10-7-2013

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Michael J. Saraceno
University of St. Joseph

Rachel B. Tambling
University of Connecticut

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Recommended APA Citation

Saraceno, M. J., & Tambling, R. B. (2013). The Sexy Issue: Visual Expressions of Heteronormativity and Gender Identities in Cosmopolitan Magazine. *The Qualitative Report*, 18(40), 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2013.1459>

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Abstract

The current study used a qualitative image analysis to explore observed interactional behaviors communicated through images printed in Cosmopolitan magazine during the calendar year of 2009 as a means to infer social values. Two general inquiries were used to guide the manner with which behavior was observed: is a heteronormative bias present and what values regarding the expressions of sexual orientation and gender identities can be inferred from these images. The sample consisted of 722 individual images depicting groups of two or more persons. Images were coded for group gender composition, activities engaged in, and physical touch. Results indicated a strong bias favoring heterosexual romantic/sexual intimacy and disfavoring homosexual romantic/sexual intimacy. The differences found between groups of women and groups of men suggest the expression of traditional hegemonic gender stereotypes in these image selections. Together, these findings suggest that traditional gender identities and heteronormative ideas were the dominant values communicated in these media image selections.

Keywords

Image Analysis, Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Heteronormativity, Magazine

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Acknowledgements

This research was made possible thanks to funding from the University of Connecticut Office of Undergraduate Research.

The Sexy Issue: Visual Expressions of Heteronormativity and Gender Identities in *Cosmopolitan* Magazine

Michael J. Saraceno

University of St. Joseph, West Hartford, Connecticut, USA

Rachel B. Tambling

University of Connecticut, Storrs, Connecticut, USA

The current study used a qualitative image analysis to explore observed interactional behaviors communicated through images printed in Cosmopolitan magazine during the calendar year of 2009 as a means to infer social values. Two general inquiries were used to guide the manner with which behavior was observed: is a heteronormative bias present and what values regarding the expressions of sexual orientation and gender identities can be inferred from these images. The sample consisted of 722 individual images depicting groups of two or more persons. Images were coded for group gender composition, activities engaged in, and physical touch. Results indicated a strong bias favoring heterosexual romantic/sexual intimacy and disfavoring homosexual romantic/sexual intimacy. The differences found between groups of womyn and groups of men suggest the expression of traditional hegemonic gender stereotypes in these image selections. Together, these findings suggest that traditional gender identities and heteronormative ideas were the dominant values communicated in these media image selections. Keywords: Image Analysis, Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Heteronormativity, Magazine

Introduction

It is important to be aware of the values of a culture and the impact they have on the members of its society. Values underlie, and to a large extent, determine the behavior of individuals. Unlike behavior, values are not directly observable. One way values can be uncovered is by the analytical interpretation of relational themes that emerge from the observed behaviors of members in a society (Vinson, Scott, & Lamont, 1977). Relational themes of particular interests are group composition, interpersonal contact, and activity participation restrictions. Such themes are commonly present in human social behaviors and have an associated set of beliefs and values.

One way that researchers can analyze the behavior of a society is through the critical examination of images in multimedia. Images provide static representations of behaviors that lend themselves to investigation concerning the values of the intended audience. As a result, images in multimedia offer research a unique view of dominant discourses around group composition, interpersonal contact, and activity participation restrictions.

Purpose

Using a qualitative image analysis, this study explored the current values (c. 2009) of American society, as described by the images in print issues of *Cosmopolitan* magazine. Specifically, attitudes toward sexual orientation and gender identities were evaluated from the observed behaviors in images using an inductive perspective. Two general inquiries were

used to guide the manner with which behavior was observed: (a) is a heteronormative bias present, and (b) what values regarding the expressions of sexual orientation and gender identities can be inferred from these images. Heteronormativity is the idea that the dominant culture of a society views heterosexuality as the “normal” sexual orientation.

This study is unique in that quantitative data will be presented to quantify the qualitative inquiry and provide a rich presentation of the results. Additionally, throughout this study, the feminist word *womyn* is used in place of *woman*, *women*, and *female*—except when intentionally used for emphasis—as an enhanced identifier of a gender separate from *man*.

Multimedia Images as Cultural Snapshots

The images in magazine advertisements have often been the subject of social science research due to the vast numbers of individuals they reach daily (cf. Döring & Pöschl, 2006; Goffman, 1978; Kang, 1997; Milillo, 2008; Xue & Ellzey, 2009). In the construction of advertisement images, emphasis is placed on information that is thought to be influential within the dominant culture of the target audience, such as commonly held values and beliefs (Wolin, 2003). Goffman (1978), proposed the idea that human models in advertisement images are intentionally choreographed to convey particular values concerning social identity and expectations. The values chosen for representation by human models in advertisement images are a reflection of the dominant cultural beliefs regarding social identities. As a result, the representation of human relationships in advertisement images offers research a unique view of normative discourses regarding social identities related to sexual orientation and gender.

The analysis of magazine advertisement images often excludes images related to editorial articles. Editorial articles, similar to advertisements, are created to complement the dominant cultural discourses of the target audience. Images juxtaposed with editorial text are selected to visually enhance the central themes of the article. Likewise, images of human models are intentionally choreographed to represent the chosen relational values. The exclusion of editorial images with human models from analysis of magazine images results in an incomplete assessment of social values communicated through the images. Appropriately, this study includes all images of human models printed within the selected magazines, both editorial and advertisement.

Sexual Orientation, Heteronormativity, and Hegemonic Gender Identities

Sexual orientation, according to Stein (1999), involves “a person’s sex-gender and the sex-gender of other individuals in relations to that person,” (p. 40). Stein’s identification term sex-gender describes the composite identity of the most salient sexuality and gender identities of a person as perceived by other members in society. For this study, Stein’s description of the behavioral definition of sexual orientation was chosen.

