“MAKE HIM WORSHIP YOU”:

The representation of feminine sexuality and female discourses in Seventeen and Cosmopolitan

Bachelor’s thesis

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract

Medialla on keskeinen rooli mielikuvien ja ajatusten välittäjänä. Naistenlehdet ovat vakiintuneet keskeiseksi osaksi nykypäivän mediakenttää, ja niiden edullisuus sekä laaja levinneisyys ovat herättäneet myös tutkijoiden mielenkiinnon. Monet heistä ovat pyrkineet selvittämään millaisia representaatiota naistenlehdet tarjoavat lukijoilleen. Erityisesti seksuaalisuuden kuvaaminen lehdissä on noussut tärkeäksi osaksi tutkimuskenttää, sillä aiheeseen liittyvän sisällön määrä on viime vuosikymmeninä lisääntynyt monissa naisille suunnatuissa julkaisuissa. Lehtien representaatioilla on merkittävä rooli naisten seksuaalisuutta koskevien käsitysten välittäjänä sekä näiden käsitysten muokkaajana.

Tämän tutkimuksen tavoitteena oli määrittää kriittisen diskurssin tutkimukseen ja feministisen lingvistiikan teorioihin pohjaten, kuinka naisten seksuaalisuutta representoidaan kahdessa naisille suunnatussa aikakauslehdessä. Valitsin tutkimukseeni artikkeleja *Cosmopolitan*-lehdestä, jonka lukijakunta koostuu aikuisista naisista, sekä *Seventeen*-lehdestä, jonka lukijat ovat pääosin teini-ikäisiä. Tutkimuksen tarkoituksena oli nostaa esille ne keskeiset diskurssit, joiden pohjalta seksuaalisuutta kuvataan, sekä vertailla mahdollisia eroja ja yhtäläisyyksiä eri lukijaryhmille suunnattujen lehtien välillä.

Analyysin perusteella ilmeni, että naisten seksuaalisuuden representointi oli pitkälti samansuuntaista molemmissa lehdissä. Lukijoita kannustettiin itsenäiseen ja aktiiviseen toimintaan, mutta samanaikaisesti naisten seksuaalisuuden kuvattiin automaattisesti linkittyvän miesten seksuaalisuuteen. Heteronormatiivisuus ja yksiavioisuus olivat keskeisiä diskursseja, joiden lisäksi stereotyyppiset käsitykset miesten ja naisten välisistä eroista olivat vahvasti läsnä sekä *Seventeenissä* että *Cosmopolitanissa.* Tutkimuksen perusteella ilmeni kuitenkin eroja siinä, kuinka seksiä käsiteltiin osana naisten seksuaalisuutta: *Cosmopolitanissa* aihe oli keskeinen osa seksuaalisuuden representointia, kun taas *Seventeenissä* sen käsittely rajoittui yhteen artikkeliin.

Asiasanat – Keywords
Critical discourse analysis, media representations, sexuality, magazines

Säilytyspaikka – Depository
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Muita tietoja – Additional information

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1 INTRODUCTION

Mass media can be understood as an inseparable aspect of life in western societies today. It has an undeniable potential to reach large audiences and, therefore, transmit vast quantities of information. Women's magazines, in particular, are a part of mass media, and contain numerous advertisements, pictures and articles that all provide the consumer with some type of information about appropriate ways of being a woman (Gupta et al. 2008:249). Gupta et al. (2008:250) state that, due to their ever increasing role in contemporary media and their potential to forward messages regarding society's expectations on women, these magazines have become a target of a lot of academic scrutiny by scholars from a variety of fields over the past few decades. Especially research on the sexual messages in women's magazines has been widely studied due to the large proportion this type of content has in many of the popular magazines available for women. Indeed, according to Kim and Ward (2004:161) by examining any women's lifestyle magazine one will notice that articles surrounding the topics of sex and relationships are an integral part of the genre. Findings from these studies have demonstrated that magazines tend to put forward stereotypical notions of gender as well as unquestionably represent heterosexuality as the default for both men and women (Gupta, et al. 2008:257). Furthermore, several scholars have also questioned the assumption that sexual content in these magazines is liberating for women, but rather pointing to the idea that they function to put men and women in unequal positions and, as a result, privilege masculinity (Gupta et al. 2008:259; Moran and Lee 2011:161).

However, even though the amount of scholarly attention on sexuality representation on women's magazines has been extensive and advances have been made in understanding how today's media portrays women, more research is required to broaden the scope of the issue. More specifically, much of the research conducted has focused on magazines targeted to adults (e.g. *Marie Claire, Cosmopolitan*) while teen-focused content (e.g. *Seventeen, Teen*) have received less attention. Furthermore, comparative research on magazine content with regards to sexuality has targeted men's and women's magazines and attempted to discover how sexuality representations of the genders vary (e.g. Farvid and Braun 2006). However, no comprehensive study on the potential differences and similarities in sexuality portrayals in both teen-focused and adult-focused magazines for women has been conducted. This type of research would not only increase knowledge of how contemporary women's magazines portray feminine sexuality in general but also provide insight into whether these portrayals change depending on the target demographic.

Examining these potential differences as well as similarities can prove useful in understanding how the topic of female sexuality is regarded in the context of both adult women and teenage girls since representations in magazines always reflect the wider context of the society in which they are produced.

The present study attempts to build on previous research on sexuality representations in women's magazine in addition to which it takes a special interest in comparing these representations between Seventeen, a magazine targeted at teenagers, and Cosmopolitan whose readers are mainly adult women. The purpose of the study is to identify those discourses that are central when representing women's sexuality in both of the magazines and simultaneously provide comparison between the magazines in order to reveal potential differences and similarities.

2 BACKGROUND

This section will introduce the theoretical frameworks of critical discourse analysis and feminist linguistics. Critical discourse analysis was chosen for the theoretical framework since it is concerned with the concepts of power and ideology and how they are mediated through language use. This theory will be complemented by drawing on elements from feminist linguistics in order to pay special attention to how discourses around femininity and masculinity are exercised to create and maintain inequality in society. Furthermore, discussion on the concept of sexuality and how it can be researched in linguistics is provided. Lastly, some central findings and ideas that previous research on feminine sexuality representations in women's magazines has identified are presented.

