

POST-FEMINISM AND SPECIALIZED MEDIA: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF COSMOPOLITAN HEADLINES

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Abstract

The perspectives on contemporary forms of feminism are often diffuse and lead to various controversies. In the present paper I will approach the differences between the third wave of feminism and post-feminism (and their relation with other 'post' concepts like postmodernism and post-structuralism), also taking into account the first and second wave. The main focus of the article is to identify the trends that postfeminist media promotes as the new values of today's women. In doing so I chose to analyze the contingency of the terms found on the covers of Cosmopolitan magazine, the best-selling women's magazine in the world. The selected units were the issues dating from January 2008 until March 2013 and I have deepened the analysis of two main elements promoted by post-feminism (also found in a significant amount in the magazine according to the data obtained): the beauty and fashion complex and the independent woman. Both come from the postmodern tendency regarding individualization as a primary objective for the individual. This construction of the self is made through economic freedom and this also correlates with the choice to shape one's self through looks and body. On the basis of the two elements mentioned above, the study will try to see in what amount the two hypotheses confirm: 1. the magazine over-promotes beauty and 2. Cosmopolitan magazine also promotes the independent woman (the career woman) and thereby puts on a second place the traditional roles of women (of mothers and wives). Also, two other elements tend to intersect with beauty and independence: pop culture and sex life.

Keywords: post-feminism, backlash, the beauty complex, the independent woman.

1. Feminism – a brief introduction

Feminism represents a „defensive reaction towards misogyny and sexism”¹, its means „svary, literally, fom one self-declared feminist to the next”², the feminist paradigm states that women are being oppressed by men due to the unbalanced power relationships which are based not on the biological characteristics of the human being, but on the evolution of power relationships between men and women in society³.

Used for the first time in 1895 in Great Britain⁴, the term “feminism” largely asserts that gender issues rely on the way in which the public and the private fields are being organized⁵. In regards to this aspect, Susan Faludi reminds us that the feminist agenda is very simple, even if there are many disputes around the term: feminism “asks that women not be forced to choose between public justice and private happiness”⁶, it asks that women to gain the right to define themselves “instead of having their identity defined for them by their culture and their men”⁷. It can be said that feminism is a true paradigm shift which „pulled out of the shadows and silence half of humanity”, completely transformed the economy and the labor (through women's access to education), the family life (through the control of reproduction) and, of course, the identity of the "anonymous half" as it has been defined by men and the patriarchal family⁸.

Given the fact that feminist main goals differed during its history and the apparent “pattern of fall and rise of feminism over time”⁹, most theorists preffer to categorize it in three main waves: equality feminism (the first wave), difference feminism (the second wave) and autonomy feminism, which began in 1990 and continues to this day (the third wave). De Beauvoir proposed the division of feminism in two waves: modern feminism (equality feminism) between 1789 and 1950s and contemporary feminism that runs from the ‘60s until today.

¹ Mihael Miroiu, *Drumul către autonomie*, Polirom, Iași, 2004, p. 27

² Angela McRobbie, *The Aftermath of Feminism*, SAGE Publications, London, 2009, p.2

³ Vladimir Pasti, *Ultima inegalitate. Relatiile de gen din Romania*, Poliram, Iasi, 2003 p. 57

⁴ Miroiu, op cit., p. 58

⁵ Ibidem., p. 72

⁶ Susan Faludi, *Backlash. The Undeclared War against American Women*, Three Rivers Press, New York, 2006, p. 15

⁷ Idem.

⁸ Daniela Roventa-Frumusani, „Identitatea feminină și discursul mediatic in România postcomunistă”, Otilia Dragomir (coord), *Femei, cuvinte și imagini - Perspective feministe*, Iași, Editura Polirom, 2002, p. 22

⁹ Jane Pilcher and Imelda Whelehan, *Fifty key concepts in gender studies*, SAGE Publications, London, 2004, p.52

1.1. First wave

The first wave feminism was defined as “equality feminism” as it has succeeded to obtain a equal legal status for women in relation to men¹⁰. The beginning of first wave feminism is hard to be pointed with accuracy: some consider that it took place from at least “the mid to laste nineteenth century until about the 1920s”¹¹ even if concerns about the rights of women had been raised before the nineteenth century (authors like Christina de Pisan, Mary Astell, Mary Wollstonecraft) while others (Simone de Beauvoir) consider it lasted until the 1950s.

First wave feminism was also described as “social feminism”¹² as the movement requested equality for women in the public field (mostly political and working rights). Given the context of the World War I, women proved they can handle the economic production and this was used as an argument to ask for political rights. The result of this struggle were the regulation of women's work and the full voting rights for all women¹³.

1.2. Second wave

Some consider the starting point for the second wave feminism to be the year 1963 when Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mistique* in the U.S. while others the year 1949 when Simone de Beauvoir published, in France, *The Second Sex*. No matter the year the second wave appeared, its basic feature was “the transition from the equality feminism to the difference feminism”¹⁴.

