

HOW TO BE A GIRL:
THE DISCOURSE OF COMPULSORY HETEROSEXUALITY, DESIRE, AND
ADOLESCENT FEMALE SEXUALITY IN *SEVENTEEN* AND
COSMOPOLITAN MAGAZINES FROM THE LATE 20TH CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

DANIELLE E. KEISER: How to Be a Girl: The Discourse of Compulsory Heterosexuality, Desire, and Adolescent Female Sexuality in *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan* Magazines from the Late 20th Century

(Under the direction of Professor Susan Grayzel)

This work explores the discourse of adolescent sexuality and desire presented to readers by *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan* magazines published between 1970 and 1989. The essay draws distinctions between articles and advertisements, pointing to those articles and ads that promote what Adrienne Rich called “compulsory heterosexuality” and those that encourage a less restrictive kind of femininity. The essay claims that *Seventeen*, because it targets a younger audience than *Cosmopolitan* does, promotes a more sexually normative framework of heterosexual relationships, compulsory matrimony, and motherhood for young readers. *Cosmopolitan*, on the other hand, teaches readers to embrace female sexuality and desire without needing marriage or motherhood to affirm their femininity.

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Introduction

“People tend to make a fuss about anything that goes against the accepted norm- mainly because every deviation is a threat to its continuing existence and therefore must be discouraged. Sometimes, too, those who automatically conform to the established customs simply envy the courage of anyone bold enough to ignore them and tend to see such independence as something of a reflection on themselves.”

-Abigail Wood, *Seventeen Magazine*, August 1976

In this essay, *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan* magazines will be analyzed for the ways in which they presented American ideals of sexuality and desire as girls grew into young women between the years of 1970 and 1989. This study will highlight the articles in these periodicals that promoted compulsory heterosexuality as well as areas where articles deviated from heteronormative ideals. Historical framework of the women’s movement in America will open the analysis as a structure for the examination of the magazines as the articles respond to sociopolitical changes in the United States over the course of two decades. A brief section follows the analysis of the articles, detailing the advertisements in the same issues of *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan* from 1970-1989. The close of the essay tracks changes over three decades within each magazine, and compares the two publications to each other.

The 1970s and 1980s were chosen because they fall between the advent of 2nd wave feminism and caught the beginning of 3rd wave feminism, but stop before the rise of “lipstick lesbians” and 1990s sexual ambiguity. The 1990s also saw the first years of the internet, which not only changed the way girls found answers to their numerous questions about their ever changing bodies and sexual feelings, but also changed the way magazines were distributed and consumed as articles and advertisements became digitized. Only one issue from each year will be used, so as to take a sample of the 20-year time span and track change

and continuity over the decades studied. The August issue is used when possible, as this issue is largest and has the most articles and advertisements for the back to school season. *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan* were chosen because they each publish a monthly issue and are both published by the same parent company, Hearst. However, *Seventeen* is targeted at an audience between the ages of 11 and 17, while *Cosmopolitan* is meant for girls aged 16 to 25, so the changes between not only the years, but also the age groups can be monitored.

Seventeen and *Cosmopolitan* hold longstanding and sought after spaces on drugstore magazine racks because they promote a socially accepted American rhetoric of the transition from girlhood to young womanhood, one in which girls are taught to develop crushes on boys, get married, and begin families. However, despite the popularity of these publications over several decades, they each fail to offer a comprehensive view of what the transition from girlhood to womanhood looks like for the majority of American teenagers and young women because the magazines lacked intersectionality in the chosen decades. Rather, the two periodicals historically promoted an image of ideal girlhood based upon white, middle to upper class, heterosexual girls growing into women. In omitting other, intersectional views of girlhood, *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan* imagined an American ideal of girlhood that only included white, middle-class girls.

Girls who had enough spending money to buy magazines for leisure reading generally came from middle to upper class families. The girls' parents could give them a weekly allowance of spending money or they could earn it by completing "typically" feminine jobs such as housework or babysitting. Because spending money mostly came from parents, parents controlled much of what their daughters purchased with the money they earned. Parental influence over the content of *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan* due to their purchasing

power complicated the private nature of printed periodicals. Magazines were a significant avenue through which to breach sensitive topics, such as puberty and adolescent sexuality, because they were, and continue to be, read privately. Though parents likely knew what the content of the magazine taught, girls read the magazines by themselves, which allowed them a measure of privacy. Periodicals were inexpensive when compared to the cost of full books, making them more widely accessible to young readers with little of their own money to spend. Magazines were also widely available in terms of circulation; most drugstores and newsstands stocked shelves of magazines, making it relatively simple for young women to find a place where they could purchase their monthly copy of *Seventeen* or *Cosmopolitan*.

Magazines possessed a measure of privacy in regards to questions about puberty and sexuality that girls might lack in school and at home. While in school, sex education was limited to what teachers and the government decided was appropriate material for the students and the questions girls were brave enough to ask. Public sex education was severely limited, usually teaching only abstinence until marriage. At home, the television was confined to the family living room where the privacy necessary for sensitive subjects was nonexistent, therefore, broadcasts to inform girls about their anatomy and desires were impractical. Magazines offered young women a way to learn about the changes their bodies went through, their sexuality and desires, and a myriad of other questions about the transition from girlhood to womanhood within the print of an article rather than having to ask their mothers or older sisters and cousins.

Seventeen and *Cosmopolitan* allowed girls to begin negotiating the transition between girlhood and womanhood. *Seventeen* targeted an audience of girls between the ages of 11 and 17, and for the most part, carefully presented a vision of sexuality and desire in which sex

should only exist within the contract of marriage. Its articles led girls through the tumultuous years of puberty, answering their mailed in “Ask the Editor” questions regarding what was normal and what was not as their bodies changed. They also outlined girls’ growing interest in the opposite sex and encouraged these feelings of heteronormative attraction as the basis for future marriages.

Cosmopolitan produced articles for teenage girls between the ages of 16 and 25, presenting a narrative of normative sexuality and desire to a group of young women who were both physically and mentally more mature than their counterparts, the readers of *Seventeen*. Unlike in *Seventeen*, *Cosmopolitan* presented female desire as something that young women should own explored sexual needs both within the confines of marriage and in non-marital relationships. *Cosmopolitan* went a step further than *Seventeen* as its articles taught women to vocalize their needs in relationships, both sexually and emotionally, rather than allowing themselves to be used for male pleasure.

The two magazines acted as a tag-team, providing a comprehensive ideal for what female sexuality and desire should look like as young women transitioned from girlhood to their teenage years and then into young womanhood. Because the publications were divided based upon the age of the targeted audience, the parent company of both magazines, Hearst, had the ability to promote socially accepted views of sexuality in two separate periodicals divided based on age appropriateness. The magazines were divided into publications for girls and young women, which allowed the editors to publish articles in *Seventeen* aimed at promoting the institution of marriage through articles about dating and abstinence, while *Cosmopolitan* could present less conservative thoughts on sex and relationships because the

editors expected older readers to already bring a firm understanding of the importance of marriage and safe sex with them when they leafed through the magazine's pages.

Literature Review: Adrienne Rich's "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence"

Despite the seemingly positive impact had by these magazines on educating young women about their changing bodies and hormones, the magazines failed to reach the progressive level that the women's movement strove for. *Seventeen* taught girls how to grow into their sexuality, so long as their sexuality fell within the confines of heterosexual marriage. Only one "proper" option for being a woman was given to young readers. Though *Cosmopolitan* was less strict about the boundaries of sexuality, it was meant for older readers, so by the time girls made the jump from *Seventeen* to *Cosmopolitan*, the damage of stereotypical heteronormative teaching had already been done. Many of the articles in both *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan* alike tried to steer away from these outdated ideas, but the advertisements- which will be analyzed at the close of this essay- littered throughout the pages of the magazines did not always help to break down ideas of heterosexual normativity in the magazines for teens.