2.1 Theoretical framework

2.1.1 Critical discourse analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) takes as its starting point the assumption that language is not a neutral tool that reflects reality. Rather, CDA supposes that language can help to constitute the way individuals think and understand certain phenomena, meaning that the reality that people experience in their day to day lives is dependent on language (Wodak 1997:9). Furthermore, CDA sees language as a social practice, inseparable from its context. More specifically, the relationship

between language and society is a dialectic one: language is both socially constituted as well as constructive (Wodak 1996:17, as cited by Wodak 1997). Ways of speaking are defined by the prevalent society and language simultaneously shapes the social reality around it.

Central to critical discourse analysis is the notion of power that is manifested through language (Meyer and Wodak 2001:2). Because of its dialectic relationship to society, language "[…] has the potential to establish and maintain social and power relations, values and identities, as well as to challenge routine practices and contribute to social change." (Wodak 1997:9). Therefore, language is regarded as the tool which enables power to function in a society. Critical discourse analysis focuses on discourses which can be understood as a group of ideas about specific phenomena, which then work to determine the way people understand that phenomena. CDA focuses on different discourses that are in circulation about a certain phenomenon and attempts to discover how power is manifested through them (Cameron and Kulick 2003:16). For example, in the context of the present study, a discourse of compulsory heterosexuality (Litosseliti, 2006:100) is one of the many discourses in circulation with regards to feminine sexuality and, therefore, determines the way people understand that issue. Furthermore, it has been noted that CDA is particularly useful when examining the representation of gender, since the issue is often times linked to power and social processes and inequality is manifested through descriptions of gender (Macdonald 1995:44).

Discourses around certain phenomena are not neutral but ideologically invested in order to sustain or undermine power relations (Fairclough, 1995: 82). According to Fairclough (1995:73),: "[…] language is a material form of ideology, and language is invested by ideology". In other words, the ideologies that are established in a society are realized through language and discursive practices. Closely related to the notion of power and ideology in discourse is the concept of representations. Representation, in critical discourse analysis, refers to language used to assign meaning to, for example, social groups and their practices (Fairclough, 1989). Important in this notion is the fact that representations are not reflective of reality but rather, constructed in language and, therefore, ideologically invested. Furthermore, these particular representations of ideology that are manifested through discourse gain the position of 'common sense' so that they are no longer regarded as ideological (Fairclough, 1995:43). According to Fairclough (1995: 43), this process of naturalization hides unequal power relations and makes them appear as inevitable and natural.

The aim of CDA, then, is to uncover ideologies manifested in discourse that may help to create and maintain unequal power relations between individuals in a given society. Critical discourse analysis sees language as constitutive because it plays a role in maintaining power and inequality but also

has the potential to transform the status quo (Fairclough, 1995:91). CDA can be seen as denaturalizing social structures by showing how these structures determine discourses around certain phenomena. Meyer and Wodak (2001:2) summarize the aim of critical discourse analysis by stating : “In other words, CDA aims to investigate critically social inequality as it is expressed, signaled, constituted, legitimized and so on by language use .” Thus, CDA is not only descriptive in its analysis of language in society but aims to critically analyze it in order to bring about change.

2.1.2 Feminist linguistics

Feminist linguistics (FL) is a feminist-oriented linguistic theory that takes as its fundamental aim to discover and demystify the ways in which language and other social practices create and maintain gender divisions and inequalities in society (Wodak 1997:7; Talbot, 1998 as cited by Litosseliti 2006:23). According to Wodak (1997:7), FL shares many of the same principles and basic assumptions with critical discourse analysis, however, it is distinguished by positioning male and female linguistic behavior and phenomena and the systematic discrimination of women established through language as its main focus of inquiry. Furthermore, feminist linguistics takes a critical stance in discourses that are seen to privilege males while excluding women (Lazar, 2005:5). In other words: “Feminist linguistics attempts to relate gender related linguistic phenomena and language use to gender inequality and discrimination” (Litosseliti 2006:23). Similarly, Wodak (1997:8) suggested that for feminist linguistic researchers the focus on the following two questions is crucial: 1. How are women represented in the existing language system and? 2. How does the linguistic behavior of the group of women differ from men? For the purpose of the present study the first question is central since it helps to uncover the ways in which language is used to represent women.

More specifically, and relating to the discussion on critical discourse analysis, Litosseliti (2006: 58) discusses gender related discourses which are discourses that say something about the actions, behavior, choices etc. of men and women. According to her, these gendered discourses are used in order to create boundaries for gender appropriate behavior and create unequal positions for men and women. Furthermore, nowadays issues of power and ideology with regards to the construction of hierarchal gender society are regarded as increasingly subtle, and a variety of cultural and institutional contexts are involved in the process of creating and maintaining them (Lazar 2005:1-2). Therefore, combining critical discourse analysis and feminist linguistics, one can discover how

discourses that center on gender are created and maintained and how these discourses work in society to position men and women differently. Together, critical discourse analysis and feminist linguistics provide a powerful critique on the discourses that are in circulation about gender in society, and attempt to change these representations in order to establish equality.

2.2 Sexuality representations

In order to define the concept of sexuality, it is important to clarify two closely related concepts: sex and gender. According to Litosseliti (2006:11): "[…] *sex* refers to biological maleness and femaleness, or the physiological, anatomical differences that distinguish men and women, whereas *gender* to the traits assigned to a sex- what maleness and femaleness stand for- within different societies and cultures". Although, there is some difference in the definition of these terms, the general understanding regards sex as a biological characteristic while gender is socially constructed and, therefore, means different things in different contexts. Similarly to gender, sexuality can be seen as social in nature and referring to 'the socially constructed expression of erotic desire', and is therefore a cultural rather than natural phenomenon (Cameron and Kulick: 2003:4). However, Cameron and Kulick (2003:4) also argue that in much discussion the term sexuality is reduced to refer to sexual orientation. More specifically, while the concept of sexuality can take on the broad meaning of referring to one's desire in general, it is more commonly understood to define the object of that desire by categorizing people as homo- or heterosexual.

