems. While Karbo noted many of the issues and problems women have, she does not shy away from noting that others have problems as well. Others were noted as being the source of problems for the advice seeker and that they have no desire to change themselves:

"But your husband seems to be a compulsive liar; he does it out of habit and feels more comfortable lying than telling the truth." (September 2007)

Warnings on relationship. Relationship warnings are explanations that show how both parties contribute to the relationship. Karbo makes it very clear how difficult relationships are, but does not place any blame or responsibility on anyone—instead highlighting that it is difficult for both partners. These warnings mostly suggest that the relationship may be deteriorating and in need of repair, and some relationships, particularly affairs, may be detrimental to those involved:

"...his low-wattage [sexual] desire-- and callousness in refusing you-- means that something in your marriage is seriously amiss." (January 2007)

"Or maybe you're simply growing apart." (September 2007)
Instruction Themes

For the instruction themes, many themes emerged from the thematic analysis:

Outside help. For the outside help theme, Karbo often referred advice seekers and their loved ones to seek outside help, generally through counseling or therapy, and other times simply through self-help books or even just housekeeping assistance in the home:

“...find a good family therapist who will help all of you come off your position a bit.” (December 2007)

“You need a little help, m'dear. You may not want or be able to afford a regular housecleaner, but perhaps someone could come in once a month.” (March 2007)

Accept/wait. As for accepting or waiting in the situation, advice seekers were advised to accept the situation or others’ choices and feelings or to wait until situation changed:

“If he still doesn't want this new position, you need to respect his decision.” (September 2007)

“You're a rebel in your marriage, and there's no reason you can't approach preparing for motherhood in the same way. Hang out for a bit, observe yourself and your feelings, and see what comes.” (October 2007)

Communication. For communication, females were encouraged to communicate feelings and treat others well through communication. Clarity and setting boundaries were suggested within these themes, and one instance even encouraged the female to express her anger without worrying about consequences. Nonetheless, women were advised communications should be careful and calculated without sharing some information depending on seriousness of situation. Communication was highlighted as an important tool in relationships for repairing and understanding problems that might exist. Communication is strongly stressed as a way to resolve problems.
**Stop/change own behavior.** In themes for stopping or changing own behavior, an emphasis was placed on taking care of and respecting others and social standards. Karbo recommended females change their mindsets or perspectives on issues with others. Two particular examples include females being advised to keep work and romance separate and to make motherhood a priority.

“One way to make this easier on yourself is to stop spying on him.” (May 2007)

“Then, the next time he says he’s meeting them for a drink, get a sitter and go along...Try to be open to these new people; you might like them.” (November 2007)

**Empower/respect self.** Females were encouraged to be independent and kind to themselves. Women are put first when Karbo encourages women to understand their own needs, to stand up for themselves, and to find happiness. Once again, motherhood was highlighted within this theme, emphasizing the joy motherhood and other maternal outlets can bring to a female. Nonetheless, Karbo does encourage females to empower and change themselves for their own sake rather than for the sake of the relationship. Women are instructed to be kind to themselves and to be strong, in addition to leaving and gaining independence from others. The empowerment of females is contrary to some of the other more traditionally stereotypical views Karbo presents:

“You need to go about your business. You need to get a life.” (July 2007)

“You have to help yourself before you can help anyone else.” (March 2007)

**Evaluate situation.** For evaluation themes, women are encouraged to monitor situations, particularly being aware of the feelings and concerns of others and self, as well as contemplating the state of the current situation and relationship:

“But what's the worst you can imagine? If you can absorb that hit, then it might be worth it to let this man know how you feel.” (August 2007)
“How did he respond to you at the wake? Did it seem as if your feelings were reciprocated? Be honest with yourself here.” (January 2007)

Leave/avoid others. In themes where the female advice seeker is encouraged to avoid or leave a situation, women were generally advised to avoid a person or sacrifice at least part of the relationship. These themes also reinforced how a female should not even want to be a part of certain relationships:

“If he refuses [to get counseling], then rethink things. It may mean leaving-or staying and doing without sex. While it's true that a lively, lusty relationship can't flourish when only one person wants sex, many marriages survive in less-than-ideal circumstances, and if that's all right with you, it's all right.” (August 2007)

Change others. Lastly, females were advised to change others. Others need to make changes in perspectives and behaviors, sometimes requiring female to gently encourage these changes in others or to make compromises. Other changes should be left to the discretion of others, particularly to male mates:

“Ask him if... he could take charge at home while you're away. He wouldn't be the first man to fall at his wife's feet in gratitude upon her return, saying, 'I don't know how you do it.'” (March 2007)

Men's Health: “Ask the Girl Next Door”

In “Ask the Girl Next Door,” Nicole Beland resolves men’s relationship issues. These problems tend to require a great deal of instruction and explanation on how men are to behave and think.

Question Themes

For Men's Health first relationship problem page, “Ask the Girl Next Door,” men express confusion about women and concern about perception in their questions. Both the concern over perception and the confusion expressed display men not as the strong, confident stereotypes, but rather they become much more human by revealing that they
do not know everything and have insecurities. The following themes were identified in the question portion:

*Etiquette.* Men's Health’s “Ask the Girl Next Door” advice seekers were self-conscious in how they were supposed to act and behave. For themes in etiquette, males sought advice on how to best present themselves sexually and in relationships, as well as wanting to understand and fix their own shortcomings. The traditional stereotype of men being sturdy oaks and fighters was not supported within these questions.

“Is it okay to order in when I invite a girl over for dinner?” (April 2007)

“My wife says we should know each other's e-mail passwords. How do I escape this one?” (November 2007)

*How to communicate.* In questions on how to communicate, men inquired how to express themselves and their feelings as well as how to tactfully be honest:

“What's the easiest way to let her know I'm not interested?” (April 2007)

“I have a crush on my roommate. How should I let her know?” (June 2007)

*How to compromise.* For how to compromise, men sought information on how to compromise in various aspects of life, including work, sex, and home.

“I like the house much neater than my girlfriend does. How can we sync up?” (November 2007)

*How to change female.* Male advice seekers also asked about ways to change a female by changing her habits, particularly sexual habits, or behaviors. This reveals a bit more of a controlling stereotype, but in comparison with the vast majority of other questions in “Ask the Girl Next Door” that do not seek to change women, this desire for some female behavior modification is not an overpowering part of this problem page:

“She kisses as if she's trying to suck off my face. Can I change that?” (June 2007)
How to deal with female's issues. Some questions focused on men trying to deal with females' issues, wanting to know how to handle females’ desires and problems, as well as trying to detect females’ sexual preferences:

“What do I do when she cries for no reason?” (November 2007)

“I need space to sleep, but a lot of women like to cuddle all night. What's a nice way to move her over?” (November 2007)

Understanding females. On a similar note, males inquired about how to understand women, especially their wants, feelings, and interests. One question that stood out was in regards to a male not understanding a female’s double standards in fantasies. In trying to understand females, men also questioned females’ interest in men, especially wondering about women’s fidelity and if females will be accepting of male.

How to attract/impress female. Lastly for the question portion, there were many themes of men seeking ways to attract or impress women, such as expressing uncertainty on how to display interest, wanting to know more on how to find women to date, and satisfying a woman’s needs and desires:

“The wink as a flirting device—effective?” (June 2007)

“How do I meet more women?” (March 2007)

Explanation Themes

Nicole Beland provides a mix of views in describing men and women in the explanation portion, in which the following themes emerged:

Understanding females. “Girl Next Door” Nicole Beland explains what females want and how they and why they act in certain ways, including preferences/desires, concerns, and thought processes/behaviors. Women are displayed as knowing what they want and valuing knowledge, honesty, and self-control, showing a bit more determined
and rational side to women than traditional stereotypes. Some of the pettiness of women is also highlighted, contradicting the rational stereotype, creating mixed views of women:

"Ask if you can start over. We find that charming—it makes us feel like we’re in a Hugh Grant movie." (July/August 2007)

"For your gal pals, the day you fall in love will feel like the day they close down Disneyland—another fun spot they never plan to visit, but hope will always be there for them." (September 2007)

**Reassurance/encouragement.** Men are reassured that they make good decisions and can attract and/or satisfy women. One question even challenges the stereotypical roles of males:

"There are plenty of men out there who can tackle the entire range of household chores with patience and skill… And you might be one of those men, in which case your woman has no right to request that you alone handle stereotypically male tasks.” (March 2007)

"No matter what you may have written [in your e-mails], you have the moral high ground.” (July/August 2007)

**Warnings to men.** In the last set of themes for the explanation portion, men are warned to carefully approach women to prevent awkward and inappropriate situations, as well as to really evaluate and be prepared to make sacrifices for the relationship:

"Sitting around with people you have absolutely no interest in is just one of the banes of being in a relationship.” (April 2007)

"Complaining won’t do it. Call her a slob and she’ll start ticking off a laundry list of your own flaws.” (November 2007)

**Instruction Themes**

For the instruction portion of “Ask the Girl Next Door,” men are advised to put females’ needs first, promoting a more empathetic view of men, as can be viewed in the following themes:
Change behavior. For changing their behaviors, men need to change their mindsets, change their approaches to women, and become gentle and make females comfortable:

“[Being “tender” in bed is] like brain surgery: Slow down, pay attention, and make small, careful movements.” (March 2007)

“Ask her point-blank how much joint income she needs to feel secure. If her number is wildly different from yours, go to a financial planner to find a fair solution,” (December 2007)

Communicate. As for communication, male advice seekers are given a plethora of sometimes contradictory communication advice, including being direct, subtle, demanding, tactful, discreet, humorous, and in control, all depending on the situation. The advice to men provides some non-traditional stereotypical ways of behaving, especially in encouraging communication. Women are traditionally seen as the communicators, and encouraging men to take on this role—despite the mixed signals in how to communicate—shows a push towards a more balanced relationship where both members are encouraged to communicate rather than hold in emotions and problems. Men are encouraged to be careful in their communications so to not emotionally hurt or trouble women, which displays females as emotionally fragile, but is also supportive of men being aware of others’ feelings.