In this essay, I will be using an idea presented by feminist scholar Adrienne Rich to confront the heteronormativity presented in teen magazines.¹ Rich's "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" was published in 1980, directly in the middle of the research presented in this essay. She argued that women were kept in an inferior societal role by "compulsory heterosexuality," or the idea that to be a woman, one must marry a man, care

¹ Adrienne Rich. "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence (1980)." *Journal of Women's History*, vol. 15 no. 3, 2003, 11-48.

for a home, and raise children.² She asserted that because of the taboo surrounding homosexuality and female sexual desire and a historical economic reliance of women on men, girls have never truly been given the chance to explore their sexuality because there has only been the heteronormative option available to them.³ I will view the articles and advertisements in *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan* through the lens of compulsory heterosexuality in order to assert when the magazines promote or undermine a heteronormative lifestyle for young readers.

Rich's further assertions about the uncontrollability of the male sex drive, coupled with female economic reliance upon men, match what I have found as I work through the magazines in the 70s and 80s.⁴ Articles taught girls over and over again that chastity was their own responsibility because no matter how gentlemanly the boy seemed, once he became aroused, he became more animal than man. So girls were left believing that men could not control their lust, which meant girls became little more than objects of sexual attraction after male puberty.

At the same time, men controlled the economy and girls could not hope for a steady life without a heterosexual marriage to protect them, so despite the male shortcoming presented by the magazines, girls saw little option but to marry and adhere to normative roles.⁵ This need for heteronormative lifestyle was shown to girls over and over in articles and advertisements promising them that with and adjustment to their lifestyles or the purchase of a product they could be just what men wanted them to be, which would allow

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

them to find a boyfriend, which may eventually become a husband who could financially support them.

In the lives of the young women who read *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan*, Rich's assertion of compulsory heterosexuality was less about steering away from homosexuality- though the magazines did not condone homosexuality- than it was about the economic and social necessity of heterosexual marriage.⁶ The magazines worked to enforce "proper" gendered roles for young readers not because these roles were important to society but because performing these roles would allow girls to grow into the type of young women who could find a husband to provide for them. *Cosmopolitan* strove to destabilize these gendered roles with articles about women in the workplace, female desire and sex outside of marriage, and divorce. However, *Seventeen* remained a place in which girls were taught that compulsory matrimony, which stemmed from the idea of compulsory heterosexuality, was the only option for women in the United States.⁷

Historical Framework

1848-1939

The seeds for the women's movement of the 1960s and 70s were planted 120 years before the 1970s publication of *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan* with the women's suffrage movement of the late nineteenth century. First wave feminism began in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as women began to struggle for the right to vote in government elections.⁸ The Seneca Falls Convention met in 1848 and was the first large-scale gathering

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Doris Weatherford. *A History of the American Suffragist Movement*.

of women discussing women's rights.⁹ Seventy years later in 1919, a women's suffrage amendment passed through congress and was sent to the states for ratification.¹⁰ In 1920, the 19th amendment to the U.S. constitution granted women the right to vote.¹¹

In 1921, Margaret Sanger founded the American Birth Control League, which led to the 1936 modification of a federal law labeling contraceptive information as "obscene."¹² Women were meant to marry, care for the home, and birth and rear children in the 1920s and 30s United States. Widespread education about and marketing of contraceptive measures would have meant that women could choose when, and *if*, to have children.¹³ If women could regulate when they had families, they could leave the domestic sphere to join the workforce if they so chose.¹⁴ If women were able to choose whether or not to have children at all, the entire idea of the American family would have been destabilized.¹⁵ Federal laws illegalizing contraceptive information and contraception was one way the government could control women's reproductive cycles and ensure continued growth of the American workforce through family growth.¹⁶

The conscription of American soldiers during World War I and World War II pulled men out of the workforce, leaving work that needed to be done and not enough men left on American soil to complete it.¹⁷ Women stepped into industrial jobs that had previously been

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Linda Gordon. 2002. *The Moral Property of Women*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 59.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Lewis A. Erenberg and Susan E. Hirsch. *The War in American Culture: Society and Consciousness During World War II*.

reserved for men, ensuring that crucial supplies for the war were made and shipped overseas.¹⁸ As the war effort became critical in the World Wars, women even enlisted for military service for the first time in an official capacity.¹⁹ However, after the end of the war, men returned home and pushed women back into the domestic sphere²⁰. With the exception of an increase of women in clerical positions, the middle to upper class white women this project is interested in once again mostly disappeared from waged labor to return to their work within the home.²¹

1939-1959

As men returned from war, women returned to their domestic jobs within the home, and the baby boom began, white middle class women found themselves entrenched even more deeply within the domestic sphere than they had been before the war.²² The growth of the American suburbs in the 1950s promoted a new kind of “housewife” culture in which women were able to completely care for their homes and children because those two aspects of life were their primary concern. Suburban children’s needs were meant to be taken care of by their mothers, which led to the evolution of the stage of life that is now associated with the term “childhood.” These children went to school each day and came home to minimal household chores, leaving them with leisure time to spend with peers.²³ Because children lived within the new category of childhood, the period which once would have encapsulated only the space before a child was old enough to begin working, girls had more time to live

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² "The Baby Boom Cohort in the United States: 2012 to 2060." U.S. Census Bureau, fig. 1.

²³ “Enrollment Trends: U.S. Education in the 20th Century.” National Center for Education Studies.

with their parents, learning from their mothers how to be housewives before they got married.²⁴

At the same time that housewife culture was becoming prominent among white, middle class American women, the grassroots of a second wave feminist movement were taking form alongside the publication of influential new texts such as *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*.²⁵ *The Second Sex* detailed the treatment of women throughout history, while *The Feminine Mystique* asserted the problems arising from a culture where housewives were fully educated only to spend their lives taking care of menial domestic work.²⁶ This second-wave feminist movement grew alongside the civil rights movement, leading to separation within the women's movement as white feminists drew away from women of color who they saw as potential hindrances to their grasp for equality.²⁷ White feminists worried that a public association with more "radical" feminists from the civil rights movement would hurt their cause as they lost the support of other white feminists who did not agree with the civil rights movement.²⁸

1960s

The 1960s ushered in the real emergence of the second wave feminist movement. The National Organization for Women (NOW) was founded in 1966, seeking to gain political and

²⁴ Theresa Richardson. "The Rise of Youth Counter Culture after World War II and the Popularization of Historical Knowledge: Then and Now." *Boston University Historical Journal*, 2.

²⁵ Imelda Whelehan. ed. *Modern Feminist Thought: From the Second Wave to "Post-Feminism."* New York: New York University, 1995.

²⁶ Betty Friedan. *The Feminine Mystique*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1963.

²⁷ Julie A. Clements. *Participatory Democracy: The Bridge from Civil Rights to Women's Liberation*. American University Press, 2003.

²⁸ Ibid.

social rights for American women.²⁹ The organization centered around issues such as better jobs for women, equal pay for women, reproductive rights for women, policies regarding sexual harassment, and policies regarding sex-based workplace discrimination. NOW and other movements promoting feminist thought led to the revival of the Equal Rights Act, originally proposed in 1923, which would guarantee equal rights for American women.³⁰ In 1968 and 1969, groups staged protests at the annual Miss America pageants, which brought large-scale media attention to the women's liberation movement for the first time.³¹

The 1960s were hugely influential for the women's movement because there were leaps made in the contraceptive industry.³² In 1960, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved the first oral contraceptive pill for American consumption.³³ This led to a marked shift in public opinion on various methods of contraception. In 1963, the first birth control pill, Envoid, was made available for purchase.³⁴ In 1965, the Supreme Court legalized the purchase and use of oral contraceptives for married couples with the case *Griswold v. Connecticut*.³⁵ The court ruling said that due to the Bill of Rights, couples had a right to marital privacy and overruled a Connecticut law prohibiting any form of contraception.³⁶

The gay liberation movement picked up speed in the late 1960s and moved into the early 70s, promoting an ideal of free love among young, counterculture Americans of any sexual orientation. However, the larger women's movement of white, heterosexual, middle

²⁹ "About." National Organization for Women.

³⁰ "Martha Griffith and the Equal Rights Amendment." U.S. National Archives.

³¹ "People & Events: The 1968 Protest." *PBS American Experience*, 1999. Microform.

³² See earlier information about Margaret Sanger, pp. 7-8.

³³ Suzanne White Junod. "FDA's Approval of the First Oral Contraceptive, Envoid ." *Update: The Bimonthly Publication of the Food and Drug Law Institute*, Jul-Aug (1998).