However, even though the terms sex, gender and sexuality refer to separate phenomena, they are often used interchangeably. Especially heterosexuality is experienced and understood by many as inevitably linked to gender. Meaning that, for example, being a female entails compulsory sexual desire of a male; in order for one's gender to be regarded as female, one's erotic desire must also be defined by the terms of heterosexuality (Cameron and Kulick 2003:6-7). Therefore, for the purpose of this study, representations of sexuality are taken to entail notions about gender as well, meaning that when women's sexual desire is represented, it includes notions of how women are regarded in society and what characteristics they are assumed to possess. Cameron and Kulick (2003:7) also highlight this connection by arguing that the study of sexuality needs to be understood and to overlap with the study of gender.

Therefore, as noted above, sexuality and language research considers sexuality to be a social phenomenon, or in other words what people understand in reference to the concept of sexuality depends on their spatial and temporal context. The concept of representations discussed earlier is

closely related to the study of sexuality and gender since, according to Cameron and Kulick (2003:10): "Our understanding of what is sexual, and what different ways of being sexual mean, is always dependent on the kind of discourse about sex that circulates in a given time and place […]". In addition, since our understanding of what it is to be sexual depends on the representations available to us, this is inevitably connected to one's concept of self because we draw on the same representations when we construct ourselves as sexual beings. Furthermore, representations of sexuality within a certain society are always a stage for ongoing power struggles over who has the ability to define the concept of sexuality. Cameron and Kulick (2003:43) argue that the effects of this are felt in our social lives.

2.3 Sexuality and women's magazines

Women's magazines have been under a lot of academic scrutiny over the past decades because, as a part of today's mass media, they provide women information about appropriate feminine behavior (Gupta et al. 2008:249). In addition, content that centers specifically around sexuality has steadily increased, therefore, proving reader's with unpresented amounts of information about sexuality and sexual relations (Kim and Ward 2004: 48). However, despite the increasing amount of information and the seeming celebration of sexual liberation of women, analyses of the magazines suggest that implicit ideologies are manifested in order to control women for the benefit of men (Moran and Lee 2011: 161) or in order to increase advertisers' profit (Lindner 2004 as cited by Farvid and Braun 2006:204). In other words: "Research on sexual content in women's magazines has identified dominant ideologies that promote sexual role stereotypes and privilege masculinity" (Moran and Lee 2011:159).

Research on women's magazines claims that male sexuality is often privileged over female sexuality, and that sex and sexual relationships are portrayed as constant work for women in order to obtain a partner. According to Moran and Lee (2011:165), women's primary sexual role is to appear attractive to their male partners, therefore undermining any notions women's ability to express their own sexual preferences. Moreover, women are represented as having to provide men with 'great sex' in order to secure a monogamous relationship. This is, in turn, achieved by following the numerous tips and tricks that contemporary women's magazines provide for their readers (Menard and Kleinplatz 2008:13). Similar ideas were also apparent in a study by Gill (2009:352) who argues that finding and maintaining a relationship is left to the woman's responsibility and is the result of constant research, planning and strategy. According to these types

of representations of female sexuality, women's own sense of sexual desire is replaced with constantly having to work in order to secure a relationship. Therefore, male sexuality is being privileged in numerous ways and as Farvid and Braun (2006:300) argue: "Female sexuality always exists in relation to its 'target'—male sexuality."

Another apparent description of sexuality identified in women's magazines is the naturalization of gender differences. Male and female sexuality and sexual behavior is portrayed differently and, related to the idea of sex being work for women (e.g. Gil 2009; Farvid and Braun 2006), women are encouraged to adjust their own sexuality to men's (presumed) preferences (Moran and Lee 2011:166). More specifically, men are assumed to be mainly interested in sex while women primarily desire relationships, and for them sex is not a motive in itself but a way for attaining a man (Moran and Lee 2011:167). Also, any discussion around cheating centers around the notion that men naturally desire multiple partners even when in a relationship and therefore 'cannot help themselves' while women who cheat on their partners are heavily judged and moralized for these actions (Farvid and Braun 2006:303). Furthermore, according to Farvid and Braun (2006:303), women's magazines depict these gender related differences as 'natural' and 'complimentary' or in other words 'the way things are'. It has been argued that this naturalization of gender differences greatly reduces men and women's notions of freedom and they are forced to function within the boundaries of limited and stereotypical notions of sexuality.

While men are represented as the main object of female sexuality, descriptions of sexuality that fall outside this heteronormative ideology are marginalized or absent altogether. Therefore, the discussion of female sexuality has been limited to a heterosexual definition in women's consumer magazines (Gupta et al. 2008:248). Moran and Lee (2011: 164) state that women were represented as being or wanting to be in a monogamous heterosexual relationship and that the possibility for desiring a female partner was not dealt with. Along similar lines, it is argued that while many contemporary women's magazines appear to celebrate sexual freedom and female autonomy, female sexuality is seen exclusively in conjunction to male sexuality (Farvid and Braun 2006:299). Research by Jackson (2005) provides another example how same sex desire is consistently down played in magazines. She provides examples on how the word 'lesbian' is avoided in teenage girls' letters to a magazine and how readers are not encouraged to verbally identify themselves as lesbians (2005:306). Researchers have argued that the frame of heteronormativity represented in women's magazines continues to diminish sexual autonomy and works in the favor of maintaining patriarchal ideologies (Moran and Lee 2011: 175; Farvid and Braun 2006:296).

Given the fact that women's magazines are widely available for consumers and that many researchers argue that they mediate limited and negative prescriptions of female and male sexuality, some scholars have been interested to discover how these representations affect attitudes and behavior. Kim and Ward (2004) investigated how the level of exposure and motivation for reading magazines affected young women's associations around sexual attitudes and feminine ideologies. The results indicate that reading adult focused magazines (e.g. *Cosmopolitan*) correlated with positive evaluation of assertive females and regarding sex as fun and risk free as well as rejecting stereotypical notions of masculinity. However, reading teen oriented magazines (e.g. *Seventeen*) was more likely to correlate with stereotypical notions of masculinity and femininity.

3 THE PRESENT STUDY

3.1 Aim and research questions

The present study attempts to build on previous research on sexuality representations in women's magazines which has identified that the content of these magazines furthers dominant ideologies that maintain and promote sexual role stereotypes and help to sustain male dominance (Moran Lee, 2011:159). The present study will apply a broad definition of sexuality, referring to one's erotic desire (Cameron and Kulick 2003), and the specific focus will be on portrayals of women's sexuality in contemporary magazines. Because of their affordability and vast readership, these magazines have the ability to produce and maintain people's assumptions about what constitutes as appropriate sexuality and sexual behavior.

