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Look Younger, Lose 10 Pounds, and Influence Your Audience:
A Content Analysis of Popular Men's and Women's Magazine Cover Blurbs and the Messages
They Project to Their Readers

A thesis
presented to
the faculty of the Department of Communication
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Master of Arts in Professional Communication

by
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May 2005

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Keywords: Cultivation, Framing, Stereotype, Gender, Magazines

ABSTRACT

Look Younger, Lose 10 Pounds, and Influence Your Audience:

A Content Analysis of Popular Men's and Women's Magazine Cover Blurbs and the Messages

They Project to Their Readers

by

Rhajon N. Colson-Smith

This research examined cover blurbs on popular men's and women's magazines and the messages they communicate to their readers about women. The content analysis looked at the covers of *Esquire*, *Gentlemen's Quarterly*, *Vogue*, and *Good Housekeeping* from 1999 through 2003 to see what these magazines were cultivating and framing through their cover text during the time surrounding the new millennium. The women's magazines examined promoted gendered messages, messages encouraging an idealistic or unattainable ideal of women, to their readers more so than the men's magazines researched. There also appeared to be an increase of gendered messages in the men's and women's magazine sample as a whole from 1999 through 2003. In order to counteract these findings and for progress to be made during the current millennium, individuals working within the communication field must realize the power of the written word and make efforts to discourage the presentation of gendered messages.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Many individuals rely on magazines for the latest news and entertainment. Often, individuals choose a magazine based not only on its reputation but on the several blurbs adorning the front cover. These blurbs provide a glimpse of the entire magazine's content and will determine if the magazine makes it into the hands of the consumer or is simply left on the shelf. Through a publication's cover blurbs and images, the magazine hopes to make a connection with its audience, inviting the reader to take a look inside. "Magazines emphasize a sense of personal connection—attempting to foster a bond between reader and publication...If the magazine fails to maintain a vital, concerned relationship with the reader, it will wither."¹

There is a publication for almost any interest imaginable, bringing thousands of possibilities for a reader to choose from at the newsstand.² While there are over 17,000 magazines available, some inevitably rise to the top as being the most popular or best selling in the nation.³ These "magazines challenge the defining parameters of mediated communication and interpersonal communication; reconfigure and blur the boundaries between one medium and another; and defy maxims about constraints of time, space, and identity."⁴ This thesis examined several of the country's most read magazines for both men and women to determine what the magazines, or more specifically their covers, were saying to their publics about women. The magazines chosen for this research include: *Esquire*, *Gentlemen's Quarterly (GQ)*, *Vogue*, and *Good Housekeeping*. These publications were studied to investigate the messages their front covers presented to audiences at the turn of and immediately following the new millennium.

"From television sitcoms and music videos to magazines and movies, the media offer a wealth of messages regarding the expected role of women both in interpersonal relationships and

in society more broadly.”⁵ These various media are presenting idealized images and messages to their audiences of how a woman should look, act, love, and live in today’s society.⁶ Further, “the barrage of messages about thinness, dieting, and beauty tells ‘ordinary’ women that they are always in need of adjustment— and that the female body is an object to be perfected” (“Beauty and Body Image,” 2003). These messages come in all forms. Most commonly seen in images, messages about a woman’s body can also manifest themselves in the form of the written word. The power of the magazine to influence and promote these messages about women is many times underestimated. This medium’s messages about women are a growing problem in today’s society and should be of great concern not only to women but to men as well.

This study was done to help make advances toward correcting this deficiency. Findings from this research could be potentially significant to both men and women, providing both genders with valuable information on messages that *Esquire*, *Gentlemen’s Quarterly (GQ)*, *Vogue*, and *Good Housekeeping* magazine covers project to the public and what these magazines may say about women. This research could be beneficial in helping to combat the perpetuation of stereotypes involving objectification and traditional feminine ideals of the female population. In addition, it could also help determine the sources of many of the insecurities women feel concerning body image. If the sources that encourage this view of women are identified, perhaps steps can be taken to modify them, allowing women to be recognized for their intellects and contributions to society rather than their bodies or the traditional gender roles society dictates they should play.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Several subject areas must be explored in order to develop a point of reference for this current research. One must first examine the cultivation and framing theories as underlying forces at work. This review of literature examines the evolution of women in magazines during the twentieth century and looks specifically at how they are portrayed in both men's and women's magazines today. In addition, the importance of a magazine's front cover, the prevalence of media stereotypes on these covers, and previous research surrounding them is investigated. Finally, an examination of current issues concerning the front covers and text of magazines are studied to exhibit the need for research looking specifically at the power of the written word on the covers of popular men's and women's magazines.

Cultivation and Framing Theories

The foundation for this research is rooted in the cultivation and framing theories. First studied in the 1960s, cultivation theory developed out of research known as Cultural Indicators.⁷ This research study has been called "the longest-running continuous media-research undertaking in the world."⁸ Over 35,000 characters and 3,000 programs have been observed and recorded as part of this study.⁹

The cultivation theory centers on the effects television, particularly violence on television, has on its viewers.¹⁰ The father of the cultivation theory, George Gerbner, developed the cultivation hypothesis which states that an individual's extreme exposure to "cultural imagery" will shape that individual's view of reality.¹¹ "People think of television as programs,

but television is more than that; television is a mythology- highly organically connected, repeated everyday so that the themes that run through all programming and news have the effect of cultivating conceptions of reality.”¹² Cultivation theorists believe that, in television, the more an individual is exposed to television reality, the more he or she watches television, becoming dependent on media for perspective and guidance.¹³

In the early stages, cultivation theorists were primarily interested in the effects of television violence on its viewers.¹⁴ Over the years, however, “the investigation has been expanded to include sex roles, images of aging, political roles, environmental attitudes, science, health, religion, minorities, occupations, and other topics.”¹⁵ While early studies focused on immediate behavior and attitude changes in an audience caused by television’s messages, cultivation studies now look at the totality of the medium and whether it may cause a shift in an audience’s behavior and/or attitude over the long run.¹⁶ Some theorists suggest that the effects of cultivation theory impact the individual’s attitude rather than his or her behavior.¹⁷ “Cultivation research is concerned with the most general consequences of long term exposure to centrally-produced, commercially supported systems of stories.”¹⁸

In the cultivation theory’s in-depth study on television, several patterns have emerged.¹⁹ White males are over-represented as prominent and financially secure, while females are outnumbered and are not viewed as having the same opportunities given to them as males.²⁰ Women are also more likely to be viewed as victims.²¹ “Cultivation researchers have argued that these messages of power, dominance, segregation, and victimization cultivate relatively restrictive and intolerant views regarding personal morality and freedoms, women’s roles, and minority rights.”²² Although this statement is made in reference to television, it may hold true in various other mass media formats as well.

According to Golan and Wanta, framing is a concept that allows media to organize their views on the content they wish to communicate to the public.²³ How a particular topic is framed can determine if and how the topic will be absorbed or viewed by a particular audience of media.²⁴ Often referenced as a news delivery technique or for delivery of political propaganda, framing is, as theorist Entman said, "...to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating context, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation."²⁵ Through framing, mass media are able to have a significant impact on building "social reality."²⁶ "...A frame is an ever-present discursive device that channels the audience as it constructs the meaning of particular communicative acts."²⁷

Today's media-reliant society depends on frames as mental shortcuts in order to gather and process information more quickly and effectively.²⁸ These shortcuts cue the audience on how to interpret and process the message.²⁹ How an issue is framed will trigger how an individual makes sense of the world.³⁰ The Frame Works Institute, an organization whose purpose is to investigate media's use of framing, defines framing as being made up of several elements.³¹ These elements are messengers, metaphors, messages, visuals, stories, numbers, and context.³² According to this institute, these elements signal meaning to those who receive the message.³³

Both the framing and the cultivation theories can be seen in the mass media's representations of and suggestions for a woman's body image. A 2004 research study looked at the role television plays in the development of body image among white and African American college-age women.³⁴ This study used cultivation theory, in its original television medium, as its theoretical basis for research. The research hypothesis derived from the belief that

“...representations of women’s bodies shown on television are so skewed, adopting this reality for young women is believed to lead to decreased satisfaction with their own bodies, a strong desire to be thinner, and disordered eating behavior.”³⁵ Findings from this study indicated that there is a strong correlation between a white woman’s negative view of her body and her exposure to mainstream television. This study did not, however, find this same correlation among African American college-age women.³⁶ This racial discrepancy aside, this study does point to the presence of cultivating influence of media on women.

Another research study, conducted in 2002, examined how men’s and women’s fashion magazine covers are cultivating and framing the importance of physical appearance to their various audiences.³⁷ The results from this research found that “...women’s magazines do place a greater emphasis on the importance of appearance than do men’s magazines. Women’s magazines contain significantly more appearance related textual messages, physical self-improvement messages, and ‘same sex’ appearance messages.”³⁸ These framed and cultivating messages are encouraging their readers to alter themselves in order to meet an unattainable ideal.

Researchers from Indiana University examined how media coverage of sex and sexually transmitted infections differs between men’s and women’s popular magazines. Again, one of the underpinnings of the study was the cultivating and framing effects these magazines have on their readers.³⁹ “If television and film viewing can shape attitudes and influence perceptions of reality, it is reasonable to argue that men and women’s magazines might have similar effects.”⁴⁰ When young adults read popular magazines such as *Glamour* or *GQ*, “...during the height of their sexually active years, the information about sex could serve to influence attitudes about sexual behavior, including perceptions of risk.”⁴¹ This research found there to be a difference between men’s and women’s magazine discussions of sex and sexually transmitted infections

and that men's magazines contain fewer articles about sex and its risks than do women's magazines.⁴² From this research, women's magazines appear to frame and cultivate sex and the issues surrounding it in a more frequent manner than their male counterparts.

Finally, in a March 2004 edition of *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, researchers from the University of Michigan studied the correlations between the sexual attitudes of young women and their reading of women's magazines.⁴³ Based on cultivation theory, "...it was hypothesized that frequent readings of teen- and adult- focused women's magazines would be associated with greater acceptance of themes reported to appear in each magazine group."⁴⁴ The findings of this research fell in line with this hypothesis. Researchers found that "...reading magazines specifically for appearance advice was positively related to women's reports of objectifying their own bodies and with a belief that women should be indirect and alluring when attracting men's interest."⁴⁵ The use of magazines, and the way certain messages are framed in these magazines, are cultivating beliefs on gender issues and the roles women play in relationships to the male and female readers of these magazines.

