

BEHIND THE COSMO-GIRL:  
Women's representations and the brand of  
*Cosmopolitan* magazine

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HUMANISTINEN TIEDEKUNTA  
KIELTEN LAITOS

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**BEHIND THE COSMO-GIRL:  
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Kriittisen diskurssintutkimuksen lähtökohta on ajatus kielestä todellisuutta ja kulttuurisia arvoja muokkaavana ja uusintavana välineenä. Siksi totuttuihin puhetapoihin eli diskursseihin tulee kiinnittää huomiota, jos halutaan muuttaa yhteiskunnan epätasa-arvoa tuottavia rakenteita tai nostaa näkyville erilaisiin ihmisryhmiin liitettyjä piileviä oletuksia.

Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoitus on lisätä tietoa kulttuurisista naisrepresentaatioistamme kriittisen diskurssintutkimuksen metodeja hyödyntäen. Valitsin tutkittavaksi aineistokseni kaksi artikkelia *Cosmopolitanista*. Pyrin tuomaan uuden näkökulman naistenlehtien analyysiin vertaamalla artikkeleista löytyvää naiskuvaa *Cosmopolitanin* imagoon nykyaikaisille, itsenäisille naisille tarkoitettuna lehtenä.

Analyysini osoitti, että *Cosmopolitanin* tapa representoida naisia ei vastaa lehden imagoa. Molempien artikkeleiden aihepiiri, sanavalinnat ja kielenkäyttöön sisältyvät taustaoletukset edustivat melko suppeaa ja vanhanaikaistakin naiskäsitystä. *Cosmopolitanin* naislukijan oletettiin olevan epävarma, ulkonäköönsä ja sen korjailemiseen keskittynyt ja valmis ottamaan yksityiselämäänsä liittyviä neuvoja tai suoranaisia käskyjä ulkopuolisilta. Lukija myös kutsuttiin tavoittelemaan saavuttamattomaksi tehtyä ulkonäköihannetta. Nämä tulokset vastaavat useiden aikaisempien tutkimusten tuloksia, mutta ovat pahasti ristiriidassa lehden mainostaman vapaan, itsenäisen ja iloisen "Cosmo-tytön" (lehden prototyypin lukijan) mielikuvan kanssa. Sitä paremmin se kuitenkin vastaa lehteä suurelta osin rahoittavien mainostajien tavoitteita.

Koska *Cosmopolitan* on laajalti luettu lehti, sen maailmankuva on vaikutusvaltainen. Sen imago naisten vapaata itseilmaisua ja päätösvaltaa korostavana lehtenä on harhaanjohtava, ja siksi aihetta pitäisi jatkossakin tutkia. Oma tutkimukseni oli melko suppea, ja lisätutkimus muun muassa lehden mainoksista ja kuvituksesta antaisi kattavamman kuvan aiheesta. Myös kvantitatiivinen tutkimus tuottaisi arvokasta tietoa.

Asiasanat: critical discourse analysis, women's representation, ideology

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Language is a source of great power. It contains and hides assumptions that significantly influence the way we perceive reality and give meaning to the things and people around us. To reveal and correct inequalities in the society it is, therefore, highly important to pay attention to the way language use contributes to and strengthens the current reality. One method of getting to the presuppositions and social constructions in language use is discourse analysis. Because of its usefulness in this regard, it has often been employed in examining gender relations in the society.

Since the media plays a prominent role in today's western society, the type of language it uses and the way it represents reality has a major impact on our worldviews. When attempting to break old views and representations of gender the media is, thus, an important object of study. Many studies on various topics concerning gender and the media have been conducted, and this is the field to which the present study also contributes.

My target of interest is women's representation in *Cosmopolitan* magazine, and I will compare the way the magazine's articles depict women to the image *Cosmopolitan* publicly declares to convey of the female sex. To reach the underlying ideology behind the articles, I will employ the methods of critical discourse analysis and examine women's representations in the magazine. Although *Cosmopolitan* has been researched before, this particular topic has not been thoroughly studied. I thus hope to bring a new point of view to the study field, and perhaps uncover wide-spread ways of using language that create inequality.

I will begin this paper by introducing in Chapter 2 the basic assumptions and aims of critical discourse analysis as well as some previous studies made on gender representations in women's magazines. I will also elaborate my own study question at the end of the chapter. In Chapter 3 I will discuss the data I examine in my study as well as the methods with which I conduct my analysis. In Chapter 4 I will then report the results of my analysis, and Chapter 5 is dedicated to a discussion on those results. Chapter 6 concludes my study, and in it I will present some propositions for further study.

## **2. DISCOURSE AND GENDER**

In this chapter I will introduce the theoretical framework onto which I intend to base my own research. I will first discuss critical discourse analysis; the world view behind the tradition, the terms essential to it and the purpose of doing it. After this general introduction I will more precisely introduce research conducted on women's magazines. I am going to concentrate on a few studies that I find are of especial importance for my research, and discuss them in the light of themes relating to my topic of interest. At the end of the chapter I am going to present my own study question.

### **2.1. Critical discourse analysis**

I start my research from the assumption that language is a tool with which we make sense of the world. As Lehtonen (1996: 30-31) writes, language is the medium with which reality is divided into meaningful parts. With language, we give meaning to the world around us. We can have no knowledge outside of language.

Moreover, the divisions and meanings in languages are created according to certain rules, that is discourses (Lehtonen 1996:31). By discourse I mean, as Lehtonen (1996:32) expresses it, particular ways of representing reality. Discourses are established ways of describing the world through language, assumptions and ways of speaking that are perceived as common sense in a certain culture. When we speak or write about something, we can never really get to the "truth", the reality surrounding us. All we can ever do is create and use representations of the world, thus always portraying it from a certain point of view and through the values of a certain culture, paying particular attention to certain qualities of it and, at the same time, disregarding others. As Gill (2007:58) states, language use always involves making choices. Language use is, thus, never objective description but representation. As certain ways of representing reality, discourses that is, become widely accepted, they come to have an important effect on the way we perceive reality and the meanings we give to it.