Compromise/sacrifice. Beland suggests men compromise or even make sacrifices in relationships, including dropping an issue or just trying to avoid female’s issues rather than dealing with them:

“If you really think you’re head over heels for this woman, you should move out before coming clean.” (June 2007)

“Just beware the ‘thongs are for skanks’ response. You’re better off dropping it than dealing with that trap-fitted debate.” (March 2007)
Encourage change in female. Men should encourage changes in women through challenging them or finding solutions to their issues:

“If you want her to polish your knob with passion, give her a challenge.” (June 2007)

Accept/wait. Men are also advised to accept and wait with some issues, especially drawing upon patience:

“Rather than worrying about being late, pop open a cold one, cue up an episode of South Park, and enjoy some rare uninterrupted time on the couch.” (September 2007)

Understand/encourage others. Lastly, men are advised to encourage and understand others, trying to understand things from the female perspective and making the female feel more comfortable:

“To find out (a female’s feelings), arrange a situation in which you’re (1) together at night, (2) in a sexy place like a bar or your couch, and (3) hovering within a foot of each other. Then watch how she acts…” (December 2007)

Men’s Health: “Jimmy the Bartender”

For “Jimmy the Bartender” the problems revolve around a range of relationship issues that touch upon what men can do to resolve these problems. Much of the emphasis on how men should handle situations, although other themes addressing how others can change and explanations of the situation also emerged, as found in the following themes.

Question Themes

Unlike all of the other problem pages, except for Redbook’s “The Hard Stuff,” “Jimmy the Bartender” addresses relationship issues that extend beyond romantic relationships, including work, family, and friends. For romantic relationship concerns, male advice seekers have very similar concerns as in “Ask the Girl Next Door,” where men are trying to understand what is the best way they can behave in particular situations, whether wondering how to handle a problematic situation or how to impress others or
how to express their feelings. Unlike in “Ask the Girl Next Door,” male advice seekers
do not seek how to change others, although there is concern expressed about others’
behavior, such as concern over their girlfriends’ fidelity, but the advice seekers are
looking more at how to handle the situation rather than how to change it. Again, men
reveal an emotionally aware consciousness.

In Men’s Health’s “Jimmy the Bartender” problem pages, the following question
themes were addressed:

How to handle others. In regards to questions on how to handle others, males
inquired how to deal with difficult situations in life, including dealing with competition,
changing relationships, difficult people, secrets, son’s recovery, and standing up for self.

Concern about self-perception. For self-perception, males sought advice on how to
gain respect from others, including from their sons; how to overcome others’ judgments
of them; and how to attract and impress others, including a woman’s family and
coworkers:

“My boss’s daughter is a knockout. I’d like to ask her out, but I don’t want to mess
things up at work.” (July/August 2007)
“My stepson keeps taking cheap shots at me. How can I gain his respect?”
(January/February 2007)

How to handle emotions/situations. In these questions, the male experiences tension
between his relationship and his own needs:

“I just got married and have been busy. Now my buddies have cut me out of the
loop. How do I show them I’m just crunched for time?” (January/February)

How to communicate. For how to communicate, the male needs advice on how to
share important information and how to express feelings to others:

“I will never forget how awkward it was to have the sex talk with my dad. How can
I make sure it’s easier on my son—and me?” (March 2007)
“My boss makes racist jokes, and I'm not sure whether to laugh along or say something.” (January/February 2007)

*How to respect others' feelings.* Men want to find ways to not want to hurt others and to respect their feelings:

“I have three extra tickets to a huge basketball game, and four buddies. What do I do?” (March 2007)

“I'm gunning for a promotion and I'm scheduled to play golf with the big boss, who's totally a duffer. I'm a six handicap. Do I take a dive?” (July/August 2007)

*Understanding others.* Men seek understanding of others and are often unsure about females' feelings:

“I have no problem meeting women in bars, but that's where things end... What gives?” (June 2007)

*How to handle emotions/situations.* Men want to know how to handle particular emotions and situations:

“When I asked my girlfriend to marry me, she said, 'I don’t know.' How will I know when it's time to try again?” (November 2007)

“A guy at my office won't shut up...How do I get him to leave me alone?” (May 2007)

*Explanation Themes*

In the explanation portion of “Jimmy the Bartender,” “Jimmy” provided readers with explanations that can be classified as follows:

*Benefits.* In benefits, Jimmy highlights good things that might come out of a situation:

“You’ll get the chance to meet and mingle with single ladies looking for love (a win) while you stay platonic with your ex and have a few good drinks (also a win).” (November 2007)

*Warnings.* Jimmy warns about drawbacks in relationship changes and issues:
"I'm sorry to say that part of winning the heart of a whiplash-causing woman is dealing with jealous guys. They'll make a move anytime, anywhere, on any woman, including yours." (April 2007)

**Understanding males.** As for understanding males, Jimmy explains and gives his perspectives on males' actions and beliefs, in which he labels men as clearly wrong for their unfair actions and how their actions affect others.

"If you can't buck it up for a 2-hour meal with the people she cares about, then, Gary, you are an uninterested ass." (January/February 2007)

"But man, this is your soul. Whether you're moved by the hard stuff or fluffy pop, I don't care." (October 2007)

**Male’s responsibilities.** As for male responsibilities, Jimmy informs men on what actions they must take responsibility for and what they do not need to take responsibility:

"You're his brother, not his bodyguard or bail bondsman." (May 2007)

"It's never easy to tell a guy he needs help. But this isn't about you looking like a hypocrite; it's about you having the BBs not to stand idle while he kills himself or someone else. Yes, there's going to be a confrontation. Yes, he's going to try to turn this around on you. Yes, you have to do it." (July/August 2007)

**Understanding others.** In understanding others, females are viewed as beautiful creatures, and men need to put an effort into impressing them. In reference to females' careers, Jimmy does state that females should do work that makes them happy. Females are to be appreciated, but are claimed to be very different and complex. Besides understanding females, Jimmy notes that children are resilient and that males should be careful in judging others.

*Instruction Themes*

The instruction portion of “Jimmy the Bartender” contained the following themes:

*Joking.* Unlike most of the other problem pages, Jimmy would jokingly advise male to act in a particular way, such as to hit an annoying neighbor or to bring the male's
attractive girlfriend by to see Jimmy. While advice was provided through this teasing, it is evident by the context that Jimmy does not intend for this advice to be followed.

Humor, including joking and teasing, is seen more commonly with “Jimmy the Bartender” than any other of the problem pages. This is noteworthy since it is the only male-to-male problem page in this study, and it highlights how humor is a powerful and important tool for men in not taking problems too seriously and in expressing this to others as well.

**Male should not change.** Themes about how a male should not change included advice in which the male advice seeker was encouraged to continue his behavior by doing it to the best of his ability or by standing his ground in not changing himself:

“Kill him [in golf], Bill. No mercy. If you fake it, he'll know, and then you can forget about the promotion.” (July/August 2007)

“If you can't beat him on the links, then get him out on the court, on a run, anywhere into your athletic domain. It won't change his ego, but at least you can knock a few strokes off it.” (December 2007)

**Male needs to change.** On the other hand, Jimmy advised males to change their personalities and approaches to further themselves in relationships. Nonetheless, men are encouraged to help others and change themselves for others. While there are occasions where men are told to stay firm in their attitudes and behaviors, they are just as often encouraged to change themselves and accept others for the sake of their relationships. Men are encouraged to behave in less traditionally stereotypical fashions by taking action to repair the relationship and helping others.

**Help/impress others.** Jimmy also instructed males to help or satisfy others’ needs through sacrifice, empowerment, generosity, fairness, prioritizing and simply just assisting and pleasing others. This also included impressing others, where men were
instructed to be polite, thoughtful and respectful, yet Jimmy did also suggest adding in jealousy and bribery in certain circumstances to really get the male’s point across.