More specifically, I am focusing on two different magazines that are aimed at different demographics. Firstly, I will consider *Cosmopolitan* whose main audience consists of adult women. Secondly, I am going to look at sexuality representations in *Seventeen* which targets teenagers. My aim is to discuss how both of these magazines deal with the topic of female sexuality and also to compare them in order to discover any potential differences and/or similarities. I will attempt to point out relevant discourses that constitute the representation of women's sexuality in the magazines and provide discussion on how these discourses are connected to larger ideologies and power relations in society. However, it should be noted that while I will only explicitly discuss feminine sexuality, implicit references to male sexuality representation will be made since many

contemporary magazines treat them as complimentary (e.g. women as submissive, men as dominating). The research questions will be the following:

1. What types of discourses are central in the context of female sexuality in both of the women's magazines?
2. What differences and/or similarities are there between the magazines?

3.2 Data and method of analysis

The magazines chosen for the present study are *Cosmopolitan* US and *Seventeen*. *Cosmopolitan* is an international women's magazine brand that is released monthly. The magazine includes a range of articles focusing on a variety of issues from health to career to sex and relationships. Furthermore, it can be seen as targeting an audience of adult women: the largest age group being 18-34 year-olds and the median age of the readers 34.7 (Cosmopolitan media kit 2016). *Seventeen*, on the other hand, reaches a younger audience of women; the median age of the readers is 16.5 years (Seventeen media kit 2016). It is an American based teen's magazine which discusses many relevant issues for its readers such as relationships, school and celebrities. Both of the magazines have a large audience base and are estimated to reach millions of readers monthly (Seventeen media kit; Cosmopolitan media kit 2016). My data consists of eight articles, which are listed in the bibliography, four from both *Cosmopolitan* and *Seventeen*. The articles were chosen from a relatively short time period of 19 months. Furthermore, the articles were chosen based on similar topics of love, dating and relationships since representations of female sexuality are assumed to be relevant regarding those topics and also in order for results from both magazines to be comparable.

My method for data analysis will follow the conventions of critical discourse analysis as presented by Fairclough *in Language and Power* (1998). According to him (1998:91), discourses are apparent in three different levels: text, interaction and social context. Therefore, to properly detect and analyze discourses on all of the three levels one needs to include descriptions of these discourses as well as interpretations and explanations. Descriptions can be understood as focusing on the textual manifestation of discourses, therefore, paying attention to issues such as word choices and ways of writing in creating different ways of seeing the world (Fairclough 1998:94). However, according to Fairclough (1998:118): "[…] if one is interested in the social values associated with texts and their elements, descriptions need to be complimented with interpretations and explanations". Therefore, discussion on what relevant discourses imply about women's sexuality and the reasons for

exercising these discourses with regards to the wider societal context of the magazines is included in the analysis.

4 ANALYSIS

The next section of the present study will include analysis of the eight articles that were chosen, four from *Seventeen* and four from *Cosmopolitan*. In general, five separate discourses that represent women's sexuality were identified: the discourse of the go-getter girls, the discourse of monogamous hetero relationships, the discourse of inevitable gender differences, the discourse of male supremacy and the discourse of science and physiology.

4.1 Discourse of the go-getter girls

A common way of discussing feminine sexuality and female discourses in the context of relationships and sex in both *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan* is by representing women and girls as powerful and in control. These magazines portray women as knowing what they want in terms of their relationships and as possessing the power to adjust their partners' behavior to match these preferences. This discourse of the go-getter girls often appears together with a complimentary discourse which, in turn, represents men as clueless and in need of female authority. This discourse portrays women as empowered individuals who have the ability to make independent choices regarding their sex lives and relationships; therefore, they are rejecting traditional gender roles which regard women as passive while men are seen as actively pursuing them. Similar ideas were also brought up by Machin and Thronborrow (2003:454), who argued that the brand of Cosmopolitan is based on certain core values such as independence and power, which come across in the representation of different social practices within the magazine. Furthermore, in articles relating to sex, the imperative of getting what one wants proposes an idea of empowerment and emancipation with regard to women's sexuality (Machin and Thronborrow 2003: 462).

Articles in both magazines forward the idea of the independent and empowered go-getter girl which is established through a variety of linguistic means. "*Land Your Perfect Date"* (*Seventeen* April 2015) provides the readers with instructions on how they can secure their preferred date for Prom. The article consists of specific tips such as "Give your crush a hint" and "Next time you're together, pull him in for a Snapchat […]" which represent women as knowing what they want and encourages them to pursue that. Furthermore, the verb *pull* can be considered rather assertive and refers to determinate behaviour which further emphasizes the notion that women should have

control over their romantic relationships. However, while the article promotes the discourse of the go-getter girls, it can also be seen as ultimately resorting to traditional notions of gender roles. The article suggests that readers should "Just do the asking!" because "[…] it is better than sitting around waiting for an invitation that may never come.", therefore women are told to be active and independent in their pursuit of a romantic interest and the magazine discards the idea of passively waiting for a man. However, traditional notions of the roles of men and women in relationships are simultaneously endorsed by first suggesting an indirect approach of giving a hint and by framing asking directly as the last, more unpleasant, resort: according to the article asking a boy out is "easier said than done."

Similarly, *Cosmopolitan* also represents women as empowered and knowing how to get what they want. In a reoccurring section of the magazine *"Manthropology- Your Guide to the Male Brain"* (July 2016) women are given advice on how to make their men better partners. The article portrays women as the authority in relationships by giving them the power to alter their partners' behaviour to their liking. The article asks a question "Are great BFs [boyfriends] born… or bred?" and by using the verb *breed*, which is commonly used to refer to animals, it creates a power dynamic where women are put in the position of authority while men are represented as passive and controllable, akin to animals. Furthermore, the article suggests that women should "[…] leave cues about their expectations with a little technique called pre-framing", which portrays women as needing to manage men and guide them in the right direction while men are represented as clueless about the expectations of women in the context of romantic relationships.