The concept of ideology is strongly tied to discourse. According to Fairclough (1989:2-3), ideologies are common sense assumptions that are means of legitimizing existing social relations. As discourses, on the other hand, are set ways of representing certain objects and phenomena, they are unavoidably sources and carriers of ideologies. Discourses are, then, never innocent or meaningless, but represent the world from a particular point of view that is

beneficial to some and very likely harmful to others. As Lehtonen (1996:23) writes, power is often acquired and retained by getting people to believe in particular views of the world, by succeeding in giving certain representations and thus meanings the status of common sense. Discourses are, therefore, important sources of power.

I will approach discourses and ideologies from the perspective of critical discourse analysis (CDA). CDA attempts to reveal the underlying discourses embedded in language use and thus uncover the ways in which power is exercised in a society. The aim is, then, to change societies for the better by making them more equal. (Kress 1996:15) The intention is to show that alternative ways of looking at the world are possible and to give voice to those to whom the dominant discourses are unbeneficial. This is done by closely examining actual language use and looking at the values that a receiver has to assume in order for language use to make sense to her/him.

## **2.2. Studies on women's representations in women's magazines**

There is plenty of research conducted on women's magazines and how they portray women. Magazines from *Cosmopolitan* to *Women's Weekly* have been studied by numerous researchers and from many points of view. Caldas-Coulthard (1996: 253) divides women's magazines into two different categories: the traditional ones such as *Woman's Own* and the "newer glossy ones" such as *Cosmopolitan*. Since my own target of interest is *Cosmopolitan*, I am here going to concentrate on the analysis made on these "newer" magazines. I will discuss themes relevant to my own research, and present my own view of some of the related studies.

### **2.2.1. Contradiction**

First of all, one discussion highly important to the present study is that about contradiction and coherence in women's magazines. Gill (2007:191-204) explains that there are continuous inconsistencies in women's magazines, ranging from differing advice concerning how to stay fit to varying views on women's sexual pleasure. Many different voices can be heard in the magazines simultaneously, from a feminist one telling women to do as they feel comfortable to a conservative one advising them to please their man as best they can. The discussion, then, is over whether these inconsistencies truly mean that the magazines are inherently contradictory in nature, or if the incongruities are merely superficial and possibly a means of

concealing and excusing an ideology which as such would seem out-dated to the magazines' readers. This debate is relevant to me since critical discourse analysis pays particular attention to different voices in texts and attempts to give them a plausible explanation. I will, then, be commenting directly on this discussion as I analyse *Cosmopolitan* magazine and determine what, if any, distinct ideology can be found behind its articles. Gill's study is especially useful for me in this work since she gives a wide overlook onto the topic and presents a great deal of important studies made in this field to support her arguments.

Many researchers have come to think that the apparent contradictions in women's magazines are only an illusion. For instance, Machin and Thornborrow (2003) conclude that there in fact is a very coherent ideology behind all the surface-level discrepancies in *Cosmopolitan*. They (2003) examined *Cosmopolitan* magazines from 44 different countries in order to find similarities and differences in the ideologies and representations in them. They found that despite the fact that *Cosmopolitan* seems to emphasize women's independence, the magazine actually consistently advocates a very different view of women. In fact, the magazine expected women to be insecure and unhappy in their bodies, and all the power women had was most often derived from their sexuality. Although apparently having all the freedom modern women should have, women were yet defined in relation to men and assessed by their appearance. When women's work was discussed, it was done in terms of its social aspects and not the work itself. In addition, pleasing men was often a priority for women. This study (ibid.), then, argues for the view that there actually is quite a consistent ideology behind at least *Cosmopolitan*. The ideology Machin and Thornborrow (2003) found in *Cosmopolitan* magazine gives me a good point of comparison as I discuss my own study results.

### **2.2.2. Feminism**

The debate over contradiction and coherence also relates to a second question relevant to me, that is whether or not women's magazines are feminist. Gill (2007:198-204) writes that women's magazines have at least some feminist ideas in them. For instance, women are naturally presumed to have the right to work and compete with men in the workplace. She (2007) continues, however, that an opposite view can also be argued for. Women's magazines place a strong emphasis on women's appearance. In addition, no structural inequalities are presented in the magazines; to any problems that women might have, individual transformation is offered as the solution. Also Eggins and Iedema (1997:168-169) bring forth similar arguments in their research on magazines *SHE* and *NW*. They conclude that women's

magazines are often characterized by, among other things, a distinct emphasis on women's appearance and the minimization of the importance of social problems related to womanhood. According to these researchers, then, even the newer women's magazines do not completely correspond to the traditionally feminist ideals. Gill's as well as Eggins and Iedema's observations about the characteristically non-feminist features in women's magazines support my hypothesis about *Cosmopolitan*. The question of feminism in women's magazines will also be one of my central concerns as I analyse women's representations in *Cosmopolitan* in closer detail.

### **2.2.3. Commercialism**

A third topic important to me and often discussed among researchers is commercialism and its impacts on women's magazines. Gill (2007:202) lists advertisers' needs as perhaps the most important factor influencing the content of women's magazines. She (ibid.) writes that goals such as the empowerment of women are often sacrificed to please advertisers. Routine practices of editors tie the content of articles in women's magazines together with that of the advertisements next to them. Also Mary Talbot (1992) finds great respect for advertisers in her perspicacious analysis of the magazine *Jackie*. Positive attitude towards advertisers has, then, been found in magazines meant for women and girls of all age. These study results will be useful to me as I try and find motives and reasons behind women's representations in *Cosmopolitan*.