The behavioral view states that sexual orientation is determined by the sex-gender of the most recent individual that one engaged in sexual acts with (Stein, 1999). If one engages in sexual acts with people of the same sex-gender, then she/he is considered homosexual. If one engages in sexual acts with people not of the same sex-gender, then she/he is considered heterosexual. Each individual sexual act determines the sexual orientation of that person until a new sexual act occurs. The behavioral definition of sexual orientation, according to Stein (1999), is based on the assumption is that there are only two sex-genders, male and female. According to this definition, the sex-gender identities of gender-blended, other-gendered, and third-gendered, among others, do not exist. The male-female sex-gender

binary results in only three possible sexual orientations: asexual, heterosexual, and homosexual. Because the sexual orientation of an individual is determined by gender of the partner that participated in the most recent sexual act, other sexual orientations, such as bisexuality, do not exist according to the behavioral perspective (Stein, 1999).

The advantage to using this perspective as a definition of sexual orientation is that it lends itself to directly observable behavior. Due to the nature of images in multimedia, the only feasible way to determine sexual orientation in static representations of behavior is by the genders of individuals engaging in intimate behaviors with one another. Intimate behaviors are activities in which sexual and/or romantic attraction or desires are demonstrated or implied.

A social issue related to sexual orientation is the topic of heteronormativity, the systematic cultural value-set that strongly favors heterosexual orientation and considers all other sexual orientations as “non-normative”. The discourses concerning gender identities in a heteronormative culture assert the position that there are two distinct, complementary genders (man and woman) that all members of that society must conform to, with their biological sex, gender identities, and gender roles collapsed into one sex-gender identity (Lovaas & Jenkins, 2000). These restrictive identities are termed *hegemonic masculinity* and *hegemonic femininity*.

According to Tolman (2006), hegemonic masculinity is the “dominant conception of manhood, encompassing a set of norms and behaviors that men must strive to demonstrate—to themselves and to others—that they are ‘real men’,” (p. 76). The qualities of a hegemonic man complement those of the traditional gender norm in western culture. A man is to suppress his emotions (except for anger), remain hard and distant in his relationships, be unquestionably heterosexual, sexually objectify women, have a high sex drive, and participate in the continued subordination of women (Tolman, 2006).

Hegemonic femininity, similarly, conceptualizes one specific form of femininity as dominant and normal (Tolman, 2006). It defines the expectations of how women “should and should not feel, behave, and think regarding themselves, their own bodies, their roles in relationships, and their responses to expectations about men,” (p. 76). These expectations correspond to the traditional gender norms of women in western culture. Qualities of the hegemonic women include the suppression of confrontational emotions (e.g., anger), promotion of nurturing emotions (e.g., compassion), pursuit of increasing physical attractiveness to men, and conflict avoidance for the preservation of relationships (Tolman, 2006). Hegemonic femininity can be thought of as having complementary qualities to hegemonic masculinity.

Review of Relevant Research

Considerable research has found that the primary gender identities present in media images are those of hegemonic masculinity and femininity. Kolbe and Ablanese (1996) investigated the physical appearance of “sole males” appearing in the images of advertisements in several male-oriented magazines for the year of 1993. They found that the men in the images often had traditional male characteristics: a muscular physique, facial hair when a rugged appearance was desired, upscale suits and casual clothing, and hair that was conservative in length. Similarly, one part of Labre’s (2005) study looked at how the bodies of men were represented in images in *Men’s Health* and *Men’s Fitness* magazines published from 1999-2003. She found that men were more likely to be shown as low in body fat and very muscular. The evidence of this research suggests that the stereotype of the hegemonic masculine icon is epitomized for use in advertisement images.

Part of Milillo's (2008) study investigated how womyn models were depicted in mainstream magazines. She found that women in mainstream magazines were typically younger, more feminine in appearance, thinner, and wore more sexually-themed or revealing clothing (Milillo, 2008). Conversely, womyn in lesbian magazines were portrayed in a manner that suggested they were to be viewed as desexualized individuals (Milillo, 2008). Womyn models typically had a greater variety in body size, as well as were more androgynous in appearance. Additionally, there was a large number of images of womyn touching each other in a supportive-friendly manner (Milillo, 2008).

Malkin, Wornian, and Chrisler (1999) analyzed the images and text on the covers of six issues of 21 popular womyn's and men's magazines for the year of 1996. They found that 78 percent of the covers of womyn's magazines communicated messages concerning body appearance, whereas none of the covers of men's magazines did. Additionally, the positioning of weight-related messages on womyn's magazines implied that losing weight could lead to a better life (i.e., through being more physically attractive) (Malkin, Wornian, & Chrisler, 1999). The results of these studies suggest that the hegemonic feminine women gender stereotype is most often represented in the images of mainstream magazines.

Gender identity expectations is another topic that has received a considerable amount of attention. According to Kang (1997) current research has established that modern-day womyn are still typically cast in (traditional) gender identities that are similar to those found by Goffman in 1978. Womyn are often portrayed in home settings, or in beauty or sex-oriented roles. Wolin (2003) conducted a thorough synthesis of research conducted from 1970-2002 on gender issues in advertising, and found that, although the extremity of gender identity stereotypes have decreased over the years, certain roles and activities are still inherently gendered.