Another article in *Cosmopolitan* puts forward the notion that women are the active and more powerful party in romantic relationships. *"Why You Need to Have the (Mini) Talk"* (June, 2016) reveals *Cosmopolitan* readers '[…] why lower pressure convos [conversations] are the new road to commitment'. Women are advised not to settle for a man "until you're positive that a dude is worth it" in order to secure the best possible relationship. The article rejects the notion that women are indiscriminately pursuing a relationship and attempts to supply women with the means for making empowered decision about choosing a partner. For instance, the article states that "It is not about sitting around while he figures his shit out- it's about having clarity on where the relationships is going for you". Therefore, women should not feel obliged to follow the lead of men or to adjust their own behaviour to male preferences, but rather to make independent choices regarding their own sexuality and romantic relationships.

The imperative of the discourse of the go-getter girls is to make women feel empowered, in the context of sexuality and relationships, by assuring that they have to ability to choose for themselves. The go-getter girl is active when it comes to her love life and the idea that women should sit around waiting for men is strongly opposed. Furthermore, this discourse can be understood as a characteristic of post feminism, which according to Gill (2009:346) is "[…] a sensibility characterized by a number of elements: a taking for granted of feminist ideas alongside a fierce repudiation of feminism; an emphasis upon choice, freedom and individual empowerment […]". However, even though post-feminism seemingly emphasizes women's ability to choose, researchers have also criticized the movement, claiming that instead of contributing to equality between genders it serves to enforce patriarchal and masculine hegemony (McRobbie 2007:723). Therefore, in the context of the present study, while articles such as "*Land Your Perfect Date"*, *"Manthropology"* and "*Why You Need to Have the (Mini) Talk"* position women as authority figures who have the opportunity to choose what they want for themselves and are presented with the means for obtaining that, these choices are carried out in the framework of patriarchal hegemony since ultimately the only available choice is that of finding a (male) partner. By masking women's actions as choices, equality is assumed to having been achieved and is no longer an issue (McRobbie, 2007:732).

4.2 Discourse of monogamous hetero relationships

Complimentary with the idea of the go-getter girl, a discourse which represents women as continuously pursuing monogamous hetero relationships appears central. As discussed above, women's magazines increasingly present their readers as empowered individuals whose actions are characterised by the ability to choose. However, this discourse can be seen to enforce an unequal power dynamic between the genders hence, the choices women make are restricted by the society in which they take place. Both *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan* perpetuate an idea that finding a partner and securing a relationship is the end goal of feminine sexuality and women's actions, even though this imperative is often times disguised as the discourse of empowered and independent go-getters. Furthermore, the object of women's desire is a man, and women are represented as seeking for exclusivity, therefore perpetuating the ideal of monogamous hetero relationships. Parallel ideas about the representation of feminine discourses in women's magazines were also presented by Zaragoza (2012:102) who found heterosexuality to be a dominant frame in her analysis of the representation of adolescent sexuality. Furthermore, Gupta et al. (2008:164) found that women's

magazines routinely normalise and privilege the status of a heteronormative monogamous relationship.

The discourse of women as endlessly pursuing a male partner with whom they can secure and maintain a monogamous relationship, is manifested through multiple linguistic means in both *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan. "Master the Group Date" (Seventeen*, March 2016) advices the readers on certain techniques which will ensure a successful date. The article establishes finding a love interest as the main objective of dating by stating, for example: "From getting organized to grabbing your potential love interest's attention" which conveys the idea that the point of organizing a group date is in order to find a potential partner. In addition, the article encourages its readers to engage in conversation with their crush because **"**at best you will spark his interest, at worst you will have a good chat". By framing interesting contact with another person or "a good chat" as less valuable than getting one's crush interested, reinforces the idea that the only reason men and women interact with each other is to secure a relationship. More specifically, here the best case scenario is finding a partner and everything that falls short of that is less desirable. Furthermore, the imperative is to specifically spark *his* interest which can appear to represent women as unquestionably seeking for a romantic partner while men are to ones who need pursuing; women need to behave in a certain way in order to make themselves interesting.

Another example of the discourse which represents women as always pinning for a relationship can be found in "*Why You Need to Have the (Mini) Talk" (Cosmopolitan* June 2016). The article simultaneously celebrates the discourse of an independent and empowered woman (discourse of the go-getter girls, discussed above), however, it fails to question the underlying assumption that relationships only occur in the framework of heteronormativity and monogamy. More specifically, the idea that proper relationships can only be established between two individuals comes across several times in the text. Women are recommended to have multiple discussions about the state of the relationship with their potential partner in order to find out "whether they are exclusive" and to establish "some type of commitment". Furthermore, the lack of desire for commitment can be understood as coming from the man's side since the readers are encouraged to make sure their partner is serious about the relationship and "not because they only want to hook up". Therefore, the article can be seen to represent women as wanting exclusivity in relationships and also as being the ones who are actively pursuing these relationships. It can be concluded that while the article promotes a post-feminist ideal of empowered women, the traditional understanding of relationships as exclusive and heterosexual is not challenged.

The use of gender specific pronouns and nouns is also a reoccurring theme throughout the magazine articles, which contributes to the forwarding of the discourse on women's sexuality to be exclusively understood within the boundaries of heteronormativity. The pronouns that refer to men appear together with a variety of gender neutral terms; however, the lack of consistency in neutrality positions heterosexuality as the default for female sexuality and desire. "*Land Your Perfect Date" (Seventeen* April 2015), for instance tells its readers to "give your crush a hint" because "some guys need that". While the term *crush* is considered gender neutral in a sense that it can refer to both men and women, the word *guy* is typically used to discuss men. The article does not explicitly state that the only available target for a woman's desire is a man; however, by using terms that are both gender neutral and specific to men interchangeably, the magazine perpetuates the discourse that women's sexuality can only be understood in relation to its male target. Similarly, another *Seventeen* article *"What He's Thinking: When You're Being Emoji-nal"* (October 2015) constructs the idea that women are only interested in men by opting for the use of word choices that exclude the representation of sexuality outside the heteronormative paradigm. The article interviews panellists who inform the reader what different emoticons mean from their opinion. The headline uses the gender specific pronoun *he*, therefore implying the reader that the article specifically discusses the male perspective on the issue. Moreover, plenty other gender specific term and phrases are used throughout the article, such as "[…] if you're giving guys the right message.", "meet our guys", "stop obsessing over his moves". In addition to the use of gender specific terminology, the panellists that were chosen to give their opinion on the meaning of emoticons were exclusively men, perpetuating therefore an idea that only the male opinion is worth voicing.