Unlike the first wave which focused on the public sphere, the second wave insisted on the private sphere and on the “liberation from the oppressiveness of a patriarchally defined society”¹⁵. Second wave feminists considered that equality was not yet achieved even if women won their public rights since they had to deal with inequality in their personal lifes. They claimed that “the

¹⁰ Miroiu, op. cit., p.56

¹¹ Pilcher, Whelehan, op. cit., p.52

¹² Randall in Jane Pilcher and Imelda Whelehan, p.53

¹³ Miroiu, op. cit., p. 58

¹⁴ Ibidem, p. 65

¹⁵ Pilcher, Whelehan, op. cit., p. 144

intimate matters should not be taboo in the public discourse, on the contrary, they become relevant for the organization of society"¹⁶.

Second wave feminism relied on the idea that "biology is not destiny", idea supported by both Friedan and de Beauvoir. In the U.S. Betty Friedan debunked the myth of the happy and fulfilled American married woman, showing that this is only an appearance and that in reality these women live in a constant state of boredom and ignorance while limiting themselves to raising children and cleaning the house¹⁷. Simone de Beauvoir coined in her book the idea that "**One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman**", underlining the importance of the cultural and political context¹⁸.

The liberation of women from the social constraints based on their bodies led to the "anti-family position and the collective care of children"¹⁹ in the 1970s and early 1980's. This, as we will see below, will be later used as an argument to strengthen the anti-feminism position of the backlashers.

Among the achievements of the second wave feminism we can count: the control of reproduction (by facilitating the access to contraceptives), access to some hitherto considered typically male professions, equal wages for men and women, state support for childcare (in some countries), legal sanctions against all forms of rape, sexual harassment and domestic violence²⁰. Along with first wave feminism, the second wave was criticized for reflecting mainly the interests of white middle class women and not focusing on women who live in poverty, black women, asian women or east-european women²¹.

1.3.Third wave

By far the most controversial wave of feminism - in terms of its definition and characteristics - is the third wave, mostly due to the fact that its moment of occurrence (the late 1980's and the

¹⁶ Miroiu, op. cit., p.71

¹⁷ Ibidem, p. 65

¹⁸ Idem.

¹⁹ McRobbie, 2009, p.32

²⁰ Ibidem, p.72

²¹ Idem.

beginning of the 1990s) corresponds also with the appearance of post-feminism. Third wave feminism can be described as the feminism of a younger generation which acknowledges the legacy of the second wave feminism, but also identifies its limitation such as the fact that it remained exclusive to the condition of white and middle class women²². It is also important to mention that most third wave feminists separate their perspectives from post-feminism²³ and the article will explain below the main reasons why this difference is essential.

Third wave feminism was also named "the feminism of autonomy" and this is closely related to the fact that the new wave distanced itself from "the conservative, victimist approach of the two previous waves"²⁴. If the first two waves emphasized gender differences, the lower condition of woman society and privacy, the third wave points out the differences between women in different social, economic and political contexts.

Third wave promotes "a politics of difference"²⁵(which comes in close relation with the derridean poststructuralist ideas) and recognizes that feminism continues to be an "active and important force in contemporary society"²⁶. The main focus of this wave is "not the difference between men and women, but the difference between women that belong to particular social and political contexts"²⁷. What also makes it different from the previous waves is the movement's "activism outside the academy"²⁸ as it tries to make its ideas present in many fields, its approaches being "less academic, more accessible, more popular and more narrative"²⁹. Besides the structure of its discourse (using a less demanding one), third wave feminism also changed the ways of transmission, adding mass media among the channels used to communicate, thereby adapting itself to the media environment and realising its "politics through mass media and popular culture"³⁰.

²² Pilcher, Whelehan, op. cit., p. 169

²³ Ibidem, p.170

²⁴ Miroiu, op. cit., p. 81

²⁵ Shelley Budgeon, "The Contradictions of Successful Fertility: Third-Wave Feminism, Postfeminism and 'New' Feminities" in *New Feminities. Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity*, New York, 2011, p. 282

²⁶ Ibidem, p.281

²⁷ Miroiu, op. cit., p. 79

²⁸ Budgeon, op. cit., p. 290

²⁹ Miroiu, op. cit., p.81

³⁰ Pilcher, Whelehan, op. cit., p. 171

Another novelty in the structure of the discourse is the preference for an “empowerment discourse” – third wave feminism does not appeal to a casualty discourse. This change also represents an adaptation to the current women’s condition since during the last half of the century women gained access to many positions which developed “women’s ability to define their own identities independent of their relations to others”³¹.

Third wave feminism defends the politics of second wave feminism while also understanding its limitations. Third wave feminists consider that feminism must continue its battle for women’s rights, for all women: black, asian, spanish, working class women and so on. It stands for the interpretation of each context that women are subjected to.

