

A2 Media Studies essay on Lifestyle Magazines and Gender

To what extent do lifestyle magazines reproduce stereotypical images that reinforce dominant ideologies? Refer to specific examples in your answer.

Magazines are produced in order to create maximum sales and get maximum profit. To do this magazines try to cater for the biggest audience that they can. For this reason magazines reinforce dominant ideologies as this is trying to create appeal to the 'normal.' Two magazines that I have discovered that play up to this idea of dominant ideology are Cosmopolitan and Loaded. These magazines portray what is considered to be desirable and normal and it is interesting to look at the differences between what the different genders are supposed to be interested in and how they are supposed to behave.

Representation is important to consider when looking at magazines. In Cosmopolitan August 2002 the semiotics of the images portrayed the women as beautiful, young and healthy. The best example I found was on page 30- the fashion page. All the models had perfect figures and faces. This sort of representation means that the expectations of the appearance of women rises, when reality can't match up to this. This could well affect self-esteem of the audience. This idea backs up Maslow's theory, when magazines present the unattainable it is impossible for the audience to 'self-actualise.' This could suggest that although audiences may accept the stereotypical images in magazines, they may not be doing society any favours.

Language in a magazine is also used to reproduce stereotype of the 'status quo.' For example in Loaded-August 2003 women are seen as sex-symbols. '27 clothes-free foreign ladies!' This sort of language means that the stereotype of women being there for the enjoyment of men is maintained. 'Cosmopolitan' works in a similar way with articles such as 'Discover the secret to help you slim.' Women are portrayed as having the responsibility to improve the way they look and act, possibly for the benefit of men.

The pluralist response to this kind of stereotyping is that the reason that men/women are portrayed in this way is because that is what audiences want, giving a voice to what most people feel and believe. It suggests that sexist stereotypes no longer exist, as men and women are now equal in the media business. There are examples of this such as the men's magazine 'Men's health,' this magazine is based on self-improvement for men. Also 'Sugar August 2003' had an article on future careers for young girls. Examples such as this seem to demonstrate equality of gender in magazines: if women's sole role was giving pleasure to men then careers wouldn't be an option.

Although there are a few examples of magazines working against dominant ideology and stereotypes, this seems the exception rather than the rule. It is because of this that audiences are forced to accept them as there is little choice of anything else. However it is important to remember that appealing to the dominant ideology gives maximum profits. This must mean that this is what the majority of audiences want, otherwise they wouldn't buy them.

Teacher Assessment

Written within a time limit of 40 minutes, this essay makes a direct attempt to answer the question. Relevant examples from specific magazines are used to illustrate points. The time limit would explain the approach to relevant areas of theory: effective in terms of overview whilst without detailed analysis.

At A2 level, as part of an examination response, this essay would be a grade B/A borderline.