### **2.2.4. Addressing women**

A fourth discussion touching my topic concerns the way women are addressed in women's magazines. Several researchers have concluded that women are often addressed in a friendly tone in women's magazines. According to Gill (2007:183), journalists in these magazines often attempt to form a personal relationship with the readers. Magazines meant for younger women, on the other hand, assume a big-sisterly tone (Talbot:1992), which could be considered a more obvious version of the friendly tone of women's magazines. Whether sisterly or friendly, the editors tend to give their readers advice and guidance that normally might be expected from people with whom the readers have an actual relationship. Gill's and Talbot's observations give me a point of comparison as I examine the tone of voice used the articles of interest to me. They also give me clues at how to interpret the tone of voice used in them.



### 2.2.5. “The Cosmo-girl”

Fifth, the type of worldview magazines such as *Cosmopolitan* would like to be seen as advocating has also been described in previous research. Machin and Thornborrow (2003) write that the core values *Cosmopolitan* magazine is openly promoting are power, independence and fun. According to them (2003), the magazines introduce the idea of the “Cosmo-girl”; the girl who encompasses the values *Cosmopolitan* proclaims and who actively lives by them. She, quoting a phrase often explicitly repeated in the magazine, is a “fun, fearless female”. *Cosmopolitan* would like, then, to be considered a magazine meant for the active, modern woman.

Machin and Thornborrow’s (2003) observations about the image *Cosmopolitan* wishes to convey of itself are crucial for my research. I take the values they mention in their article as my point of departure as I compare *Cosmopolitan*’s overt ideology with the values that can be found behind the texts in the magazine. I believe this to be quite an important task to do since the inconsistency between the public image of the “Cosmo-girl” and the actual representations of women in *Cosmopolitan*, although apparent in Machin and Thornborrow’s analysis, is not explicitly commented upon in the article. Machin and Thornborrow, then, describe what the “fun, fearless female” in reality is like, but they do not explicitly criticize it by pointing out that the depicted image of her actually has, apart from being female, little to do with this surface-level description of her. This gives me room to compare the “fun, fearless female” to her more precise portrayal in the magazine.

### 2.2.6. Summary of the studies on women’s magazines

To sum up, women’s magazines are a topic much debated and researched. The contradictions they entail as well as their ideological content has often been discussed, and commercialism’s impact on those has been thoroughly examined. Women’s magazines’ attitude towards women and its expressions in the tone with which women are approached have also been commented upon. In addition, the way that magazines themselves would like to be seen has been touched by researchers. Nevertheless, there still remains much to do in this field of study, and previous studies leave plenty of room for further analysis. All of this previous research gives me an excellent point of comparison and advice on how to interpret my own study results.

### 2.3. Study question

In this study I intend to analyse *Cosmopolitan* magazine in terms of the way it portrays women. Magazines like *Cosmopolitan* like to advocate themselves as liberal, representing the free, modern woman. What I intend to do is, by means of critical discourse analysis, compare the view that the magazine wishes to give of itself to the way women actually are represented in the magazine.

## 3. DATA AND METHODS

In this chapter I will discuss the practical execution of my study. First, I am going to explain what data I have chosen to examine and why I decided to choose this particular data for my analysis. Then, I will describe the method with which I have conducted my analysis and explain why I felt it was the best alternative for my study.

### 3.1. Data

My target of interest is women's representations in women's magazines. From all of the magazines published, I have chosen *Cosmopolitan* magazine for my analysis. There are several reasons for this. First of all, *Cosmopolitan* is a very successful and popular magazine sold all over the world. Its influence, then, reaches a vast amount of people. Moreover, the "light" nature of the magazine often makes us forget that the roles and hidden presuppositions in it are no less influential than those in more "serious" newspapers just because of the carefree tone that they are expressed in. In addition, the image of *Cosmopolitan* as a magazine for young, independent women is very strong. Because of the success of this image and the way it increases the magazine's distribution, I consider it of particular importance to take a close look at the magazine's brand and the roles assigned for women behind it.

I have chosen two articles from the British *Cosmopolitan* (August 2007) to analyse in this study. These articles are titled *Foxy lady* and *Drop a dress size at your desk* (see appendices). I decided to examine these particular articles because they both give women a model to strive towards in their lives; in their own ways they show their readers what women ought to be, but approach the issue from different points of view. *Drop a dress size at your desk* tells women explicitly what they ought to do to look good. *Foxy lady*, on the other hand, offers women an

idol to envy and identify with. Both of these texts are typical examples of articles appearing in *Cosmopolitan*.

I have chosen only two articles and no pictures for my analysis because the length of this thesis is limited, and I want to do my analysis thoroughly. The reason I have not decided to analyse just one article with the pictures included in it is that I want a point of comparison for my text, to have a more representative view of the magazine's overall content.

### **3.2. Methods**

I have taken my method of analysis from the lectures of Text and literacy-course (spring 2007), taught by Pii Varis, and the course's materials, designed by Anne Pitkänen-Huhta and Pii Varis. These methods fit into the framework of critical discourse analysis.

First, I read the articles carefully through, paying close attention to different textual features of the text in terms of their representation of women. I analyzed word choices to see what type of connotations the words used had, and looked at the syntactic structures of the texts. I searched the texts for presuppositions to find assumptions which were taken for granted and which the readers were also expected to believe. In addition, I paid attention to those things which the readers were expected to know beforehand. I also examined how the readers were addressed in the articles, and analysed the texts in terms of contradiction and coherence to see if they were consistent in their representation of women. From these features I tried to gather a view of the magazine's attitude towards its supposedly female readers and thus women in general. In short, I attempted to see what type of ideology lay behind the texts and how the textual features in them contributed to that.

Having done this analysis carefully, I combined my results to see if there were any recurring themes in the articles. I then compared these results to the image of the "fun, fearless female" discussed in Chapter 2.2.5. In Chapter 5 I discuss the reasons for my results as well as their implications.