2. Postfeminism

Postfeminism is a term coined by 1990s mass media which is used as a label for what the media considers to be the trend of women's movement after the first and second wave feminism³². Although it overlaps in terms of time with the third wave of feminism, postfeminism denies the principles promoted by feminism (in particular the second wave) and considers that feminist ideas are no longer relevant as women have achieved equality. Given the intersection between postfeminist and the media, many authors see postfeminism as one of the top supporters of the backlash against feminism. Also, Susan Faludi argues that this ideological trend did not first occur in the 1990s, but that „postfeminist sentiments first surfaced in the 1920s press”³³.

Angela McRobbie sees postfeminism as „an active process by which feminist gains of the 1970s and 1980s come to be undermined”³⁴. Through the metaphors of freedom and choice that are now inextricably linked to young women, „feminism is decisively aged and made to seem redundant. Feminism is cast into the shadows, where at best it can expect to have some afterlife”³⁵. Contemporary popular culture elements are an effective means in this destruction of feminism, the

³¹ Budgeon, op. cit., p. 284

³² Miroiu, op. cit., p.74

³³ Faludi, op. cit., p. 65

³⁴ Angela McRobbie, „Post-feminism and popular culture”, în *Feminist Media Studies* Vol. 4, No.3, Taylor & Francis Ltd., 2004, p.255

³⁵ Ibidem., p. 255

„anti-feminist endorsement of female individualisation is embodied in the figure of the ambitions TV blonde”³⁶.

Postfeminism is also associated with other concepts sharing the `post` prefix: postmodernism, poststructuralism³⁷. The main idea shared by the `post` triade is the fact that everything is fluid, nothing can be clearly defined or confined, nothing can have a singular definition. `Post` can be understood in two different ways: either that it has exceeded or superseded the term, that „we are now decisively beyond the substantive noun”³⁸, or that the `post` term has „come from”³⁹ the original term. As Miroiu puts it, the `post` prefix „might denote succession, not necessarily adversity”⁴⁰. Another interpretation of this issue asserts that postfeminism „relies upon a fundamental contradiction – feminism is both incorporated but simultaneously reviled”⁴¹ and that the term incorporates in a selective way some elements of feminism which are then presented in a easy, „media-friendly version”⁴².

Also, postfeminism can be understood as a form of „rebranding for feminism”⁴³ by continuing to support women but giving up „the politics and claims of self-empowerment”⁴⁴ and replacing it with „the right of self-expression”⁴⁵. This new right, intensively promoted by postfeminists and also the media, becomes the main motto in constructing the identity of today’s women. The right of self-expression is exploited in a limited way and it comes hand in hand with the encouragement to „embark on projects of individualized self-definition and privatized self expression exemplified in the celebration of lifestyle and consumption choices”⁴⁶. Supporting this view, Mihaela Miroiu also

³⁶ Ibidem., p. 257

³⁷ Miroiu, op. cit., p. 74

³⁸ Michelle Barrett, “Postfeminism” in *Understanding Contemporary Society. Theories of the Present*, SAGE Publication, 2000, p. 50

³⁹ Ibidem, p. 50

⁴⁰ Miroiu, op. cit., p. 74

⁴¹ Budgeon, op. cit., p.281

⁴² McRobbie, 2009, p.31

⁴³ Pilcher, Whelehan, op. cit., p. 106

⁴⁴ Ibidem, p. 105

⁴⁵ Budgeon, op. cit., p. 289

⁴⁶ Ibidem, p.281

states that postfeminist lifestyle is „the product of the economic independence and sexual freedom of women”⁴⁷ thus making the economic and consumerist compound a main front in analyzing postfeminist trends.

The postfeminist affirmation that women’s identities are not static and that they cannot be clearly defined represents an affiliation with the poststructuralist agenda and with its view that „meanings cannot be fixed or remain stable, but are endlessly remade through the process of reading/speaking and changes in social life”⁴⁸. The fluidity of identities is clearly underlined by postfeminists: „personal identities cannot be imposed by anybody, not even by feminists”⁴⁹, nobody can dictate women how they should live or what values they should promote or adopt. This is why most postfeminist detach themselves from the feminist label and strongly advocate that the first and second wave movements were rigid and scanty.

Despite the poststructuralist agenda postfeminism supports, its manifestation sometimes contradicts the relativity of terms, the fluidity of definitions and the freedom of choice (but we should keep in mind that choice, as Baudrillard claims, has come to be overly commercialized⁵⁰). The denial of the first and second wave feminisms represents a strong argument for this position. If postfeminism would accept a true fluidity in definitions then it should not fiercely fight against the second wave and any resemblances found in the current feminist sphere. As McRobbie observes, from the postfeminist point of view, feminism „robbed women of their most treasured pleasures, i.e. romance, gossip and obsessive concerns about how to catch a husband”⁵¹. If postfeminism truly would dismiss any trace of categorization then we should not witness such a „binary opposition between feminity and feminism”⁵², where feminity is seen as a basic characteristic for postfeminism. This tendency to reinstate feminity prevails in the postfeminist agenda where traditional feminine good looks are combined with a new exercise of women’s power⁵³. Faludi condemns the „return to feminity” and describes the feminine woman as „forever static and

⁴⁷ Miroiu, op. cit., p. 75

⁴⁸ Pilcher, Whelehan, op. cit., p. 113

⁴⁹ Miroiu, op. cit., p.75

⁵⁰ Michelle M. Lazar, p. 46

⁵¹ McRobbie, 2009, p. 21

⁵² Ibidem., p.13

⁵³ Barrett,op. cit., p. 48

childlike"⁵⁴. Also, Faludi tears the so-called myth of choice by arguing that this is mostly created by the media and advertisers that promote „the pseudo-emancipation of women"⁵⁵ where the freedom to choose is, in fact, the freedom to consume.