In a related study, Paek, Nelson, and Vilela (2011) investigated how gender identities were portrayed in television advertisements in Brazil, Canada, China, Germany, South Korea, Thailand, and the United States. They found that men were the predominant gender featured in advertising. Men were more often used as models and voice-over announcers than womyn (Paek, Nelson, & Vilela, 2011). Additionally, womyn were typically portrayed as having stereotypical qualities and roles, such as homemaker, sexual object, and dependent on men. These studies provide additional evidence of the continued use of hegemonic gender identities in advertising.

Research Questions

The current study was designed to contribute to the existing literature by translating the behavior captured in multimedia images into a meaningful snapshot of the current (c. 2009) cultural values regarding sexual orientation and gender identities held by the audience of the mainstream western pop-culture magazine, *Cosmopolitan*. With this intention, three research questions were constructed concurrently with the codebook to ensure a strong methodological relationship between research questions and methodology:

1. Is a heteronormative bias present in these media image selections?
2. What social norms are communicated as (in) appropriate for same-gendered and mixed-gendered groups in these media image selections, and what attitudes do they reveal regarding sexual orientation?
3. What social norms are communicated as (in) appropriate for womyn-only and men-only groups in these media image selections, and what attitudes do they reveal regarding the expression of gender identities?

Methodology

A qualitative image analysis framework using the unit of analysis of groups of two or more persons was used in this study to examine 722 selected images from twelve issues of *Cosmopolitan* magazine published during the calendar year of 2009. In order to give the qualitative inquiries a sense of depth, quantitative measures were used to capture the richness of the data numerically.

Cosmopolitan magazine was specifically selected due to its popularity. It had been the best-selling magazine in college bookstores for over 25 years at the time of this study, and had approximately 18,331,000 readers in 2009 (The Hearst Company, 2009). It was also the most popular magazine for women aged 18-34, with about 9,218,000 of its readers in this group (The Hearst Company, 2009). The year 2009 was selected because it was the purpose of this study to provide a snapshot of the current cultural attitudes for this population subset, and that was the most recent year for which a complete set of magazines was available at the time of coding.

Given the static nature of images in magazines, a group of two or more people was chosen as the appropriate unit of analysis because of its ability to communicate content regarding the relational interactions between the people of which it is composed.

The following section describes the explicit criterion that was developed for the selection of images to include in this study. This criterion and the codebook used were constructed at the same time and tailored for a high degree of correspondence.

Image Selection Criterion

- Images were differentiated from each other based on the perceptible frame, regardless of size or format on the page. In a comic-strip styled series of images, each frame in the series was counted as an individual image. If the content of an image expanded across two pages, the edges of the pages served as the boundaries of the frame. In a collage of images, each image was coded separately.
- Images selected were composed of two or more individuals depicted as the subjects of the image. Individuals were defined in this study as either human persons or cartoon representations of human persons. The subjects of the image were defined as individuals located in foreground or midground of the image. The foreground and midground were selected under the assumption that in magazine images, the viewer expects to find the object of interest in these two layers, whereas the background of the image serves to provide information about the setting. Individuals located in the background were excluded from image analysis measures.
- Illustrated or cartoon-like animated depictions of individuals were included; as such depictions were clear in their intent to represent images of human persons.
- If an image appeared multiple times within a single magazine issue or was repeated across multiple issues, each instance of appearance was coded for individually. The number of occurrences of identical images was not recorded.
- In images with multiple physical contact points between individuals, the most intimate contact presented was coded for.
- Images that have been artistically rendered to show multiple images of the same individual—with no other distinct person in the subject location areas—were excluded.
- Images of inanimate objects with human-like or anthropomorphized characteristics (e.g., faces or limbs on a peanut) were excluded.
- Images with obvious image editing, such as superimposed persons or apparent “cut-and-paste” body compositions, were excluded.

- Images of singular parts or segments of human bodies (e.g., an image of two clasped hands) were excluded.
- Images of individuals whose majority of their body was obscured (e.g., an image of two legs protruding from behind an office chair) were excluded.

Differentiating images as used for editorial articles or advertisements was not recorded. This was intentional because of the assumption that the audience is impacted by the values communicated by the entirety of images contained within the magazine as a whole. In other words, the audience views both editorial and advertisement images through the experience of reading a magazine, and the total of the ideas communicated through both types of images are perceived collectively as the values of that particular magazine. Due to the methodological rigor desired for the quantitative analysis of behavior in this study, the context for each image (e.g., juxtaposed editorial text) was not coded.

Codebook Development and Item Rationale

Three previous studies (Döring & Pöschl, 2006; Milillo, 2008; Xue & Ellzey, 2009) were referenced as scaffolding methodologies, with certain items being tailored for use in the current study. The items of *no contact*, *simple contact*, *intimate contact*, and the term “very intimate contact” were acquired from Xue and Ellzey (2009, p. 6). From Döring and Pöschl (2006, p. 177), *group membership* and the item *utilitarian* were directly adapted.

The authors collaboratively developed the remaining codebook items and their definitions through an iterative process utilizing a pilot test of the coding scheme on one issue of four popular gender-oriented magazines. Thorough field notes regarding observations and questions arising throughout the process were recorded. Following a collaborative analysis and discussion of field notes and coding results of the pilot test by both researchers, the preliminary coding scheme was revised. Areas of agreement were accepted, resulting in a majority of mutually agreeable codes. Codes that were in question were discussed until a consensus was developed. Field notes were taken during the consensus-building process to enhance the quality and confirmability of the results. The primary researcher independently coded each image in each magazine for both the pilot and this study, using the coding scheme as it was developed at each time.