I chose this method because it seemed to me the most appropriate one for my study questions. With CDA, it is possible to closely examine the choices a journalist has made and analyse and discuss all the small elements that contribute to how we create and understand reality. Of course, this method restricts the analysis to a very small data, and with quantitative research it would have been possible to analyse a much wider range of articles. However, a great deal of

this type of analysis has already been conducted, and, moreover, it would not allow me to analyse the deep ideological structures that hopefully can be reached with CDA.

## **4. RESULTS**

In this chapter I am going to report the results of my analysis on the two articles mentioned earlier. With CDA, I will try and explain how women are portrayed in the articles. I will discuss the articles separately, and organize my analysis by first describing themes and recurring ideological structures I have found in the texts. I will then compare those results with the image of the “fun, fearless female”, to see if they are alike.

### **4.1. Drop a dress size at your desk**

The first article I am going to analyse is titled *Drop a dress size at your desk*. It is a *Cosmo promotion*, that is an article which is at the same time an advertisement, in this case of *The Cosmo Diet Club*. The article is advising women how to lose weight. As there are no actual women presented in the article and my objective is to examine women’s representation in the text, I will in this analysis pay close attention to the qualities attached to the assumed (female) readers of the article. I will examine what type of an attitude the writer has towards them and what type of world view the readers are expected to accept and share.

#### **4.1.1. Idealizing transient beauty**

The first and most obvious theme defining women and womanhood in the article is appearance and its presupposed importance for women. This becomes obvious in many ways. First of all, despite the fact that the topic of the article is weight loss, good looks are the actual goal the reader is expected to have. This is apparent in the word choices in the article. There are three expressions referring to weight-loss in the text: *lose weight*, *slim* and *drop a dress-size*. As two out of the three are focused on the aesthetic aspect of losing weight, it is clear that the discourse in which losing weight is discussed here is not that of healthy lifestyle but that of appearance. This also indicates that women are supposed to share the view that being thinner indisputably looks good. The article starts with the sentence “Slimming is a cinch with the Cosmo Diet Club”. The sentence, thus, carries a presupposition that being slimmer is preferable and that slimming would bring the reader closer to some predefined beauty ideal. Secondly, beauty and fashion are expected to be of interest to the reader also beyond her own

personal appearance. Also this can be seen in the presuppositions in the text, as the reader is expected to know who the model Kate Moss is without any clarification but her name. Thirdly, the wish to look “better” is presented in the article as universal and preferable for every woman, including all the readers. The text pushes women to start dieting by saying that “Now there’s no excuse for falling off the weight loss wagon”. Here not trying to lose weight is presented as the unadvisable exception. Every woman is thus invited to share a worldview where a common beauty ideal and the struggle to reach it are of major importance. All of this supports the observation which, among others, Machin and Thornborrow (2003) and Eiggins and Iedema (1997:168-169) have made about women’s magazines’ placing a great emphasis on women’s appearance.

The beauty ideal of the article is, however, transient. As already mentioned, the article invites its readers to believe that there is an ideal appearance worth aspiring to. It seems, however, to be so self-evident that it does not need to be depicted. The only descriptions of the desired outcome of losing weight appear in expressions *slim* and *drop a dress size*, which actually describe the process of dieting and not the state to which the readers are supposed to aspire with dieting. As there is no “good” weight mentioned or any ideal appearance explicitly described, all readers, apparently regardless of their size, are invited (and actually ordered, due to the imperative forms used in the text) to the project of dieting. No reader can say that she matches the ideal since it has not been straightforwardly described. The article, then, plays a trick on its reader: the reader is invited to admire an ideal appearance which everyone is supposed to know and share but which at the same time does not exist, or at least is securely out of the reader’s reach. Never-ending dieting, therefore, remains the only choice for her. This cleverly creates a situation where the help of *The Cosmo Diet Club* is continuously needed. Here the apparent contradiction in the article, then, turns into a coherent business strategy, supporting Machin and Thornborrow’s (2003) conclusion that a coherent ideology can be found behind women’s magazine’s superficial contradictoriness. In this case the contradiction is being exploited, if not constructed, to promote the sale of a product. As also Gill (2007:202) concludes, then, the content of women’s magazines can often be traced back to advertisers’ needs. To sum up, the article places women in a position where they are endlessly chasing after an ideal that cannot be reached because it does not really exist, leaving them with only the means with which to get there but never the goal itself.

#### 4.1.2. Positioning and addressing the reader

A second issue relevant when analysing the magazine's attitude towards women is the way it positions its reader in the society. The article expects the reader to have an active lifestyle. Her busy social and work life are constantly being referred to, and the difficulties that might inflict on her dieting are thoroughly discussed. For instance, the reader is expected to feel "too busy to be stressing about meals". This relates to what Gill (2007:202) writes about the newer women's magazines having assumed certain feminist principles, in this case taking for granted that the reader works and has the freedom to control her own schedule. It should, however, be mentioned that, although expected to participate in work life, the reader is not believed to be working in a very high position. The journalist refers to the reader's colleague as "the girl sitting next to you at work", indicating a position not very independent or authoritative. The autonomy the reader has does not, therefore, encompass all of the segments of her life.

Weight and self-control are one area where the reader is depicted as having no power or independence at all. Actually, concerning them the reader is being depicted as almost childishly insecure. The journalist addresses the reader directly in much of the text, almost all of the advice given in the article being in the form of imperatives. For instance, as a solution to problems when shopping for food, the journalist encourages the reader to "Simply print off our shopping lists...". The reader is, then, expected not to mind the journalist giving almost direct orders to her. Moreover, the journalist actually takes the right to "speak for" the reader, to imitate her. The text is constructed from excuses seemingly made by the reader for why she cannot lose weight, and the journalist's answers overruling all of these claims. For instance, the fictional reader says "I've just got not will power", to which the journalist then offers a solution. Also, the journalist seems to expect the reader to be almost passive; "A hectic life and specific diets, no problem, we have the meal plans ready so you do not have to do any thinking yourself". Hereby the journalist constructs a picture of an almost childlike reader who cannot control her own body although she very much would like to, and is in desperate need of the magazine's help.