**Accept/wait.** As for accepting or waiting themes, men were advised to wait for others to change and to accept current situations:

“If you think the two of you have a shot at making it work, then let the other relationship run its course and then some.” (April 2007)

**Avoid/no action.** This theme encourages men to avoid awkward and frustrating situations and to exclude others from activities. Avoidance seems to be the only traditionally male stereotypical behavior encouraged so that men do not address issues at all:

“…let his friends and family have their peace without the ever-so-slight taint of your presence. Staying home may be the best gift you could give him.” (December 2007)

**Communication.** Communicating was a major theme addressed by Jimmy, encouraging men to communicate feelings and to use communication as problem solving, including sharing important information, confrontation, using humor, and being honest. In one instance, Jimmy recommended the use of “women’s” nonverbal communication as a way of showing feelings and avoiding annoying colleagues. Jimmy even notes how nonverbal communication is part of the women’s realm, and he encourages men to embrace this method of communication in order to get across their feelings without directly addressing the issues and to not hurt others.

**Evaluate situation.** Finally, men were advised to evaluate the situation, monitoring and examining the situation and others’ feelings on the matter:

“First, you need to decide whether this girl is truly someone you want to pursue.” (July/August 2007)
In "Ask the Sex Professor" the problems center on sexual problems in relationships, often requiring men to empower or change themselves in some way for the benefit of the relationship.

**Question Themes**

The third and final problem page section from *Men's Health*, "Ask the Sex Professor," has two main themes in the question portion:

*Female advice.* For female advice, males inquired how they could satisfy sexual needs of females. Although this could be interpreted as men trying to impress women and improving women’s sexual abilities for men’s own needs, it cannot be denied that the men do express genuine concern about what satisfies the women in their lives. The questions revolve around men trying to keep their wives satisfied or finding new sexual positions that their girlfriends will enjoy. The women become the central focus of their concerns rather than themselves. Women are viewed as sexual partners, not perceived as sex objects.

*Understanding sexual behavior.* Males seek understanding of both males’ and females’ sexual issues and preferences. Men again appear as open and uncertain in trying to understand others, once again revealing that men are not all-knowing and have uncertainties, even when it comes to the topic of sex:

"Why does talking dirty to my girlfriend in bed send her over the edge? (October 2007)

**Explanation Themes**

As for the explanation portion, two themes again emerged:

*Sexual functioning.* Technical sexual explanations are provided to the reader.
Reassurance. Males are reassured they are normal or that they are probably satisfying females just fine. The reassurance of men attempts to relieve concerns and worries of men. While men are shown as being normal and successful, it also comforts men when they are in need of support:

“Good news: She is probably ultra-satisfied already.” (September 2007)

Instruction Themes

The instruction portion of “Ask the Sex Professor” again had two themes:

Encouraging acceptance. Men are encouraged to be accepting, such as of their own sexual fantasies. Men are instructed to take less traditionally stereotypical roles by accepting their own feelings and emotions, in this case through sexual fantasies, and by putting the needs of others before themselves:

“Accept [mental images of other women] and make space in your head--and bed--for your mental harem.” (December 2007)

Satisfying female. Tips and tools are provided to sexually satisfy a female partner:

“If she still doesn't have an orgasm, remember to return the favor later with an all-about-her pleasure session.” (September 2007)

Cosmopolitan: “Ask Him Anything”

“Ask Him Anything” addresses romantic relationship problems from a variety of perspectives, generally handling the emotional impact of relationships by placing a great deal of the responsibility on females.

Question Themes

Cosmopolitan magazine’s problem page, “Ask Him Anything,” has four question themes that emerged:
Confusion. With themes dealing with confusion, female advice seekers were confused by or trying to understand a male’s intentions, feelings, or behavior, especially whether a male was interested in a female. Additionally, some females expressed uncertainty about how their own behavior may be affecting how men treat and react to females. The advice seekers expressed a great deal of confusion in trying to understand men’s behaviors and why they were treated in certain ways by men.

Concerns. With females’ concerns, the concerns generally were in regards to males’ behaviors and males’ perceptions of females. Female advice seekers mix complaining with concern, which could be interpreted as whining, a traditional female stereotype:

“I’m seeing this great guy and in love for the first time. But he’s had three other serious relationships with women he was in love with, and it bothers me. He says his feelings for me are stronger. Do you think he loves me more?” (July 2007)

“I have fun hanging out with [a guy friend], but I’m afraid of leading him on. Do you think I should cut him off?” (October 2007)

Upset. The themes in which female advice seekers were upset consisted of mostly frustration for males’ behavior. A great deal of frustration and insecurity was revealed by the females’ questions, although they did not display emotional hurt and pain as was felt by Redbook’s advice seekers:

“I’ve asked him to respect my diet, but he says I need to live my life and relax. Is he trying to sabotage me, or does he just not understand?” (March 2007)

“His lax attitude is a huge turn-off to me, and if he doesn't get it together, I'm going to dump him.” (November 2007)

Change. In wanting change, females wanted to change relationship (i.e. improve or slow it down) or wanted to encourage change in male. Additionally, females sought ways to change their relationships, putting the females in traditionally stereotypical positions of needing to repair and nurture their relationships:
"I love my boyfriend, but I do not get along with his best friend... I really see a future with my guy, so I want to smooth things over. How should I go about it?" (March 2007)

"My guy and I have great sex, but he only wants it on the weekend... He says he gets stressed during the week, which I can understand. But is there anything that I can do to change that?" (August 2007)

Explanation Themes

Within this mix of explanations, there are hits and misses with traditional gender stereotypes. The following explanation themes emerged in "Ask Him Anything:"

Male beliefs. The magazine respondent, Jonathan Small, provides a wide range of explanations about males' behaviors and thoughts, stressing that men will express their interest in women, although their communication with females may be vague, dishonest, or nonexistent. Contradicting many claims that men will make their intentions and feelings clear, one time Small notes that some men may be shy or embarrassed to contact female. Furthermore, men are portrayed as picky in what they want in a romantic partner. Often men are portrayed as sexual creatures, behaving in a different manner when it comes to sex and finding ways to obtain a sex partner, although males are also portrayed as wanting and being capable of having a relationship with some exceptions. Generally male behavior is justified, although Small notes that men should be understanding and respectful to women. Men are described to be fairly clear-minded and competent in their decision making, making their interests in females to be clear, but they maintain the traditional stereotype of men not being as competent as women in communicating their feelings, leading to dishonesty and vague social cues. There also remains the stereotypical perspective of men as primarily focused on sex, although this
characterization is not fully developed in “Ask Him Anything” since Small does also support the idea of men wanting relationships and commitment.

Reassurance. Another common theme in the explanation portion of “Ask Him Anything” is reassurance, where Small acknowledges and praises females for their strength, independence, and kindness, in addition to reassuring females that their boyfriends are normal and honest.

Female beliefs. Small also attempts to explain female beliefs, saying that some females believe they can change men, can be pessimistic, can detect men’s feelings, are paranoid, and make mistakes and bad choices. Nevertheless, Small also notes that females can inspire change in men and are justified in their feelings. Female stereotypes are not fully recognized either here since Small promotes female independence and strength, but does concede that women become absorbed in paranoia and make many mistakes as well as being in tune to the social cues of others.

Female error. Small also notes females’ errors in not expressing feelings, being vengeful, and in violating others’ trust:

“Well, before you get all righteous, let me point out that you were snooping! Just because his phone bill was lying on the table doesn't mean you had the right to read it. What you did was wrong, so it'll be hard for you to make a case.” (April 2007)

“If you are a little older, I'm surprised you haven't brought it up with him before...unless, of course, you don't really feel ready either.” (February 2007)

Warnings. On top of this, Small provides warnings to females to be careful with relationship and to beware of males’ true feelings:

“...if you're both in your late 20s or early 30s and this guy hasn't even broached the M word, either, you're not The One or he's just not ready yet.” (February 2007)
“Ah, welcome to the wonderful world of ex sex. It’s hot, it’s naughty…oh yeah, and it’s a really stupid idea.” (April 2007)

**Instruction Themes**

In the instruction portion of “Ask Him Anything,” Small instructs females to do the following:

*Accept/wait.* In accepting or waiting, females are to accept current situation and partner as is or to wait for relationship to change or develop:

“There may still be relationship potential; it’s just too soon to tell. Give him a little more time to sort things out in his head. Generally, it takes guys longer to be comfortable with the cuddly stuff.” (March 2007)

“…if you want to move forward, go ahead…just do so with extremely low expectations. It may be a sucky attitude, but you have to assume it’s not going to work out. That way, should things change in your favor, you’ll be pleasantly surprised. Still, give yourself a deadline…” (May 2007)

*Leave/find another/avoid.* On the other hand, women are also advised to leave, avoid, or find another in some circumstances. For example, women are advised to leave the relationship, keep options open and find someone with whom she is more compatible, and to not take back mate. While there is a great deal of encouragement in leaving a relationship, which is a sign of independence, it is often followed by advice that women should seek another mate. It is subtly supported that while women should be free from destructive men, they should continue the search for a mate—not to be alone.