The Evolution of the Woman on Magazine Covers of the Early Twentieth Century

The woman, as presented by mass media, has taken many forms and has evolved over time. Of particular importance in this study is how women are projected to various audiences on magazine covers. The Girl on the Magazine Cover, a book written by Carolyn Kitch, examines the evolution of the woman on the front page of this particular print media over time.⁴⁶

According to Kitch, it is the early twentieth century that laid the foundation for the perception and acceptance of the modern day woman.⁴⁷

...Media stereotypes of women first emerged not in mass media from the 1970s to the 1990s but in mass media of the first three decades of the century... .Current media

definitions of, and debates about, femininity, masculinity, class status, and Americanness have their origins in media of a century ago.⁴⁸

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, the magazine industry quickly evolved into a business of selling the publication not only to readers but also selling these readers to advertisers.⁴⁹ The best way for a magazine to accomplish this business, and thus make a successful name for itself, was to grab its audience's attention. This was done through the magazine cover. The cover "...declared the magazine's personality and promise. It also made a statement about the intended reader."⁵⁰ At the beginning of the twentieth century, photography in newspapers was beginning to become more regularly seen but was still far from the norm. In contrast, the magazine industry as a whole continued to use illustration on their front covers simply because the topics discussed within a magazines' pages were not dealing with reality but rather idealism.⁵¹

At the turn of the century, *Ladies Home Journal* did a series of covers intended to represent the "American Woman." "In the artists' tableaux, ideological messages emerged less from the figures of individual women than from the entire setting. The meaning of the 'American woman' had to do not so much with her looks, but rather with her location and context."⁵² At the beginning the twentieth century, this magazine was informing its audience that the roles women played in American society were expanding.⁵³

The onset of the twentieth century also saw the emergence of another image of the American woman on the covers of many popular magazines. This image was known as the *Gibson Girl*, a simple pen and ink sketch of a woman that sometimes took the form of a portrait while other times an entire person. This image "...looked quite similar from one drawing to the next, and this consistency made her the first visual stereotype of women in American mass

media. Her rapid rise to fame created a blueprint for the commercial uses of such a stereotype.”⁵⁴ The *Gibson Girl* represented beauty to the American public, thereby encouraging women that having beauty was their greatest asset.⁵⁵ The image of the *Gibson Girl* easily made its way from the pages of many magazines into the popular American culture of the time, promoting new ideas on gender roles. This woman was a rather strong female who was well established financially and was often times seen in some type of conflict with a male.⁵⁶ “The strong will of women was a recurring theme in Gibson’s commentary on turn-of-the-century gender relations.”⁵⁷

Other portrayals of women in magazines during this period of the early 1900s also portrayed women in more progressive and nontraditional roles. Many magazine readers experienced on magazine covers for the first time women engaging in outdoor activities like horse back riding and canoeing rather than sitting in the parlor sipping tea. In addition to this modern view of women was the image of young ladies as active athletes and college students.⁵⁸ “Whether or not she was portrayed as educated or athletic, the magazine cover girl of this era was almost always shown outside the home, a rhetorical shift that acknowledged real change in women’s social roles.”⁵⁹

It is important to note that a magazine’s audience played a very important role in determining what image of the modern, American woman was projected in the early 1900s. In many of the magazines where the readership was primarily male, the image of the American woman was more subdued and traditional, with the woman appearing more demur. Likewise, in magazines targeted primarily to women, the American female was a great deal more progressive.⁶⁰ “On magazine covers and at the movies, the idea of a new sexually free American

woman was presented as a threat to men, and she was captured in at least three new visual ‘types’ of the American woman.”⁶¹

Mass media of the early 1900s to 1920s were threatened by these three progressive movements of socialism, immigration, and feminism. Of major focus in the area of feminism was the suffrage movement and many “radical” publications during this time took on the responsibility to again shape the idea of the modern American woman.⁶² The image seen on these magazine covers portrayed a woman as a heroic figure from a Greek myth. “Artists working for women’s rights periodicals did not invent new imagery to visualize the New Woman who was a suffragist; instead, they used familiar and comforting notions of womanhood to make suffrage seem natural and right.”⁶³

Media, and magazines specifically, continued to be a voice for women’s right to vote as well as an advocate for nontraditional gender roles as the United States entered World War I. At the outbreak of war, however, the American popular culture turned sharply back to the traditional image of the woman. For example, “...magazines of the day made clear that a woman’s noblest wartime calling was that of mother, whether her children were young adults serving their country or youngsters who represented the future of democracy.”⁶⁴ This value in the traditional role of women extended through media and pop culture well after the end of the war, making the introduction of the progressive woman at the turn of the century all but forgotten.

With this revival of the traditional woman image seen throughout American media, came an emphasis and focus on the American family. Images of both femininity and masculinity graced the covers of many popular magazines at the time.⁶⁵ The family was a symbol of strength during this time and through the persuasion of the magazine cover, promoted twentieth-century commercial and social lifestyle.⁶⁶ The magazine cover was a powerful tool.

Cover imagery of this era expressed—for the first time in media that were truly national—ideas about gender and about class, gradually diffusing those identity tensions by blending them into a larger notion about what it meant to be a ‘typical American’ in the modern era.⁶⁷

Women’s and Men’s Magazines Today and Their Representations of Women

It most certainly comes as no surprise that an idealized concept of beauty is being presented in many media today. Mass media of today’s American culture are constantly influencing society, imparting their ideas of norms, values, and standards that will no doubt be embraced.⁶⁸ A research study conducted by Dr. Nancy Signorielli in 1997 examined six different forms of mass media and the messages that these media are sending to young women. Her findings from this research were actually twofold. “The media offer girls many positive role models, women shown being self-reliant and using intelligence, honesty, and efficiency to achieve their goals.”⁶⁹ While this may seem to be an encouraging sign, this research also found that these same media, including magazines, reinforce stereotypical messages concerning a woman’s appearance, goals, and relationships. “More importantly, the findings show that all of these media do send girls similar messages—both positive and negative—increasing their influence through repetition.”⁷⁰

The women’s magazine industry has long been a source of news and perspective. In the early 20th century, the female body began to be seen as a means of expression for a modern woman in popular magazines and in media as a whole.⁷¹ “Characteristics that the media promoted as the most coveted for the 1920s woman were youth, beauty, and the ability to wear fashionable clothing. Thinness was promoted as the essential factor in the attainment of each of these desired traits, and thus, had many layers of meaning.”⁷² In addition to these two themes

were health and celebrity appeal which were seen in magazines like *Ladies Home Journal* and *Vogue*. In a study where researchers examined *Vogue* and *Ladies Home Journal* of the 1920s, it was determined that there was a link between the ideal feminine body seen in the 1920s and that of the 1960s and the 1980s through 1990s.⁷³ All of these decades focus on the importance of thinness in popular media. It is entirely possible that the messages in 1920s media "...helped construct notions about what was believed to be true, namely, that the embodiment of these specific physical attributes defined a woman's value or status in society. Further, magazine content often implied that it was a woman's responsibility to construct her identity in the images of the ideal."⁷⁴

Certainly many women look to magazines for advice on a myriad of topics. Of the most prominent topics, body image is always present. One commonality between both teen and women's magazines is extensive content related to beauty and body image. "Women's magazines are full of articles urging that if they can just lose those last twenty pounds, they'll have it all—the perfect marriage, loving children, great sex, and a rewarding career."⁷⁵ The pages inside women's magazines are no different from the outside covers that are consistently preaching the theology of beauty and appearance that is most always unreachable for the average American woman. "The barrage of messages about thinness, dieting and beauty tells 'ordinary' women that they are always in need of adjustment—and that the female body is an object to be perfected."⁷⁶ In a 1998 study examining teen magazines, it was found that in these magazines "...young women are told that they must lose weight, learn about sophisticated sexual techniques, apply makeup well, dress in a sexy manner, and engage in self-analysis when (not if) their real world does not fit with the world depicted."⁷⁷ These teen magazines are expressing the same messages that their women's magazine counterparts are promoting.

Harrison and Cantor found that various forms of media can affect or influence women's development of eating disorders. Further, magazines, more so than television, was more influential on this development.⁷⁸ "Consumption of media increasingly obsessed with the perfect body and providing negatively toned depictions of nonperfect bodies may be an important factor fueling body dissatisfaction to disordered levels."⁷⁹ Magazines are an accelerant fueling this fire of body dissatisfaction.

Teens and women are not the only ones affected by media's focus on thinness as the ideal body image. Men are also affected by this message, which they in turn absorb and then impart back to the female population. "As a result of media's emphasis on women's thinness, women may be exposed to a double dose of pressure to become thin: through media messages glorifying female thinness and through pressure from men and other women who have been exposed to these messages."⁸⁰ Men's magazines are no doubt communicating messages about women to their audiences as well. In Harrison and Cantor's study that looked at the effects various media can have on disordered eating habits in women "...overall magazine reading and the reading of men's entertainment magazines were significantly and positively correlated with attitudes stressing the importance of a woman's thinness."⁸¹ This is a fascinating observation considering it is the male who was directly exposed to the media message, while the female was only indirectly exposed to the message through the male. Further, male magazines often place women in the background at the same time they are making advances in the professional world.⁸² "...It is no coincidence that as women are achieving greater social, political and professional equality, these magazines symbolically relegate them to subordinate positions as sex objects."⁸³

In a *Folio* magazine article written by Maryjane Fahey in March 2004, she analyzes the recent success of the men's magazine industry. Fahey points out that the male's goal is not

merely to read but rather to find entertainment.⁸⁴ In this highly competitive industry, these male entertainment magazines must catch a potential reader's eye. This is accomplished by the ever crucial cover. "The cover comes in two categories: the demi-celebrity babe in various states of undress, shot in studio against a simple background or the young, handsome male celebrity shot against white for the 'classier' magazines."⁸⁵ Along with either image are catchphrases that promise all forms of entertainment imaginable. The combination of these two elements keeps the industry going strong and the male reader coming back for more.⁸⁶

The Importance and Power of the Magazine Cover

The magazine industry is a tremendous business. In 2003, there were 17,254 magazines available in North America.⁸⁷ Of these, 6,234 were consumer oriented publications. Total magazine sales for the magazine industry, as compiled by the Magazine Publishers of America, was 352,601,091.⁸⁸ Of this figure, 301,800,237 (86%) magazines were sold through subscription and 50,800,854 were sold as single copy sales at the newsstand.⁸⁹ Translating these figures into revenue, the entire magazine industry circulation revenue for 2003 was \$10,033,349,803.⁹⁰ Seventy percent or \$7,019,241,182 was obtained through paid subscriptions and \$3,014,108,621 (30%) was obtained through single copy sales.⁹¹

A magazine cover is of utmost importance to a publication vying for the billions of consumer dollars available at the newsstand. It serves as the window to the magazine and must capture a potential reader's attention and money in a mere matter of seconds. This means images and coverlines must be constructed in a way that they are well displayed as well as well written.