This somewhat patronizing attitude towards the reader is, however, being at least partly concealed and softened up in the article. One way this is done is, as already mentioned, by giving the reader credit for her activity in other areas of her life. Another way is showing her understanding for her good intentions and honest efforts. The big-sisterly tone Talbot (1992)

found in Jackie can also be detected in this article. For instance, the journalist shows empathy for the reader by admitting that “We all start with the best intentions...”. The reader is thus kindly being taken under wing of the protective and better-knowing journalist. From this it can be concluded that the reader is expected to welcome guidance and not take patronizing as an insult and imposition on her private life.

#### **4.1.3. Summary of the analysis**

In conclusion, the article *Drop a dress size at your desk* appoints women a clear position. It depicts its readers and thus women as people the life of whom is mostly spent, and should be spent, chasing after a beauty ideal which is so universal that it does not need to be described. When it comes to this pursuit of beauty, despite their otherwise somewhat emancipated lifestyles, women are expected to be incapable and in need of an advice. What more, they are expected not to mind being told what to do, indicating passivity.

## **4.2. Foxy lady**

The second article is titled *Foxy Lady*, and it is an interview of the model Izabel Goulart. The model is depicted at her work place, at a photo shoot for the cosmetics brand *Pout* which is also being advertised on the same page as the article. To find what type of representations of women this article carries, I am going to examine the general world view in the text which its readers are expected to share. I will also analyse the way Goulart is being depicted and the way the assumed readers are being portrayed and addressed.

### **4.2.1. Concentrating on appearance**

The main theme related to womanhood in this article, as in the previous one, is beauty. All of the interviewer’s questions to the top model regard her looks and the way she personally keeps up her appearance; her career or opinions about anything else are not considered of interest to the readers. Women are also expected to have working to enhance their appearance as a self-evident part of their daily routine. This comes up several times in the text. The journalist uses the expression *beauty must-have* without clarification or a specific context where it for some reason would be essential to try and alter one’s appearance. This indicates the presupposition that women’s owning and using at least some products to try and look better goes without saying. The same expectation can be detected as Goulart uses her spare

time routine of *slapping on moisturiser and mascara* before going out as evidence about her not being *a girly girl*. Wearing “only” some make up serves, then, as an example of not being conscious of one’s appearance. Moreover, as in the previous article, the reader is expected to be interested in issues concerning beauty also beyond her own life. As a presupposition, she should for instance know who Claudia Schiffer is and be familiar with the hardly self-explanatory expression *size-0 trap*. To sum up, the article expects women to find beauty and issues relating to it both interesting as a topic to know and read about and as something that they should work for in their daily life.

Moreover, the major importance of weight and the presupposition of a universally accepted weight ideal are also evident in this article. Goulart’s appearance is mostly discussed in the context of weight, it appearing as a topic in three of the five question-answer pairs of the article. Goulart’s slim body is constantly being admired by the journalist, who explicitly pulls the assumed readers in with her admiration by using the expressions *we* or *us* referring to herself and the readers in three of her questions. For instance, she tells Goulart to “Tell us how you got your perfect curves”. The expectation that there is a universally shared “right weight” is evident also in Goulart’s already previously mentioned expression *that size-0 trap*. Here, the demonstrative pronoun *that* indicates the presupposition that everyone believes there to be a weight which is too thin. This could also be a sign of the discourse of modern feminism that Gill (2007:202) mentions there to be in the newer women’s magazines; it is no longer acceptable to at least openly promote an exceedingly unhealthy body-image. To sum up, the article invites the reader to share a worldview where a certain weight is unquestionably better than others.

#### **4.2.2. Envyng a contradictory hero**

The article is constructing Goulart into almost a non-humanly hero for women. The journalist creates a discourse where the model, the ideal, is being separated from the “normal women”. This becomes clear as the journalist divides the world into *we* on the one side, encompassing the journalist, the readers and in the beginning of the article the staff of *Cosmopolitan*, and Goulart on the other. The model in her extraordinariness is then being contrasted with the *we* by the journalist’s manner of forming her questions. This happens, for instance, as she tells Goulart to “Tell us about your hang-ups before we start hating you”. Goulart’s perfection is thus given yet more weight by emphasizing the *we*’s assumed incompetence to reach it. Her speciality is made evident also in the constant repetition of her apparently not working for her



good looks and “perfect curves”; for instance, she will not confess to watching what she eats. Goulart is thus depicted as almost inhuman, her not sharing the same realities as other women. In this article and the discourse it constructs for women, then, beauty is the material with which heroes are made.

In continuation, in this article, just as in the previous one, the ideal constructed for women is also deeply contradictory in nature and out of women’s reach. Goulart’s reality, as already mentioned, is not depicted as the same as that of other women. She does not have to work for her body, whereas the assumed readers are presented as far from getting to her shape. Moreover, although beauty and femininity are presented as something highly important, Goulart who is depicted as the embodiment of both does not seem to identify with those characteristics at all. She strongly denies being *a girly girl*, which in this context appears as something non-desirable, and emphasizes her apparently “masculine” hobbies such as snowboarding and football. Here, then, an inner contradiction in the feminine ideal becomes exposed: women are offered an ideal of extreme (stereotypical) femininity which, when reached, does not seem to be desirable, and in fact seems to lose in appeal to its opposite, masculinity. It would thus seem that there are actually two hierarchically organized, incompatible ideals for women, neither one of which as such is sufficient. In a culture where masculinity is traditionally highly regarded, “girliness” as its opposite cannot qualify as perfection. For *Cosmopolitan*, however, masculinity as the sole ideal for women would not only conflict with the attempt to create a shared female culture, but also be troublesome to advertisers of beauty products. This article, then, makes more visible the female ideal I discussed concerning the previous article, only to reveal it even more complicated. The ideal is, however, being constructed so that women do not really need to face the contradictions in it; as it has been made sure that no one can reach it, no attention has to actually be paid to what it is like, only to the chase after it.