*Support.* Small also instructs females to support others or repair relationship by finding ways to help and encourage mate or to reinvigorate relationship:

“Just help ease his anxiety. Next time you go out, don’t have sex. The more he gets to know you, the less he’ll view you as an untouchable sex goddess and the more relaxed he’ll be.” (November 2007)
“Don't pressure him—that will only make it worse. Instead, if you've been together for a few months, you might want to consider both getting tested and then using another form of birth control.” (April 2007)

*Monitor/evaluate situation.* For monitoring/evaluating the situation, females are advised to monitor their relationships for problems and evaluate the state of the relationship as a whole. Additionally, females need to evaluate what they are doing wrong and if they are making good and realistic decisions:

“If [boyfriend changes], great; if not, you'll have to decide if you can deal with his dual daytime personality.” (May 2007)

“Before you consider packing up, come down to Planet Earth for a sec.” (November 2007)

*Change/improve self.* Females are also encouraged to change or improve themselves through changing their mindsets and behaviors to best benefit themselves, which can include controlling the situation, becoming happy with a situation, and seducing their partners. Women are also strongly encouraged to change themselves, forcing females to be the ones to sacrifice and fix the relationship.

*Encourage other to fix situation.* Females are not the only ones who should change, though, as Small encourages females to push others to fix the situation and/or relationship by threatening, encouraging, setting examples and rules, and compromising with partners. While women are encouraged to change others, it is through using threats, leading by example, and compromise, requiring females to take the lead in fixing the relationship:

“If his slacker behavior goes on for another month though, it's time for some tough love. Like a roommate, tell him if he can't pay rent, he'll need to find new living arrangements and some other sucker to mooch off of.” (January 2007)

“You could offer really amazing sex as an incentive...[S]ay, "Sex would be so much better and wilder all the time if you had your own place." Plant the hot-sex seed and watch his interest grow.” (November 2007)
Communicate. Finally, females are encouraged to communicate their feelings and wants. Although some subtleness and tact is recommended, Small also instructs being direct and confronting partners in some situations. Nevertheless, Small equally encourages females to not disclose information or to not express some concerns with mates in order to avoid making some matters worse than necessary. Communication is advised as a useful tool, that while more of a traditionally female tool in relationships is useful for both partners. Nonetheless, Small strengthens the concept of communication as a primarily female stereotypical tool by encouraging females to be careful in their communications as to not upset others.

Cosmopolitan: “Paging the Love Doctor”

“Paging the Love Doctor” is unlike the rest of the relationship problem pages in its approach. Instead of focusing on their own relationships, the problems look at the relationship difficulties of celebrities and apply them to their own lives. The primary focus is in trying to understand the current situation rather than changing it.

Question Themes

For Cosmopolitan’s other relationship problem page, “Paging the Love Doctor,” the “love doctor” Bella Dishell gives relationship advice to advice seekers questioning celebrity behavior. In the question portion, the following themes emerged:

Personal issues. For themes regarding personal issues, advice seekers questioned the behavior of celebrities and why they acted in certain ways regarding relationships. Advice seekers questioned what might be the result of celebrities’ actions in dating and relationships. Although celebrities were the catalyst for the question, the subject provided a more general question on human issues in relationships, such as what makes a
good mate, what effect someone’s personality can have on their potential and current relationships, what problems may develop from certain behaviors, and how to handle certain circumstances:

“Lindsay Lohan has said that she would like to get married before her 30th birthday. Is it a good idea to set a deadline for such a big milestone?” (March 2007)

“Kirsten Dunst recently said she’d never go on a blind date. Is shutting yourself off from particular ways of meeting people too limiting?” (July 2007)

Understanding behaviors. Advice seekers also wanted to understand the behavior of celebrities, questioning men’s behavior as well as the couple as a whole:

“Donald Trump has said that Angelina Jolie is only a 5 in his book. What’s the deal with guys who insult hot girls?” (February 2007)

“Brad Pitt said he and Angelina Jolie will wed when ‘everyone else’ can—i.e., gay couples. Is this an excuse?” (January 2007)

Relationship issues/successes. In addition, advice seekers sought to understand relationships as a whole, including both problems and successes. For example, females questioned what strengthens and harms a relationship, how much effort should be put into a relationship, what roles partners should take in a relationship, and how to evaluate a relationship.

Etiquette/proper behavior. Lastly, female advice seekers questioned what is proper etiquette or behavior in a relationship, such as when a person should make a change in a relationship status or how to end a relationship.

Explanation Themes

Within the explanation portion of the “Paging the Love Doctor” section, Dishell provides explanations that are classified among the following themes:
Gender-neutral. In gender-neutral recommendations, Dishell makes no mention or implication of which gender needs to make certain changes and generally suggests changes for both or either partner. Some recommendations include how to break up, potential for lasting changes, not dismissing promiscuity as wrong, and encouraging healthy friendships with an ex’s family. For the most part, this portion steers clear of gender stereotypes on the whole, whether traditional or non-traditional, by applying explanations and recommendations that are targeted at both or either gender:

“...if one person takes charge and their mate is happy to acquiesce, it can work.” (August 2007)

“Everyone has different PDA comfort levels, and in many cases, it's something that has to be negotiated.” (December 2007)

Warnings. Dishell also provides warnings in which she cautions against falling into dating traps, having unrealistic expectations, and changes in self that are unsupported:

“It's good to have high hopes, but don't be unrealistic. With a new romance, it's normal to feel a head-over-heels rush of love.” (July 2007)

Fears/problems. Also addressed are fears/problems, especially people’s fears of and within relationships:

“It's possible that Sandra viewed marriage as scary because she had seen relationships around her fail and didn't want to be trapped in a bad situation herself.” (February 2007)

Relationship creation/advice. Dishell also explains what creates a relationship, highlighting compatibility, communication and effort. Overcoming obstacles, bonding, finding balance and establishing equality within a relationship are what can strengthen it and make it last:

“Strong relationships aren't always based on love at first sight. When people are passionate about a mate immediately, it's often more a sign of infatuation than representative of long-lasting feelings. The best fit is a guy with whom you are
compatible, have chemistry, and can be yourself—whether that realization takes five
days or five years.” (April 2007)

“In the strongest relationships, partners feel equally appreciated and taken care of.”
(August 2007)

**Understanding females.** In understanding females, this theme consisted of
explanations that the female can and should make changes for the sake of the
relationship, as well as finding ways to improve and better one’s own situation. Females
are once again seen as the ones whose changes can fix a broken relationship:

“Once she figured out what kind of guy she was truly compatible with, she became
at ease with the structure of marriage.” (February 2007)

“Comparing a guy pal to your ex-boyfriends and/or feeling jealousy toward his
girlfriends are clues that you may want to take something platonic to the next level.”
(September 2007)

**Understanding males.** Alternatively, men were understood as being the only ones in
control of changing themselves, having different perspectives, being wary of certain
reputations, and having particular preferences. Men are in control of themselves and are
picky in their decision-making, which could fall under either gender stereotype:

“Many women think they can solve their guys' problems... with love and support,
but it's impossible. He has to overcome it himself.” (January 2007)

“Some men make disparaging remarks about gorgeous women to stand out from the
pack—to make themselves seem more interesting and secure.” (February 2007)

**Instruction Themes**

Unlike the explanation portion of this problem page and much more like the
instruction portion of “Ask Him Anything,” Dishell instructs females most often to make
changes and accept problems in relationships, as expressed in the following themes:

**Avoiding/leaving.** For avoiding/leaving, females should leave bad relationships and
couples need to recognize when to end own relationship. Nevertheless, the advice for
female to leave or avoid destructive relationships is more in the step of promoting independent females, especially since there is no mention of finding a new mate:

“If he’s relapsed more than once and the relationship is damaging your life (you’re picking up his bad habits or he’s hurting your happiness or self-esteem), then it may be time to get out.” (January 2007)

*Communicating.* As for communicating, females are encouraged to express concerns and to find emotional support in friends. Communicating is a common instructive theme seen throughout the problem pages, but the communication here is not advised to be as cautious—females should simply express themselves—and is seen as a tool in healing, which makes it far less stereotypical:

“Discuss your [infidelity] concerns with him. In certain cases, it’s possible that one person is unable to sustain intimacy or that their mate just wasn’t a good fit.” (May 2007)

“So be up-front about your expectations early, like Drew seems to be. In today’s dating world, lots of men are thrilled with an egalitarian romance.” (June 2007)

*Evaluating.* Dishell instructs females to evaluate the situation and relationship to detect issues, feelings, and relationship feelings. The evaluation implies that females can detect relationship problem cues, but is still a step in the right direction in promoting that women rationally consider the state of their current situations:

“If he doesn’t start to focus on you again, then reevaluate the relationship.” (May 2008)

*Waiting/accepting.* Females are also encouraged to wait or accept a male or the situation until the situation changes:

“Love means different things to different people. Nicole may have professed her love early, but you should wait until you’re sure you’re on the same page as your partner.” (May 2008)
Changing/improving. Finally, Dishell instructs both couples and females to change, with couples needing to improve the overall relationship and for females to find ways to resolve issues by spending time with friends and possibly seeking professional help. While females are encouraged to make changes, some of the changes benefit the female more than the relationship and the couple is encouraged to change together as well:

“The key is to focus on what you still enjoy together.” (April 2007)

“Some relationships are harder to get over, and it takes time to get your bearings back. Figure out what you need from a guy. Try writing in a journal, talking with confidants, or seeing a therapist.” (December 2007)

Maxim: “Ask Maxim” & Sex Expert Problem Pages

Similar to Men's Health's “Ask the Sex Professor,” Maxim looks at the sexual aspects of relationship problems in its problem pages. Men are often the ones to make some kind of change for the sake of the relationship in these problem pages.