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Linda Gordon. 2002. *The Moral Property of Women*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 289.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

class women pulled away from self-identified lesbian feminists in attempts to avoid the association with homosexuality that might keep them from achieving equality, thereby pushing those who identified as “sexually deviant” outside of the mainstream women’s movement.³⁷ Second wave feminists, such as the members of NOW wanted equal rights for those like them, that is for educated, straight, middle to upper class, women who wanted the same rights as men. They saw anyone who did not fit those roles, whether due to race, socioeconomic status, education level, or sexual orientation, as potential stumbling blocks on the road to their equal treatment with the men of their own class and race.³⁸

1970s

The 1970s continued the momentum of the women’s liberation movement as the Equal Rights Act, originally proposed in 1923 and picked back up by second wave feminists in the 1960s, passed in congress and was sent to be ratified in the states.³⁹ Feminists rallied together to promote the act in the states so that it could be made federal law. In 1972, the Supreme Court decision of Baird v. Eisenstadt legalized the purchase of oral contraception for all women, regardless of marital status.⁴⁰ This was a step towards the reproductive autonomy the women’s movement sought. Women could now buy birth control regardless of their marital status, which opened the possibility for more sex outside of marriage without fear of unwanted pregnancy.

³⁷ John D’Emilio. “After Stonewall.” *Queer Cultures*. Eds. Deborah Carlin and Jennifer DiGrazia. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2004. 3-35

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ "Martha Griffiths and the Equal Rights Amendment." The Center for Legislative Archives. August 15, 2016. <https://www.archives.gov/legislative/features/griffiths>.

⁴⁰ Linda Gordon. 2002. *The Moral Property of Women*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 289.

In addition to the Supreme Court decision of 1972, there was also a series of higher education amendments passed by the federal government in 1972. Among these was Title IX, which mandated that no person could legally be excluded from a federally funded place of public education based on gender.⁴¹ The following year, the Supreme Court decision in the *Roe v. Wade* case made waves when it granted women the right to legal abortions.⁴² This decision caused, and continues to cause, controversy in certain social and religious circles, but it allowed for a higher level of awareness surrounding domestic violence and American women's need for welfare and childcare in addition to legalizing a procedure granting women reproductive rights.⁴³ The *Roe v. Wade* decision, when coupled with the earlier decisions regarding oral contraceptives, granted American women a level of autonomy- especially for their bodies- that was previously unheard of.

The backlash from these Supreme Court decisions was vocal and widespread. The largest group of protesters followed a woman named Phyllis Schlafly. Schlafly and her followers proclaimed themselves to be anti-feminist and morally conservative, which placed them directly at odds with recent Supreme Court decisions on abortion and contraception and with women's groups pushing for the passage of the Equal Rights Act.⁴⁴ Schlafly and her supporters worried that if the Equal Rights Act were to be ratified in the states and pass in congress, public bathrooms would be made unisex, women would lose the alimony they needed to support their children in the event of a divorce, and women would be forcibly

⁴¹ "Title IX and Sex Discrimination." U.S. Department of Education.

⁴² Linda Gordon. 2002. *The Moral Property of Women*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 300.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ "Phyllis Schlafly." National Women's History Museum.

conscripted into military service.⁴⁵ Schlafly and her movement gained many followers and threatened the passage of the Equal Rights Act in the states, which led feminists and women's organizations to fight back.⁴⁶

These feminists came together at the National Women's Conference in 1977 in an attempt to combat the conservative narrative of the Schlafly-led anti-feminist movement.⁴⁷ The conference was an endeavor to bring feminist attention back to the Equal Rights Act and to continue to gain supporters for the women's movement despite conservative backlash.⁴⁸ The Equal Rights Act needed ratification in 3 more states before it could return to congress and the women's movement did not want to back down when they were so close to their goal. Despite attempts by feminist groups to encourage voters in the aforementioned states to vote for the Equal Rights Act, conservative women argued that the passage of the act would only endanger housewives, which led to enough trepidation that the act was not ratified in any new states following the National Women's Conference.

1980s

In the 1980s, the AIDS outbreak in the United States pushed the women's movement from the spotlight of the American media's attention. The breakout of the AIDS epidemic drove a wedge even further between the women's liberation movement and the gay liberation movement as women struggled to separate their demand for rights from the very public social

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ The ERA was not ratified in Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Nevada, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Utah, or Virginia by the 1982 deadline.

⁴⁷ "The 1977 Conference on Women's Rights That Split America in Two." Smithsonian History.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

backlash against the gay community.⁴⁹ However, when cases of AIDS began to surface in women- due to both shared needles and contraction from male partners- the AIDS crisis really began as the American public realized that anyone and everyone could contract the virus.⁵⁰ Due to this fear of contracting the virus, the documented use of condoms increased dramatically as both homosexual and heterosexual partners strove to protect themselves from infection.⁵¹ In 1985, it became clear to medical professionals, and through them the American public, that the virus could be passed from a mother to her child, which led to more fear surrounding the disease.⁵²

While those stricken with the disease and their advocates rallied against the Reagan administration's dragging its feet on much needed AIDS research, the federal government poured money into researching the disease and looking for plausible treatment and a cure.⁵³ However, because AIDS research was being conducted under a conservative government, the literature released surrounding AIDS education reflected the views of those in charge.⁵⁴ AIDS education stressed abstaining from drug use and sex, especially homosexual sex, effectively pushing a compulsory heterosexual agenda as it tried to keep Americans from contracting the virus.⁵⁵ The outbreak of the AIDS crisis and the resulting fear of the gay liberation movement coupled with the already mounting tension between "feminists" and

⁴⁹ Jamie Harker. *Queer Theory*. The University of Mississippi.

⁵⁰ "A Timeline of HIV/AIDS." AIDS.gov

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ David France. *How to Survive a Plague*. 2012.

⁵⁵ "A Timeline of HIV/AIDS." AIDS.gov

“housewives” in the United States forced the abandonment of the Equal Rights Act, which was dropped three states short of being returned to congress for approval.⁵⁶

President Ronald Reagan was elected in 1980 and again in 1984 on the Republican Party ticket.⁵⁷ His reelection campaign, after the start of the AIDS crisis and a decade of steady women’s liberation movements, was called itself “Morning in America.”⁵⁸ This ad campaign promoted life in small town, middle class America within heteronormative families with a male breadwinner and a female housewife.⁵⁹ Reagan’s conservative policies, the ERA’s failure to ratify in 15 states, and the widespread focus on the AIDS crisis pushed the women’s movement from the American center stage for a few years. However, women’s rights were still being fought for, if only on a smaller scale. Only twenty years after the approval of the first women’s contraceptives, steady use of intrauterine devices continued to climb as women persisted in holding control over their reproduction.⁶⁰ In 1986, the Supreme Court decision of *Meritor Savings Bank v. Vinson* ruled that sexual harassment in the workplace fell under workplace discrimination and could be prosecuted.⁶¹ This ruling took steps to ensure the equal workplace rights of women and their male counterparts.⁶² In 1987, the United States Census Bureau published findings that women made on average \$0.67 to

⁵⁶ “The 1977 Conference on Women’s Rights That Split America in Two.” *Smithsonian History*.

⁵⁷ “Ronald Reagan.” *The White House Archives*.

⁵⁸ “Top Ten Campaign Ads: ‘Morning in America’.” *Time*.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Linda Gordon. 2002. *The Moral Property of Women*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 290.

⁶¹ Victoria Bartels. “*Meritor Savings Bank v. Vinson*: The Supreme Court’s Recognition of the Hostile Environment in Sexual Harassment Claims.” *Akron Law Review*.

⁶² *Ibid.*

men's average \$1.00 when completing the same job, which led to further pushes for workplace equality through the growth of the third wave feminism movement of the 1990s.⁶³

⁶³ "Women in the Workforce." United States Census Bureau.

Seventeen 1970-1989

1970s

In issues within the 1970s and 80s, *Seventeen* became a safe space for girls to ask questions about their bodies in the “Letters to the Editor” section, where their questions about normal and abnormal bodily functions could be answered. The magazine offered the girls a place where they could anonymously ask their questions without fear of reprimand from a teacher or parent and learn about their menstrual cycle, how women become pregnant, and a myriad of other topics they felt could not or should not be answered through another channel. The monthly magazine, available to be read alone in a bedroom, became a way for girls to understand the changes their bodies experienced as they transitioned from girlhood to womanhood.