It is also interesting that Goulart, despite the admiring tone in which she is being depicted, is in many instances not being discussed in a manner which can be considered respectful. The work she has put into reaching her professional position is not discussed or even recognized. The journalist refers to her as the model “...whose sexy curves have bagged her a contract”. In stead of Goulart herself, agency is thus given to her body shape. She is also referred to as a *babe* and a *professional bombshell*, indicating a condescending attitude towards her. Actually, she seems to be objectified in a way usually related to men’s derogatory talk of women. In

addition, calling Goulart a *professional bombshell* does not make modelling seem like actual work. Also Goulart seems to verify this discourse concerning modelling by saying that her job is simply “being healthy, sexy and confident”. Women are, then, invited to take as a role model a woman depicted as a sex object who has had everything come to her simply by passively letting her good looks make things happen. This compliments my conclusions about the reader’s assumed passivity in the previous article; not only is the reader expected to be passive, but so is her ideal. Also Machin and Thornborrow’s (2003) analysis confirms that *Cosmopolitan* depicts women as innately passive.

#### **4.2.3. Positioning and addressing the reader**

The attitude towards the reader in this article, as in the previous one, is somewhat condescending. The contrast already discussed between the reader and Goulart depicts the reader as not being everything a woman should and could be. The journalist invites her to an audience admiring and jealously gazing at Goulart, as the seemingly humorous comment “Tell us about your hang-ups before we start hating you” reveals. Moreover, at the bottom of the page, in the *3 essential sexy body tips*-section, the reader is again directly addressed and told what to do. Here the journalist assumes the authority to tell the readers what to do and to define what is essential, expecting the readers to respond well to an imperative syntactic form. The reader is, thus, invited to take part in a collective feeling of inadequacy and, as a result, be ready to let somebody else tell her how to overcome this. This attitude matches the passive image of women I discussed earlier.

#### **4.2.4. Summary of the analysis**

To sum up, this article emphasizes appearance’s importance for women to the extent that Goulart is being portrayed as a hero and idol for women because of it. The ideal appearance promoted by the article is, however, constructed so that it to begin with is out of women’s reach. What more, the femininity advocated in it is actually not even depicted that desirable in the end. In addition, the model women are expected to take as an ideal is not being depicted very respectfully, thus indicating that women ought to idolize passivity and find comments usually considered derogatory flattering. Women are also expected to be insecure because of their inability to reach this objectified position.

### 4.3. What about the fun, fearless female?

As discussed in Chapter 2.2.5, *Cosmopolitan* has created (or hopes to create) a public image of a magazine meant for young, active women. The magazine's prototypical reader is the "fun, fearless female", a "Cosmo-girl". Power and independence are supposed to characterize her. Next, I will discuss the results of my analysis on the two articles in relation to this image.

The image of the "fun, fearless female" corresponds with the representation of the assumed reader of the text in some respects. As discussed in relation to *Drop a dress size at your desk*, the assumed reader is financially independent. She is expected to work and manage her own time. It is also assumed that she lead an active lifestyle with plenty of social contacts. This can be seen as a part of the "fun" in the "Cosmo-girl's" character, in that she is enjoying life and making room for spare time activities.

However, the assumed reader also differs greatly from the "Cosmo-girl". Although she is independent in many respects, she is also expected to be very insecure about her appearance and spend a great deal of time trying to change it. This insecurity is significant, since appearance is supposed to be highly important to her. The reader is also expected to welcome advice and orders from other people. Here, then, it can be questioned if a woman who cannot accept her appearance as it is and spends a great deal of money attempting to improve it can really be said to have a positive, "fun-oriented" and confident attitude towards life. Moreover, the reader is expected to idealize and identify with a woman depicted as a sex object. This role, entailing a presupposition of passivity, seems to collide with the image of the emancipated, fearless woman *Cosmopolitan* would like to be seen as advocating. The feminism mentioned earlier and also discussed by Gill (2007:202) does not, then, extend very far.

To sum up, the representation of women in the two articles I analyzed does not quite match the image of the "fun, fearless female". Surely there are elements about her that do; but on the whole, my analysis has revealed many aspects about her that seem to differ greatly from the qualities explicitly attributed to her.

## 5. DISCUSSION

In this chapter I intend to discuss the results of my research. I will contemplate on reasons behind women's representations in *Cosmopolitan*, as well as why there seems to be such a contradiction between the overt and covert ideologies in the magazine.

### 5.1. Reasons for the disparities between *Cosmopolitan's* brand and women's representations

As discussed in Chapter 4, the image of women in *Cosmopolitan* is very unlike the type of image the magazine publicly wishes to convey of itself. There must, therefore, be reasons both for why women are represented in the way described in Chapter 4 as well as for why the magazine's brand advocates a very different type of representation.

Several explanations for the negative representations of women in the magazine can be found. For instance, it could be assumed that, just as many other people, at least some of the journalists in *Cosmopolitan* simply have conservative values and that shows in the magazine. Yet, probably the most important reason is the fact that *Cosmopolitan* gets a vast amount of profit from advertisers. Therefore, as Gill (2007:202) writes, advertisers' needs must be taken into consideration in the articles of the magazine. Dependency on advertisers limits what can be written in *Cosmopolitan* as well as the way the themes in the magazine are treated, since bold representations of women independent from traditional norms would not only risk driving away more conservative readers but also promote an ideal that would discourage women from buying the products advertised. This would be likely to happen especially as the items typically advertised in women's magazines are make-up and the like, that is products meant for altering one's appearance. Actually, it is customary in women's magazines that the line between the contents of articles and the advertisements is blurred. It could be said, then, that women's magazines have taken on the responsibility to create the needs for buying the products advertised in them. Generating insecurity in women by representing them as inadequate serves this goal.