⁹² If not, the competition positioned right next to the magazine on the newsstand will win the audience's attention. The cover's creators must grab the audience's attention but also must reinvented the cover each month to appear different yet the same, conveying to the potential

reader that this is a magazine always evolving and reliably addressing current topics.⁹³ “Covers serve many functions, but chief among them is the come-on—or, more accurately, the come-on-in, the content’s fine.”⁹⁴

Almost no one will dispute the importance and power of a cover’s image, but many individuals do not fully take into account the power of the coverline. According to *Folio* magazine, deciding on the right coverlines ranks at the top of the list of importance in cover design with choosing a cover’s color or the cover’s model.⁹⁵ The success of the magazine at the newsstand is dependant upon the cover. “The best covers are assembled so that all the elements—the logo, the image, the copy, the color, the composition and the type—work together to create a classic.”⁹⁶ The reoccurring theme in the magazines that survive to become classics is that their images and coverlines work together to communicate one strong, simple message.⁹⁷

If the intent of a magazine’s cover is to project a strong message about itself to its audience, what then are popular magazines for both men and women saying to their audiences reading them? A 1999 research study examined several popular traditional, modern, and fashion magazines for both men and women in order to study what these covers’ images and text together were communicating to the American public.⁹⁸ Cover text themes coded in this research focused on diet, exercise, body image, leisure, and news. Several interesting trends emerged. One of these themes was that over and over again both men’s and women’s magazine covers projected messages about what a woman should strive to look like and what a man should try to look for in a woman.⁹⁹ Very little attention was given to the male body on these covers, while a great deal of emphasis was placed on the women’s physical appearance. Most disturbing to the researchers conducting the study was that messages that focused on weight and improving one’s physical appearance were placed next to messages that focused on improving a person’s

life. This placement, the researchers felt, may cause the reader to merge the two messages—that changing one’s body would lead to a better and happier life.¹⁰⁰ The overall findings from this study suggested that “...in men’s popular magazines the focus is on providing entertainment and improving one’s life by expanding knowledge, hobbies, and activities. Women’s magazines, however, seem to focus on improving one’s life by changing one’s appearance, especially by losing weight.”¹⁰¹

A research study conducted in 2002 examined the effects that the magazine covers of *Ladies Home Journal*, *Seventeen*, *Esquire*, and *Essence* had on the ever-changing mass culture of women from 1947-1995.¹⁰² This study also looked at both the cover image and text on long-running, popular ladies magazines. Blurbs in this research were coded to include themes that focused on appearance, infatuation, sex, home, family, relationship, news, career, health, and marriage. Most of the covers studied contained a woman as its cover image and projected themes considered to be of a traditional nature.¹⁰³ Some of these traditional coverlines included messages about appearance as well as men and women relationships, and home and family. “While women’s were more apt to discuss ‘sex’ (16%), ‘marriage’ (10%), and ‘understanding the opposite sex’ (9%), men’s magazines gravitated toward ‘admiring the opposite sex’s looks’ (19%), ‘sex’ (7%), and ‘understanding the opposite sex’ (5.5%).”¹⁰⁴ While some of the messages found on both men’s and women’s magazine covers were the same, the frequency of their occurrence was quite different between these two groups.¹⁰⁵ These findings imply that both men’s and women’s magazine covers are projecting many different messages to their audiences before they even open the publications, weaving a common thread that emphasizes sex, beauty, and relationships.

Media Stereotyping

Stereotypes are inevitable in most any media outlet. Television, news, entertainment, advertising, and print media sources all communicate some form of them to their various audiences.¹⁰⁶ What exactly is a stereotype? *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary* defines a stereotype as “something conforming to a fixed or general pattern; especially: a standardized mental picture that is held in common by members of a group and that represents an oversimplified opinion, prejudiced attitude, or uncritical judgment.”¹⁰⁷ The Media Awareness Network explains stereotypes as “codes that give audiences a quick, common understanding of a person or group of people—usually relating to their class, ethnicity or race, gender, sexual orientation, social role or occupation.”¹⁰⁸

According to Day, in the text *Ethics in Media Communications*, the most visible and controversial issues associated with stereotypes in today's media are sexism and racial prejudice.¹⁰⁹ The unfortunate result of stereotyping is that it can have profound social effects on those who become its victims.¹¹⁰ Media stereotypes simplify various kinds of differences in a particular group of people, transforming these assumptions or misrepresentations of this group into what is perceived by their audience as reality. This new reality then encourages and perpetuates all types of inequality and social injustice.¹¹¹

Those working within the media industry hold the key to continuing or ceasing stereotypes of reality. “...Media practitioners have a moral responsibility to understand the differences between stereotypes and reality and to maintain a steady vigilance against stereotypical portrayals that perpetuate real-world discrimination.”¹¹² It is difficult to determine if those working within the media industry truly recognize the power they hold. Their ability to influence society at any given moment is quite alarming. “The prevalence of stereotypical

symbols and messages in media content implicates the persistent question of what the media's role in society should be."¹¹³

In media that focus on women, either speaking to them or about them, stereotyping is at work. This stereotype may take the form of an image, words, or a combination of the two.¹¹⁴ This type of stereotyping is often seen in countless advertising campaigns where a woman is often portrayed as beautiful and sexually appealing but also domestic and perhaps helpless. The male, on the other hand, is seen as in control, confident, aggressive, and active.¹¹⁵

While the image of women in media has changed somewhat over time, from a strictly traditional role of homemaker in the 1950s to a more self-assertive individual in the 1970s and 1980s, there is still a need for media to portray women in a realistic manner rather than one focusing on the importance of physical beauty.¹¹⁶ It is evident that, in many ways, the female stereotypes created and reinforced in the early twentieth century have carried through to the county's popular culture at the close of the twentieth century.¹¹⁷ The imagery seen in mass media throughout the entire twentieth century has communicated, perpetuated, and encouraged certain ideals of gender in American culture that will continue to be communicated and preserved for years to come.

Mass media exist not only to make money but also to make meaning. For a century, they have disseminated a particular group of visual stereotypes of womanhood and manhood (though mainly womanhood) that stand for not just gender ideals but also issues of what it means to be 'typically' American and what it takes to have status in American culture.¹¹⁸

Within the world of stereotypes and women in media is the objectification of the female body. There is perhaps no better evidence of a stereotypical image of women than that presented

in an objectifying manner. *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary* defines objectification as coming from the root of objectify, which is simply “to treat as an object or cause to have objective reality.”¹¹⁹ Objectifying images of women, seen in both men’s and women’s magazines amplify the problem with stereotyping. These stereotypical and objectifying images simply do not reflect the true reality of a woman but are redefining what they believe to be a woman in today’s society.¹²⁰

Objectifying images are causing women to be preoccupied with trying to attain beauty, youth, and sex appeal and are further creating a culture that is rooted in superficial, objectifying/stereotypical ideals.¹²¹ Men’s and women’s magazines, through the window of their front covers, are presenting stereotyped, gendered messages to their audiences.¹²² These gendered messages, as defined in this research, are messages that promote a stereotypical/objectifying image of women, causing females to be primarily concerned with beauty and body image as well as traditional gender roles involving relationships and domestication.¹²³

Current Issues

In the past few years, many popular magazine covers have become the center of much public controversy. The issue resurfacing over and over again is the indecency of magazine cover images and coverlines, and the battleground for this intrusion is the check-out lanes of the local supermarket or discount superstore.¹²⁴ The major cause for concern from individuals advocating their removal from the check-out lanes of these establishments is that consumers of all ages—adults and children— are being exposed to risqué magazine covers right in front of their faces, whether they want to see them or not. According to Judy Krause from the American Decency Association, these inappropriate magazines are everywhere. “One would have to be

blind not to see them. Even a glance captures the erotic images and portrays women as mere toys and objects, producing lust in many males.”¹²⁵

Wal-Mart has found itself at the center of the magazine cover controversy in the past few years. In 2003, the mega-retailer received much criticism from its patrons for carrying the racy *Maxim* magazine where children were able to access it.¹²⁶ Women’s magazines too have been targeted as being too inappropriate for check-out lane readers. In June 2003, the concerned families who voiced their concerns over these magazines were victorious in getting the country’s number one retailer to somewhat cover the ladies’ magazines in question, *Cosmopolitan*, *Redbook*, *Marie Claire*, and *Glamour*, would be somewhat covered up.¹²⁷ “Wal-Mart announced it will be installing specially made, u-shaped magazine racks that will conceal the story tease lines on each side of the magazine, leaving the center and the magazine’s name viewable.”¹²⁸ This move made by Wal-Mart clearly demonstrated that the most offending element of the front covers to the concerned consumers was the coverlines, even more so than the cover image, which was to remain partially, if not totally, visible in the new “display” racks.

The American Decency Association reported that in early 2004, Wal-Mart moved the Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Edition from the prominent check-out lanes and the store’s entrances back to the discount center’s magazine section.¹²⁹ This move came after Wal-Mart had again received complaints from patrons as well as the American Decency Association. While Wal-Mart does appear to be listening in this instance, it still “places other magazines with blatant sexual imagery and verbiage and with absolutely filthy content at their check-out counters.”¹³⁰ Of these, are magazines like *Glamour* and *Cosmopolitan* which had been “covered-up” just one year earlier.¹³¹

In a separate effort in 1999, an organization known as Morality in Media began a campaign to encourage supermarket chains to remove from their check-out lanes magazines that contained sexually blatant coverlines. Again, the concern was the message these magazines covers were sending not only to women but also to children.¹³² “Besides the obvious concern about vulnerable children and adolescents standing at check-outs all across America every day viewing these prurient cover headlines, many women, both conservative and liberal, are also outraged about the growing sex obsession of so-called women’s magazines.”¹³³ It is alarming that these popular culture women’s magazines and covers are becoming more and more like typical men’s pornography publications.¹³⁴

While conservative groups are advocating for change in the presentation of women on popular magazine covers, many moderate organizations are addressing this issue as well. About-Face is an organization that “...promotes positive self-esteem in girls and women of all ages, sizes, races, and backgrounds through a spirited approach to media education, outreach, and activism.”¹³⁵ This group wants to encourage a critical examination of images and messages of women so prevalent in fashion magazines.¹³⁶ The intent of this group is to educate families, educators, researchers, and policy makers for positive change in media.¹³⁷

Controversy surrounding magazine covers has developed not only in popular culture publications but in scholarly publications as well. A 1999 *British Medical Journal* article written by Jocalyn Clark analyzed the covers of 50 *Journals of the American Medical Association* in order to examine how both the male and female sexes were portrayed in the magazine’s cover art. “Of the 34 covers depicting humans, 25 (74%) presented stereotyped sex images—that is, women were predominantly positioned as ‘objects’ (of desire) and men as (powerful, strong) ‘subjects.’”¹³⁸ In five of the covers studied, women were seen as caregivers or cleaners, in

traditional, gender roles. Thirteen covers displayed the woman as a submissive creature, with her eyes gazing down rather than at the reader, while the male figure was seen in a different light on these covers, looking directly at the reader in an authoritative manner.¹³⁹ Most alarmingly, 12 out of the 15 covers with women on them included babies while six displayed nudity. Cleavage and babies adorned 12 of the total 50 covers examined. The medical journal's depiction of women on its covers "is in sharp contrast to its coverage of issues related to women's health... The stereotypical representations of the sexes in this one year sample of JAMA covers seems to detract from the stated social responsibility of medical journals."¹⁴⁰