In regards to the relationship between postmodernism and postfeminism, many consider that postfeminism is the result of the intersection between feminism and postmodernism⁵⁶. Postfeminism is presented by the media as a modern alternative to obsolete feminism which makes it closely related to consumer society and, even more, it can be said that the postfeminist rules and models are dictated by the consumer culture. As McRobbie underlines, the feminine consumer culture has three main pillars: career success, glamour and sexuality⁵⁷. All three are based on the main characteristics of postmodernism: individualism and the construction of the self. Therefore it is no surprise that the most acclaimed slogans praised by postfeminism are economic and sexual freedom. In the following pages I will develop a brief analysis of the (financial and sexual) independence and the beauty cluster (containing beauty and fashion trends and also the management of the body) using also the data from the research.

At the same time, McRobbie wonders if postfeminism represents a complexification of feminism or a backlash against feminism⁵⁸ since it criticizes academic feminism and claims that it addresses free and nonconformist women who do not obey the canons and models imposed by society. Other authors have also supported the idea that postfeminism is a creation of multinational corporations that treat women as their territory and educate them to become Barbie dolls that can have it all: career, family, beauty, youth, sexual satisfaction – and all just by engaging in the consumption of the entire network of services and goods that provide such an image⁵⁹. As stated at the beginning of the section, it is difficult to find a strict and firm definition of postfeminism but among its basic characteristics we can count: the comeback of femininity (accompanied by a constant critique of feminism), the interdependence with mass media and popular culture, the economic and sexual freedom.

⁵⁴ Faludi, op.cit., p. 84

⁵⁵ Ibidem., p. 86

⁵⁶ Brooks (1997) cited in Fifty key concepts in gender studies, p. 110

⁵⁷ McRobbie, 2009, p.28

⁵⁸ McRobbie, 2004, p. 255

⁵⁹ Germaine Greer in Mihaela Miroiu, p. 76

2.1. The media and the backlash against feminism

The term 'backlash' was coined in 1991 by Susan Faludi in *Backlash. The Undeclared War Against American Women* where she described it as a deceptively progressive strategical trend promoted by the media and the advertisers. The term is also consistent with the feminism fragmentation into waves and Faludi shows (through the analysis of the main journals for the U.S.) that each feminist movement was attacked by the media even in its heyday. It is important to note that the backlash does not only states that feminism is overrated and superannuated, but it also supports the idea that the 'female identity crises' are caused by feminism which robbed women from their feminity and destroyed the woman's happiness⁶⁰.

The media has a major concern about the image of beautiful bodies, pop culture celebrities and models who exemplify a good life and that besides looking flawless are also surrounded by the latest consumer goods - images of a carefree life, of bodily pleasures and excesses, of narcissistic pampering. these images promoted by the media "they strengthen what we are not and what we would like to be"⁶¹. The relationship between beauty, media and the backlash against feminism is given by the political function of the beauty code. Having a negative self-perception, being anxious and frustrated, women "turn their face from social and political competitiveness", the accept subordinate jobs and lower wages than the ones received by men. This way women are made to be more concerned with their looks than public affairs.⁶² Advertiser have promoted the fact that beauty can be bought from the early ages of the media backlash against feminism and this led to "the perception of beauty as a consumer product"⁶³.

Also, this sustained promotion of the 'new traditionalism' and good looks respects the A-T-R model (awareness-trial-reinforcement)⁶⁴. The first step (awareness) is the easiest and uses repetition to make people aware of the product (as Faludi also noted: "trend journalism attains authority through the power of repetition; said enough times, everything can be made to seem

⁶⁰ Faludi, op. cit. p. 65

⁶¹ Ibidem, p.197

⁶² Lipovetsky, op.cit., p. 117

⁶³ Lipovetsky, op. cit., p. 124

⁶⁴ Stan Le Roy Wilson, *Mass Media/Mass Culture*, Mc Graw-Hill, 1992, p. 309

true"⁶⁵); the second step (trial) implies an extra effort to determine the consumer to buy the product – here the media (in its promotion of beauty, sex, independence) delegates celebrities to do the hard work; the last step (reinforcement) ensures the continuity of the process and the distribution of the product bought/value adopted.