Question Themes

Maxim advice seekers, in particular, surprisingly showed a great deal of concern about how they were judged by females sexually and also how to please women. Most of the advice sought concerned a relationship rather than casual encounters. Maxim had relationship/sex questions asked in both their sex expert sections and their “Ask Maxim” sections. With these sections combined, the following two themes emerged in the question portion:

Uncertainty. Uncertainty included concern for and insecurity in own and female’s sexual issues. For being a lad magazine focused on drinking, sex, and sports, the vulnerabilities displayed by advice seekers in expressing their own insecurities and
uncertainties in relationships transcended the stereotypical view of men as stable and confident:

“My penis is askew... Is there something wrong with me? I'm totally embarrassed about it.” (January 2007)

“My girlfriend and I recently did it in the ocean, and something about the water made it unpleasant for her. Is this normal?” (April 2007)

Female inquiry. Female inquiry consisted of questions in which men sought to understand females’ sexual preferences and pleasures, including seeking advice on how to encourage females to partake in certain sexual activities. Even in a problem page dedicated to sexual relationships, there is a slight feeling of self-sacrifice in pleasure-seeking, putting the woman first or at least trying to understand her preferences.

“Are there any sexual positions or situations that women generally hate?” (January 2007)

“As far as basic anatomy goes, is the 69 position better for guys or girls?” (June 2007)

Explanation Themes

For the explanation portion, Maxim respondents provided responses that fell into the following themes:

Positive outlook. The positive outlook theme provided men with realistic sexual expectations and reversed the outlook on males’ obstacles. While the positive atmosphere may seem uncharacteristic for a male magazine, it seems along the lines of the reassurances and other light-hearted problem page responses in men’s magazines noted in this study:

[In response to a question about what to do if the condom breaks:] “...be thankful for all the times you were held up at third base.” (October 2007)
Reassurance. Reassurance consisted of responses that assure males that their situation or problem is normal and that females will not judge them. The reassurances are strongest in assuaging men's fears and concerns, which again expresses a more vulnerable side of men:

“But if your penis is healthy and working, don't worry. If a woman has seen enough penises, she'll know they can vary and will probably be fine with it.” (January 2007)

Warnings. With warnings, the Maxim respondent cautioned men about possible sexual deviance, relationship problems, and disadvantages of pregnancy consequences. The warnings presented to men are much more in line with traditional stereotypes, encouraging normalcy and avoidance of relationship problems, which includes pregnancy in this case. Since the male deviance in this case dealt with possible homosexual tendencies of the male, homophobia is encouraged. While pregnancy is obviously a life-changing experience, the fear of fatherhood and the commitment that comes with that is strongly expressed through this response.

Out of male's control. Responses that claim a male is out of control place the control in the hands of the female or that problems are irreparable. This also aligns with men being out of control of the situation since this is contrary to men being strong and in control of their lives:

“A truly committed bisexual woman will make a choice [about sexual preference], one way or the other.” (November 2007)

Technical explanation. Technical explanations were also provided for sexual problems and solutions.

Instruction Themes

In the instruction portion, four themes emerged:
Sacrifice/compromise. Men were encouraged to sacrifice satisfaction or compromise for female’s benefit:

“First, you’ll have to cool your jets for three to six weeks while the wound [from her piercing] heals.” (June 2007)

“There's an easy solution-- just move the show onto your beach towel.” (April 2007)

Change in other. Men were encouraged to change others for the benefit of the female partner:

“Rather than frustrating both parties by furiously trying to bring her to orgasm, take a step back and ask her (very nicely) to masturbate in front of you. If she's OK with this and capable of satisfying herself manually with you in the room, see if she'd do the same thing with her own hand, during the act of intercourse.” (June 2007)

Change in self/take action. With instructions on changing self or taking action, men were encouraged to change their mindsets and accept themselves, as well as to find ways to protect themselves sexually. Maxim respondents also encouraged men to seek professional help with potential health concerns and discouraged “deviant” sexual behaviors. Most of the instructions require men to make the change for the benefit of their relationships, accepting or changing to save the relationship:

“Whichever category you're in [i.e. sexual fantasy of girlfriend having sex with other men or male being bisexual], you and your girlfriend are probably better off as a duo. Your relationship would likely suffer if you brought in a third party, but fantasize all you want.” (January 2007)

Communication. Lastly, men were encouraged to communicate with partners to understand partners’ needs and to communicate own needs and desires. Communication also counters the traditional male stereotypes and makes the Maxim problem pages actually seem to be more progressive with its views of men:

“If your girlfriend is the rum-and-Coke type who rarely experiments, find out what other positions she may enjoy by breaking them down. Instead of asking her if she likes it from behind, for example, ask her why she does or doesn't enjoy deep
penetration specifically. Articulating details tells both of you what pleases her.” (January 2007)

“Does she want to have sex with women?...Ask her. If it was just an experiment, then she’s not gay.” (November 2007)

Magazine Layout

In reference to the third research question, each magazine places a different emphasis on problem pages, and each problem page fills a particular role within its magazine. To begin with, Redbook’s “The Hard Stuff” is usually in every issue and is for the most part the only problem page in the magazine. The rest of the magazine, which is generally around 250 pages including advertisements, deals with a variety of issues ranging from fashion, beauty, and entertainment to relationships and sex to family and home life, including cooking, decorating, and family problems. Therefore, “The Hard Stuff” fits in well with this range of domestic topics. The home life articles and topics reveal the importance of domestic roles, which “The Hard Stuff” supports. Since Redbook attracts an older and more settled demographic of women than Cosmopolitan, these subject matters fit with the interests of this group. Unfortunately, because of the demographics and Redbook’s anchor in traditional gender stereotypes, this magazine’s problem page is likely to be the slowest to evolve into a progressive magazine, if it ever does.

Men’s Health seems to rely the most on problem pages with the three problem pages studied in this paper, in addition to others including “Ask the docs” and “Ask Men’s Health,” which provide health advice and general life advice, respectively. Men’s Health’s more than 200 pages of ads and articles have more of a health focus (hence the name of the magazine) than the other magazines with advice on fitness, diets, and healthy...
living, in addition to relationships and technology. The numerous problem pages in *Men’s Health*, including the ones studied in this paper, all have significant roles in supporting men and providing direction during a transitional period of gender roles. When men’s roles are unclear, *Men’s Health* fills the role of a guide that navigates the difficult territory of understanding what it means to be a modern man.

Of *Cosmopolitan*’s generally 200-plus pages (including advertisements), “Ask Him Anything” and “Paging the Love Doctor” are only minor portions of the magazine. The rest of the magazine discusses mostly sex, fashion, beauty, and celebrities. Nevertheless, both problem pages are two of the few regular and consistent features since much of the rest of the magazine will vary in its articles monthly. *Cosmopolitan* holds fast to traditional bastions of stereotypical female interest, especially that of appearances. Much like the “Ask Him Anything” problem page, *Cosmopolitan* seems far less liberated and independent than might be perceived. Relying upon sex as a message of liberation, “Ask Him Anything” displays how even sexually open-minded problem pages can still retain traditional modes of stereotyping. Nevertheless, as “Paging the Love Doctor” makes strides towards more gender-neutral relationship commentary, *Cosmopolitan* has the possibility of transcending these stereotypical trappings.

*Maxim*, on the other hand, is far less consistent with the problem page portion of its magazine. Although nearly monthly, the “sex doc,” Dr. Sari Locker, gives some type of sex advice, only sporadically does she give advice in a problem page format. Instead, she usually just provides details on a set subject or problem. The “Ask Maxim” portion is filled with a variety of questions that only once in a while hit on relationships or sex issues. The rest of the magazine, which is normally just shy of 150 pages with
advertisements, addresses some of the issues *Cosmopolitan* addresses—fashion, sex, and fashion—but also touches on a variety of seemingly random topics from sports to current events (e.g. the war in Iraq or politics) to entertainment and gadgets. And of course, there are also plenty of pages solely dedicated to gratuitous semi-nude women. With the recent combination of *Maxim* and *Stuff* in late 2007, *Maxim* bloats to around 200 pages, including advertisements, and has a heavier emphasis on gadgets and gear due to the *Stuff* section now included in *Maxim*. The superficial glance at such a variety of topics attempts to appeal to a broad audience. Again, it seems like the unclear gender roles of men make it difficult for men's magazines to create a magazine that fits within what could be considered a typical modern man's role. The fractured male stereotype leaves *Maxim* covering all of its bases with a range of topics. Perhaps for this same reason, problem pages remain inconsistent to provide a variety of approaches to relationship and sexual issues.

**Summary of Data**

**Similarities**

Not surprisingly, because of the reuse of problem page formulas and a finite number of relationship issues, the problem pages have more similarities than differences. The problems addressed in all of the problem pages sought or advised change in either the advice seeker or others in the advice seeker's life. The change in the advice seeker sometimes required making an effort or sacrifice for the sake of the relationship, whereas other changes in the advice seeker encouraged empowerment or enlightenment in understanding particular issues. Changing others usually required a change in behavior
by others towards the advice seeker. The similarities between all of the problem pages are best explained through the metathemes developed from the emergence of each problem page’s many themes.