One would assume that because many popular culture and scholarly publications are plastered with sexual images and headlines that the publications' producers are simply delivering to their audiences what that audience wants.¹⁴¹ A study commissioned by Morality in Media, says no. This poll, which surveyed Americans 18 and older, found that 73 % of participants said they believed that sexual and provocative cover text on women's magazines was inappropriate. Eight-one percent of women polled said these coverlines were inappropriate. When asked if they would favor action that would cover these cover blurbs, 60 % said they would favor such a policy, with 64 % of women saying they would favor policy to hide them.¹⁴² With these findings in mind, it is hard to fathom why both the men's and women's magazine industries do not recognize the need to clean up some of their front cover content to meet the requests of their readers. Instead, maybe as part of a marketing strategy, they choose to continue to make them racier and racier. Following this strategy, the consumer, perhaps unaware of the true messages being cultivated within, continues to shell out the money to buy them.¹⁴³

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Introduction

The cultivation and framing theories provided as a basic theoretical context for the present research demonstrate that magazines do have the potential of influencing their audiences.¹⁴⁴ With this foundation in place, this review of literature examined the image of women in popular magazines and their covers from the early 1900s to present day. Much of the research in these areas found that even though progress was made over time, many magazines and their covers still promote gendered messages of women to their audiences.¹⁴⁵ These gendered messages are promoting a stereotypical/objectifying image of women and are causing females to be primarily concerned with beauty and body image as well as traditional gender roles involving relationships and domestication.¹⁴⁶

The front cover of any magazine acts as a window for the publication, thereby making its design and presentation of crucial importance to its creators.¹⁴⁷ Many popular magazines are attracting audience attention through their clever or risqué front covers and are being positioned in places like the supermarket check-out lane where most anyone is able to read and thus be cultivated by them.¹⁴⁸ Previous research has examined the messages that men's and women's magazine cover images and text as a whole are projecting to various audiences.¹⁴⁹ This previous research does not, however, examine the messages of the cover text alone. The void of research in this area leads one to ask: what are the messages that coverlines alone are communicating and therefore cultivating and framing to the audiences of today's popular men's and women's magazines? Narrowing down these popular men's and women's magazines to a more attainable

level of research, what are the cover blurbs of *Esquire*, *Gentlemen's Quarterly*, *Vogue*, and *Good Housekeeping* communicating and therefore cultivating and framing to their audiences in the new millennium?

Research Questions

From this literature review, several research questions were formed:

Research Question 1: What are the prominent blurb themes that emerge from the entire cover blurb sample of *Esquire*, *Gentlemen's Quarterly*, *Vogue*, and *Good Housekeeping* magazines as a whole?

Research Question 2: What is the overall prevalence of gendered messages in all blurb themes from *Esquire*, *Gentlemen's Quarterly*, *Vogue*, and *Good Housekeeping* magazines as a whole?

Research Question 3: What are the predominant themes that blurbs on the covers of the men's magazines as well as the women's magazines project to their audiences?

Research Question 4: How are gendered messages presented in blurb themes on the covers of the men's magazines examined versus the women's magazines examined?

Hypotheses

Defining the independent variable in this research as the blurb theme and the dependent variable as the gendered message, the following hypotheses were developed from the previous research:

Hypothesis 1: During the years of 1999 through 2003, gendered messages will increase in the total sample of men's and women's magazine cover blurb themes as a whole.

Hypothesis 2: Sex and beauty/body image themes will more frequently appear in blurbs on the men's magazine covers studied more than any other themes.

Hypothesis 3: Themes involving beauty/body image or fashion will more frequently appear in blurbs on the covers of the women's magazines researched more than any other themes.

Hypothesis 4: Women's magazine cover blurbs studied will present more gendered messages of women than men's magazines.

Exploratory Research Question

Exploratory Research Question: How do the magazines of *Esquire*, *Gentlemen's Quarterly*, *Vogue*, and *Good Housekeeping* compare with each other individually and can any pattern of gendered messages be established in each magazine during the time period of 1999 to 2003?

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

One of the fastest growing types of quantitative research is the content analysis. While many definitions of the research method exist, a “content analysis may be briefly defined as the systematic, objective, quantitative analysis of message characteristics.”¹⁵⁰ A content analysis may encompass many different studies on images, sounds, the spoken word, or written text. “...The terms text analysis or text content analysis refer to the specific type of content analysis that focuses on written or transcribed words.”¹⁵¹ Because this study looks exclusively at the written text on the front covers of magazines, this research is a text content analysis.

The practice of using the content analysis is a form of research growing with popularity. It is employed by researchers working in psychology, sociology, business, and communication.¹⁵² “Content analysis as a research method is consistent with the goals and standards of survey research. In a content analysis, an attempt is made to measure all variables as they naturally or normally occur. No manipulation of independent variables is attempted.”¹⁵³ The content analysis has been used by communication researchers to examine a number of different areas. According to Neuendorf in The Content Analysis Guidebook, some of the more popular media issues studied by using content analysis include the representation of minority groups, the presence of violence, advertising, news, web analysis, political communication, and gender roles.¹⁵⁴ In the area of gender roles, Neuendorf points out that content analyses are quite commonly used to look at stereotyping and the media’s presentation of body image.¹⁵⁵

Research Design and Collection

The goal of the present study was to investigate what messages are being cultivated by magazine cover blurbs during the time period surrounding the present millennium. In Kitch's book, *The Girl on the Magazine Cover*, she projects the twenty-first century to be much like the beginning of the twentieth century, with women still being negatively stereotyped.¹⁵⁶ "If the past informs the future, she [the girl on the magazine cover] will continue to tell us much about media and about American life in the twenty-first century."¹⁵⁷ This research sought to determine whether the magazine industry has made any progression into its presentation of the female on its covers during the time period surrounding the millennium, or if this medium, in a time of opportunity and progressiveness, is still very much like that at the turn of the twentieth century.

To best test the research questions and hypotheses listed in this research, a content analysis was conducted on *Esquire*, *Gentlemen's Quarterly (GQ)*, *Vogue*, and *Good Housekeeping* covers from January 1999 through December 2003. Because this research studied the messages these magazines project to their audiences in the new millennium, the population of their covers from 1999 to 2003 was examined. In this particular content analysis, the years surrounding the millennium were purposively chosen to examine what popular magazines covers were saying about women at a particularly progressive and promising time in history—the turning of the millennium. Covers were obtained via website, library, and interlibrary loan.

Variables that were analyzed in this content analysis included the themes present in the blurbs on the magazine cover and if the blurbs perpetuate gendered messages of women. The independent variable in this research was the blurb's theme and the dependent variable was the gendered message of women that this blurb's theme projected to its audience. A gendered message of women are those blurbs that present a stereotypical/objectifying image of women

that may cause females to be primarily concerned with beauty and body image or traditional gender roles.

Analysis

Two hundred forty *Esquire*, *Gentlemen's Quarterly (GQ)*, *Vogue*, and *Good Housekeeping* covers were examined, using the blurb as the unit of analysis. A blurb is defined in this research as the tagline(s) describing the topics covered within the particular month's magazine. Each cover averaged six to seven blurbs, resulting in a population size of 1,617. Because of its large population, the significance level for this research was determined to be $p < .01$, with a confidence level of 95 %. From the previous research by Malkin and Brinkley, blurb categories were compiled to create the following themes: beauty/body image, career, celebrity infatuation, celebrity news, family, fashion, health, home, marriage, money, news, sex, and leisure.¹⁵⁸ Blurbs whose message could not be identified were classified as "can't tell." The coding scheme and definition of themes given to these variables were:

- 1= Beauty/body image- blurb promoting physical self-image or beauty
- 2= Career- blurb oriented toward professional or work issues
- 3= Celebrity infatuation- cover text presenting celebrity in a sexual or lustful manner
- 4= Celebrity news- blurb with topic pertaining to celebrity current issues
- 5= Family- blurb promoting family relationship issues
- 6= Fashion- blurb presenting fashion trends and topics
- 7= Health- blurb displaying issues dealing with personal health
- 8= Home- blurb focusing on domestic issues
- 9= Love/relationship- blurb dealing with relationship issues with significant other
- 10= Marriage- blurb involving marital topics

11= Money- blurb focusing on financial theme

12= News- blurb presenting current events

13= Sex- blurb focusing on sexual gratification

15= Leisure- blurb promoting pastime activities including reading and recreation

30= Can't Tell- blurb with more than one theme or with a theme unable to be classified

Example of gendered messages given in Malkin's research that analyzed popular magazine covers included: "Get the Body You Really Want," "Stay Skinny," and "5 Ways to Keep Your Husband Faithful."¹⁵⁹ The gendered message code was established to be:

0= Non gendered message

1= Gendered Message

Each magazine was assigned a number so that blurb theme and gendered message data could easily be attributed to the corresponding publication. The following coding scheme was given to the four magazines used in this research:

1=*Esquire*

2=*Vogue*

3=*Good Housekeeping*

4=*Gentlemen's Quarterly*

This research employed the use of two coders. A test for intercoder reliability was conducted with approximately 30 blurbs and intercoder reliability was 100 % in all categories with the exception of blurb theme, which was 93 %. Coders used a codebook that provided thorough instructions for the research. During the course of the research, coders analyzed each cover and blurb, coding them into the categories listed above. Once data were collected, it was

compiled using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software program to determine what prevailing themes and gendered messages existed.

Description of Sample

The newsstand is a battle ground for the magazine industry. While approximately 4500 to 4700 consumer magazines are available in retail outlets, the average supermarket carries only 700 titles and may only have 300 or 400 on the shelf at any particular time.¹⁶⁰ The magazines for this research were chosen because they have won the battles waged at the newsstand and were ranked in the top ten of the most read magazines in America as reported by *Folio* magazine during the millennium time period.¹⁶¹ Each magazine has a long, established history of delivering print journalism to the American public. Further, *Esquire*, *Gentlemen's Quarterly*, *Vogue*, and *Good Housekeeping* all reach a rather similar demographic group of readers ranging in age from early 30s to early 40s with a household income from approximately \$55,000 to \$65,000, yet these magazines cover a diverse number of interests within their publications.¹⁶² It is important to note that, although the magazines may have similar age and income demographics, these magazines do appeal to different genders, with *Esquire* and *Gentlemen's Quarterly* reaching a primarily male audience and *Vogue* and *Good Housekeeping* reaching a primarily female audience. It is of great interest to this research to determine what messages these magazines with diverse interests are sending through their magazine cover blurbs to an audience of approximately the same age and income.