The fact that the media (magazines, in particular) continuously tried to undermine the message and goals of feminism is plentifully detailed by Susan Faludi in *Backlash*. As she notes, backlashes appeared once feminism started to gain ground, the two movements often being found in the same period. The backlash on feminism increased after World War II: women were sent back home as their help was no longer essential in supporting the economy. Also, this tendency was correlated with the expansion of the advertising industry which but this “did not transform women into full-time happy housewives, it just demoted them to poorly paid secretaries”⁶⁶. The 80’s backlash focused on the condition of single women: the media, with the aid of pop psychologists started to blame on the 70’s feminism the unhappiness and the despair of single women. In the same period, as Faludi shows, when the backlash press “wasn’t labeling single women mental misfits, it was busy counting the bodies”⁶⁷. This trend was then accentuated once the fashion industry had difficulties in selling their products and the backlash focused on the ‘sexyness’ women should show at work. The fashion industry banded together with the beauty industry and sent their advertising ‘troops’ on the field. From now “consumption, youth and beauty are new obligations for women”⁶⁸.

3. CASE STUDY

3.1. Methodology

In order to have a closer look at how the media is interacting with the feminine/feminist trends promoted today, I chose to analyze the most popular magazine in Romanian: *Cosmopolitan* magazine, the issues from January 2008 until March 2013. This option was strengthened by the fact that „magazines represent the most specialized form of media”⁶⁹.

⁶⁵ Faludi, *op.cit.*, p. 93

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 69

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 112

⁶⁸ Lipovetsky, *op. cit.*, p. 163

⁶⁹ Stan Le Roy Wilson, *Mass Media/Mass Culture*, Mc Graw-Hill, 1992, p. 120

Cosmopolitan magazine is known worldwide and it is the best-selling women's magazine in the world (as it proclaims itself on the cover and also on the official website⁷⁰). The first issue of Cosmopolitan magazine appeared in 1886 in the United States and addressed the high class of the society. Since 1956, the magazine changed its audience, addressing modern young women who want to build a career. Today, Cosmopolitan is published in 34 languages and sold in over 100 countries, the magazine with the largest circulation in the world⁷¹. Cosmopolitan magazine's target audience is represented by women with the age between 20 and 45 who live in large cities, with medium and high education (83% from the audience), which have an income higher than the average and act as the main shopper in the family⁷². The Cosmopolitan consumer (also called "the Cosmo girl") is active, happy to spend money, sees the magazine as a source of information, loves comfort and beautiful things, is concerned to look good and wants a job which will give her the opportunity to be promoted.

The magazine was launched in Romania in 1998. According to its media kit, Cosmopolitan considers itself more than a magazine, it represents a lifestyle which is trustfully followed by its readers: „Cosmopolitan is the life stylist for millions of *fun fearless females* who want to be the best they can be in every area of their lives [...]. Young women love and trust COSMO as their best girl friend, the one that anticipates their needs (no matter if it's about beauty, fashion, health, career or love and relationship)”⁷³.

The research method used for this article was content analysis technique, using the contingency method where the context unit selected was the cover of 62 issues of the Cosmopolitan magazine. According to Osgood, the contingency or co-occurrence analysis extracts from the text the relationships between the elements of the message and highlights the simultaneous presences of two or more elements in the same semantic context; the visual model for analyzing this frequency is the contingency matrix which “provides the information necessary for comparing expected or chance going-togetherness of categories with actual obtained going-togetherness”⁷⁴. Also, Osgood points out that “when dealing with deliberately planned messages, particularly when the source is

⁷⁰ <http://www.sanomahearst.ro/reviste/cosmopolitan.html>

⁷¹ http://www.sanomahearst.ro/uploads/magazine/mediakit/4/Cosmo_Media_Kit_2012_ENG.pdf

⁷² Idem.

⁷³ http://www.sanomahearst.ro/uploads/magazine/mediakit/4/Cosmo_Media_Kit_2012_ENG.pdf

⁷⁴ Charles Osgood, Contingency Analysis. Validating Evidence and Process. in The Content Analysis Reader, Klaus H Krippendorff, SAGE Publication, 2008, p. 115

an institution, as in propaganda (or mass media content) analysis, it would probably be safer to speak of the "policy" of the source rather than its association structure"⁷⁵. Whether or not we might deal with a policy of the magazine analyzed, the contingency method represents a complex manner of finding and examining the association between various terms/themes that form the message of the best selling women's magazine.

The cover of a magazine is carefully and strategically built to attract and persuade readers to buy the publication; the cover includes the headlines of the most important articles found inside the magazine and these are selected based on the structure of Cosmopolitan itself: „relationships and romance, the best in fashion and beauty, the latest on women's health and well being, as well as what is happening in pop culture and entertainment ... and just about everything else fun fearless females want to know about."⁷⁶

3.2. Hypothesis

The analysis starts from two assumptions: that mass media (as the main voice of postfeminism) promotes two main values: beauty and economic independence.

The first hypothesis of the research is that Cosmopolitan magazine, as a representative figure of postfeminist media, over-promotes beauty, sees it as a duty and therefore prioritizes the theme.