Group membership

In accordance with Stein’s (1999) behavioral view of sexual orientation, the mutually exclusive gender identity binary womyn-man was used in this study. In compliance with the assumptions of this view, the gender identities of third-gendered, other-gendered, gender-blended, among others, were excluded from analysis. The discrimination between these two gender identities was achieved through the use of typical visual gender cues. Examples of these cues include breasts, long hair, and typical feminine clothing for “womyn,” and musculature, facial hair, and typical masculine clothing for “man.” This resulted in three mutually exclusive categories for group gender composition: *mixed-gendered* (womyn and man/men), *womyn-only*, and *men-only*.

Behavior categorization

One of the assumptions of this study was that sexual/romantic relationships between persons, and therefore, sexual orientation, could be interpreted through observed interactional behavior. Behavior was codified via two domains: (a) the participation of the subjects of an

image in a particular activity and (b) the type of physical contact between the subjects of an image.

The categories used to code activity participation were *chores/paid work*; *sports/exercise*; *relaxing* (e.g., sitting on a couch watching sports, at the beach); *being out and about* (e.g., walking down a street, shopping); *serving a decorative function in the image/modeling/posing for the camera*; *friends or family members talking or standing next to each other*; *spending alone/romantic time with one another* (e.g., standing close to one another gazing into each other's eyes, out on a date); *having sex/intimate relations*; *eating* (e.g., at a bar, restaurant, kitchen table with food); and *cannot be determined*.

The degree and location of physical touch were used as clues to ascertain the level of closeness or intimacy between the individuals in the relationship. Intimacy was defined in this study as conveying romantic or sexual themes to the viewer. The degree of intimacy depicted served as indicator of the level of romantic-sexual involvement between the individuals, which was used to infer sexual orientation.

In order to determine sexual orientation, the gender identities of the individuals engaged in physical touch were recorded according to the following categories: *no touch*, *mixed-gendered* (womyn and man/men is/are touching), *womyn-only* (womyn is/are touching womyn), and *men-only* (man/men is/are touching man/men).

The categories used to code type of touch were *no touch*; *utilitarian* (grasps, manipulates, holds a person—e.g., helping someone up, business person handshake, holding a person in sports, such as tackling or figure skating poses); *simple touch* (e.g., teammate patting on back, holding hands or hugging in a friendly manner); *intimate touch* (e.g., caressing erogenous zones, holding in a desirous/possessive manner, feeding each other, hugging in a romantic manner); *very intimate touch* (intimate contact in a sexually suggestive way—e.g., disrobing a person, kissing area around the navel); and *depicting sex* (people are in actual/implied sexual positions—e.g., straddling).

Research Question Operationalization

The following section outlines the primary research questions investigated in this study and their operationalization definitions. The first question relates to the confirmation of the presence of a heteronormative bias.

Is there a heteronormative bias in these media selections?

Heteronormative bias was operationally defined by three criteria. The first was having more images of mixed-gendered groups than same-gendered groups. The number of images of mixed-gendered and same-gendered groups was viewed as representative of the mainstream cultural attitudes towards sexual orientation acceptance. Greater representation of mixed-gendered group composition over same-gendered was considered indicative of cultural biases regarding the normativity of a heterosexual orientation. Equal representation of same-gendered and mixed-gendered groups (i.e., 50 percent of images) was considered indicative of a lack of heteronormative bias.

The second criterion was having more images of mixed-gendered groups participating in the activities of *spending alone/romantic time with one another* and *having sex/intimate relations* than same-gendered groups. These two activities were chosen because depiction of amorous or sexual interactions implies the participants have a sexual/romantic relationship with one-another. The nature of the sexual behavior and/or partner-ownership exemplified was used to categorize the sexual orientation of the individuals. To determine equal

representation of same-gendered and mixed-gendered groups engaged in these activities, a Chi-square test was conducted.

The third criterion was having more images of mixed-gendered groups participating in the items of *intimate touch*, *very intimate touch*, and *depicting sex* than same-gendered groups. These three touches were selected because of the sexual and romantic messages they communicate. To determine equal representation of same-gendered and mixed-gendered groups engaged in these types of touches, a Chi-square test was conducted.

The remaining two research questions set out to identify, define, and interpret the societal values regarding sexual orientation and gender identity presented in these issues of *Cosmopolitan* magazine.

What social norms are communicated as (in) appropriate for same-gendered and mixed-gendered groups in these media image selections, and what attitudes do they reveal regarding sexual orientation?

This study sought to define cultural values as they emerged from analysis of the coded data. Therefore, social norms were inferred from the coded data based on the ideological trends that emerged from the analyzed behavior of these two group types. Behavior was analyzed via activity participation items. Both womyn-only and men-only groups were collapsed into the *same-gendered* group for analysis with respect to this research question.

What social norms are communicated as (in) appropriate for womyn-only and men-only groups in these media image selections, and what attitudes do they reveal regarding the expression of gender identities?

Gender-specific social norms were identified using the same process as the previous research question. Womyn-only and men-only groups were evaluated separately for analysis with respect to this research question. Because the unit of analysis was groups of people, it was beyond the scope of the codebook developed to investigate gender roles and behaviors of individual persons within a group. Consequently, images of mixed-gendered groups were excluded from analysis.

The number of images of womyn-only and men-only groups was viewed as representative of the mainstream cultural attitudes towards same-sex relationship acceptance. Greater representation of one gender group composition over the other was considered indicative of cultural biases regarding the normativity of same-sex relationships. For example, more womyn-only groups than men-only groups would be indicative of a cultural bias that favors relationships between women and disfavors relationships between men. Equal representation of womyn-only and men-only groups (i.e., 50 percent of images) was considered indicative of a lack of relational bias.

Results

Demographics

The frequencies for group membership portrayed in the images across all twelve issues of *Cosmopolitan* magazine investigated were as follows: 558 images (77.3 percent) of mixed-gendered groups, 141 images (19.5 percent) of womyn-only groups, and 23 images (3.2 percent) of men-only groups.