For more than 70 years, *Esquire* has been a monthly men's magazine recognized for its controversial or eye-catching content. It was listed as number seven of the top 10 selling men's magazines by *Folio* magazine in 1999.¹⁶³ *Esquire*, a publication of Hearst Communications, Inc., had a total paid circulation of almost 719,000 in 2003.¹⁶⁴ Approximately 84 % of the

magazine's sales came from subscriptions and 16 % of sales came from the newsstand.¹⁶⁵ In 2003, total circulation sales revenue for *Esquire* magazine was \$13,637,193.¹⁶⁶ Revenue totaling \$9,810,393 was obtained from subscription sales and \$3,826,800 was obtained through single copy sales at the newsstand.¹⁶⁷

According to a recent study conducted by *Esquire*, 65.3 % of its readers are male and 34.7 % are female.¹⁶⁸ This same study found that the average age of the *Esquire* magazine consumer is 40 with an average household income of \$55,338.¹⁶⁹ Furthermore, over 32 % of *Esquire's* readers have graduated from college.¹⁷⁰ The magazine is described by its editor in chief David Granger as

...special because it's a magazine for men. Not a fashion magazine for men, not a health magazine for men, not a money magazine for men. It is not any of these things; it is all of them. It is, and has been for nearly seventy years, a magazine about the interests, the curiosity, the passions, of men.¹⁷¹

Gentlemen's Quarterly (GQ) is a men's fashion and style magazine published by Conde Nast Publications, Inc. "It is the only magazine that cultivates an audience of affluent, successful men who care about style and design and who want to engage the world."¹⁷² *Folio* magazine ranked *GQ* as the number three top selling men's magazine in 1999.¹⁷³ The magazine, founded in 1957, has a total average paid circulation of 788,851 with 73.3 % of sales coming from subscriptions and 26.7 % of sales occurring at the newsstand.¹⁷⁴ Total circulation revenue for *Gentlemen's Quarterly* in 2003 was \$18,600,006, with \$11,700,660 coming from subscription sales and \$6,899,346 coming from single copy sales.¹⁷⁵ Seventy-four % of *GQ's* readers are men and 26 % are women.¹⁷⁶ The average age of the magazine's reader is 32.7 and the average

income is \$65,081.¹⁷⁷ The publication's mission "...is fueled by a belief that writer passion leads to reader passion, whether the subject is travel, food, fashion, politics or pop culture."¹⁷⁸

Established in 1892, *Vogue* magazine is a monthly fashion publication "...edited for the woman who considers style a way of life."¹⁷⁹ The magazine is ranked as the number nine selling women's magazine by *Folio* magazine.¹⁸⁰ According to the publication's website, *Vogue's* total audience is 9,835,000 and 8,704,000 (88.5%) of them are women.¹⁸¹ The Audit Bureau of Circulation's 2003 Publisher's Statement for *Vogue* listed the magazine's total average paid circulation as 1,260,026.¹⁸² The average age of the publication's readers is 35 and the median household income is \$62,420.¹⁸³ Approximately 39 % of *Vogue* sales are made at the newsstand, while 60.9 % are made in subscription sales.¹⁸⁴ *Vogue's* total circulation revenue for 2003 was \$44,497,889. Revenue totaling \$22,663,435 was reached through subscription sales and \$21,834,455 was made through single copy sales.¹⁸⁵ *Vogue* is a Conde Nast publication and according to its mission statement, "*Vogue* gives readers a lens thorough which they can view our time, and gain knowledge and information they trust."¹⁸⁶

In *Folio* magazine's listing of the top women's magazines of 1999, *Good Housekeeping* ranked number three in the category.¹⁸⁷ Established in 1885, the monthly publication is published by Hearst Communications, Inc. and serves "the woman, her home, and her family."¹⁸⁸ According to the *Good Housekeeping* website, 23,848,000 individuals read the magazine. Approximately 87 % of these readers are women and 13 % are men.¹⁸⁹ The magazine's Publisher's Statement, given by the Audit Bureau of Circulations, lists *Good Housekeeping's* average paid circulation as 4,755,893.¹⁹⁰ The publication "...is read by one out of every five American women each month."¹⁹¹ The average age of the magazine's readership is 41.7 and the median household income is \$52,392. An interesting demographic about *Good Housekeeping's*

readers is that 12,336,000 of them are employed. Of these, 5,763,000 are working mothers and 4,428,000 hold professional or managerial positions in the workforce. Roughly 11.5 million readers of *Good Housekeeping* have attended or graduated from college and 18.6 million are high school graduates.¹⁹² Eighty and a half percent of *Good Housekeeping* magazines are sold through subscriptions and 19.5 % are sold as single copy sales at the newsstand or grocery store check-out lane.¹⁹³ Total circulation revenue for *Good Housekeeping* in 2003 was \$109,849,765, with \$83,580,295 coming from subscription sales and \$26,269,470 coming from single copy sales.¹⁹⁴ Table 1 presents the demographic and general magazine statistics from *Good Housekeeping* as well as *Esquire*, *Gentlemen's Quarterly*, and *Vogue* magazines.

Table 1

Demographic & Magazine Data for *Esquire*, *Gentlemen's Quarterly*, *Vogue*, and *Good Housekeeping*

<u>Data</u>	<u>Esquire</u>	<u>Gentlemen's Quarterly</u>	<u>Vogue</u>	<u>Good Housekeeping</u>
Publisher	Hearst	Conde Nast	Conde Nast	Hearst
Age	40	32.7	35	41.7
Income	\$55,338	\$65,081	\$62,420	\$52,392
Total Paid Circulation	719,000	788,851	1,260,026	4,755,893
Total Circulation Revenue	\$13,637,193	\$18,600,006	\$44,497,889	\$109,849,765
Female Audience	34.7%	26%	88.5%	87%
Male Audience	65.3%	74%	11.5%	13%

Limitations

While a content analysis provides many advantages for the communication researcher, there are also several limitations as well. In her text, *Communication Research: Asking Questions, Finding Answers*, Joann Keyton discusses many of these weaknesses.¹⁹⁵ One such limitation in content analysis research is not being able to capture or record the message or text to be examined. In addition, the overabundance or under abundance of coding categories may make it difficult for patterns in the research to surface.¹⁹⁶ In the present research, this particular limitation was an important consideration. While there are numerous categories in which the

cover blurbs on the magazines must be categorized, it is possible that a particular message pattern from these blurbs was completely unrecorded simply because it could not be categorized.

An additional possible weakness in this research is that it focused exclusively on magazine cover blurb messages surrounding the turn of the millennium. Findings from the research must not be generalized to speak for any other period of time and should also not be considered reflective of the entire men's and women's magazine industry as a whole. This research applies directly to the cover text of *Esquire*, *Gentlemen's Quarterly*, *Vogue*, and *Good Housekeeping* magazines during the time period of 1999 through 2003. Lastly, as with any research, the ever-present subjectivity of the human coder is always a concern, making the intercoder reliability test and results in this research of extreme importance to prevent research contamination.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS

Introduction

The findings of the content analysis on the magazine cover blurbs of *Esquire*, *Gentlemen's Quarterly*, *Vogue*, and *Good Housekeeping* are presented in this chapter.

Frequencies

Sixteen hundred and seventeen magazine blurbs were examined from a population of *Esquire*, *Gentlemen's Quarterly*, *Vogue*, and *Good Housekeeping* magazines during the time period from 1999 through 2003. Frequencies from this research are displayed in Table 2. The average number of blurbs per magazine was 6.74. *Good Housekeeping* had the most blurbs, with 444 on its covers, while *Esquire* had 398, *Gentlemen's Quarterly* had 394, and *Vogue* accounted for 381 blurbs of the total sample.

Table 2

Distribution of Blurbs on *Esquire*, *Gentlemen's Quarterly*, *Vogue*, and *Good Housekeeping*

Magazine	Number of Blurbs on Cover
<i>Good Housekeeping</i>	444 (27.5%)
<i>Esquire</i>	398 (24.6%)
<i>Gentlemen's Quarterly</i>	394 (24.4%)
<i>Vogue</i>	381 (23.6%)
Total Sample	1,617

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 asked what predominant themes emerged from the total research sample when examined as a whole. The frequency of themes from the total sample is illustrated in Table 3. The most frequent theme coded out of the total sample was celebrity news, making up 20.5 % of the total. Fashion ranked second with 14.9 % of the total population, followed by

the theme beauty/body image, which represented 10.6 % of all blurbs studied. At the opposite end of the spectrum, less than 1.0 % of all blurbs analyzed promoted a theme of marriage to their audiences. It is important to note that a total of 13.0 % or 210 blurbs were classified as “can’t tell” due to those blurbs containing a multitude of themes or because the coder was simply unable to determine its classification.

Table 3

Themes Present in Blurbs on Magazines Covers Studied and the Frequency of Their Occurrence

Themes	Frequencies
Celebrity News	332 (20.5 %)
Fashion	241 (14.9 %)
Beauty/Body Image	172 (10.6 %)
News	118 (7.3 %)
Leisure	115 (7.1 %)
Celebrity Infatuation	89 (5.5 %)
Health	88 (5.4 %)
Home	70 (4.3 %)
Money	48 (3.0 %)
Sex	44 (2.7 %)
Family	31 (1.9 %)
Career	28 (1.7 %)
Love/Relationship	16 (1.0 %)
Marriage	15 (0.9 %)
“Can’t tell”	210 (13.0 %)

Note: N=1,617.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 asked what the overall prevalence of gendered messages was in themes on *Esquire*, *Gentlemen's Quarterly*, *Vogue*, and *Good Housekeeping* magazine covers as a whole. A gendered message of women are those blurbs that present a stereotypical/objectifying image of women that may cause females to be primarily concerned with beauty and body image or traditional gender roles. Analyzing this total population and its frequency of gendered messages, this research found that 64.6 % of all blurb themes did not present a gendered message of women to their audience, while 35.4 % of them did.

In order to study the blurb themes and their prevalence of gendered messages individually, a chi-square analysis was completed on each theme category. These results are displayed in Table 4. Findings for Research Question Two were significant, with $p < .001$.

The theme of beauty/body image had the most occurrences of gendered messages, with 88.4 % of all blurbs within this theme presenting a gendered message of women. Other themes that scored high in the gendered message area included celebrity infatuation at 86.5 % gendered messages, home with 70.0 % gendered messages, and family with 64.5 % gendered messages.

Table 4

Blurb Themes and the Prevalence of Gendered Messages Within Them

Themes	Gendered Message	Non Gendered Message
Celebrity News	75 (22.6%)	257 (77.4 %)
Fashion	109 (45.2 %)	132 (54.8 %)
Beauty/Body Image	152 (88.4 %)	20 (11.6 %)
News	6 (5.1 %)	112 (94.9 %)
Leisure	6 (5.2 %)	109 (94.8 %)
Celebrity Infatuation	77 (86.5 %)	12 (13.5 %)
Health	5 (5.7 %)	83 (94.3 %)
Home	49 (70.0 %)	21 (30.0 %)
Money	16 (33.3 %)	32 (66.7 %)
Sex	24 (54.5 %)	20 (45.5 %)
Family	20 (64.5 %)	11 (35.5 %)
Career	3 (10.7 %)	25 (89.3 %)
Love/Relationship	5 (31.3 %)	11 (68.8 %)
Marriage	8 (53.3 %)	7 (46.7 %)
“Can’t tell”	18 (8.6 %)	192 (91.4 %)

Note: N=1,617; Chi-Square =604.75; df=14; p<.001.

Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1 predicted that gendered messages would increase in the entire population’s cover blurbs during the years of 1999 through 2003. The results are given in Table 5 for this hypothesis. A chi-square analysis was completed to analyze the total population of cover blurbs

during the time period from 1999 to 2003 in order to determine the prevalence of gendered messages from year to year. From 1999 to 2003, the presence of gendered messages did increase overall. Findings for Hypothesis One were significant, with $p < .01$, therefore Hypothesis One was supported.

Table 5

Cover Blurbs From 1999-2003 and the Presence of Gendered Messages

Year	Gendered Message	Non Gendered Message
1999	90 (30.1 %)	209 (69.9%)
2000	115 (37.1%)	195 (62.9%)
2001	100 (31.4%)	218 (68.6%)
2002	132 (36.0 %)	235 (64.0%)
2003	136 (42.1 %)	187 (57.9%)

Note: N=1,617; Chi-Square=12.63; df= 4; $p < .01$.

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 asked how the distribution of themes on the men’s magazines studied compared with those from the women’s magazines. Data comparing the men’s magazine blurbs to the women’s blurbs were analyzed to determine the presence of themes within them. These results are seen in Table 6. In this research question’s chi-square test that compared these two groupings of blurbs, findings were significant, with $p < .001$. The top five men’s themes in descending order included celebrity news, leisure, fashion, celebrity infatuation, and sex. The top five themes on the women’s publications in descending order were celebrity news, beauty/body image, fashion, home, and health. Blurbs containing the theme of beauty/body image occurred 148 times on the women’s magazines, as opposed to 24 times on the men’s

magazines studied. Other themes that were more prevalent on women's magazines included family, health, and home. Family themed blurbs appeared 27 times on women's magazines and only four times on men's magazines. Health themes occurred 58 times on women's magazines and 30 times on the men's publications studied. Finally, the home theme occurred 68 times in women's magazines and only two times on the male magazines.

Some themes did occur more on male magazines than on the female magazines. Blurbs with a news theme appeared 96 times on male magazine covers, while only 22 times on the female covers. Leisure themed blurbs occurred 102 times on the men's magazines studied and only 13 times on the female's publications.

Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2 predicted that the themes of sex and beauty/body image would frequently appear in blurbs on the men's magazine covers studied more than any other. As the figures in Table 6 indicate, hypothesis two was not supported. While sex was the fifth most prevalent theme, it only occurred in 4.2 % of themes on these covers. Beauty/body image ranked even lower than sex, making up only 3 % of the themes present.

Hypothesis 3

Hypothesis 3 predicted that themes involving beauty/body image or fashion would frequently appear in blurbs on the women's magazine covers studied more than any other. The results for this hypothesis were somewhat mixed, as Table 6 illustrates. While neither blurb theme of beauty/body image or fashion ranked first in occurrences on these women's magazines, they did rank second and third, immediately behind celebrity news. Beauty/body image occurred 17.9 % of the time in blurb themes on these women's publications and fashion occurred 17.6 % of the time. Hypothesis Three was somewhat supported in this research.

Table 6

Distribution of Men’s Magazine Themes vs. Women’s Magazine Themes

Theme	Men’s Magazines	Women’s Magazines
Beauty/Body Image	24 (3.0%)	148 (17.9%)
Career	9 (1.1%)	19 (2.3%)
Celebrity Infatuation	67 (8.5%)	22 (2.7%)
Celebrity News	179 (22.6%)	153 (18.5%)
Family	4 (0.5%)	27 (3.3%)
Fashion	96 (12.1%)	145 (17.6%)
Health	30 (3.8%)	58 (7.0%)
Home	2 (0.3%)	68 (8.2%)
Love/Relationship	10 (1.3%)	6 (0.7%)
Marriage	2 (0.3%)	13 (1.6%)
Money	18 (2.3%)	30 (3.6%)
News	96 (12.1%)	22 (2.7%)
Sex	33 (4.2%)	11 (1.3%)
Leisure	102 (12.9%)	13 (1.6%)
“Can’t tell”	120 (15.2%)	90 (10.9%)

Note: N=1,617; Chi-Square=358.03; df=14; p<.001.

Research Question 4 and Hypothesis 4

Research Question 4 asked how gendered messages are presented in blurb themes on the covers of the men’s magazines as well as the women’s magazines examined. Hypothesis 4 predicted that the women’s magazine cover themes studied would present more gendered messages of women to their audiences than those on the men’s magazines examined. Results for

this research question and hypothesis are recorded in Table 7. After running a chi-square test on these variables, the results were determined to be significant with $p < .001$. Fifty-five and a third % of the women's magazine cover blurbs promoted gendered messages within their themes, while only 14.8 % of the men's magazine themes contained these same types of gendered messages.

Examples of blurbs that presented gendered messages on the covers of *Vogue* included: "The Power of Fashion: Clothes to Conquer the World In,"¹⁹⁷ "The Flawless Face: Secrets to Perfect Skin,"¹⁹⁸ and "Is Your Hair Hip?: One little Snip Could Change Your Life."¹⁹⁹ Samples of *Good Housekeeping* blurbs that presented gendered messages included: "Beauty Clinic: How to Get Gorgeous Eyes, Pretty Lips, and That Glow,"²⁰⁰ "Get Thinner, Happier, Richer,"²⁰¹ and "Spring Cleaning for Real Women."²⁰² Examples of *Gentlemen's Quarterly* blurbs that promoted gendered messages of women included: "Fill Her Hunger: Five Recipes For Seduction,"²⁰³ "The Sultry Beauty of Halle Berry,"²⁰⁴ and "Sheer and Sexy Gifts For Her."²⁰⁵ Samples of *Esquire's* cover blurbs that promoted gendered messages included: "The Triumph of Cleavage,"²⁰⁶ "How to Build a Better Blond,"²⁰⁷ and "All About Women Handy Step by Step Instructions: ...Sex in France, Underpants ...Buoyant Breast, and Where to Touch Her."²⁰⁸ Examples of "Can't tell" blurbs that contained multiple messages or insufficient theme information included: "How to: Beat the Common Cold, Improve Your Memory, Dress Like a Page Out of *Esquire*,"²⁰⁹ "Thomas Mallon on God, Terrence Rafferty on Westerns, James J. Cramer Cools on Net Stocks,"²¹⁰ "300 Brilliant Choices,"²¹¹ and "Save Time Now: Shortcuts From America's Busiest Women."²¹² Gendered messages appeared in blurb themes more than three times as much on the women's publications as they did on the men's publications. Hypothesis 4 was strongly supported in this research.

Table 7

Men's and Women's Magazines and the Presence of Gendered Messages within Them

Magazine Group	Gendered Message	Non Gendered Message
Men's Magazines	117 (14.8%)	675 (85.2%)
Women's Magazines	456 (55.3%)	369 (44.7%)

Note: N=1,617; Chi-Square=289.70; df=1; p<.001.

Exploratory Research Question

The Exploratory Research Question asked how each magazine, *Esquire*, *Gentlemen's Quarterly*, *Vogue*, and *Good Housekeeping*, compared individually with each other and if any pattern of gendered messages could be established within the five years examined. The next series of analyses completed from this research analyzed each individual magazine separately. Table 9 shows *Esquire*, *Gentlemen's Quarterly*, *Vogue*, and *Good Housekeeping* magazines and the frequency of each blurb theme on these magazine covers examined. Findings comparing all magazines with one another, as Table 8 illustrates, were found to be significant. Celebrity news ranked as the number one theme on both *Esquire* and *Gentlemen's Quarterly* magazine covers. *Vogue's* top theme was fashion, which made up 34.9 % of its total themes. *Good Housekeeping's* top ranking theme was beauty/body image, which accounted for 22.5 % of this publication's blurb themes. These findings should be heeded with caution because eight cells had an expected count of less than five.

Table 8

Frequency of Themes on the Covers of *Esquire*, *Gentlemen’s Quarterly*, *Vogue*, and *Good Housekeeping*

Theme	<i>Esquire</i>	<i>Gentleman’s Quarterly</i>	<i>Vogue</i>	<i>Good Housekeeping</i>
Beauty/Body Image	14 (3.5%)	10 (2.5%)	48 (12.6%)	100 (22.5%)
Career	6 (1.5%)	3 (0.8%)	6 (1.6%)	13 (2.9%)
Celebrity Infatuation	55 (13.8%)	12 (3.0%)	20 (5.2%)	2 (.5%)
Celebrity News	91 (22.9%)	88 (22.3%)	85 (22.3%)	68 (15.3%)
Family	1 (0.3%)	3 (0.8%)	4 (1.0%)	23 (5.2%)
Fashion	22 (5.5%)	74 (18.8%)	133 (34.9%)	12 (2.7%)
Health	10 (2.5%)	20 (5.1%)	11 (2.9%)	47 (10.6%)
Home	1 (0.3%)	1 (0.3%)	4 (1.0%)	64 (14.4%)
Love/Relationship	1 (0.3%)	9 (2.3%)	5 (1.3%)	1 (0.2%)
Marriage	2 (0.5%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	13 (2.9%)
Money	11 (2.8%)	7 (1.8%)	2 (0.5%)	28 (6.3%)
News	64 (16.1%)	32 (8.1%)	22 (5.8%)	0 (0.0%)
Sex	23 (5.8%)	10 (2.5%)	9 (2.4%)	2 (0.5%)
Leisure	34 (8.5%)	68 (17.3%)	6 (1.6%)	7 (1.6%)
“Can’t tell”	63 (15.8%)	57 (14.5%)	26 (6.8%)	64 (14.4%)

Note: N=1,617; Chi-Square=850.54; df=42; p<.001.

A chi-square test was conducted to determine the presence of gendered messages in each magazine title. Findings in this test were significant, with p<.001, and are reflected in Table 9. *Good Housekeeping* ranked the highest in occurrences of gendered messages, with 253 (57.0%)

themes containing this message. Two hundred and three blurb themes (53.3%) on *Vogue's* covers contained gendered messages, making the majority of the magazine's messages gendered rather than nongendered. *Esquire's* themes contained 91 (22.9%) gendered messages, while *Gentlemen's Quarterly* scored the lowest in this area with only 26 (6.6%) themes promoting gendered messages on its covers.

Table 9

Esquire, Gentlemen's Quarterly, Vogue, and Good Housekeeping Magazines and the Prevalence of Gendered Messages within Them

Magazine	Gendered Message	Non Gendered Message
<i>Esquire</i>	91 (22.9%)	307 (77.1%)
<i>Gentlemen's Quarterly</i>	26 (6.6%)	368 (93.4%)
<i>Vogue</i>	203 (53.3%)	178 (46.7%)
<i>Good Housekeeping</i>	253 (57.0%)	191 (43.0%)

Note: N=1,617; Chi-Square=313.82; df=3; p<.001.