Cosmopolitan and *Seventeen* both utilize the discourse of compulsory monogamous and heteronormative relationships in their representation of women's sexuality and feminine discourse in the context of relationships. Articles frame women as actively pursuing men by positioning the securing of a relationship as the main goal of their actions. Furthermore, these relationships can only be established within the framework of heterosexuality and monogamy, meaning that women are continuously represented as looking specifically for a male partner and deviant sexual orientations are not present, and that exclusivity is a defining characteristic of a proper relationship. It can be noted, however, that this discourse can appear simultaneously with another discourse that frames women as empowered. Gill (2009:362) also noted the tendency for women's magazines to frame readers' autonomy and power as a tool to "find and keep a man" or to "get him to propose". The readers are not explicitly told that they ought to establish exclusive relationships with men, however by leaving out any differentiating representations this message comes across implicitly.

Therefore, the scope of power that women are represented as having can be questioned and whether this power can only be utilized when pursuing a heterosexual relationship.

4.3 Discourse of inherent gender differences

While women's magazines tend to represent women as actively pursuing relationships with men, these magazines simultaneously position the two genders very differently in terms of their tough processes, assumptions and ideas about relationships as well as ways of behaving. This discourse of inherent gender differences is apparent in both *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan,* and it puts emphasis on the notion that men and women are inevitably different because of gender, and that these differences are often seen as a potential source of miscommunication. Other researchers have also identified the discourse of gender differences as a distinct way of representing both men and women in women's magazines. Moran and Lee (2011: 166) concluded that men and women are explicitly portrayed as different with regards to their sexual tendencies and behaviors. Furthermore, they argued that these magazines encourage their readers to adjust their own sexuality in order to please their male partner. Similarly, Gill (2009:364) put forward "[…] the idea that men and women are separate, but – crucially – complementary, species, who are metaphorically creatures from different planets." A variety of articles from both *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan* are based on the notion of gender differences and mutual intelligibility between men and women as well as the idea that women need help in decoding the opposite gender.

What He's Thinking: When You're Being Emoji-nal (Seventeen, October 2015) takes as its baseline assumption the idea that men and women will have differences in their way of perceiving emoticons and the significance they carry: "The kissing face. The smirk. Heart eyes. All those faces can translate so many ways. So before you hit send on that text, turn the page to find out if you're giving guys the right message". The article emphasizes the idea that difficulties in understanding and interpreting emoticons occur exclusively between men and women by excluding any female opinion about the topic, therefore, forwarding the idea that only men are unintelligible to women. Furthermore, the article includes phrases such as "decode him on social media" and "get a real read on his behavior" further emphasizing the notion that men have ways of behaving that women do not understand and, as a result, creates the discourse of gender differences. By rejecting the possibility that people of the same gender can have different interpretations and simultaneously telling the readers that men act and think in ways that are not shared by women, the magazines puts forward a discourse where gender is regarded as the main category for defining human behavior. In other

words, differences in interpreting emoticons do not occur between women because gender is the reason behind miscommunication.

The discourse of inherent gender differences is also an underlying theme *in Cosmopolitan's* article *"Your Guide to the Male Brain – Manthropology"* (October 2016), which discusses various techniques for improving one's partner. The word *Manthropology* is a modification of the term anthropology, which refers to the study of various aspects of human behaviour in society. The title is intended as a joke, therefore establishing the idea that men are so unintelligible to women that understanding them can be considered a specific field of study. The phrase "Your guide to the male brain" further emphasises this notion by drawing on the discourse that there are fundamental and inherent differences between men and women; the male brain has distinct characteristics that are not shared by the female brain. "*Manthropology*" is a reoccurring section in Cosmopolitan which would suggest that the discourse of fundamental differences between men and women is well received by the magazine's audience. Similarly, another article from Cosmopolitan exploits the assumption that men and women are inherently different and, as a consequence, women need to figure out the inner workings of their partners mind. *"12 Things Guys Don't Care about in Bed"* (June 2015) lists a variety of aspects that can be considered concerns for women when it comes to sex. These include issues such as the appropriateness of one's body hair or underwear. By concluding that these are aspects that men are not preoccupied with, the article makes the complimentary assumption that women do care about them, therefore drawing on the discourse of gender differences. In general, both *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan* tend to represent men and women as two uniform groups that can be considered inherently different but simultaneously complimentary, like two sides of a coin.

While men and women are increasingly represented as two completely separate groups who will inevitably have trouble navigating each other, this issue is rarely framed as a negative one. More specifically, even though *Cosmopolitan* includes descriptions of men such as "guys are cave men" and "men are like dogs" ("*I'm Sleeping with Someone New. Send Help!", Cosmopolitan* April, 2016) women are, nonetheless, encouraged to pursue a male partner. The underlying assumption that the only acceptable target for women's sexuality is a male is not questioned, even though men are described to be the complete opposite of women. However, *Seventeen* draws on an alternative discourse which represents men and relationships as potentially undesirable and a source of negative emotions. This discourse comes across in the article "*Land Your Perfect Date" (*April 2015) which mostly discusses how the reader can secure their crush as a date for Prom. However, the article also states that "You don't need to be paired up to have an incredible night", therefore telling the readers that going with a romantic interest is not essential. Furthermore, the article

encourages women to attend prom with a friend group, and this statement is rationalized by casting a negative light on the idea of going with a (male) date "That way you won't have to babysit a rando all night". Another article "*Master the Group Date" (*March 2016) utilizes a similar discourse by telling the reader that "It doesn't have to be the worst when you're the only one not boo'd up". This idea is further emphasised by framing dating and relationships as a source of trouble: "[…] enjoy the fact that you can kick back without any bae-related issues". While *Seventeen* magazine draws on the discourse which represents men and relationships as negative and not having a partner as positive, this discourse appears together with representations of women which emphasise the importance of relationships. For instance, "*Master the Group Date"* can be seen as simultaneously encouraging women to actively pursue a relationship (the discourse of the go-getter girls), as well as framing them as a source of anxiety. Furthermore, a similar discourse which portrays men and relationships as negative is not apparent in Cosmopolitan, regardless of the fact that men are often framed in a negative light. Even though gender differences are emphasised, they are mostly regarded as inherent and the way things are. Furthermore, these articles position women as responsible for navigating their partner's brain and decoding their behaviour, hence establishing an unequal power dynamic for the benefit of men.