The second hypothesis assumes that postfeminist media also promotes the independent woman and thereby puts on a second place the traditional roles of women (wife and mother). If beauty concerns represent an old topic in women's culture, independence is relatively new and it emerged in the public sphere once with the first wave feminism. Also, the analysis will try to see if there are any unusual correlation between the independence of women and their traditional roles.

3.3. Results and data analysis

The terms selected for the analysis were referring to nine main topics: sex life; beauty tips; fashion and trend; body and diet; relationships; marriage; career; motherhood; celebrities and pop

⁷⁵ Osgood, op.cit., p. 119

⁷⁶ Cosmopolitan media kit

culture. I separated the „beauty and fashion complex” into three topics to be investigated (1. beauty tips; 2. fashion trends; 3. body and diet) because they refer to different sub-aspects regarding the physical appearance: the first one approaches beauty in its minimalistic details (hair, nails, skin, make-up), the second implies a materialistic and consumerist component (which is also to be analyzed in its contingency with career as the means of obtaining the economic resources necessary for being up to date with fashion) and the third one enforces the self-control over the body.

Table 1 – Raw Data Matrix

The appearance of the terms on the covers of Cosmopolitan magazine

Sex life	Beauty tips	Fashion trends	Body & diet	Relationship	Marriage	Career	Motherhood	Pop figures, celebrities
91.9%	67.7%	33.8%	56.4%	77.4%	12.9%	53.2%	14.5%	93.5%

The table above shows that on the 62 covers analyzed the most popular themes refer to pop culture (93.5%, the lack only from the winter issues where the main subject is about new years' resolution and the annual zodiac) and the improvement of the sexual life (91.9%) being followed by topics that talk about relationships (77.4%) and beauty (67.7%). Situated in the middle of the chart, being present in only almost half the issues taken into consideration, we find the topics regarding body maintenance (56.4%) and career advices (53.2%). Fashion is present on only 33.8% covers while motherhood (14.5%) and marriage (12.9%) are left at the bottom of the chart.

The contingency matrix

TERMS	Sex life	Beauty tips	Fashion	Body & diet	Relationship	Marriage	Career	Motherhood	Pop figures, celebrities

			trends	tips					s
Sex life	---	0.62	0.31	0.51	0.71	0.11	0.48	0.13	0.85
Beauty tips	0.66	---	0.22	0.37	0.51	0.08	0.35	0.09	0.62
Fashion trends	0.30	0.12	---	0.19	0.26	0.04	0.17	0.04	0.31
Body & diet tips	0.51	0.27	0.21	---	0.43	0.07	0.30	0.08	0.52
Relashionships	0.69	0.50	0.25	0.45	---	0.09	0.41	0.11	0.72
Marriage	0.14	0.11	0.03	0.09	0.06	---	0.06	0.01	0.12
Career	0.46	0.35	0.14	0.27	0.38	0.12	---	0.07	0.49
Motherhood	0.12	0.06	0.08	0.08	0.11	0.04	0.04	---	0.13
Pop figures, celebrities	0.85	0.62	0.30	0.53	0.77	0.14	0.51	0.14	---

From the contingency matrix above we can see that the expected contingencies are rarely identical with the obtained ones. This is the case of: sex life with body and diet tips, pop figures with sex life, beauty with career, pop figures with beauty, motherhood with body, relationships with

motherhood. Most of the expected contingencies are closely to the obtained ones. There are some results that differ, in some cases the difference means the double or more than double between the expected values and the obtained ones. For example, the intersection between beauty tips and fashion is expected to be 0.22 but in fact is only 0.12; body and beauty topics were estimated to be found together in 0.37 cases but they were found in only 0.27; motherhood and fashion were expected in 0.04 cases but they were present in 0.08; career and marriage, as well, were expected in a lower percentage and were found in 0.12 cases instead of 0.06. The largest gap between expected contingencies (0.01) and obtained contingencies (0.04) is between motherhood and marriage, the estimated number being four times lower than the actual data.

By far the highest co-occurrence found is the one between celebrities and sex life (0.85 in both scales) which strengthens McRobbie's idea that „we are witness to a hyper-culture of commercial sexuality”⁷⁷. Cosmopolitan magazine promotes the exploration and understanding of female sexuality, sexual pleasure becomes a goal for women which necessarily has to be fulfilled. We are witnessing therefore a dialectic of hedonism where pleasure and happiness are the women's new coordinates, hence the increase of all the techniques and templates that must be followed. The highest association found (pop figures and sex life) also comes as a confirmation for McRobbie's position that „the media is the key site for defining codes of sexual conduct. It casts judgement and establishes the rules of play”⁷⁸. Also, both pop figures and sex tips represent the most popular terms from the 62 covers analyzed (see table 1 above). The result of this contingency also is correlated with the fact that celebrities are often shown as sex-symbols, always looking impeccable (the obtained co-occurrence of pop figures and beauty is also high, 0.62).