The August 1971 issue of *Seventeen* opened with an article detailing the college dorm experiences of three girls who chose to live in co-ed university housing.⁶⁴ Co-ed housing was a recent addition to the options for girls going away to college, and the girls each expressed hesitance at first, both to live with men and to explain to their parents that they would be living with men.⁶⁵ The article asserted that, in the girls’ experience, living in a co-ed dorm did not cause their hall-mates to constantly go to bed with each other as their parents feared might happen.⁶⁶ One girl stated that she simply had “friends- not *girl* friends and *boy* friends” in her dorm, which led her to view her male friends as companions rather than potential husbands.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ “Away from Home.” *Seventeen*. August 1971, 2.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

This article was both informative for girls beginning their decision process about moving into university housing and disruptive in that it broke down the stereotype of male and female friendships were impossible because sexual tension would get in the way. Each of the girls experienced nerves as she thought about telling her parents that she would be living with men because their parents grew up in a world where the genders were strictly divided, both in education and in the private versus the public spheres.⁶⁸ However, in the early 1970s, the second wave feminist movement had taken off and many young Americans were seeking gender equality on a completely new level.

As the girls lived in the dorms and realized they could share common spaces with men and form companionate bonds with them, rather than sexually charged relationships, the girls began to understand that it was possible to be friends with a member of the opposite sex.⁶⁹ As will be outlined later, many articles in *Seventeen* asserted to readers that men could not control their sexual needs and would put girls into compromising sexual situations when they were in close contact, but this article seems to debunk the idea that men and women could not share a space without resorting to sexual intimacy.⁷⁰

Another article in the same August 1971 issue detailed the lives of young girls who married immediately after completing high school.⁷¹ Although there were some girls who did not cite unwanted pregnancy as the cause of their young marriage, many of the girls did.⁷² The blame for these unwanted pregnancies was a lack of knowledge about how a woman

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ "The Ups and Downs of Young Marriage." *Seventeen*. August 1971, 236.

⁷² Ibid.

actually became pregnant.⁷³ Girls saw themselves as mentally ready to be sexually active, but their sex education was lacking.⁷⁴ The unspoken text of this article asserted that without proper sex education, girls were not refraining from sexual activity; they were just even more likely to become pregnant without wanting to due to having unprotected sex.

The following August, a 1972 issue of *Seventeen* argued against ideas presented a year earlier in the article “Away from Home.” The later article “Can Boys and Girls Really be Friends?” combated the earlier claims from girls attending college that male/female friendships could work well without sexual tension.⁷⁵ The article was penned by a male endocrinologist who wrote, “I would question whether sexuality is ever absent from *any* male-female friendship,” based on his understanding that young girls sought to give men what they required, fueled by an “inner urge to give him what he wants.”⁷⁶

This article firmly pushed girls back towards an understanding of compulsory heterosexuality that the “Away from Home” article sought to steer girls away from. The author reasoned that because “women have traditionally kept men in a position of superior status” there was no equality on which to build the basis of a friendship.⁷⁷ However, this assumption failed to recognize the male component of the expectation of inferior roles for the women in their lives. This reinforced a societally proscribed idea that girls were meant to grow up to become wives and mothers, not to have male friendships. The author’s understanding of young men and women assumed that young women could not control their

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ “Can Boys and Girls Really Be Friends?.” *Seventeen*. August 1972, 240.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

romantic feelings for their male friends while also assuming that the male friends could not control their feelings of lust around their female friends.⁷⁸

In a short, but clear article called “Black White Mood” a young girl wrote in to share what her parents’ reaction would be if she were to begin dating an African American boy.⁷⁹ She wrote that her mother would say she was not bothered by the boy’s race, but “she hope[d] her liberality [would] never have to be tested.”⁸⁰ This assumption about her mother added another facet to the compulsory heterosexuality of the 1970s. Society encouraged girls to date boys so that they would one day marry and start a family. However, these relationships needed to stay within the boundaries of race; single race relationships were yet another limitation placed on the sexuality of young girls growing up in the 1970s. However, limitations on relationships and marriage were not limited to a single race. In some instances religion and social class, or a mixture of race, religion, and social class all became deterring factors in the relationships of young people in the United States. Relationships that crossed religious lines or attempted to bring together members of different social classes went against the cultural norm and created tension between both opposing parties.

August 1973 presented the first of many articles on the subject of menstruation in an article called “12 Questions Girls Asked Most About Menstruation.”⁸¹ This article became yet another place for girls to have their questions answered without embarrassment or backlash. The questions in the article, ranging from “Why am I irregular and is it okay” to “Can I use tampons while swimming?” seemed like common sense questions, but may not have been for girls who had been taught very little about puberty, the changes their body

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ “Black White Mood.” *Seventeen*. August 1972, 244.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ “12 Questions Girls Asked Most About Menstruation.” *Seventeen*. August 1973, 210.

would go through, and their own anatomy, whether in school or by the adults in their lives.⁸² These girls who turned to a periodical to answer their questions about their cycle were the same girls who risked unwanted pregnancy because they did not know enough about the way their bodies worked to know any better.

“Your Letters was a reoccurring article that answered questions from readers; the August 1974 section responded to a previous article entitled “No Rights.”⁸³ The girls wrote in with appreciation for the “No Rights” article because they believed the article reminded girls that whether they were sexually active or not had no effect on their worth as women.⁸⁴ Regardless of the original intent of the author of “No Rights,” the readers of *Seventeen* found a way to begin dismantling the idea of compulsory heterosexuality being pushed onto them. In American society, compulsory heterosexuality was inextricably intertwined with compulsory matrimony.

As a largely Christian and Jewish society, sex was an act limited to matrimony by religious law, but girls took “No Rights” and used it to prove to themselves that their worth did not come from how many men they had slept with, nor did it stem from the maintenance of their virginity until marriage.⁸⁵ They also used the article to speak out against the so-called “Masculine Mystique” that existed within the pages of *Seventeen*.⁸⁶ According to the girls who wrote in, the magazine projected an image of young men onto its readers that painted them as animalistic and unable to control their need for sex.⁸⁷ The girls who read *Seventeen*

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ “Your Letters.” *Seventeen*. August 1974, 6.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

did not see boys in their own lives struggling with this issue to the extent that the magazine tried to sell it to readers.⁸⁸

The girls' responses to "No Rights" further served as a way for readers to realize that their sexuality could not define them, nor were men all trying to seduce girls as the magazine said they were. Articles asserting that girls had to protect themselves from animal-like men were not only unflattering to the men from whom they stripped self-control, but also to the girls they cautioned. In warning girls that any male friendship could lead to sexual immorality, *Seventeen* kept its readers trapped in a constant state where the articles withheld sexual agency from readers and asserted that girls did not have what one responder referred to as "a little common sense."⁸⁹ In writing articles teaching girls that they were going to be the only responsible partner in a relationship, *Seventeen* attempted to take away the ability of its readers to choose to have sex and burdened them with only one option: to practice chastity and self-control.

Later in the same 1974 issue of *Seventeen*, an article explained to young readers what the Equal Rights Amendment was and was not.⁹⁰ The author highlighted the ways in which opponents used scare tactics in an attempt to prevent the passage of the amendment, such as male opponents' fear of losing "masculine supremacy" and female opponents fear of losing "female privilege."⁹¹ Girls were told that the amendment would only mean full equality between men and women in terms of American citizenship and rights.⁹² The article illustrated

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ "The Equal Rights Amendment." *Seventeen*. August 1974, 62.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

the beneficial nature of the amendment and tried to dispel the popular opinion of the opposition, which was led by people such as Phyllis Schlafly.⁹³

Despite sending contradictory messages about girls' role in romantic relationships with men, *Seventeen* sent a clear, and potentially progressive, message about the rights women deserved as American citizens. According to the article detailing the Equal Rights Amendment, girls could and should expect the same types of jobs, salaries, and civil rights as their male counterparts.⁹⁴ This article pushed girls to see the ERA as positive change to American government that came following the Supreme Court decision of *Roe v. Wade* and the passage of Title IX, when widespread opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment gained strength.⁹⁵

The following August *Seventeen* published another educational article about current political events. "Rx for Sexist Education: Title IX" explained to readers what the Title IX section of the Education Amendments Act was, and what it would mean for their schools.⁹⁶ In addition to clarifying that Title IX would not necessarily open men's sports teams to women, just provide an opportunity for new women's teams, the article also asserted that under Title IX, schools should open typically gendered classes- such as wood shop and home economics- to anyone interested in taking them.⁹⁷ This assertion supported the idea that girls were falling victim to projected gender roles in society within public schools where "stereotyped sex roles [we]re subtly taught."⁹⁸ The author of the article chose to stand up for Title IX as a necessary change to American education, as it was a step closer to gender

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ "Rx for Sexist Education: Title IX." *Seventeen*. August 1975, 58.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

equality for women, and therefore an important message for the young readers of *Seventeen*.⁹⁹ This article, much like the article detailing the Equal Rights Amendment mentioned above, attempted to show girls the roles they should be taking in the American workplace rather than continuing to support stereotypical gendered roles for women within the home.