*Cosmopolitan* cannot, however, publicly admit to promoting a largely conservative image of women designed to plant and preserve insecurity in its readers. This would conflict with the widely accepted feminist principles of women's self-determination and power, and drive away potential readers, especially as the magazine is targeted at young women independent at

least enough to have their own money to spend. So the magazine has to be careful, balancing on the thin line between modern feminism and conservativeness and cautiously choosing elements from both sides to please both the advertisers and the readers. The easiest way to do this (and definitely the most pleasing to the advertisers) is to separate the content from the brand, thus inviting readers with money and independence, but offering them a mixture of feminist elements and a message that advises them to not be happy as they are. There can, then, be found a clear purpose and a coherent ideology behind the conflicting brand and representations.

## **5.2. Implications of *Cosmopolitan's* world view**

As *Cosmopolitan* is a very popular magazine, its somewhat conservative view of women is widely distributed and thus influential in preserving cultural values. Naturally no magazine alone can shape the way women are viewed in a society, but as a part of a flow of similar representations, *Cosmopolitan* contributes to a discourse of women which still carries the presuppositions of women's passivity and orientation to a private sphere of life circled around appearance. This discourse upholds for women a norm according to which it is abnormal not to be insecure and preoccupied with one's appearance. In this world view beauty seems to be the only real ambition for women, and other goals and objectives are consequently left for men. By implication, then, *Cosmopolitan's* discourse positions men before women when it comes to the public sphere of societal decision-making and business. The magazine thus partakes in sustaining structures that create inequality, making it difficult for women to break away from the role traditionally appointed to them.

Making *Cosmopolitan's* representations of women all the more alarming is the fact that, as the relative success of the magazine's brand suggests, the discourse it entails is partly accepted as modern and liberal. This makes it frighteningly easy for readers who do not apply careful criticism to what they read to assume elements of the magazine's world view almost unnoticed. *Cosmopolitan's* representations are, then, far from harmless.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

In this study I have tried to bring forth a new point of view to the studies on *Cosmopolitan* magazine. I have also, on a small scale, attempted to elaborate on the sometimes carefully hidden cultural perceptions of women that shape the world views and realities of all of us.

Especially the latter goal is of uttermost importance when attempting to change our culture and society into a more equal one, and obviously a great deal more work has to be done in that area. Further research on the topic should, therefore, be conducted. As my study was quite concise, a wider analysis including pictures and advertisements would add interesting information about the gender representation in *Cosmopolitan*. Comparative studies on other similar magazines would of course extend our knowledge of the subject. In addition, since my study was qualitative and my results can thus not easily be generalized, quantitative study on the topic would be useful. It would also be interesting to compare women's magazine's gender representations to those in magazine's meant for men of approximately the same age and social group, as my study did not touch upon that and it is not only women's perceptions of themselves that shape gender relations.

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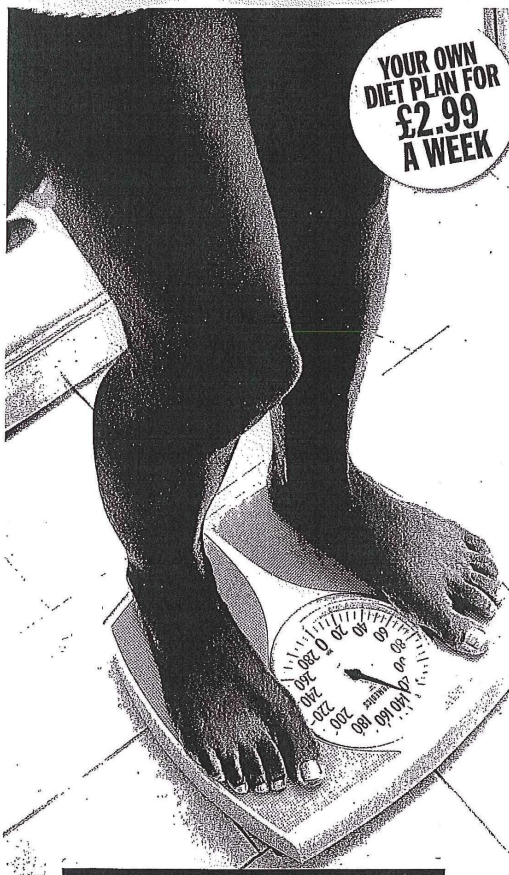
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Appendix I: Drop a dress size at your desk

23

# DROP A DRESS SIZE AT YOUR DESK

Slimming is a cinch with the Cosmo Diet Club. In fact, you'll have no excuse for falling off the weight-loss wagon



## "I WANT TO LOSE WEIGHT BUT..."

### ...I'VE JUST GOT NO WILL POWER"

Moment of weakness? Mid-afternoon sugar craving? Before you reach for the biscuits, pick up the phone – we have 24/7 expert advice on hand to keep you on the straight and narrow. Contact our nutritionists any time by email, phone or live chat for incentives, advice and support.

### ...I FIND IT DIFFICULT TO STAY MOTIVATED"

We all start with the best intentions but it can be hard to stay on the right track – especially when the girl who sits next to you at work is blessed with the Kate Moss gene, and spends the whole day shovelling in chocolate. Visit our blogs and chat rooms to compare notes, swap tips or simply vent your stress to fellow dieters in the same boat.