*Question Metathemes*

*Feelings & understanding.* Many of the advice seekers expressed some uncertainty, sought to understand the opposite sex, and/or were upset by or concerned about someone else. Confusion in trying to understand how the other gender operates is expressed in many of the questions from men and women. Perhaps the confusion and feeling of vast differences between the two genders is perpetuated by the fact that differences between men and women are reinforced by respondents in the problem pages.

*Effect on others.* Additionally, many of the problem pages had advice seekers concerned in particular how their behaviors would affect another, either in attracting another or by hurting another. Both genders are very conscious about how they are perceived by others and what effect their actions may have on another person, generally a significant other.

*Reacting to others.* Lastly, many of the respondents expressed some of their own feelings and concerns in response to the actions of others. Being upset with other people or trying to understand how to deal with other people’s problems were consistent themes found throughout the problem pages.

*Explanation Metathemes*

*Encouraging/Empowering.* Commonly found among these problem pages is reassurance or encouragement of some sort. This builds upon the insecurities expressed by the advice seekers with respondents alleviating the stress and uncertainty felt by the
advice seekers. While nearly every problem page had significant themes of reassurance, "Jimmy the Bartender" did not. As the only male-to-male problem page in this study, it raises the question if the dynamics between men and women make this type of support and encouragement more acceptable and commonplace than it does in male relationships.

**Warning/Discouraging.** Warnings or some type of discouragement is found in every problem page examined. Respondents do not leave advice seekers in a comfortable position with the warnings and discouragements, admonishing the behavior of advice seekers and sometimes painting a bleak picture of the state or potential state of the relationship.

**Describing.** In the explanation portion, most of the problem pages created very complex and varying—sometimes even contradictory—descriptions of each gender. This accounts for the complexities of humans, in general, as well as the complexities of relationship issues. Nevertheless, when blanket statements are made by the respondents, such as men make their feelings clear to women, only to contradict themselves later by claiming sometimes men may be vague or unsure or discreet or even dishonest in their expression of feelings, responses simply become confusing to those who may follow the advice closely. On the other hand, it just may encourage readers to continue reading the problem pages for specific examples that best apply to their own lives.

**Instruction Metathemes**

*Sacrifice/change self.* All of the problem page advice seekers were instructed to make some kind of change in themselves for the sake of the relationship or for the other person in the relationship. Even in “Ask the Sex Professor,” men were instructed to find ways to satisfy females—which in turn requires some change in men’s methods and
behaviors. Neither gender was immune to needing to make some change in their relationships. Nonetheless, some problem changes recommended more change in self than other problem pages.

Additionally, almost every problem page at one point encouraged readers to accept their current situation. The only exception is Maxim, which could be attributed to the predominance of sexual issues that may have called more for a solution and compromise rather than accepting or waiting for resolution. Also, since reassurance was a common theme among Maxim problems, rather than just instructing men to accept their problems, they were told to reframe the issue so that there were no problems at all and that the men were actually normal. Otherwise, acceptance or waiting is a popular theme in these problem pages, stressing that readers cannot resolve all of their issues and must learn to live with certain situations. While patience may seem to be a more female stereotype, this theme transcends gender boundaries in these problem pages.

Empower self. On the other end of the spectrum, all of the problem pages encouraged in one way or another people to change themselves and their behaviors for their own benefit. Sometimes this meant strengthening their own resolve, evaluating the current situation, or leaving bad relationships, whereas others simply encouraged communicating to express one’s own feelings and desires in a relationship. The methods of communication differed for each problem individually – with some recommending direct, straight-forward communication, and others suggesting being discreet or being cautious on communicating at all—but almost all of the problem pages encouraged communication as an important tool in resolving conflict and expressing emotions, even for men.
Change other. Sometimes it was noted, as well, that the other person in the relationship was in need of changing in most problem pages; “Paging the Love Doctor” and “Ask the Sex Professor” were the only exceptions. “Paging the Love Doctor” kept a somewhat gender-neutral stance, and on occasion encouraged females to make changes in themselves, but the structure of this problem page encouraged more change in both partners rather than just one. “Ask the Sex Professor,” on the other hand, was quite focused on how men can improve the situation; even when females experienced problems, men were instructed to find ways to satisfy or help the female.

Differences

Despite the similar themes found throughout this study, differences were apparent as well. Redbook and Men’s Health’s “Jimmy the Bartender” differ from the other relationship problem pages by touching on a range of relationship issues from family and friends to work and romantic/sexual relationships. The themes found regarding the variety of relationships did not differ much from themes of purely romantic relationships since uncertainty and how one affects others remain important issues in all types of relationships. No significant differences were found between friendship relationships and romantic relationships addressed in Men’s Health and Redbook.

Nevertheless, by addressing this range of relationships, the advice seeker became viewed differently. No longer were these young, single men and women seeking relationships and/or sex. Dealing with extended family, children, co-workers, and acquaintances revealed a depth of concerns facing a generally more settled and slightly older crowd than found in Maxim and Cosmopolitan (Readership section, 2007; Key Audience, 2008; Maxim overview, 2002; Advertise with Men’s Health, 2005).
Familial relationships. The roles of parenthood addressed in *Redbook* and *Men's Health* were in stark contrast to the concerns of *Maxim* and *Cosmopolitan* that never addressed the issue of parenthood other than a brief mention in *Maxim* about preventing pregnancy and all of the responsibilities and problems that come along with having a child. This most likely can be attributed to both *Men's Health*’s and *Redbook*’s large percentage of married readers to whom familial issues will be of greater concern than younger, single audiences, such as those of *Cosmopolitan* and *Maxim* (Readership section, 2007; Key Audience, 2008; Maxim overview, 2002; Advertise with Men's Health, 2005).

Even between the two problem pages that did address familial relationship problems, vast differences were discovered. Advice seekers’ mentions of children in “Jimmy the Bartender” focused on how to guide and raise a son properly—daughters were not mentioned. While men could be considered nurturing the growth of their sons in *Men's Health*, the mindset of these fathers is to foster masculine traits in their sons and the role of fatherhood is simplified into how he can make a boy into a man. It is encouraging that fatherhood is mentioned, but it still seems to be of less importance and gravity than the role of motherhood when compared to *Redbook*'s mentions of motherhood. Additionally, advice seekers expressed concern for friends and the state of their friendship, but the concerns did not vary much from that of romantic relationships.

Work relationships. Besides familial roles, work relationships were examined by both problem pages, and while the idea of women working outside of the home was not a foreign concept, stay-at-home moms seemed to remain the norm with no mention of men staying at home with their families. Instead *Men’s Health* portrayed men in the
workplace; few questions addressed the labor of women, whether in the home or outside the home. Nonetheless, one male did ask about the role his wife should take in work, which Jimmy encouraged the female to do whatever makes her happy. This respect shown towards women is surprising since the tagline for “Jimmy the Bartender” states, “On women, work, and other stuff that screws up men’s lives,” playing to the lad magazine aspect of Men’s Health (Jimmy the Bartender, 2007). Instead, it does not display many traditional gender stereotypes in its explanations.

Redbook regularly supported motherhood, which overshadowed the value of a career in many of the problems. Even when Karbo supports the idea of women working, it is because the career enables the woman to be a better mother. In the August edition of “The Hard Stuff,” Karbo instructs a single mother to not follow through with her feelings for her superior at work because she could lose her job and would not be able to support her children. This is the only time in the study where Karbo strongly supports the idea of a woman working.

Romantic relationships. Women’s problem pages more frequently fall into the trap of traditional gender stereotypes as opposed to the men’s problem pages. The only exception would be “Paging the Love Doctor” in Cosmopolitan, which remained the most gender-neutral of all of the problem pages. In Redbook the question themes revealed sensitive and emotionally fragile female stereotypes mixed with concern for others and how the females affect others. While there were some controlling aspects of the females wanting to change others in their lives, the empathetic and emotionally fragile problems overshadowed this slight variance in gender perspectives. In addition, the explanation themes emphasized the importance of traditionally stereotypical views of
women as mothers, diminishing the importance of work outside the home. While the explanation redeems itself partially by not pushing women to abandon their work roles completely, women are seen in a one-dimensional perspective. While women are not expected to help everyone in their lives, most of the burden of repairing relationships falls upon the women. Additionally, men are viewed as being in control of their emotions, knowing what they want, and only being intrigued by women who make them “chase” them. Not all is completely traditional in its presentation, though, since women are encouraged to strengthen and empower themselves, but other traditional themes remain the dominant themes for *Redbook*.

As for *Cosmopolitan*, “Ask Him Anything” advice seekers were less traditionally stereotypical in their requests, although signs of whining and needing to repair the relationship provided a fairly traditional stereotypical aura. The explanation portion of the responses were also mixed with traditional and nontraditional stereotypes, especially in describing men as clear-minded, incompetent in communicating their feelings, and focused on sex, while also claiming that men want relationships and commitment. Small, *Cosmopolitan’s* “Ask Him Anything” respondent, also mixes female stereotypes in the explanation portion by promoting female independence and strength, while also describing women as paranoid, making mistakes, and socially intuitive. The most stereotypical portion of “Ask Him Anything” is found in the instruction portion, where women are expected to accept situations and support others. Encouragement to leave bad relationships falls into the trap of traditional stereotypes by encouraging females to find a new replacement for the mate. Women are the ones often required to make change in the relationship, including changing themselves, and communication must be carefully
calculated so others are not upset or hurt. Most of these instructions fall into traditional female stereotypes.