Table 10 ranks the themes appearing, in descending order, on the covers of *Esquire* magazine. In addition, this table displays the occurrence of gendered messages within each theme. *Esquire's* top five themes included: celebrity news, news, celebrity infatuation, leisure, and sex. The themes of celebrity infatuation and sex had a majority of gendered messages within them, with 96.4 % of celebrity infatuation themes containing gendered messages and 65.2 % of sex themes containing gendered messages as well. Findings here were significant, but because a multitude of theme possibilities existed and 13 cells with expected count less than five remained, results should be viewed with caution.

Table 10

Esquire Cover Blurbs with Theme and Gendered Message Frequency

Themes	Frequencies	Gendered Message	Non Gendered Message
Celebrity News	91 (22.9 %)	8 (8.8%)	83 (91.2%)
News	64 (16.1 %)	3 (4.7%)	61 (95.3%)
Celebrity Infatuation	55 (13.8 %)	53 (96.4%)	2 (3.6%)
Leisure	34 (8.5 %)	2 (5.9%)	32 (94.1%)
Sex	23 (5.8 %)	15 (65.2%)	8 (34.8%)
Fashion	22 (5.5 %)	0 (0.0%)	22 (100.0%)
Beauty/Body Image	14 (3.5 %)	8 (57.1%)	6 (42.9%)
Money	11 (2.8 %)	0 (.0%)	11 (100.0%)
Health	10 (2.5 %)	0 (0.0%)	10 (100.0%)
Career	6 (1.5 %)	0 (0.0%)	6 (100.0%)
Marriage	2 (0.5 %)	1 (50.0%)	1 (50.0%)
Family	1 (0.3 %)	0 (.0%)	1 (100.0%)
Home	1 (0.3 %)	0 (0.0%)	1 (100.0%)
Love/Relationship	1 (0.3 %)	0 (0.0%)	1 (100.0%)
“Can’t Tell”	63 (15.8 %)	1 (1.6%)	62 (98.4%)

Note: N=398; Chi-Square=261.37; df=14; p<.001.

Table 11 illustrates each sampled year of *Esquire* magazine and the percentage of that year’s blurb themes that presented gendered messages of women. Findings in this area were not significant, indicating no difference from year to year.

Table 11

Esquire Cover Blurbs From 1999-2003 and the Presence of Gendered Messages

Year	Gendered Message	Non Gendered Message
1999	19 (23.2 %)	63 (76.8%)
2000	18 (24.3%)	56 (75.7%)
2001	22 (27.8%)	57 (72.2%)
2002	17 (19.5 %)	70 (80.5%)
2003	15 (19.7 %)	61 (80.3%)

Note: N=398; Chi-Square=2.17; df=4; p= n.s.

The top ranking blurb themes for *Gentlemen's Quarterly* included celebrity news, fashion, leisure, news, and health. Table 12 displays these results as well as the remaining themes appearing on the magazine's covers. In addition, this table also shows the prevalence of gendered messages within each of these themes. It is necessary to note that only the celebrity infatuation and beauty/body image theme contained a majority of gendered messages within them. As with *Esquire*, findings were significant in this particular chi-square analysis, but because 16 cells had an expected count less than five, results should be viewed with caution.

Table 12

Gentlemen's Quarterly Cover Blurbs with Theme and Gendered Message Frequency

Themes	Gendered Message	Non Gendered Message	Frequencies
Celebrity News	1 (1.1%)	87 (98.9%)	88 (22.3 %)
Fashion	0 (0.0%)	74 (100.0%)	74 (18.8 %)
Leisure	1 (1.5%)	67 (98.5%)	68 (17.3 %)
News	0 (0.0%)	32 (100.0%)	32 (8.1 %)
Health	0 (0.0%)	20 (100.0%)	20 (5.1 %)
Celebrity Infatuation	12 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	12 (3.0 %)
Beauty/Body Image	5 (50.0%)	5 (50.0%)	10 (2.5 %)
Sex	4 (40.0%)	6 (60.0%)	10 (2.5 %)
Love/Relationship	2 (22.2%)	7 (77.8%)	9 (2.3 %)
Money	0 (0.0%)	7 (100.0%)	7 (1.8 %)
Career	0 (0.0%)	3 (100.0%)	3 (0.8 %)
Family	0 (0.0%)	3 (100.0%)	3 (0.8 %)
Home	0 (0.0%)	1 (100.0%)	1 (0.3 %)
“Can’t Tell”	1 (1.8%)	56 (98.2%)	57 (14.5 %)

Note: N=394; Chi-Square=241.30; df=13; p<.001.

In the chi-square analysis that determined the prevalence of gendered messages in *Gentlemen's Quarterly* blurb themes from 1999 through 2003, no pattern emerged. Table 13 displays these results. No significance here means that the messages in this publication were consistent throughout the five years studied. The occurrence of gendered messages remained extremely low over the course of this five-year timeframe.

Table 13

Gentlemen's Quarterly Cover Blurbs From 1999-2003 and the Presence of Gendered Messages

Year	Gendered Message	Non Gendered Message
1999	6 (9.8 %)	55 (90.2%)
2000	6 (7.7%)	72 (92.3%)
2001	2 (2.7%)	72 (97.3%)
2002	6 (5.6 %)	102 (94.4%)
2003	6 (8.2 %)	67 (91.8%)

Note: N=394; Chi-Square=3.51; df=4; p= n.s.

Vogue's top blurb themes included fashion, celebrity news, beauty/body image, news, and celebrity infatuation. The results are recorded in Table 14. Over 73 % of fashion blurbs, 81.3 % of beauty/body image blurbs, and 50 % of celebrity infatuation blurbs all contained gendered messages. The majority of themes in sex, family, home, and money also promoted gendered messages on the *Vogue* covers studied in this research. Findings from this particular chi-square were significant, but because 14 cells had an expected count less than five, results should be taken with caution.

Table 14

Vogue Cover Blurbs with Theme and Gendered Message Frequency

Themes	Frequencies	Gendered Message	Non Gendered Message
Fashion	133 (34.9 %)	98 (73.7%)	35 (26.3%)
Celebrity News	85 (22.3 %)	30 (35.3%)	55 (64.7%)
Beauty/Body Image	48 (12.6 %)	39 (81.3%)	9 (18.8%)
News	22 (5.8 %)	3 (13.6%)	19 (86.4%)
Celebrity Infatuation	20 (5.2 %)	10 (50.0%)	10 (50.0%)
Health	11 (2.9 %)	3 (27.3%)	8 (72.7%)
Sex	9 (2.4 %)	5 (55.6%)	4 (44.4%)
Career	6 (1.6 %)	2 (33.3%)	4 (66.7%)
Leisure	6 (1.6 %)	0 (0.0%)	6 (100.0%)
Love/Relationship	5 (1.3 %)	2 (40.0%)	3 (60.0%)
Family	4 (1.0 %)	4 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Home	4 (1.0 %)	2 (50.0%)	2 (50.0%)
Money	2 (0.5 %)	1 (50.0%)	1 (50.0%)
“Can’t Tell”	26 (6.8 %)	4 (15.4%)	22 (84.6%)

Note: N=381; Chi-Square=92.05; df=13; p<.001.

Findings were significant in the chi-square analysis of *Vogue*'s gendered messages over the course of the five years studied. Table 15 displays these results. From 1999 to 2003, the prevalence of gendered messages on *Vogue*'s covers increased from 30.6 % in 1999 to 63.4 % in 2003.

Table 15

Vogue Cover Blurbs From 1999-2003 and the Presence of Gendered Messages

Year	Gendered Message	Non Gendered Message
1999	19 (30.6 %)	43 (69.4%)
2000	47 (62.7%)	28 (37.3%)
2001	29 (35.4%)	53 (64.6%)
2002	56 (70.0 %)	24 (30.0%)
2003	52 (63.4 %)	30 (36.6%)

Note: N=381; Chi-Square=38.36; df=4; p<.001.

Table 16 displays the results of the *Good Housekeeping* chi-square analysis which, with eight cells containing an expected count of less than five, were determined to be significant.

These results should be examined with caution. The most frequent blurb themes on *Good Housekeeping* covers during the five years examined in this research were beauty/body image, celebrity news, home, health, and money. With the exception of the health theme, all of these themes also had a majority of gendered messages within them. Only the themes of health, career, and leisure did not have a majority of gendered messages prevalent among them.

Table 16

Good Housekeeping Cover Blurbs with Theme and Gendered Message Frequency

Themes	Frequencies	Gendered Message	Non Gendered Message
Beauty/Body Image	100 (22.5 %)	100 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Celebrity News	68 (15.3 %)	36 (52.9%)	32 (47.1%)
Home	64 (14.4 %)	47 (73.4%)	17 (26.6%)
Health	47 (10.6 %)	2 (4.3%)	45 (95.7%)
Money	28 (6.3 %)	15 (53.6%)	13 (46.4%)
Family	23 (5.2 %)	16 (69.6%)	7 (30.4%)
Career	13 (2.9 %)	1 (7.7%)	12 (92.3%)
Marriage	13 (2.9 %)	7 (53.8%)	6 (46.2%)
Fashion	12 (2.7 %)	11 (91.7%)	1 (8.3%)
Leisure	7 (1.6 %)	3 (42.9%)	4 (57.1%)
Celebrity Infatuation	2 (0.5 %)	2 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Sex	2 (0.5 %)	0 (100.0%)	2 (100.0%)
Love/Relationship	1 (0.2 %)	1 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)
“Can’t Tell”	64 (14.4 %)	12 (18.8%)	52 (81.3%)

Note: N=444; Chi-Square=200.41; df=13; p<.001.

Table 17 displays the results of the chi-square analysis of *Good Housekeeping* from 1999 through 2003 and the existence of gendered messages during this time period. The incidence of gendered messages increased every year from 1999 to 2003, beginning with 48.9 % of gendered messages present in 1999 and ending with 68.5 % of these messages present in 2003. While

there was an increase in gendered messages over the course of these five years, these findings were not significant.

Table 17

Good Housekeeping Cover Blurbs From 1999-2003 and the Presence of Gendered Messages

Year	Gendered Message	Non Gendered Message
1999	46 (48.9 %)	48 (51.1%)
2000	44 (53.0%)	39 (47.0%)
2001	47 (56.6%)	36 (43.4%)
2002	53 (57.6 %)	39 (42.4%)
2003	63 (68.5 %)	29 (31.5%)

Note: N=444; Chi-Square=8.00; df=4; p=n.s.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

Introduction

The results from each research question as well as hypothesis are explained and elaborated on to determine the overall findings of this study. It must be noted once again that a gendered message of women are those blurbs that present a stereotypical/objectifying image of women that may cause females to be primarily concerned with beauty and body image or traditional gender roles. Further, from these findings, recommendations and suggestions for future research direction are suggested.