The second high value found is given by the contingency between pop figures and relationships (0.72 expected and 0.77 obtained), both representing key elements in the construction of the new femininity. The third co-occurrence is given by the ‚relationships – sex life' pair (0.69 obtained and 0.71 expected) which supports the idea that „female eroticism continues to feed on emotional meanings and images”⁷⁹.

The top three lowest contingencies should be interpreted in regards to Osgood's statement that „if the contingency is negative it presumably means that these ideas are associated

⁷⁷ McRobbie, 2004, p. 259

⁷⁸ Ibidem. p. 258

⁷⁹ Lipovetsky, op. cit., p. 25

with some kind of unpleasant affect (intentionally avoiding certain associations, for example, in order not to offend somebody, to hide something, or in compliance with a taboo, suggests that the concepts are close in the mind of the source)"⁸⁰. This chart consists of: 1. fashion – marriage (0.3 obtained, 0.4 estimated contingency); 2. a. marriage – motherhood (0.1 estimated) and 2.b. career – motherhood (0.7 estimated) both having the obtained contingency of 0.4; 3.a. beauty – motherhood and 3.b. relationships – marriage (both having the obtained co-occurrence of 0.6 and the estimated one 0.9). This dissociation of terms can be explained by the editor's choice of filling the columns on these topics separately or intermittently. Some of these results are quite surprising: marriage and motherhood both designate the private sphere and the women's traditional roles and thereby they should appear together; their dissociation might come from the limited space left for them on the main covers of the magazine. Far from being the top two issues for the Cosmopolitan target audience (see table 1 and the appearance of the two terms), the role of mother and wife seem to exclude themselves in the 62 units analyzed.

4. Discussion : the beauty and fashion complex

Once entering the mass communication period, the beauty cult has now become a political, economic and social stake⁸¹ and also a means of access to a profession using the combative strategy of seduction. Never before this period did cosmetics, care products, advances in medical and cosmetic surgery serve the beauty trend to an extent so great. Analyzing new models of femininity promoted today, Naomi Woolf affirms that beauty has all the components of a new church: like any religious cult, beauty has its own indoctrination system (cosmetics, advertising), its holy texts (beauty tips), purification cycles (diets), its own guru (Jane Fonda, celebrities), the belief in reincarnation (revitalizing creams) and its rescuers (plastic surgeons).⁸²

The terms identified in Cosmopolitan magazine support the ideal of female beauty promoted by women's magazines constructed through practices of consumption (news about fashion often include specific recommendations and advices to purchase products that belong to certain famous brands) and the "management" of the body (recommending a healthy lifestyle through sport, outlining certain areas of the body or recommending diets that help losing weight). Beauty

⁸⁰ Charles Osgood, *op.cit.*, p.119

⁸¹ Dominique Paquet, *Frumusețea. O istorie a eternului feminin*, București, Editura Univers, 2007, p. 88

⁸² Naomi Woolf quoted in Gilles Lipovetsky, *op cit*, p. 109

practices, the passion for the latest fashion trends and a flawless appearance are generally expensive and requires a solid economic capital. In addition, consumer goods designate certain characteristics that differentiate individuals; they become signs of the social position. Consumption provides the tools to negotiate the tension between individuality and generality: the goods or services can be used as fences and as bridges⁸³.

The high occurrence of terms related to the body, sexuality and beauty is in line with Mike Featherstone's idea that consumer culture asks people to take an instrumental attitude towards their bodies, to look thoroughly for any imperfections, measuring them with the ideal perfect bodies presented in advertising and mass media⁸⁴. This helps us understand the high contingency between pop culture figures and beauty tips (0.62 in both measuring scales, expected and actual) and also between pop culture representatives and body and diet tips (0.53). In Bourdieu's terms we can refer to a symbolic capital of the body. This explanation can sustain the uprising interest of women towards the gaining of a body similar to that of the fashion models and towards clothing and cosmetics. In contemporary society the body becomes the support of self identity and beauty practices are normalized as fundamental elements of the feminine selves⁸⁵. Moreover, consumer goods suggest specific characteristics that differentiate individuals, becoming signs of social position.

Although the whole 'fashion, beauty, body complex' can be interpreted as belonging to both the private and the public sphere, it is likely that the management of the body and the beauty cult to be considered active elements in the public field especially due to the mass media and advertising lobby. Fashion, unlike the other two elements (which are more bound up with will and less with money), can be seen as an area of transition between private and public life. Fashion is private because helps women to be 'sexy' and therefore they are more likely to find a partner. It is also public because it gives you a certain status in society. In addition, looking good and being up to date with fashion trends become more and more important in acquiring professional and social success (though the co-occurrence of 0.14 between fashion and career do not suggest that Cosmopolitan associates the two terms). Therefore, in the following I will analyze how the rules and ideals of (post)femininity interact with the professional lives of women.

⁸³ Jennifer Smith Maguire and Kim Stanway, „Looking good: Consumption and the problems of self-production”, *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, Nr. 11, Vol. 63 (2008), p. 67

⁸⁴ Mike Featherstone, *Body, Image and Affect in Consumer Culture*, p. 207.