### ...I'M TOO BUSY TO BE STRESSING ABOUT MEALS"

If you're juggling full-time work and a hectic social life, a new diet can seem like a lot of effort, so we've done the hard work for you with our daily meal plans. Allergic to dairy? Vegetarian? Trying to cut out sugar? Diabetic? Whatever your requirements, we've got

your breakfast, lunch, dinner and snacks covered.

### ...DIETS DON'T SEEM TO WORK FOR ME"

That's what most of our members thought when they first signed up, but we proved them wrong. Read the success stories of other dieters to inspire you, and keep you focused. Plus, get two weeks' free membership when you share your own success story.

### ...I LOVE EATING OUT"

You don't have to ditch dates, dinner parties or dining out with the Cosmo Diet Club. Just take a look at our eating-out guides. Nobody would even notice you were dieting – all they notice is how fabulous you're looking!

### ...I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO BUY IN THE SUPERMARKET"

When you're in such a routine with your weekly shop you could virtually do it with your eyes closed, shaking things up can seem a little daunting. Don't worry – there's no need to spend hours in the aisles reading the nutritional charts of everything you pick up. Simply print off our shopping lists and let us be your personal shopper.

## JOIN NOW AT

# www.cosmodietclub.co.uk

## AND GET YOUR FREE DIET PROFILE

**PLUS:**

- Weekly weight-ins online from the comfort of your own home
- Regular newsletters with the latest dieting advice, seasonal eating ideas and success stories to keep you motivated along the way



Appendix II: Foxy lady

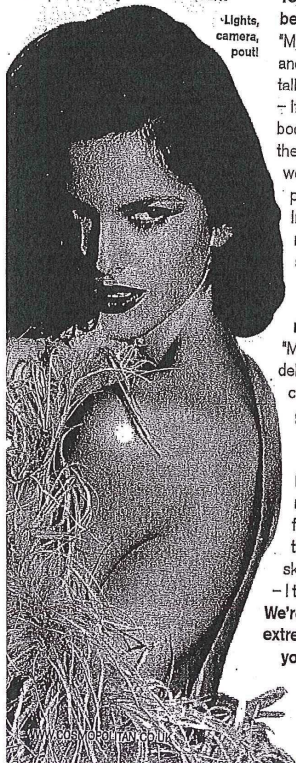
# FOXY LADY

What's it like to be a professional bombshell? Cosmo finds out as we join Brazilian babe Izabel Goulart on a sexy shoot

BY FRANCESCA LINDORFF, PHOTOPHOTOGRAPHER ELLEN VON UNWERTH, MAKEUP ARTIST CLAUDIA SCHIFFER, HAIR BY ANITA SUTZ, BEAUTY-TO-WEAR

It's 11 am in a freezing mansion in central Paris. Izabel Goulart, whose sexy curves have bagged her a contract as a Victoria's Secret 'Angel' (past ambassadors for the US undies label include Gisele Bündchen and Tyra Banks), is padding around in a lacy thong and nothing else. The hordes of male crew don't faze her and neither does the cold. She's busy doing her job, which today is shooting a campaign for Pout's three, new Beauty-To-Wear scent

Lights, camera, pout



collections. True to form, it's all about girly sexiness.

The photographer is Ellen von Unwerth, famous for helping Claudia Schiffer and Madonna look like boudoir bombshells.

While she urges the makeup artist to turn Izabel into a "proper foxy lady", we get chatting to the 22-year-old jet-setting model.

**Do you watch what you eat?**

"No, I just eat what I fancy and stop when I feel full. Food should be enjoyed; it's not something I'm going to fret over."

**Tell us about your hang-ups before we start hating you!**

"My job is to be healthy, sexy and confident. I don't let anyone talk me into having hang-ups - If someone doesn't like my body shape, I won't work for them. Fashion models have to wear tiny clothes sizes, which puts them at risk of falling into that size-0 trap. I would never jeopardise my natural shape to do that type of modelling."

**What are your beauty must-haves?**

"Moisturiser and water; I get dehydrated from aeroplane air conditioning, so I drink a lot of water. A dermatologist customised me a pared-down skincare regime that I stick to religiously. So many makeup artists use their favourite creams on me, but that can really confuse my skin. It's best to keep it simple - I think that goes for everyone."

**We're surrounded by extreme girlyness - are you in your element?**

"It's very indulgent but in real life I'm not a girly girl."



Creating lots of va-va-vo time for a total va-va-vamp.

BEAUTY JUNKIE! SHARE YOUR TIPS AT [www.cosmopolitan.co.uk](http://www.cosmopolitan.co.uk)

Striking a pose in sexy lingerie - all in a day's work for Izabel

at all. On my days off, I slap on moisturiser and mascara, then I'm out the door to play football or tennis or go snowboarding."

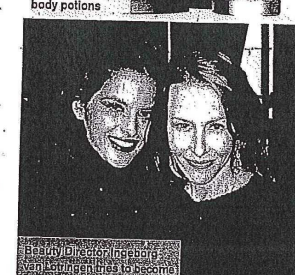
**Tell us how you got your perfect curves?**

"I was a sports freak in my mid-to-late-teens. That's when you determine your shape for life and lay down your body fat - I just didn't give the fat a chance to settle in places I didn't want it! I still play a lot of sport today, so it's not hard to stay lean."

● Pout Beauty-To-Wear scents and body products in Foxy Lady, Bohemian Belle and Vintage Chic, from £12, are available from 1 September.



Soft, sexy and oh-so-feminine: Pout's irresistible body potions



Beauty icons Claudia Schiffer and Gisele Bündchen are the inspiration for the new Victoria's Secret Angels

**3 ESSENTIAL SEXY BODY TIPS**

- Pull your shoulders back, hold your tummy in and tilt your hips forward - great posture shows off an ace and confidence
- Wear a shapely bra on your shapely days to lengthen your legs
- Dab perfume on the base of your neck, on the inside of your wrists, and on the inside of your ankles