The August 1976, a column authored by Abigail Wood explored the importance of each partner's age in a relationship.¹⁰⁰ Wood wrote in response to a reader's question: "Does age really matter?" According to the letter, parents were the biggest opposition when trying to date a boy younger than you, and she did not understand why.¹⁰¹ This parental response uncovered another aspect of American compulsory heterosexuality; that is, because their mothers and grandmothers were expected to marry men their own age or older, so too should they date boys their own age or older. However, Wood responded that the maturity of both partners mattered much more than their actual ages.¹⁰²

Wood's lengthy response summed up American fear of change and desire to continue instilling ideas of compulsory heterosexuality in youths. In answering the girl who wrote in and wondered if age really was the issue, she said, "People tend to make a fuss about anything that goes against the accepted norm- mainly because every deviation is a threat to its continuing existence and therefore must be discouraged. Sometimes, too, those who automatically conform to the established customs simply envy the courage of anyone bold enough to ignore them and tend to see such independence as something of a reflection on

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ "Does Age Really Matter?." *Seventeen*. August 1976, 76.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

themselves.”¹⁰³ This quotation is used to introduce this analysis because it wholly encompassed the ideas portrayed in this essay.

Later in the same issue, 19 year-old Karen Lindsey responded to the women’s liberation movement and Betty Friedan’s work, *The Feminine Mystique*. She acknowledged the importance of allowing girls the same opportunities as their male counterparts, but she also cautioned her fellow readers to remember that they should find the balance between rejecting traditional gendered roles and giving up the traditionally “feminine” role just because society told them to.¹⁰⁴ Lindsey asserted that, although women should have been given the opportunity for employment outside of the home if they so chose, they should not be ashamed to admit that they wanted to be stay at home mothers.¹⁰⁵ Although feminism and the women’s movement strove to improve the quality of women’s lives, in refusing to acknowledge motherhood as legitimate occupation some women were excluded from being feminists simply because they chose motherhood and domesticity.

Lindsey said “caring for children and running a home is more time-consuming than a husband’s eight or ten hours job in the ‘real world.’”¹⁰⁶ She had no issue with the women’s movement’s attempts to rid American society of compulsory roles for women, but she also recognized that “women should not... go overboard and let current social pressures mold them into something they’re not.”¹⁰⁷ Even at 19 years old, Lindsey realized that the biggest part of equal opportunity employment for women was allowing them to choose for themselves what career they wanted to pursue. This included being a stay-at-home mother, as

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ “In My Opinion: Homemaking is a Worthwhile Career.” *Seventeen*. August 1976, 186.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

“childcare and home care are recognized as productive, salaried employment in the labor market but are oddly ignored when women are employed in their own homes.”¹⁰⁸

Another Abigail Wood article in 1978 responded to reader’s questions about sexuality and growing up.¹⁰⁹ In “Staying Well: Your Medical Checkup,” Wood assured readers that it was okay for them to desire to see a gynecologist rather than a pediatrician as they grew through puberty.¹¹⁰ Wood admitted that the readers of *Seventeen* were not quite girls, but not yet women and that it was okay for them to want to discuss the changes their bodies went through with a doctor who had not been their doctor since birth.¹¹¹ In recognizing the transformation that her readers were going through, Wood acknowledged girls’ right to understand their bodies and the biological process happening to them, among these processes reproduction and the growth of desire and sexuality.

Later in the same issue, in an article titled “Relating: Trouble at Home” the author answered a letter from a reader asking about what to do about her stepfather.¹¹² She felt that his playful gestures were no longer playful and now went too far into the territory of sexual passes.¹¹³ The author assured the girl that “no matter how he regards those grabs, it’s how you feel about them that counts... If you don’t want to be touched, you have a right not to be.”¹¹⁴ This author pushed both the writer of this question, and all of the readers, to remember that their bodies were no one’s but their own and they had every right to reject sexual advances by males regardless of who the man was.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ “Staying Well: Your Medical Checkup.” *Seventeen*. August 1978, 136.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² “Relating: Trouble at Home.” *Seventeen*. August 1978, 197.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

The articles of 1970s *Seventeen* responded to the height of the women's liberation movement by acknowledging political movements and changing ideas about gendered roles for women. However, the magazine strove to remind readers that they should still adhere to ideas of chastity and monogamous relationships so that one day they could still be wives and mothers as society expected them to be. The articles in *Seventeen* advocated for women's rights to go to college, find jobs, and have equal rights as American citizens, but it did so with the underlying message that when it came time to marry and start a family, husband, home, and children should come first. Girls were taught just enough about their anatomical bodies to know why remaining chaste was the best option, but not enough about their bodies to know sex should be mutually pleasurable for both partners. It wouldn't be until girls began reading *Cosmopolitan* that young women would realize that their bodies were good for more than pleasing men and having babies.

1980s

The 1980 issue of *Seventeen* included a section of recipes for full-sized family meals for girls to try out called "Now You're Cooking."¹¹⁵ These recipe sections existed all through the issues of the 1970s, detailed meals girls could make. Despite articles arguing for women to move outside of the domestic sphere by going to college and seeking employment in the public sector, the magazine also continued to promote traditionally "female" roles for girls by teaching them to cook for an entire family.¹¹⁶ The recipe sections sought to prepare readers for their eventual roles as wives and homemakers, leaving young readers with the understanding that they should go to college, find a job, and want to come home each night and act as the primary cook in the household.

¹¹⁵ "Now You're Cooking." *Seventeen*. January 1980, 35.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Later in the same issue, an article pulled together the letters of readers speculating about what life will be like in the year 2000.¹¹⁷ Many of the fantasies about what the world would look like twenty years in the future were mostly joking as they focused on clothing and technology, but one dream of the future stood out because it dealt with marriage and sexuality.¹¹⁸ The letter explained that the writer believed in the future there would be less social stigma attached to sex outside of marriage, but more social stigma attached to having sex with someone you did not love.¹¹⁹ This letter may have described what many young people in the early 80s believed to be most important in relationships: love, not the eventual opportunity for marriage.

The August 1980 article “To Your Health: Pap Test” outlined what a pap smear was, why girls should have them, and assured girls that the tests were not as scary as everyone made them seem.¹²⁰ The article went through, step by step, and described what the procedure for a pap smear was, so that there would be no surprises when a girl decided to have one.¹²¹ This article, in particular, was helpful for readers who did not learn about female reproductive health in their sex education programs or were too embarrassed or afraid to ask their mothers about having a pap smear. Reading about a pap smear in a magazine allowed girls to gain knowledge about the procedure privately without having to risk asking an adult, who might assume the girl wanted to know because she was having sex, which could lead to repercussions both if they were having sex and if they were not but someone thought they were. Girls were so afraid of their bodies because there was a heavy social stigma attached to

¹¹⁷ “Your Life in the Year 2000.” *Seventeen*. January 1980, 83.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ “To Your Health: Pap Test.” *Seventeen*. August 1980, 70.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

virginity; even if a young woman wanted to see a doctor to find out about heavy periods, mothers and peers could assume that she wanted to see a doctor because she had lost her virginity.