4.4 Discourse of male supremacy

A final discourse that comes across in both *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan* relates to the representation of men as authority figures while simultaneously positioning women as the weaker gender. This discourse tends to privilege the male desire and encourage women to adjust their behaviour to please their partner in the context of sex and relationships. However, in many instances this process of privileging the male is not carried out explicitly but rather indirectly. The discourse of the go-getter girls (discussed above) represents women as empowered and able to make their own decisions regarding their sex lives and romantic relationships; however, as it was noted, the extent of freedom women's magazines assign to their readers is restricted by the society's masculine hegemony. Therefore, even though women are represented as having a choice, the choices they make can be seen as ultimately benefitting men since the boundaries of the society in which women operate are defined by the patriarchal society (McRobbie, 2007:721-723). Other researchers have also noted the tendency for women's magazines to place men in the position of authority and, by doing so, privilege the male desire in the expense of women. Moran and Lee (2011: 161) concluded that while the surface orientation of a lot of women's magazines is to help women feel in control of their sex lives, they ultimately promote social control of sexual behaviour

for the benefit of men. More specifically, magazines forward a message which implies that women's desires and concerns are less valuable than those of the male partner's. Similar tendencies were also picked up by Farvid and Braun (2006:300) who conducted a study on female sexuality in women's magazines. They concluded: "So although these magazines are ostensibly 'women centered,' male sexuality was prioritized in a range of ways."

Both Seventeen and Cosmopolitan place men as authority figures by publishing articles where a man is or men are in the position of providing women with information. For example, "*What He's Thinking: When You are Being Emoji-nal" (Seventeen* October 2015) advices the readers to ascertain how men interpret emoticons and to adjust their own behaviour to that. Readers are, for example, advised to "find out if you're giving him the right message", which puts emphasis on women's responsibility to figure out how men think about different issues and to act according to that preference. Furthermore, the article features male panellists, therefore giving men the authority to advice women which, in turn, represent women as clueless and needing male guidance in order to act accordingly. The readers are assumed to have trouble understanding men on their own, therefore an outside opinion is needed. Similarly, *Cosmopolitan* also makes use of male authors to advice women on how they should behave in the context of sex and relationships. In "*Manthropology-Your Guide to the Male Brain" (*October 2016) the male author provides women with tips on how they can make their man a better partner. The article simultaneously represents women as powerful and making them appear active by assigning them with the means for altering their partner's behaviour. However, women are ultimately advised to behave in ways that make the man feel good about himself. For example, women are encouraged to "Reinforce his best moments": "When he does something even a tiny bit right, give him love and attention for it. He gives you a small surprise? Tell him, "It's so sexy to have a man who takes care of me the way you do." Making men better partners is, therefore, carried out on the man's terms and women are expected to become aware of how men like to be talked to and then to adapt and adjust their own behaviour to that. The article also tells women to "set him up to win" and to "make it about your joy, not his failure" which forwards the imperative to make men feel good about themselves and implies that women are not supposed to behave in ways that will compromise that imperative, therefore, enforcing the idea of male supremacy.

Furthermore, researchers have shown that women's magazines tend to frame female sexuality as seemingly empowering for women, however, simultaneously privileging the male pleasure (Farvid and Braun 2006; Moran and Lee 2011). "*I'm Sleeping with Someone New. Send Help!" (Cosmopolitan* April 2016) also draws on similar discourses by framing female sexuality as a tool

for male acceptance. Women are, for instance, provided with different sex tips, stating that “these fool-proof moves will have him worship you”. The article positions women in a way where their sexuality is utilized in order to increase their partners’ pleasure, to “blow his mind”. In addition, a part of the article focuses on letting go of readers’ “sexual hang-ups” referring to issues that might make women feel uncomfortable during sex, such as their sex skills and body insecurities. While encouraging women to reject their sexual inhibitions can appear as liberating and empowering, it can be argued that is ultimately to please their partner. More specifically, women’s ‘sexual hang-ups’ can be regarded as factors that will intervene with their ability to please their partners. For instance, the article encourages women to practice their sex skills in private by visualising: “When you’re alone, pick a spot you like to touch and gently stroke it with your fingers as you visualize. This primes the brain.” Ultimately, the purpose of this is to improve one’s skills for sex with a male partner: “During the deed have your partner caress the sport, and others too while he’s at it!”. Therefore, the article promotes a discourse according to which women’s sexuality should be understood in reflection to its target, male sexuality.

It can be argued that women’s magazines draw on discourses that privilege men; furthermore, this discourse can be masked by seemingly assigning women with authority and representing them as having a choice. The competing discourses of male supremacy and go-getter girls were evident in the present study since both *Cosmopolitan* and *Seventeen* represented women as having authority to make decision about their sexuality and romantic relationships while simultaneously drawing on elements that shift that authority to men. More specifically, this is carried out by advising women to behave in certain ways that are approved by men; therefore, women’s freedom to act is defined by male authority. This discourse can also be seen as relating to the tendency for women’s magazines to exclude notions of female sexuality that fall outside of heteronormativity; the only possible choice for women in terms of sex and relationships is finding a male partner.

4.5 Discourse of science and physiology

Lastly, a discourse which discusses female sexuality from the point of view of physiological factors and scientific phenomenon was identified. Interestingly, this discourse appeared exclusively in one *Seventeen* article *“5 Things to Know about Your Body before Sex...”* The article presented five different factors relating to the physiological functioning of the female body that readers should take into consideration before making the decision to engage in sexual activities. The discourse which emphasises scientific and physiological factors when addressing female sexuality is

forwarded by including discussion of topics such as brain functions and sexual health: “The most crucial body part when it comes to sex may be your brain, and it might not be ready for such game-changing decision. Here’s why: the area that controls heat of the moment impulses is the last part to mature (that happens in your twenties) […]”. This section associates sex with physiological functioning of the brain and, therefore, emphasises the role of the physiological body when making the decision to have sex and fails to discuss mental phenomena such as feelings and subjective experience and their role in sexual activities. Furthermore, this discourse appears consistently throughout the article, another example addresses sexual health: “If your vagina smells odd, always feels itchy and irritated, or you experience out-of-the-ordinary discharge, it could mean your PH is off (Your vagina has a natural PH level, which helps the keep the “bad” bacteria away.)”