Heteronormative Bias

To answer research question one, is there a heteronormative bias in these media selections, comparisons were made between same-gendered and mixed-gendered groups. Chi-square tests were conducted to determine if differences existed between (a) the number of images of same-gendered and mixed-gendered groups, (b) the participation of same-gendered and mixed-gendered groups in the activities of *romantic time* and *having sex*, and (c) the engagement of same-gendered and mixed-gendered groups in the touch types of *intimate*, *very intimate*, *depicting sex*. Observed counts, expected counts, and Chi-square results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Chi-Square Results Comparing Gender Groups on Heteronormativity Items

Item	Same-gendered		Mixed-gendered		χ^2
	Observed	Expected	Observed	Expected	
Count	164	361.0	558	361.0	215.01*
Activity					
Romantic time	2	29.5	128	100.5	33.16 *
Having sex	0	19.3	85	65.7	24.97*
Touch					
Intimate	2	35.2	153	119.8	40.51*
Very intimate	0	10.2	45	34.8	13.19*
Depicting sex	0	10.7	47	36.3	13.85*

* $p < .000$

Chi-square results [χ^2 (1, N=722) =215.01, $p<.000$] comparing the number of images of same-gendered and mixed-gendered groups were significant. Mixed-gendered groups had 197 more images than would be expected by equal representation (50 percent of the total, or 361 images), whereas same-gendered groups had 197 fewer.

Results for both *romantic time* [χ^2 (1, N=130) =33.16, $p<.000$] and *having sex* [χ^2 (1, N=85) =24.97, $p<.000$] were significant. Mixed-gendered groups had higher observed counts than the expected counts, with 128 (100.5 expected) for *romantic time* and 85 (65.7 expected) for *having sex*. Same-gendered groups had lower observed counts than the expected counts, with two (29.5 expected) for *romantic time* and zero (19.3 expected) for *having sex*. This suggests that there was an intentional greater representation of mixed-gendered groups engaging in intimate activities.

Chi-square results were significant for all three types of touch analyzed: *intimate* [χ^2 (1, N=155) =40.51, $p<.000$], *very intimate* [χ^2 (1, N=45) =13.19, $p<.000$], and *depicting sex* [χ^2 (1, N=47) =13.85, $p<.000$]. More mixed-gendered groups used these types of touch more than same-gendered groups. Mixed-gendered groups had higher observed counts than the expected counts, with 153 (119.8 expected) for *intimate*, 45 (34.8 expected) for *very intimate*, and 47 (36.3 expected) for *depicting sex*. Conversely, same-gendered had lower observed counts than the expected counts, with two (35.2 expected) for *intimate*, zero (10.2 expected) for *very intimate*, and zero (10.7 expected) for *depicting sex*. This suggests that there was an intentional greater representation of mixed-gendered groups engaging in intimate touches.

Same-Gendered Groups vs. Mixed-Gendered Groups

To answer research question two, what social norms are communicated as (in) appropriate for same-gendered and mixed-gendered groups in these media image selections, and what attitudes do they reveal regarding sexual orientation, comparisons were made between same-gendered and mixed-gendered groups across activity participation items. Observed counts, expected counts, and Chi-square results are presented in Table 2. Percentages of activity participation are presented in Table 3.

Table 2
Chi-Square Results Comparing Gender Groups on Activity Participation

Activity	Same-gendered		Mixed-gendered		χ^2
	Observed	Expected	Observed	Expected	
Chores/paid work	7	5.2	16	17.8	.81
Sports/exercise	5	5.5	19	18.5	.06
Relaxing	12	10.2	33	34.8	.41
Being out and about	10	15.9	60	54.1	2.83
Decorative function	71	43.6	121	148.4	22.28*
Friends/family	40	15.9	30	54.1	47.26*
Romantic time	2	29.5	128	100.5	33.16*
Having sex	0	19.3	85	65.7	24.97*
Eating	6	9.3	35	31.7	1.51

* $p < .000$

Table 3
Comparison of Percentages of Activity Participation in Images

Activity	Same-gendered (%)	Mixed-gendered (%)
Chores/paid work	4.27	2.90
Sports/exercise	3.05	3.41
Relaxing	7.32	5.91
Being out and about	6.10	10.75
Eating	3.66	6.27
Decorative function	43.29	21.68
Friends/family	24.39	5.38
Romantic time	1.20	22.94
Having sex	0.00	15.23

There were two main trends that emerged from the data. The first was similarity between same-gendered and mixed-gendered groups across the following items: *chores or paid work*, *sports or exercise*, *relaxing*, *being out and about*, and *eating*. Both groups had almost parallel, low percentages (see Table 3) across these five items, as well as Chi-square results that were not significant. The degree of correspondence between these two groups in spite of the three-to-one difference in sample size (mixed-gendered, $n=558$; same-gendered, $n=164$) suggests that participation in these activities were approximately equal for both groups.

The second trend that emerged from the data were percentage differences between same-gendered and mixed-gendered groups regarding the activities of *romantic time*, *having sex*, *friends or family*, and *decorative function*. As can be seen in Table 3, mixed-gendered groups had higher percentages than same-gendered groups with regards to *romantic time* (22.94 percent compared to 1.20 percent) and *having sex* (15.23 percent compared to zero

percent). As the Chi-square results show, these differences were statistically significant: *romantic time*, χ^2 (1, N=130) =33.16, $p < .000$ and *having sex*, χ^2 (1, N=85) =24.97, $p < .000$. Interestingly, same-gendered groups had a higher percentage of *friends or family*, 24.39 percent, than mixed-gendered groups, 5.38 percent. Regarding *decorative function*, the observed count (71) was higher than the expected count of 43.6 for same-gendered groups. Conversely, the observed count of 121 was lower than the expected count (148.4) for mixed-gendered groups. As the Chi-square results show, these differences were statistically significant; *friends or family*, χ^2 (1, N=70) =47.26, $p < .000$ and *decorative function*, χ^2 (1, N=192) =22.28, $p < .000$. This data suggests that there was an intentional bias for a greater representation of same-gendered groups modeling for the camera and portraying friends or family members, rather than romantic or sexual partners.