Men’s problem pages, on the other hand, are more in the direction of non-traditional gender stereotypes. Male advice seekers revealed insecurities and empathy in their questions. In the explanations, stereotypes were a bit more mixed, highlighting the strengths of women as determined and rational, while providing conflicting insight highlighting pettiness. Men were the recipients of more traditional stereotypes, viewing them as clear-thinking, skillful in attracting women, sex-oriented, and essentially normal and problem-free. Nonetheless, men’s errors were pointed out, and familial roles were promoted, bringing to light a different perspective of men. Even non-traditional actions, such as men cooking for women, were supported. Unlike those in women’s problem pages, instructions in men’s problem pages did not fit with the traditional male stereotype. They encouraged communication, sacrifice and making changes for the sake of the relationship. Additionally, men were rarely advised to leave a relationship and were encouraged more often to find ways to resolve the situation.

“Paging the Love Doctor” remained the most gender-neutral. While affirming some traditional stereotypes at times, it focused more on the couple as a whole and individuals regardless of gender. Since this section is not generally about advice seekers’ personal issues, but rather those of celebrities, it creates more of a forum for advice seekers to try to understand general social behaviors and etiquette rather than express concern over their own issues. The questions are signs more of curiosity than about concern for another, which does not fall under any gender stereotype. This unique approach in examining the relationship problems of celebrities enabled it to challenge traditional
gender stereotypes in its approach to relationship issues and to encourage looking at the situation in its entirety.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Discussion

In some ways, it is surprising that women's problem pages relied more heavily on traditional gender stereotypes since *Cosmopolitan*, in particular, took a step toward moving away from traditional gender roles more than 40 years. Since men's magazines are so recent and launched in a lad magazine format with a focus on highly masculine activities of drinking, sex, and sports, it seems that they would portray stronger traditional gender roles in their problem pages. Nonetheless, the opposite was found to be true in this study, and it reveals a great deal about the magazines themselves.

*Redbook*'s slow transition to a more liberated female is not as surprising since this was foreshadowed by Gauntlett's claims of *Redbook* being heavily dominated by traditional female roles, as was supported by the dominant domestic and mothering roles found in "The Hard Stuff." *Cosmopolitan*, on the other hand, has a history of transitioning from traditional female roles to the more liberated female in the 1970s.

While *Cosmopolitan*'s problem pages steered clear from mentions of work and familial roles of females, females' roles in relationships portrayed a traditional dependent and complacent female role. The question and explanation themes were often a mix of stereotypes of both men and women, and although they may have taken into account
more idiosyncrasies of the situations, this does not seem to be the case. Rather, the respondent emphasizes that women are strong and independent, but does not shy away from considering their actions unstable and petty. If each situation was considered individually, these portrayals would not be as consistent throughout the responses, and instead some women would be highlighted as being more dependent and others would be highlighted for their emotional instability.

Men's magazines, on the other hand, have been developed in a time of changing gender roles for men, and the lad magazines were a response to a new masculinity being developed that exaggerated masculine traits. Yet their problem pages were far more subdued, humbling men and strengthening the importance and role of women. As previously mentioned in Chapter 4, the changing perspectives of men leave their roles in society as unclear. These problem pages take this opportunity to instruct men on how to be "good" partners, one of the many roles men must perform. Some of the female-oriented advice may also have to do with the fact that women are supposedly the respondents for most of the men's problem pages, excluding "Jimmy the Bartender." Even though Jimmy has traditional and nontraditional stereotypes mixed in that problem page, he seems to be the hardest on the men and is often respectful of women's needs and abilities. Assuming that "Jimmy the Bartender" is, in fact, written by a male, men may be oversensitive to the need to be aware of and careful of not falling into gender stereotype traps in fear of potential repercussions from those offended. Women speaking to women may not be as concerned about offending their audience, although this would not explain "Ask Him Anything," where a male responds to a female audience.
Although metrosexuality seems to be on the rise, as noted in Chapter 2, the depiction of men and women do not fit with the characterizations of metrosexuality. Where metrosexual men are vain and narcissistic, the *Men's Health* and, to a lesser extent, the *Maxim* men were portrayed as unsure and concerned about the needs and desires of others. This uncertainty in relationships transcends to the possible uncertainty some men may experience in their gender roles as a whole. Since *Men's Health* is known for its "touchy-feely" side, it is not out of character completely to display men's uncertainty, but still not consistent with the lad magazine aura. Women also do not fit with the metrosexual female characterization of a strong and aggressive female. While this is touched upon in the problem pages, women remain responsible for repairing and nurturing relationships as well as men in women's problem pages.

While all of the problem pages only played a small part in the magazines on a whole, they remained a consistent part of each magazine with the only exception to this being *Maxim*. The consistent messages and metathemes promoted by the problem pages may not have a great impact immediately, but over time, the constant exposure to these problem pages that reinforce the same metathemes may influence readers. Even if the stereotypes themselves may not influence the readers, the formula of applying metathemes to one's problems may play a stronger role since this is consistent throughout the various magazine problem pages.

Reflecting back on the feminist media theory where "media reflect society's dominant social values and symbolically denigrate women... by depicting them in stereotypical roles" (van Zoonen, 1994, p.17), it may not be intentional of the magazines to limit themselves to gender stereotypes, it remains a problem in all of the problem
pages. None of the problem pages is free of traditional stereotypes for either gender. This is particularly true for women's problem pages. Nevertheless, the feminist media theory's proposed communication process portrays men as the ones sending these distorted messages, but that is not always the case in the problem pages. The male respondent of "Jimmy the Bartender" challenges traditional gender stereotypes, while female respondent Karen Karbo from Redbook is guilty of sending several distorted gender messages. Therefore, claiming that men are the ones sending these distorted messages is not a fair assessment in the case of these problem pages.

The role of gender with the problem page respondents is also quite problematic when the opposite gender serves as the respondent in problem pages. Readers of "Ask Him Anything" from Cosmopolitan and its men's magazine counterpart of "Ask the Girl Next Door" from Men's Health, presumably rely upon the respondent to act as a representative of the opposite sex to explain the feelings and issues of their respective gender. This ostensibly gives the respondent greater authority in understanding their own gender, although their knowledge of their own gender is not necessarily any better than that of anyone else. Nonetheless, readers may strongly value their advice if they do view these respondents as representatives of their gender.

As for normative theory, the writers of these responses have a responsibility to their readers not to support traditionally stereotypical gender roles. Although drastic changes may be difficult, there are simple changes that can be made. For example, one easy suggestion for "Ask Him Anything" respondent Jonathan Small is that he could continue encouraging women to leave or avoid bad relationships, but there is no need to follow-up these suggestions with telling women to find another partner or relationship. This advice,
whether for men or women, should encourage some level of independence rather than encouraging a perpetual string of relationships. Learning to be content with oneself and understanding one’s needs and reasons for a relationship should be resolved instead of encouraging rebound relationships that have potential to hurt the other person, as well as the advice seeker. Advice for readers to empower and strengthen themselves is ideal for both genders, and advice along these lines should be continued. Based on the insecurities and uncertainties often expressed by advice seekers, they are in need of some support. While each situation needs to be evaluated on an individual basis, encouragement and strengthening individuals is beneficial to both genders as long as the opposite sex is not disrespected in these responses. One area in obvious need of repair is Redbook’s problem page, where motherhood is highly praised with little attention to the working woman. Mothers are obviously the target audience of Redbook, but according to their demographics, more than a quarter of their audience consists of working mothers. Stay-at-home mothers are glorified by “The Hard Stuff” respondent Karbo, while working mothers receive more criticism and less recognition. This excludes a large segment of their readers, who are already in a difficult position juggling their families and careers, and they probably are not in need of additional criticism from a magazine. Besides for the sake of ensuring more ethical journalism standards, it would benefit Redbook to target and appease (to an extent) working mothers since they have the possibility of having their own spending power. Nevertheless, if the domestic roles of women—or men—are going to be addressed by problem pages, they need to be balanced out by offering the alternative in a fair fashion. Balance and empowerment without degradation would be useful for all problem pages.
What most likely has a major impact on this mixture of stereotypes and the encouragement of men to take on more stereotypically female resolution method is the shared formula that all of these problem pages have. As identified in the metathemes, many of these problem pages address problems in a similar fashion with advice seekers expressing confusion and uncertainty, many times concerning their own feelings and behaviors, and respondents replying with reassurances, explanations of each gender’s behavior, and empowering tools in addition to advice to accept the situation or for advice seekers to change themselves. Since these lifestyle magazines are all constructed in a similar fashion, it is to be expected that their problem pages would reflect similar ways of handling issues as found in the problem pages of other lifestyle magazines.