In addition, introducing topics that are mostly related to the physical functioning of the female body in the context of sex, rather than focusing on the mental side of the topic words such as *brain, hormones, labia and clitoris* are used. Furthermore, the importance of emotions is also downplayed by framing them as a type of a side effect of physical functions of the body. This framing is apparent for example when stating: “Hormones basically run your life at the moment, Natterson says, so that heart-beating-faster vibe you get around your crush can easily be mistaken for love.” By discussing the feelings of infatuation, or love, that one might experience as a result of hormonal functioning, the importance of subjective feelings is dismissed. Different authority figures are also quoted throughout the article further puts forward the discourse of science and physiology. “Cara Natterson, M.D, a paediatrician in L.A and author of the series *Care and Keeping of You*” as well as “Sheila Overton, M.D, an ob-gyn in Rockville, Maryland” are interviewed in the article and are positioned as authorities due to their background in medicine and, therefore, are in the position to provide the readers with factual information.

While the article introduces a scientific point of view of female sexuality and makes use of formal language in discussing them, this appears parallel with a more informal and playful tone of writing. The article, for example, makes a reference to a known pop-culture figure Selena Gomez: “Sorry Selena, the heart does not always know what it wants.” Considering the reader demographic of the magazine, it can be assumed that most teenage girls are able to pick up on that reference. Furthermore, short and incomplete sentences are used to balance out the long and scientific ones: “Totally natural” This type of sentence structure can be understood as mimicking the speech patterns of the teenage readers. Therefore, it can be argued that the article’s tendency to alter between formal and informal tone of writing attempts to discuss the topic from a scientific and

neutral point of view while simultaneously engage with the reader and provide them with parts to identify with.

As it was mentioned above, this discourse of science and physiology is exclusive to the article "*5 Things to Know about Your Body before Sex…"* in *Seventeen* therefore, it did not come across in any other of the four articles that were included from the same magazine nor in any *Cosmopolitan* article. Furthermore, the article was the only one in *Seventeen* that discussed sexual intercourse per se as a part of female sexuality. Other articles that were considered in the present study framed feminine sexuality exclusively from the point of view of dating and relationships, therefore, the physical act of sex was not mentioned in any of the other articles. In addition, "*5 Things to Know about Your Body before Sex…"* appeared in a section of the magazine called "Body & Health" while the articles discussing dating and relationships were included in "Your Circle". This raises the question of why the physical act of sex is separated from the discussion of other issues relating to female sexuality, namely those dealing with romantic relationships. It can be considered whether the topic of sex in the context of teenagers is regarded as a taboo, therefore, the magazine chooses to approach it from a neutral stand point. On the contrary, *Cosmopolitan* considers sex as an essential part of female sexuality and romantic relationships, which is evident from the magazines tendency to discuss dating and relationships in conjunction with sex. It is also possible, that the topic of sex is separated from other discussion of sexuality because the magazine does not want its readers to associate sex as a necessary part of relationships. "*5 Things to Know about Your Body before Sex…"* also lends support to this idea, since it, in multiple occasions, implies that the readers should not engage in sexual activities. "Just because your body is changing doesn't mean your V-status has to change along with it." and "[…] your brain, and it might not be ready for such game-changing decision". Even though, readers are not explicitly told not to have sex, it is implied that they might not be ready, regardless of the fact that they might feel that they are.

5 CONCLUSION

The results of the present study indicate that representations of female sexuality and femininity in contemporary women's magazine are diverse. It was pointed out that the magazines examined tend to simultaneously draw on conflicting discourses that represent female sexuality in varying ways. More specifically, five different discourses were identify as relevant when representing sexuality and femininity: discourse of the go-getter girls, discourse of monogamous hetero relationships, discourse of inevitable gender differences, discourse of male supremacy and discourse of science and physiology. The first four of these where present in articles from both *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan* while the last one was exclusive to a single article from *Seventeen.* Based on the analysis of the articles it should be noted that while the present study discusses each discourse in separate sections, they are often linked and mutually complimentary. Both magazines encouraged women to exercise authority and personal choice with regards to their sexuality and romantic relationships, however, this authority was seen to function within the boundaries of monogamy and heterosexuality meaning that the only available target of desire was a male partner. Furthermore, it was argued that while both *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan* celebrate women's independence, men are often times privileged in a number of ways and as a result women's sexuality is seen as a reflection of male sexuality. This was especially true in *Cosmopolitan* where readers were encouraged to engage in sex in order to please their partners. Perpetual notions of often stereotypical ideas of gender and sexuality for both men and women were also a reoccurring discourse in the magazines especially relating to what was regarded as inherent gender differences. The idea that men and women are mutually intelligible yet complimentary was drawn on multiple times in both magazines.

As noted, the present study concluded that both *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan* utilized many of the same discourses when representing women, some interesting differences between the magazines where also discovered. First of all, even though both magazines positioned men as utterly different from women and casted a negative light on them on many occasions, their suitability as partners for women was only questioned in *Seventeen*. In other words, *Seventeen* offered its readers the idea that finding a male partner is not the only option under some circumstances. However, this was carried out in conjunction with a contradicting discourse that encouraged women to obtain a relationship. Secondly, it was noted that there was a lack of discussion on sex in *Seventeen*; only one out of four articles directly addressed this topic as a part of dating and relationships. Furthermore, the article framed sex from a highly neutral standpoint of science and physiology. This was a clear difference

from *Cosmopolitan* where the topic of sex was both frequent and central to the discussion of dating and relationships.

The present study provided insight into sexuality representations in two contemporary women's magazines and the results mainly reflect previous studies on the issue. It has been pointed out, for instance, that magazines aimed at women tend to prioritise male sexuality and represent women as wanting to secure monogamous relationships with men (Farvid and Braun 2006; Gill 2009; Moran and Lee 2011). Due to the limited scope of this research, the findings cannot be regarded as a comprehensive description of women's sexuality representations in magazines, however, they can serve as a base for further investigation. More specifically, it was argued that the topic of sex is represented differently in a teen-focused magazine compared to an adult-focused one. This would serve as an interesting point for further research in order to investigate these differences in more detail and understand the reasons for them. Furthermore, comprehending how readers receive the messages media puts out regarding sexuality representations, would require future research. The role these messages have in constructing one's own sexual identity is a complex process and, therefore, an intriguing field for investigation.

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