Womyn-Only Groups vs. Men-Only Groups

To answer research question three, what social norms are communicated as (in) appropriate for womyn-only and men-only groups in these media image selections, and what attitudes do they reveal regarding the expression of gender identities, comparisons were made between womyn-only and men-only. Chi-square tests were conducted to determine if differences existed between the number of images of each group as well as across activity participation items. Observed counts, expected counts, and Chi-square results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4
Chi-Square Results Comparing Same-Gendered Groups on Frequency and Activity Participation

Item	Womyn-only		Men-only		χ^2
	Observed	Expected	Observed	Expected	
Count	141	180.5	23	180.5	146.07**
Activity					
Chores/paid work	4	4.5	3	.7	7.61*
Sports/exercise	3	4.7	2	.8	2.41
Relaxing	9	8.8	3	1.4	1.83
Being out and about	8	13.7	2	2.2	2.39
Decorative function	64	37.5	7	6.1	18.86**
Friends/family	35	13.7	5	2.2	36.68**
Romantic time	2	25.4	0	4.1	25.66**
Having sex	0	16.6	0	2.7	19.30**
Eating	6	8.0	0	1.3	1.80

* $p < .01$

** $p < .000$

The observed counts were compared to the expected counts if there was equal representation, which was defined as 50 percent of the expected total of same-gendered images (i.e., 180.5). Results of the Chi-square were significant, χ^2 (1, N=164)=146.07, $p < .000$, meaning that there were more images of womyn-only groups than male-only groups. Groups composed exclusively of womyn had approximately 40 less images than would be expected. Similarly, groups of men had approximately 158 less images than would be expected if there were equal representation. This data suggests that there were intentional

biases favoring a greater representation of groups of womyn than groups of men, as well as favoring against single-gender groups and favoring for mixed-gender groups.

To determine if differences existed between womyn-only and men-only groups, with regards to the activities they participated in, Chi-square tests were conducted. The observed total of occurrences for each activity type was compared to the expected frequency of that activity if all activities were equal. A Bonferroni adjustment was used to modify the significance level required to achieve statistical significance. Five tests were conducted, so the level of significance required was .01 (.05/5 = .01). Results of Chi-squares for the activities of *chores or paid work* [χ^2 (1, N=7)=7.61, p=.006], *decorative function* [χ^2 (1, N=71)=18.86, p<.000], *friends or family* [χ^2 (1, N=40)=36.68, p<.000], *romantic time* [χ^2 (1, N=2)=25.66, p<.000], and *having sex* [χ^2 (1, N=0)=19.30, p<.000] were all significant. Observed counts were higher than expected counts for both groups on the items *decorative function* and *friends or family*. Regarding the items *romantic time* and *having sex*, the observed counts were lower than the expected counts across both groups. Interestingly, for the item *chores or paid work*, the observed count of three was higher than the expected count of .7 for men-only groups.

In order to assist in the clarification of Chi-square results, the comparison of percentages of activity participation for both womyn-only and men-only groups is presented in Table 5.

Table 5
Comparison of Percentages of Activity Participation in Images

Activity	Womyn-only (%)	Men-only (%)
Chores/paid work	2.84	13.04
Sports/exercise	2.13	8.70
Relaxing	6.38	13.04
Being out and about	5.67	8.70
Eating	4.26	0.00
Decorative function	45.39	30.43
Friends/family	21.74	24.82
Romantic time	1.42	0.00
Having sex	0.00	0.00

This data suggest several findings. There is a preference to select-against images of single-gender groups engaging in *romantic time* and *having sex*, as both groups had less observed counts than would be expected. There is a difference between the genders with regards to *chores/paid work*. Specifically, there are more images of groups of men participating in this activity than would be expected due to chance. Whereas 2.84 percent of womyn-only images were of *chores/paid work*, 13.04 percent of men-only images were of this activity. This intentional greater representation of groups of men engaging in employed jobs or errands suggests a gender bias is in effect. There is a preference for the selection of images of womyn-only groups engaging in *decorative function* and *friends/family*, as evidenced by exhibiting significantly more observed than expected counts for each activity. This is further supported by the percentages expressed in Table 5. As can be seen in the table, these activities have the two largest percentages of occurrences in womyn-only images. When combined, *decorative function* and *friends/family* make up 70.21 percent of these images.

Discussion

This study examined attitudes toward sexual orientation and gender identities were evaluated from the observed behaviors in multimedia images in twelve consecutive issues of *Cosmopolitan* magazine. Using a qualitative image analysis framework, two general inquiries were used to guide the manner with which data were collected and analyzed. First, this study sought to determine whether there was evidence to suggest the presence of a heteronormative bias. Second, this study sought to identify the expressions of sexual orientation and gender identities and their associated social norms communicated in the media selections. The chief goal of the study was to create a meaningful snapshot of the current set of values held by the audience of a mainstream western pop-culture magazine through the analysis of media images.