⁸⁵ Michelle M. Lazar, *The Right to Be Beautiful*, p. 49

To sum up how the results of the analysis interfere with the first hypothesis, we can see that beauty is highly associated with sex life (0.66 obtained, 0.62 expected), pop culture (0.62) and relationships (0.50). So beauty is necessary when the magazine talks about sexual pleasure, fame or feelings. Moreover, this is also a consequence of the fact with "doing beauty is a vital component of doing femininity"⁸⁶ and it comes in line with beauty topics being present in 67.7% of the units selected, fashion in 33.8% and body in 56.4%, this makes it the predominant topic of the magazines and if the analysis would have taken them together it would have obtained a presence of 98.3%.

5. Discussion : the independent woman

Until the last century, the woman was limited to the roles of wife and mother, carrying her activities in the vicinity of the household. In the last decades, in western societies, it has been developed and promoted the image of the independent woman. This image was gradually taken by countries less evolved that are still fighting with economic transition (like Romania) and also with traditional norms and models of behaviour. This new image of the independent woman is totally opposed from what has been known for centuries. Tamelessness, submission, frailty and the domestic disappear from the modern woman's agenda, being replaced by authority, independence, career.

Gilles Lipovetsky underlines that in contemporary society the women's new aspirations do not rule out their traditional responsibilities; modern and old roles coexist⁸⁷. The same impression is shared by Romanian feminist Mihaela Miroiu who underlines that women nowadays have to deal with the "double day of work" – besides having a career women also have to deal with household duties and the rise of the children. Angela McRobbie sees this double condition as a compromise generated by the "new sexual contract": this compromise requires women to play a dual role, active in the workplace and primarily responsible for children and domestic life⁸⁸. These standpoints are clearly contradicted by the contingency matrix mostly because the private lives of women consist in non-permanent commitments (relationships).

One of the main objectives of the research is to see whether the model of femininity promoted by the magazines changed the classical structure of the relations between the two genres. If until the

⁸⁶ Michelle Lazara, *The Right to Be Beautiful*, p. 37

⁸⁷ Gilles Lipovetsky, *A treia femeie*, București, Editura Univers, 2000, p.229

⁸⁸ Angela McRobbie, 2009, p.80

last century women were limited to the roles of wives and mothers, working close to home or in the household, once with the entrance in the labor market and, subsequently, in the public field women strengthened the interest for the financial independence. Table 1 shows that career is present in more than half the issues analyzed (53.2%), less than celebrities, sex life or beauty but considerably more than marriage and motherhood (both terms taken together do not exceed career). The contingency matrix shows that the lowest co-occurrence is found between career and motherhood, followed by career –marriage (see table 2). The intimate and the public (professional) spheres seem to rarely intersect on Cosmopolitan covers and they are approached separately.

The highest contingency is found between career and celebrities (0.51 obtained) as they are the new preachers of accomplished women. The second contingency is between career and sex life (0.46 obtained), both terms representing fundamental elements the era of freedom. Relationships (0.36) and beauty (0.35 obtained) also are frequently found associated with career, supporting the independence model promoted by ads and mass media.

Although marriage is not treated intensively in Cosmopolitan magazine, the high percentage of the term 'relationships' shows that postfeminist media does not promote an independent and self-sufficient woman. On the contrary, the magazine launches the woman into a quest for happiness through partners, achieving orgasm or by finding the soul mate. The promotion of sentimental values is frivolously, by promoting relationships and pleasure and not marriage . These are the traces of a ,new-traditionalism' where women are urged to focus on the private sphere, on emotional life, but not in the family.

In regards to the second hypothesis the results were ambiguous in the sense that we cannot find a strong support of economic independence, but mostly of a sexual one. The sexual independence is putting marriage and motherhood on a second place, not career.

6. Conclusions

The research confirms the first hypothesis, Cosmopolitan magazine comprising a large number of terms related to the cult of the body and beauty. A new issue emerged from the analysis of the high values of contingency of all terms regarding beauty (beauty tricks, fashion, slim body, improved sex life) and popular culture represented by the stars of the film industry, television, fashion and music. Celebrities promoted in all units analyzed are the attributes of postmodern society, replacing the models promoted in the past.

The analysis also confirms the second hypothesis, since the terms related to career are less associated with women's personal life (relationships, marriage, children). However, the small contingency between career and motherhood suggests that the two terms are often excluded, showing that some content of the covers of the magazine like to address the two issues separately. Also, if independence constrains or vanishes the traditional roles of women, so do beauty and sex. We are witnessing a hypersexualization of the discourse as McRobbie said it. The messages largely focus on activities and interestests specific to young women (even if the target of Cosmopolitan magazine is larger), marriage and motherhood do not show up in this universe of beauty, romance and pleasure. Carreer is given the 5th place in the raw matrix, so it doesn't occupy to much interest to the magazine, and hence, we presume that it educates its readers to think the same.

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