Later in the issue, there is an article written by a man instead of a woman, called “Pros and Cons of Going with Just One Guy.”¹²² Its author encouraged girls to do what felt right for them, reminding them that there were just as many cons to dating only one guy at a time as there were to dating many guys at once.¹²³ Because the girls were young and not looking for serious commitment yet, dating multiple people could allow them to learn what they really liked in a partner before they found themselves in a committed relationship with someone not fitting their needs. However, the article’s author obviously limited his advice to date around to one thing only: dating.¹²⁴ He did not explicitly tell girls that they should openly involve themselves with multiple sexual partners, which reminded readers that sex was to be reserved for marriage.¹²⁵

In August 1981, an interesting article titled “Your Right to Say No,” which explored girls’ ability to take agency in their own sex lives.¹²⁶ Unlike the article discussed above, this article did not discourage girls from exploring their sexualities. It told young readers “the spur that kept [their] virtue intact was, quite simply, fear,” in the 1960s and by the 1980s, the only thing that should be keeping virtue intact was their own ideas of “self-respect.”¹²⁷ This article went against much of what earlier issues of *Seventeen* emphasized as important: sex should only happen within marriage. The article did offer ways for girls to decide if they

¹²² “Pros and Cons of Going with Just One Guy.” *Seventeen*. August 1980, 290.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ “Your Right to Say No.” *Seventeen*. August 1981, 284.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

were ready for sex; to do so would have been a way of encouraging girls to have sex outside of marriage. However, it did present sex as an option for girls without telling them that they would forever be branded women “held in general contempt and unable to find anyone willing to marry” them as earlier magazines may have.¹²⁸

Early in the August 1982 issue of *Seventeen*, there was an article describing to young readers the possible reasons their boyfriend’s mother may not have liked them.¹²⁹ The article seems out of place because it cites a pseudo-Freudian reason for the tension between girlfriends and mothers.¹³⁰ The author asserted, “a mother may feel an unspoken rivalry with the girl... her dislike may stem from fear of losing her son’s affection.”¹³¹ The social expectancy of the 1980s was boys growing into men and finding girlfriends, who would become wives, who would become mothers. The article suggested that boys’ own mothers would have a problem with a girl stepping in to fill this expected roll. This would have developed an unhealthy pattern of thought among young readers because it would have led them to believe one of two possible things. The first was that their partner’s mothers would never accept them fully because they were usurping a role. The second was that there was not a way to mend the relationship between a girlfriend and the boy’s mother because it all stemmed from an innate psychological issue on the mother’s part, not any behavior or action on the girlfriend’s part.

Later in the same issue, the “Sex and Your Body” article, a reoccurring article each month answering questions about changing female bodies from young readers, discussed the

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ “When Your Boyfriend’s Parents Don’t Like You.” *Seventeen*. August 1982, 88.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

ins and outs of female arousal with readers.¹³² The author stressed to girls that they could and should also become aroused during intercourse, rather than just the man becoming aroused.¹³³ The article talked girls through the anatomy of the female body, telling them where to find their clitoris and linking the clitoris to female arousal during sex.¹³⁴ This was very different from the sex education of their mothers, who were told that sex was about pleasing husbands and creating babies. The article also aimed to undo years of sex education in which girls were told boys could not control their sexual urges, so the female partner had to be the one to protect her chastity.¹³⁵ This assertion was contradicted by the reminder that giving in to urges could lead to pregnancy in girls, while boys would not suffer consequences, but the caution was more about the truth of the situation than about the role of male desire in sexual relationships.¹³⁶

The next year, the September 1983 issue of *Seventeen* began with a seemingly societally normative article about saving sex until girls are older and emotionally prepared for such intimate relationships.¹³⁷ The author detailed things such as waiting until the relationship is emotionally stable before becoming intimate rather than replacing emotional relationships with sexual ones. The author also encouraged girls to discuss the meaning of sex- whether recreational or committal- before actual engaging in sexual activity.¹³⁸ However, the part of the article stood out to me was the use of the word “partner.” Never once in the article was the anatomical gender of the partners assumed to be male and female;

¹³² “Sex and Your Body.” *Seventeen*. August 1982, 248.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ “How Sex Can Change a Relationship.” *Seventeen*. August 1983, 24.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

instead, the word “partner” or “partners” was used throughout.¹³⁹ This was the first time that I observed an article was not directly targeted at heterosexual couples, but rather at any couples who may be reading the magazine and having sex. This was the first time in *Seventeen* that an option other than strictly male/female relationships was even hinted at, though it was never directly mentioned that relationships could happen between same-sex couples.

The reoccurring “Your Letters” section of August 1984’s *Seventeen* magazine, presented letters sent in arguing both sides of a controversial decision by the National Honors Society of America when they terminated a member based on pregnancy outside of wedlock.¹⁴⁰ Some girls wrote in on the side of the National Honors Society, upholding the moral bias of the generations before them by condoning “premarital sex” and claiming that she “did not uphold the ‘principles of morality and ethics’ required to belong to” the honors society.¹⁴¹ Others fought against these outdated ideas of morality by arguing that “having a child didn’t hinder her academic ability” and asserting that her choice to keep the child proved her responsibility for her actions.¹⁴² The letters are a tangible representation of those girls growing up and viewing sex as something that happened outside of marriage and the opposing girls who still viewed sex as something to be reserved for marriage.

Later in this issue, the “Sex and Your Body” section outlined common changes to the female body during puberty.¹⁴³ The magazine thus offered a private space for girls to read about the changes that would be or were already happening to their bodies, while reassuring

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ “Your Letters.” *Seventeen*. August 1984, 20.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ “Sex and Your Body.” *Seventeen*. August 1984, 150.

them about questions they may have had. The article's emphasis was on telling girls that "all speeds of development [were] normal" so they should not worry if their friends were already developing or if they were the first to start noticing changes.¹⁴⁴ Notably, the end of the article promised the next month's article would detail the changes happening in male bodies during puberty.¹⁴⁵ This not only reminded girls that boys were also going through rapid change as they transitioned into manhood, but also removed some of the mystery surrounding male anatomy and development that many girls knew very little about.

The September 1985 issue began with another "Sex and Your Body" section, this time answering as many questions sent in by readers as would fit in a few pages.¹⁴⁶ These questions covered sex, sexually transmitted diseases, and pregnancy/birth control.¹⁴⁷ The author promised women that "having fantasies about those of the same sex" did not make a person gay. This assertion did more to make readers feel shame about their desires than it did to make fantasies seem normal, because it implied that if the fantasies were homosexual in nature, they were wrong.¹⁴⁸ There is also a question about the "right way to make love" in which the author was very careful to talk about ways to show love, such as being affectionate and being there for someone when they needed you, rather than to map out the "normal" positions and practices surrounding sexual intercourse.¹⁴⁹ The article worked to break the stereotype that men needed to have sex or the "tension [would] cause unbearable pain or

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ "Sex and Your Body." *Seventeen*. September 1985, 40-42.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

sterility.” It instead implored young female readers to say no to sex unless they were ready, because doing so would not cause harm to their male partners.¹⁵⁰

The article also reminded readers that anyone who was sexually active was at risk for STDs and should know about the warning signs.¹⁵¹ This was especially important as girls became more open to dating multiple guys and having sex before marriage. The author further implored girls to remember that while society made birth control methods seem unromantic because it forced couples to interrupt intimacy to use protection, not getting pregnant accidentally was much better in the long run.¹⁵² This was backed up with answers like “you can get pregnant even the first time you have sex,” which made the danger of having unprotected sex very clear.¹⁵³ This was an important shift from magazines refusing to tell teens how to protect themselves during sex to the author facing the simple fact that teens were going to have sex and teaching them to protect themselves rather than naively believing they would not have sex just made more sense.

An article later in the same issue called “Birth Control Update” reinforced the earlier “Sex and Your Body” section regarding birth control.¹⁵⁴ The author made a list of each type of contraception, noting who was best suited for the types and what the potential side effects might be.¹⁵⁵ It gave basic instructions for how to use each type of birth control along with a reminder to ask a doctor about the type of protection that might be best for each individual.¹⁵⁶ However, the author also listed several places, including Planned Parenthood, where girls

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ “Birth Control Update.” *Seventeen*. September 1985, 75-76, 203, 208.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

could go to access birth control confidentially.¹⁵⁷ This was a direct step towards allowing girls to make decisions regarding their own sex lives without much- or any- parental intervention. Another example that points to adult realization that teens were always going to have sex and it would be better for that sex to be protected than not.