Summary of Key Findings

Research Question 1 asked what predominant themes emerged from the total research sample when examined as a whole. This research found that the top themes most prevalent in this study were celebrity news, fashion, beauty/body image, news, and leisure. These themes together accounted for 60.4 % of all 1,617 blurb themes studied and are a representation of the total themes possible in this research.

Research Question 2 asked what the overall prevalence of gendered messages was in themes on *Esquire*, *Gentlemen's Quarterly*, *Vogue*, and *Good Housekeeping* magazine covers as a whole. Results from this chi-square analysis were significant and found that the majority of themes on these magazines as a whole did not promote gendered messages of women to their readers. While the majority of themes on the covers of these publications did not present gendered messages of women to their audiences, those that did are still planting the seeds of an idealistic and unrealistic view of women. The most alarming, yet almost expected, finding here

was in the beauty/body image category. This theme, ranked as the third most prevalent, is almost 90 % of the time telling women of all ages to change the way they look or that the way they are right now just is not good enough. Messages like these, seen over and over again, are cultivating unhealthy ideals of the American woman.

Research Question 3 asked how the distribution of themes on the men's magazines studied compared with those from the women's magazines. Findings in this area were significant. Both groups' number one theme was celebrity news. Further, fashion ranked third in each group as well. The second most popular blurb theme for the women's magazines was beauty/body image, which appeared nearly six times as often as the same category in the men's magazines studied. Family oriented themes occurred over six times more often on women's magazines than on men's magazines. Health themes were almost twice as frequent in these female magazines as opposed to the male magazines. Home-themed blurbs occurred 27 more times in the ladies' publications studied than they did in the men's. Themes that were much more prevalent in the men's magazines were celebrity infatuation, which occurred three times as often than in women's magazines; news, which occurred almost five times more than in the ladies' magazines; and leisure, which occurred eight times more frequently than it did in the women's magazines researched. These findings certainly signify that women are being cultivated to focus on physical beauty, family, the home, and health infinitely more than are men. Further, men are being cultivated from men's publications to crave the ideal celebrity, focus on news, and make time for leisure far more than are woman from their women's publications.

Research Question 4 asked how gendered messages were presented in blurb themes on the covers of the men's magazines as well as the women's magazines examined. Findings in this area were again found to be significant. More than 85 % of the blurb themes from the men's

magazines did not present a gendered message of women to their readers. On the contrary, 55 % of the women's magazine blurb themes did present gendered messages to their readers. The women's magazines studied in this research are far more harmful in their framing of messages about women than are the men's magazines studied.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that there would be an overall increase in the prevalence of gendered messages from the total population of men's and women's magazines during the timeframe of 1999 through 2003. Findings for this hypothesis were significant and therefore supported the hypothesis. There was a significant increase in the overall occurrence of gendered messages from 1999 through 2003 in these men's and women's publications as a whole. This is an unfortunate commentary for the new millennium—a time of advancement and opportunity. One would assume that as equality and diversity increase that all venues of American life and culture would also advance. According to these results, these magazines do not appear to be making this progress.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that sex and beauty/body image themes would more frequently appear in blurbs on the men's magazine covers studied more than any other themes. Findings from this research concluded that blurbs with a theme focusing on sex or beauty/body image were not as abundant in number on the covers of these magazines as anticipated and therefore did not support this hypothesis. Sex ranked as the fifth most frequent theme on *Esquire* and beauty/body image ranked even lower. This discovery does come as a shock because these popular magazines are many times thought of as being full of nothing but controversial images and content. While this research cannot speak for the magazine's sometimes provocative images, it can provide some insight on their cover themes over these five years.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that themes involving beauty/body image or fashion would more frequently appear in blurbs on the women's magazines covers researched more than any other themes. The findings for this particular hypothesis were somewhat divided, however, were significant. Beauty/body image and fashion themes ranked as the second and third most popular themes, immediately behind celebrity news, on the women's magazines examined during the time period from 1999 through 2003. From these results, it is apparent that, although women's magazines may have a variety of topics they cover, beauty/body image and fashion themes are still prevalent messages being promoted. Women's magazines have not advanced too far from these types of physical appearance stressing messages that have long been a part of the female magazine landscape.

Hypothesis 4 predicted that the women's magazine cover themes studied would present more gendered messages of women to their audiences than those on the men's magazines examined. Findings in this area were significant and supported this hypothesis. Results from this research indicated that the majority of women's magazine themes studied were promoting gendered messages of women to their readers. The men's publications were, by a large majority, not promoting these types of messages through their cover blurbs. Women's magazines, it seems then, need to stop being part of the problem and begin to move toward being a solution. They should focus, less on criticizing the men's magazine industry for its shortcomings in the presentation of women, and more on building more productive messages about character, intellect, and opportunity for women in their own publications.

The Exploratory Research Question asked how each magazine, *Esquire*, *Gentlemen's Quarterly*, *Vogue*, and *Good Housekeeping*, compared individually with each other and if any pattern of gendered messages could be established within the five years examined. While each

magazine varied in its top five themes, all magazines did rank themes oriented toward celebrity news as their first or second most popular theme. *Esquire*, *Gentlemen's Quarterly*, and *Vogue* all had high occurrences of news themed blurbs, while *Good Housekeeping* had none. Beauty/body image ranked in the top three themes for both *Vogue* and *Good Housekeeping*, however, *Good Housekeeping's* occurrence of this theme was over double that of *Vogue's*. The promotion of gendered messages was higher in both *Vogue* and *Good Housekeeping* than in *Esquire* and *Gentlemen's Quarterly*. These two men's magazines did not have an overabundance of gendered messages present within their blurb themes.

No significant pattern of gendered messages over the course of the five years studied could be established in *Esquire* or *Gentlemen's Quarterly* magazines. This is because both magazines had such a low overall occurrence of these messages within their magazine blurb themes. On the contrary, *Vogue* did have a significant overall increase of gendered messages within its blurb themes from 1999 to 2003. Likewise, *Good Housekeeping* also saw an overall increase in the prevalence of gendered messages within its cover blurb themes; however, these findings could not be concluded to be significant. In a time when it is perceived that women are achieving so many breakthroughs and accomplishments, this is an alarming finding.

Recommendations

The intent of this research was to examine the messages that cover text on the popular men's and women's magazines of *Esquire*, *Gentlemen's Quarterly*, *Vogue*, and *Good Housekeeping* are communicating to their audiences. In addition, this study examined the prevalence of gendered messages of women on these publications. While this study did discover the most frequent themes adorning the covers of these magazines, it also appeared to identify those magazines that were promoting unrealistic or traditional views of women to their various

audiences. The women's magazines of *Vogue* and *Good Housekeeping* appear to promote gendered messages about women more so than the men's magazines studied during this time period. Further, this research also identified a pattern in the overall total of men's and women's magazines studied. In this group of magazines, gendered messages of women appeared to be on the rise from the time leading up to the millennium to the time immediately following it.

One of the major areas of interest in this study was to see if magazines that appealed to a similar age and income demographic, yet each with a diverse variety of topics, promoted a rather cohesive message about women. As mentioned earlier, the magazines in this study are reaching a similar demographic group of people. These four magazines, through their blurbs, are cultivating somewhat similar themes through their front covers, yet appear to be divided in their presentation of women. While the majority of the men's magazine cover blurbs are not presenting gendered messages of women to their readers, the women's magazine blurbs are promoting these messages. The beginning of the twenty-first century, in these women's magazines researched, appears to be much like the opening of the twentieth, with the woman still being negatively stereotyped.²¹³ Cultural wars fought by women to overcome stereotyping in the past century may still have to be waged today and in the future.

The ability of a magazine cover to promote and cultivate unattainable or unrealistic feminine ideals is still very much a frightening issue today.²¹⁴ The cultivation and framing power of the cover blurb must not be underestimated. In this research, all four magazines contained blurbs that promoted gendered messages to some extent. These gendered messages are sending, if not cultivating, a message in their readers that is certainly unhealthy. Years of cultivating and framing these messages could encourage a distorted view of women in both the male and female audience well into this millennium.

Although this research found the presence of gendered messages more prevalent in women's magazines than in men's, additional research is recommended in this area. This study focused on the written word on the covers of *Esquire*, *Gentlemen's Quarterly*, *Vogue*, and *Good Housekeeping*. An examination of the images that accompany these words would be beneficial to determine the entire message these magazines are sending to their readers. Students as well as professionals working in the field of communication could learn priceless journalistic values on how one should and should not attract a reader's attention, realizing that what they write may, over an extended period of time, influence how their audience views the world around them. One must never underestimate the power of the written word.

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APPENDIX

Coding Instructions

The coding instructions and a sample of a coding sheet are listed below. Both of these items were used in the collection and analysis of research in this study. Table 18 displays the coding sheet.

When each magazine cover is examined, follow these steps:

1. List the magazine identification number in the first column labeled “Magazine I.D.” The following scheme has been assigned to each of the magazines in this study:

1=*Esquire*

2=*Vogue*

3=*Good Housekeeping*

4=*Gentlemen’s Quarterly*

2. In the second column of the coding sheet, labeled “Date,” list the month and year of each magazine cover being examined.

3. Number each cover blurb. After each monthly magazine cover blurb is numbered, insert these numbers in the third column, labeled “Blurb Number.” Blurbs need to be labeled consecutively for each magazine cover studied, but not throughout the entire sample. Begin each magazine cover with number one.

4. In column four, insert the theme number that is present in each blurb. This column is labeled “Theme.” The following scheme should be used:

1= Beauty/body image- blurb promoting physical self-image or beauty

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- 2= Career- blurb oriented toward professional or work issues
 - 3= Celebrity infatuation- cover text presenting celebrity in a sexual or lustful manner
 - 4= Celebrity news- blurb with topic pertaining to celebrity current issues
 - 5= Family- blurb promoting family relationship issues
 - 6= Fashion- blurb presenting fashion trends and topics
 - 7= Health- blurb displaying issues dealing with personal health
 - 8= Home- blurb the focuses on domestic issues
 - 9= Love/relationship- blurb dealing with relationship issues with significant other
 - 10= Marriage- blurb involving martial topics
 - 11= Money- blurb focusing on financial theme
 - 12= News- blurb presenting current events
 - 13= Sex- blurb focusing on sexual gratification
 - 15= Leisure- blurb promoting pastime activities including reading and recreation
 - 30= Can't Tell- blurb with more than one theme or with a theme unable to be classified

5. In the last column, column five, list if a gendered or nongendered message is present in each blurb theme. This column is labeled "Gendered/Non Gendered Message." Example of gendered messages given in Malkin's research that analyzed popular magazine covers include: "Get the Body You Really Want," "Stay Skinny," and "5 Ways to Keep Your Husband Faithful."²¹⁴ The gendered message code is:

- 0= Non gendered message
- 1= Gendered Message

VITA

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