Heteronormativity and Expressions of Homosexuality

Conclusive evidence supporting the presence a heteronormative bias was found (see Table 1). There were three-times as many images of mixed-gendered groups than same-gendered groups. It was found that mixed-gendered groups had a higher representation than same-gendered groups across all five intimate activity and intimate touch items statistically compared. These results indicate that a heteronormative bias was present in these images. The presence of a heteronormative bias in these media selections corresponds with recent studies (Landau, 2009; Milillo, 2008) that similarly found evidence of heteronormativity in other forms of print media.

Same-gendered groups were intentionally shown in less amorous or sexual activities than mixed-gendered groups. Only four images of same-gendered groups engaging in intimate behavior (see Table 1) were found, as compared to the 245 heterosexually-themed intimate images. Same-gendered groups were found to be five-times more likely to be depicted in friend or family relationships than mixed-gendered groups. Both of these findings are very similar to those of Milillo (2008) in that non-heterosexual persons are often depicted as de-intimatized and are more often shown in friendship themed relationships.

Four images of same-gendered groups—all of womyn—were coded as engaging in intimate behavior. Because these images significantly differed from the majority of images coded, the contexts of these images were explored post-coding and statistical analysis.

One image that was coded as having an *intimate touch* was considered an outlier due to a technical limitation in the developed coding scheme. The image was of a mother and her daughter, with the daughter laying her head in the mother's lap. This contact was coded as intimate because of the location of the touch on the mother. A holistic view of the image, however, precludes this touch from being classified as intimate in a manner that expresses sexual orientation as defined in this study.

Another image that was also coded as having an *intimate touch* was of one womyn celebrity shown sucking on another womyn's tongue. The overt, sexually suggestive physical contact, however, was juxtaposed with other images and text providing ridiculing commentary about celebrities and their behavior. The context surrounding this image implies that physical contact at this level of intimacy between womyn is grotesque and comedic. In other words, intimate womyn-womyn sexual behavior is culturally relegated to the realm of burlesque humor, rather than amorous or romantic in nature. There were no images of men-only groups engaged in intimate behaviors, suggesting that intimate men-men behavior is inappropriate. It is inferred from the data that sexually intimate contact between persons of the same gender is taboo. This conclusion is comparable to results from Milillo (2008) that found lesbian womyn were often depicted as less sexualized than heterosexual womyn.

The remaining two images were both coded as having womyn participating in the activity of *romantic time*. These images were positioned around a short memoir about the same-sex marriage experience of these two womyn. Although it is evident that the two womyn in these images were romantically involved, there was no intimate physical contact portrayed in the image, reinforcing the desexualized nature of lesbian womyn (Millilo, 2008).

Expressions of Gender Identities

Results suggested that the differences between womyn and men found in these image selections indicate the expression of traditional hegemonic gender stereotypes. Womyn were presented as being primarily relationship-oriented, a fundamental construct of hegemonic femininity (Tolman, 2006). The second highest majority of womyn-only images were of womyn portrayed as friends and family members (35 out of 141 images, or 21.74 percent). Additionally, the only intimate same-gender behaviors and relationships found in these image selections were between a womyn-womyn dyad; not a man-man pairing.

Womyn were portrayed in a manner that implies a level of beauty ranking and physical objectification. Out of the 141 images of womyn-only groups, 64 of these images (45.39 percent) were specifically constructed to have womyn posing for the camera. Although one would expect a higher number of modeling images in a magazine that discusses fashion, this does not sufficiently explain the implications of the data. There were approximately twice as many images of groups of womyn posing for the camera than would have been expected if there were equal representation between womyn and men in these images (64 observed compared to 37.5 expected). The favoring of womyn-only groups functioning as modeling images becomes more apparent when comparisons are made with the number of images of men-only groups posing for the camera. The number of images of groups of men posing for the camera, 7, was approximately equal to the expected number of these types of images, 6.1. Furthermore, given that the majority of advertisements concerning the modeling of fashion are of single individuals (Wolin, 2003), the fact that such a disproportionately large amount of womyn-only groups were shown in modeling poses suggests that womyn were intentionally selected to fulfill the role of “visual objects”. Visual objects are deliberately chosen to be viewed-at and evaluated-by an audience. This objectification of womyn in multimedia images suggests that a beauty standard, similar to ones found in other studies (Goffman 1978; Kang, 1997; Malkin, Wornian, & Chrisler, 1999; Millilo, 2008; Paek, Nelson, & Vilela, 2011; Wolin, 2003), was present.

Men were also visually represented in these multimedia image selections according to traditional hegemonic male constructs. The results indicate that men were intentionally presented as financially secure. This is evidenced by the increased occurrence of images of men engaging in *chores/paid work* than would be expected if there was an equal representation of womyn and men engaging in this activity in the images. Men were found to be exclusively heterosexual. None of the images of men-only groups portrayed men in intimate behaviors. The presence of hegemonic masculinity in these media selections is in agreement with previous research by Kolbe and Ablanese (1996) and Labre (2005). The stereotypical differences between genders in this study resound with the findings of other studies (Goffman 1978; Kang, 1997; Paek, Nelson, & Vilela, 2011; Wolin, 2003).

Despite the presence of hegemonic gender identities, the data suggests the adoption of some egalitarian attitudes. Both womyn and men had the same level of participation in activities such as *eating, relaxing, and being out and about*. Interestingly, both womyn and men participated equally in *sports or exercise*, traditionally an activity engaged in predominantly by men. Womyn were represented fairly engaging in *chores/paid work*, as the number of images of womyn-only groups working was the same as the expected frequency.

The mixed set of values regarding gender expression found are comparable to the lack of explicit gender stereotypes found by Wolin (2003).

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

The findings of this study must be interpreted in the context of both the strengths and limitations of this study. This study used a unique qualitative image analysis framework that utilized data interpretation enhancing quantitative measures to explore sexual orientation and gender identity expressions in media images. The methodology for the study was developed inductively, and, with the research questions as a guide, led to the development of a methodology and coding scheme that arose organically from the research. Though this offered the researchers an opportunity for rich and deep inquiry, such a method is not without limitations.