Following all of these articles encouraging girls to embrace their sexuality within the boundaries of protected sex was one, “How to be a Perfect Houseguest,” that forced girls to move right back into their role as stereotypical women.¹⁵⁸ The article assumed that the “hostess” was female, reinforcing the housewife culture that many of the readers’ mothers would have grown up knowing and may have passed down to their daughters.¹⁵⁹ The author strove to teach girls how to make life easier for hostesses when they attended parties.¹⁶⁰ However, the article seemed out of place in a magazine that, while not the most empowering piece of literature to come out of the 1980s, gave the readers a measure of agency in their womanhood that *Seventeen* had not offered before. This article reinforced negative gendered roles for girls who might not want to live their lives as a “perfect houseguest” or wanted to read a more substantive article than one reminding them of the expectations for female behavior.

August 1987’s issue opened with the “Your Letters” section containing written responses from readers and parents regarding an earlier article detailing “practical facts about birth control.”¹⁶¹ The responses to the article ranged from disgust to praise, and came

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ “How to be a Perfect Houseguest.” *Seventeen*. August 1986, 314-15.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ “Your Letters.” *Seventeen*. August 1987, 28.

from people of all age groups, which was unusual in the “Letters” sections in *Seventeen*.¹⁶² One grandmother wrote in praising the article because “at least [teen] can be educated in a discreet manner” if they were going to be having sex anyway, while another mother wrote in with an angry letter asserting “Many teens follow your messages. Maybe if you’d encourage self-control and chastity, you could help decrease the pregnancy rate.”¹⁶³

The responses from teens were just as varied with some readers pleading for *Seventeen* to continue printing articles about birth control to help prevent unwanted pregnancy and others arguing that teens should be taught how to talk to their parents about contraception rather than how to get birth control behind their parents’ backs.¹⁶⁴ The article did not highlight a generational gap of opinion so much as it highlighted the growing issue of a post sexual liberation movement problem with abstinence-only sex education. Teens were, and always had been, having sex outside of marriage, so being able to find information about birth control in magazines may have been the one of the only ways they knew how to actually prevent unwanted pregnancy with a medically tested method.

Later in the same 1987 issue, there is an article detailing “Your First Gynecologist Exam: What to Expect.”¹⁶⁵ This article differed from previous related articles because instead of shaming girls for needing to visit a doctor after becoming sexually active, the author assured them that gynecologists could be just as helpful with overly heavy periods and any anatomical abnormalities a girl might have worried about.¹⁶⁶ Though the article in no way promoted sex before marriage, whether protected or not, it did not immediately chastise girls

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ “Your First Gynecologist Exam: What to Expect.” *Seventeen*. August 1987.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

for visiting a gynecologist. Rather, it encouraged them to know their bodies well enough to know when a medical professional was necessary.

A 1989 issue of *Seventeen*, offered a positive message about female desire cloaked in a warning to stand up for one's own moral decisions.¹⁶⁷ In "Calling the Shots," Kathy McCoy encouraged girls to retain enough agency in their romantic relationships to "express their needs and wishes."¹⁶⁸ McCoy asserted that girls should never allow their boyfriends to do anything because "it's his right to want this," which was both a reminder to say no to sex, and a powerful statement for young readers about their own role in sex.¹⁶⁹ Kathy McCoy emphasized the importance of equal partners in sexual relationships; this went against most of *Seventeen's* teachings about males being more sexual than females and the dominant partner in sex. What was originally, in all likelihood, meant as an article teaching abstinence, became an article reminding girls that they should not be afraid to speak up and become equal partners if and when they did become sexually active.

In one final article from 1989 *Seventeen* used for this analysis, readers wrote in to vocalize their opinions on teenage sex and the dangers of AIDS.¹⁷⁰ For one teen, a large part of the AIDS crisis came from having a limited amount of knowledge being spread about how one contracted the disease.¹⁷¹ She wrote that the issue, at least for her, was that "talking about AIDS mean[t] talking about sex and drugs," which were topics most schools and parents would not breach.¹⁷² Another wrote that "it [was] time for teachers and health educators to be

¹⁶⁷ "Calling the Shots." *Seventeen*. September 1989, 97-98.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ "Time to Talk." *Seventeen*. September 1989, 112-13.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

allowed to teach the complete facts about AIDS in school.”¹⁷³ Talking fully about AIDS in schools would have meant teachers also being allowed to talk openly about sex both heterosexual and *homosexual*, in schools as a way to promote safe sex. This would have deviated from the abstinence only education happening in much of the country at the time. At the close of the 1980s, the abstinence only movement in sex education ensured that young people knew very little about their bodies, how pregnancy occurred, or how STDs were spread because school children were taught that not having sex was the best solution.

The teens who wrote in to the magazine believed that shrouding sex in mystery only served to make the spread of STDs and unwanted pregnancies more rampant.¹⁷⁴ The readers understood their parent’s generation as believing “that talking about sex among teenagers would somehow validate premarital sex,” and that they would rather leave their children in the dark about sex than teach them how to protect themselves.¹⁷⁵ Teens would rather have “sexuality... discussed openly” because “teenagers were able to make healthy and informed choices” about their bodies rather than risk contracting AIDS or another disease due to ignorance.¹⁷⁶ This article, composed of pieces written by readers of the magazine, proved that despite the abstinence lessons taught throughout the magazine, teen readers would have preferred even basic sex education so that sex, even if it was premarital, could be safe sex, regardless of what their parent’s generation wanted for them.

By the end of the 1980s, *Seventeen* had become a conflicted publication struggling to find the middle ground between the women’s liberation movement of the 1960s and 70s and the growing conservative abstinence only movement of the 1980s. Many of the articles in the

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

1970s and 80s encouraged girls to learn about political movements and the rights they should have as American citizens, but refused to similarly encourage girls to explore their sexual rights. Instead, the magazine continued to teach girls that refraining from sex until marriage was the only way to remain normative. It was this conflict of interests that led into the third wave feminist movement of the 1990s. In many ways, the articles from *Cosmopolitan* sought to answer this contradiction for older readers as they encouraged young women to demand their rights both in and out of the bedroom.

Cosmopolitan 1970-1989

1970s

Cosmopolitan in the 1970s and 80s offered readers a place to ask questions about the normalcy of their sex lives, their dating habits, and their career goals as liberated women of the women's liberation movement. The magazine was published monthly and allowed young women to read articles about their sexuality and sex lives privately as they transitioned from the suppressed sexuality of girlhood to the freer sexuality of womanhood before marriage. Unlike *Seventeen*, *Cosmopolitan* encouraged women to date as many men as they wanted to and spend some time enjoying life before they became tied down by marriage and a family. The women's liberation movement was much more apparent in the its articles than in the articles in *Seventeen*, which presented young women with the chance to make sexual decisions for themselves.

The August 1970 issue began almost immediately with an article detailing more specifics related to using birth control as a primary form of contraception.¹⁷⁷ The author strove to dispel the myth that once you began birth control there was no more need to think about how to protect yourself from becoming pregnant.¹⁷⁸ She began the article with the phrase "let me take a minute to explain what it is;" the "it" she mentioned is ovulation.¹⁷⁹ She then went on to explain the anatomical processes of menstruation and how a woman physically became pregnant after fertilization through sexual intercourse.¹⁸⁰ She reminded girls that during their placebo week of the oral contraceptive pill, they could still become

¹⁷⁷ "The Pill that Makes You Pregnant." *Cosmopolitan*. August 1970, 60.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

pregnant and other forms of contraception should be used as a cautionary measure in the days leading up to and following the placebo week.¹⁸¹

Most noteworthy about this article was its obvious priority at the front of an otherwise normal issue of *Cosmopolitan* versus its complete absence from issues of *Seventeen*, both in 1970 and in the 19 years that followed in the research for this analysis. Though *Seventeen* loosened up in the later years of the research period, the authors of the magazine for younger girls were barely willing to discuss using birth control with readers for fear of encouraging premarital sex. However, in *Cosmopolitan*, girls were not only encouraged to use birth control to prevent unwanted pregnancy, but they were also taught how to track their body's natural functions to ensure that they only became pregnant if and when they wanted to. The authors and editors of *Cosmopolitan* decided that their more mature clientele were old enough to make their own decisions about when to have sex and how best to protect themselves.