This formula fits with more traditional female approaches to handling relationships. Therefore, while women’s problem pages may advise women to behave in a more traditionally stereotypical fashion of a female, men are provided the same advice as women are. Because of this, the advice becomes contrary to typical male behavior, thus making it nontraditional behavior for men. The formula of problem pages best explains why the stereotypes do not necessarily fit with the expectations of Cosmopolitan and Redbook being more progressive women’s magazines and the expectation of the men’s magazines to use more traditional gender roles.

The feminized problem page formula identified herein does have a benefit in dealing with relationships. While the magazines do not perfectly utilize this formula each time, by generally using this consistent pattern in resolving issues, both men and women are advised to handle relationship problems in similar and complementary fashions. Instead of men’s magazines encouraging men to simply leave a relationship and to disregard
women’s feelings, men are advised to be more considerate in their relationship interactions. Women are advised to act similarly. By having respondents encourage similar resolution patterns in relationships, this should ease conflict resolution since the same methods would be employed by both genders if using the advice from these problem pages. When men are instructed to act in more traditional masculine ways and women are instructed to act in traditional female ways when resolving relationship issues, it can create frustration for both men and women who are utilizing very different and incongruent resolution procedures. Therefore, this feminized formula can be beneficial to the relationship as a whole, even if it does have some pitfalls.

By identifying this feminized problem page formula, magazines and their problem page respondents can find ways to improve upon the formula and to use it to its strengths. A more gender-neutral formula might serve magazines better to avoid reinforcing traditional female stereotypes that favor sacrifice over empowerment. Additionally, it may be difficult for men to completely embrace problem pages with a feminized formula, and a gender-neutral approach could be less difficult of a transition in handling relationships. Nevertheless, this formula serves an important function in lifestyle magazines and ultimately does not seem to be harmful to either gender or to the relationships as a whole. On the contrary, a feminized formula is probably more beneficial than a traditionally masculine formula, which would discourage many of the feminized relationship solutions that have the potential for positive impacts on many relationships.
Limitations

Scholar David Gauntlett noted the following regarding men’s magazines:

...not all men read these magazines, and every person who does look at them will make a selective, active reading. Nevertheless, the magazines are indeed a ‘significant site’ for discourses of masculinity, which are reflected, reproduced and perhaps manipulated on their pages. (2002, p. 154)

It is important to keep in mind when examining these problem pages that not every reader will thoroughly read each problem page, and what will be absorbed from each reading will be an even smaller fraction of information. While this reduces some of the significance of this study, the selective nature of audiences exists throughout media, leaving it difficult to pinpoint in media research what will have an impact on audiences and what will not.

Additionally, although it is noted how problem pages are important to some readers, there are many other articles in each magazine that did not get addressed in this study that may offer deeper insight or even completely different views than those of the problem pages.

Of course, limiting this study to only one year leaves areas unexplored, particularly in Maxim. Because Maxim did not consistently publish problem pages in 2007, the analysis of Maxim is limited and could be improved with further study of prior or future years. This could also be translated to the other magazines, although it would probably not be necessary as much due to the depth of problem pages in the other magazines in the year studied.
Lastly, these magazines do not reflect all of the magazine reading population. The magazines from this study, while highly circulated, are focused to a set demographic of young, affluent, white men or women. Therefore, the extent to which this study impacts the population is limited mostly to the group targeted by these magazines. This does not diminish the importance of this study, but is notable since the same conclusions may not be drawn in other lifestyle magazines’ problem pages.

Conclusion

With the emergence of the new genre of men’s lifestyle magazines, an opportunity is available to compare messages being sent to young men and women on gender roles in relationships. Since the purpose of advice columns is to advise readers on how to behave, especially in relationships, their messages require special attention. Conflicting messages are found when contrasting men’s and women’s magazines, possibly contributing to further problems in relationships since men and women are receiving contradictory information on how to behave with the other sex and even with their own sex.

Future research would benefit from examining problem pages and lifestyle magazines as a whole from various perspectives, much like how this study has contributed to examining lifestyle magazines’ problem pages from a new approach. Studies could be expanded to include other lifestyle magazine sections, especially the typically predominant relationship section that extends beyond just problem pages. Some of the articles found in these relationship sections would be very beneficial to the study of gender stereotypes and expectations. For example, *Maxim* had an article in its July 2007
issue entitled, “Women’s Magazines,” that discussed “how to neutralize the creature [women’s magazine] pages create” (Anonymous, July 2007, p. 115). Evaluating an article such as this could provide some interesting and useful insight on how men’s magazines instruct men to act in response to women’s magazines. Future research in relationship sections would probably also have plenty of opportunities for examining how men and women are instructed to act in relationships, quite possibly including how to behave in response to the other gender’s lifestyle magazines. The relationship portion of lifestyle magazines, as well as the other pages of these magazines, provides a great deal of material that lends itself to an in-depth analysis of problem page gender relations.

Additionally, this study formed a foundation that could be built upon by other lifestyle magazines that could benefit from a similar analysis. Lifestyle magazines aimed at younger and older demographics, specific ethnic and racial groups, gays and lesbians, and audiences from other countries would provide even more areas of comparison and understanding. The four magazines studied here only provide a small slice of lifestyle magazines. Carefully examining the audience may be beneficial as well, whether when looking at lifestyle magazines aimed at various demographics or even when just looking at the four magazines described herein.

What is most useful about this study is that despite women’s magazines’ movement from very traditional gender roles and stereotypes about women prior to the 1960s and 1970s, men’s magazines’ problem pages’ have more progressive and less traditional viewpoints of gender roles. These unexpected results would be useful to identify in other magazines. Gender stereotypes in lifestyle magazines may not be highly influential to
readers, but they do reinforce negative perceptions of other genders as well as their own and provide limited gender role models.

The results of this study also strongly highlight the presence of a formula used in these magazines that tends to encourage advice seekers to change themselves more often than encouraging change in others. Encouraging change in oneself might be expected in a problem page since people can really only fix themselves, but the detailed treatment of change in all of the magazines, as detailed in the metathemes, really highlights the formula of advice seekers needing to change for the relationship. Many times the advice seeker sees himself or herself needing to change or is advised to change for the relationship, somewhat reflecting a more feminine approach of fixing and nurturing a relationship. This feminine approach challenged the expected gender stereotype reliance of these magazines and can provide a new framework for looking at other research in lifestyle magazines, so that formulas and patterns are identified.

It would be beneficial for women's magazines to change their perspectives in their advice columns so that they portray women as more independent and stronger characters, reducing some of the stereotypes used of pettiness and instability. Men's magazines should continue to display the emotional needs of men without diminishing their character and should translate some of the messages from their problem pages into other areas of their magazines that might need a more balanced perspective. Portraying the positives and negatives of each person is a key part of problem pages, but there is no need to maintain skewed gender stereotypes when encouraging new and diverse perspectives of individuals rather than genders as a whole could encourage readers to view people in the same way.
The use of the metathemes and a formula that lends itself more to a female approach in resolving problems for all of the problem pages leaves some room for improvement. While this formula is not necessarily “wrong” for magazines to use, they leave magazines open to handling problems in a more repetitive fashion without examining each problem on a more thorough and individual basis. Even if these magazines do not take themselves seriously, they owe their loyal readers respondents who can support their advice with more than just entertainment and mere opinions. Since these respondents act in the capacity of a counselor or therapist without the credentials (or at least generally not noted by the magazines if these respondents do have therapy credentials), it would be in the best interest for readers to have respondents who have some background in how to properly counsel someone on their relationship choices. This would meet journalistic ethical standards and would probably be beneficial in avoiding the use of gender stereotypes and tired formulas in resolving relationship issues. Unfortunately, the use of professional therapists, or even just those with some background in relationship counseling, may defeat the entertainment goals of these magazines and probably goes beyond the financial and other resources available to these magazines.

Lifestyle magazines, particularly women’s magazines, have made some progress from their traditional gender stereotype roots. The encouragement of both men and women to approach resolving relationship issues from a more female-oriented formula of revealing emotions, insecurity, and sacrifice of the advice seekers is one way to handle relationship issues. Nevertheless, it should not be the only way to solve relationship issues. Encouraging the empowerment of the readers is something that is probably most beneficial without strongly reinforcing traditional gender stereotypes. These problem
pages need to continue to find ways to strengthen individuals while addressing the intricacies of each relationship problem presented. Focusing on only one approach to resolving issues is limiting and may exclude other beneficial ways of repairing a situation. Furthermore, while men are challenged to use more female approaches in their resolution of issues, women are encouraged to continually use the same traditional female approaches to resolving problems. Strategies for resolving and handling problems should aim to be gender neutral and/or gender blind—male and female approaches should be used in both genders' problem pages. Through transcending the formulas set by these problem pages, readers will receive more advice that can better fit with and resolve their issues.
## APPENDIX I

### Table 6

*(Partial) Sex Stereotype Index (Williams & Best, 1977, p. 108)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male Stereotypes</th>
<th>Female Stereotypes</th>
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<td>Sentimental</td>
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<td>Emotional</td>
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<td>Pleasant</td>
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Table 6 (Continued)

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<th>Female Stereotypes</th>
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