The development of this study, the research questions, the methodology, and the codebook were undoubtedly influenced by the biases of the researchers. It is clear that the self-of-the-researcher impacts all research, and this study is no exception. Given the highly subjective nature of the research, it is possible that the primary researcher's own biases were translated into the study. The researcher attempted to reduce this bias by developing the research methodology and coding scheme with the assistance of an experienced qualitative researcher as a mentor and the use of an iterative code development process.

Because the primary researcher was the sole coder of images, there is no inter-coder reliability. The researcher attempted to reduce this bias by developing an explicit coding scheme that limited the need for subjective interpretation. Previous studies on media images (Döring & Pöschl, 2006; Milillo, 2008; Xue & Ellzey, 2009) were referenced as methodological frameworks to ensure the development of a rigorous methodology for use in this study. Pilot testing on four different magazines ensured that the items used in the coding scheme were mutually exclusive and distinct enough to prevent ambiguity during image coding.

In addition to challenges presented by the biases introduced by the self-of-the-researcher, there were some limitations introduced by the nature of the data. The primary researcher treated each instance of an image as a unique image. The researcher did not categorize, or group images by type, for tracking purposes. Although the researcher sought to maintain the richness of the data by not reducing image instances into categories, the decision to not count images by type precluded certain types of analyses. For example, the researcher could not determine how many instances that an individual beauty-product advertisement image occurred. It was also, then, impossible to make comparisons among image categories. For example, it is impossible to determine from this analysis which types of images (e.g., editorial and advertisement) were most prevalent. Such analyses may have offered additional insight into the relative frequencies of occurrences of various image types. Future researchers may wish to develop a method for categorizing images and drawing conclusions about the relative frequency of various image types.

Methodological issues that arose when creating the coding scheme resurfaced during data analysis. In creating the codebook, the researchers struggled with operationalizing key constructs of interest. For example, it was difficult to determine markers of sexual orientation in images where there was no physical contact. Though it was of interest to the researchers to examine issues related to the depiction of various sexual orientations, the process of determining if sexual orientation could be discerned based on objective image data from these types of images was considered beyond the scope of the codebook. Future researchers who examine heteronormativity in media images could expand upon the results of this study

by determining additional markers of sexual orientation that could be examined and analyzed in media images.

Finally, images were assessed by individual components, such as type of physical touch or gender of the subjects, rather than as a gestalt, or whole image. The advantage of this approach is that it allows for the development of a rigorous coding scheme with reproducible results. The downfall of using this approach, however, is that the context of the image is not recorded. The unique components of an image as well as the article content with which it is juxtaposed are important to consider when ascertaining the meaning of an image. In this study, image context was used in the in-depth analysis of the four womyn-only images that displayed intimacy and what they revealed about attitudes towards lesbians. As was demonstrated in this study, the context-dependent messages imbued within the media item as a whole influence how we perceive and interpret the values communicated by each individual image. Future researchers may wish to develop methods of capturing image context in their coding schemes. Through capturing information about image context, future researchers may be able to provide additional depth of information to their results.

Despite these limitations, this study presents several findings that will hopefully stimulate academic discussion and future research interest. The application of in-depth image analysis of behavior in assessing the prevalence of heteronormative attitudes is an approach novel to this study. The richness of the data collected by this methodology suggests its usefulness in future research on artifacts of mass media.

The images presented in *Cosmopolitan* were crafted to appeal to the expected demographics of its intended target audience of college-aged and early adulthood womyn. Whereas it is problematic to make generalizations about the values of a population as a whole from this specific sample, it is important to notice the reproduction of belief systems in these selections. The results of this study provide evidence in support of the assertion that heteronormative values are presented as normative social expectations to roughly 18 million persons a year. The existence of a strong heteronormative bias communicated to such a large number of people invites further investigation into its pervasiveness, causes, and the consequences of its reproduction in society.

Interestingly, womyn were presented in several, yet sometimes conflicting, examples of acceptable gender and sexual identities, compared to a singular hegemonic identity for men. This apparent acceptance of womyn to have varied expressions of their gender and sexual identities suggests an emerging shift in beliefs of acceptable alternative identities that is worthy of further research.

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Author Note

Michael J. Saraceno received his Bachelors of Science from the University of Connecticut in Storrs, CT, double-majoring in Psychology and Human Development & Family Studies. He is currently at the University of Saint Joseph in West Hartford, CT pursuing a Masters of Arts in Marriage & Family Therapy. Dr. Rachel B. Tambling is a faculty member in the Department of Human Development & Family Studies at the University of Connecticut in Storrs, CT. She teaches in the Marriage & Family Therapy Masters and PhD programs. Her research interests are in engagement, retention, and outcome in couple and family therapy.

This research was made possible thanks to funding from the University of Connecticut Office of Undergraduate Research.

The manuscript submitted for publication is derived from the results of an Honors Scholar Thesis authored for the University of Connecticut's Department of Human Development & Family Studies. The thesis and this current manuscript were authored primarily by Michael J. Saraceno under the guidance of Rachel B. Tambling.

Correspondence should be addressed to Michael J. Saraceno, c/o Rachel B. Tambling, Department of Human Development and Family Studies, University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT 06269-2058.

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Article Citation

Saraceno, M. J., & Tambling, R. B. (2013). The sexy issue: Visual expressions of heteronormativity and gender identities in *Cosmopolitan* magazine. *The Qualitative Report*, 18(80), 1-18. Retrieved from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR18/saraceno80.pdf>