Later in the same 1970 issue, "Love in the Dark: Girls Who Fear Men's Bodies," examined a cultural issue among women who were bold enough in their sexuality to initiate sex, but who were too shy to view the naked male body.¹⁸² The author praised young women for their forwardness and ability to embrace their sexual desires, but questioned the role of society in teaching them to be modest when it came to seeing a man naked.¹⁸³ However, the article went another step further by attacking not only society's role in teaching girls that modesty meant being uncomfortable with the male form, but also reminding readers that a

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² "Love in the Dark: Girls Who Fear Men's Bodies." *Cosmopolitan*. August 1970, 96.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

lack of sexual attraction to the male form at all was okay.¹⁸⁴ The author very casually told readers that the reason they were afraid of the male body may not have been because of their modesty at all, but rather because they lacked sexual attraction to males and encouraged them to seek a female partner if that would raise their level of attraction and increase their sexual pleasure.¹⁸⁵ The article placed absolutely no shame on being a woman who desired sex, whether that sex was heterosexual or homosexual, so long as the woman was being sexually pleased.¹⁸⁶

August 1971's issue began with an article describing a new form of emergency contraception that had just been approved by the FDA and made its way into the pharmaceutical marketplace.¹⁸⁷ In "The Morning After Pill: It Really Works," the author explained how the pill used a dose of estrogen to prompt menstruation, but also warned readers only to use the pill as an emergency cautionary method, not as regular birth control.¹⁸⁸ Interestingly, the "morning after pill" was in such an early stage of its life that the author prompted young women to take the article to their healthcare professionals to explain the new drug to them.¹⁸⁹ Not only did women need a prescription to use the pill, but they also might have had to explain what the pill was to their doctors because it was so new to the healthcare field. However, the article provided a brand new way for young women to avoid unplanned pregnancy.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ "The Morning After Pill: It Really Works." *Cosmopolitan*. August 1971, 40.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

A later article titled “Male Insecurities” followed the experience of a young man in the years of the ever-growing trend of women’s sexual liberation in the 1970s.¹⁹⁰ Although he was just one man among many young men in 1971, his opinion was valuable too because it reminded women that men were just as sexually vulnerable as women were, thus, there should be open communication in all sexual relationships. He noted that the same changes that were making women sexually freer, such as “the pill and changing ideas about sexually acceptable behavior,” were causing men to feel sexually inadequate because they did not know what women wanted anymore.¹⁹¹ According to the author, only open communication between partners could erase these boundaries and ensure that both partners found sexual fulfillment.¹⁹²

Nestled in amongst the sexually liberated articles of 1970s *Cosmopolitan* was a 1972 article, “Analyst’s Couch,” in which a male psychologist and author attributed women’s sexual problems to pseudo-Freudian logic and misogyny.¹⁹³ A woman wrote in, concerned that her inability to orgasm after a certain time period of sexual intimacy with a man would ruin her marriage.¹⁹⁴ Rather than encouraging open communication between the pair about the different origins of her problem, the doctor wrote her off as “obviously” unable to function within a relationship in which the male partner was both sexually *and* emotionally attached.¹⁹⁵ He credited the women’s intimacy issues to a potentially “dominating mother or uninvolved father.”¹⁹⁶ This article fit in poorly with the rest of the issue simply because it

¹⁹⁰ “Male Insecurities.” *Cosmopolitan*. August 1971, 118.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ “Analyst’s Couch.” *Cosmopolitan*. August 1972, 50.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

blamed a sexual problem on the woman and refused to acknowledge open communication as a way to fix a problem that affected both partner, instead blaming the issue on solely the female partner.

The very next article in the same issue argues that closed marriages are unrealistic and should slowly become a thing of the past, calling “traditional closed marriages a form of bondage for both the husband and wife.”¹⁹⁷ The author cited the retention of individual identities within a mutual partnership, necessary open communication, and a reevaluation of “traditional” gendered roles within marriage as the most important aspects of prospective open marriages.¹⁹⁸ According to the author, closed marriages sanctioned the repetition of day-to-day activity, encouraged the formation of expected gendered roles, and limited partners from doing things for themselves that their partner would normally do for them.¹⁹⁹ Of course, the absolute importance of honesty, trust, and equality within an open relationship held power in relationships, but the author fully believed open marriages would mean more power, both professionally and sexually, for women of the 1970s.²⁰⁰

The most notable article in the 1973 issue of *Cosmopolitan*, called “The Joy of Sex,” encouraged women to embrace the natural stagnation of their sex lives and use it as an opportunity to experiment to keep their relationships alive.²⁰¹ The author encouraged switching up positions, places, and times of day for having sex so as to lessen the monotony of having sex with only one person for many years.²⁰² According to her “becoming

¹⁹⁷ “Open Marriage: A New Lifestyle for Couples.” *Cosmopolitan*. August 1972, 54.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁰¹ “The Joy of Sex.” *Cosmopolitan*. August 1973, 64.

²⁰² *Ibid.*

complacent in [your] sex life... is the surest way to build tension in a relationship.”²⁰³

While different than the earlier article promoting open relationships, this article was progressive because it acknowledged that relationships change over time and even in marriage, steps had to be taken to ensure that boring sex did not cause unrelated problems due to built up tension in the bedroom.

This article did not work against the ideal of compulsory heterosexuality in an overt way, but it did work against the traditional gendered roles that would have been expected within a heterosexual relationship. The young women who read *Cosmopolitan* were encouraged to speak up in their sex lives, and the author reminded them that sex should be mutually beneficial.²⁰⁴ This went against the more traditional values taught in *Seventeen*, where sex was usually a route to pleasing your husband or getting pregnant. The *Cosmopolitan* article also challenged earlier notions that “normative” sex could only mean a single position, arguing instead that the best way uphold the practice of traditional marriage was to incorporate as many positions as possible so that boring sex would not lead to conflicts elsewhere in the relationship.²⁰⁵

The August 1974 issue opens with an article called “When Choosing a Husband... Ask the Vital Five.”²⁰⁶ This article encouraged readers to remember that marriage was no longer something that had to happen at a young age, and they should take their time getting to know their partners so that their marriages could truly be built on love instead of necessity.²⁰⁷ The author suggested that girls in the 1970s were getting married because they

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ “When Choosing a Husband... Ask the Vital Five.” *Cosmopolitan*. August 1974, 70.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

“chose to get married” rather than because it was their “only sensible option.”²⁰⁸ The article encouraged dating potential husbands for long periods of time in order to gauge how men reacted to stress, arguments, and having their girlfriend around their friends, while at the same time watching how he treated and was treated by his parents.²⁰⁹ The author’s suggestions varied greatly from contemporary articles in *Seventeen* that suggested acting as the perfect girlfriend so that boys would be attracted to you and you could find a husband at an earlier age.

A later 1974 article refuted 1972 ideas that open marriages were going to be the new normal in American society.²¹⁰ According to this author, open relationships were just a passing “fad” that was quickly ruining sexual relationships because partners could no longer trust each other and sexually transmitted infections were becoming more common.²¹¹ The article did not cite a lack of open communication as the root problem of open relationships, but implied that due to dissolution of trust between partners and the spread of STDs that communication was the largest issue.²¹² This was hardly surprising when open relationships were fostered in partnerships of young people who learned their whole lives that communication in sexual relationships was not something to expect. This was especially true among young women who were for perhaps the first time using the radicalism of the sexual liberation movement to really vocalize their sexual needs.

An article called “The New Mystique” began the August 1975 issue with a critique of the most well-known texts of the women’s liberation movement, Betty Friedan’s *The*

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ “Love is Back in Town.” *Cosmopolitan*. August 1974, 174.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid.

Feminine Mystique.²¹³ Although the author, Heffner, agreed with Friedan's call for women to have a choice in their level of education and their occupation, she vehemently opposed what she saw as Friedan shaming women who chose motherhood and domesticity.²¹⁴ Heffner asserted that Friedan's text told women "motherhood [was] not an occupation worthy of other people's respect or a woman's own self-esteem."²¹⁵ She believed this to be "destructive not only to women, but to society as a whole" because the quality of society was determined by the quality of the children it raised.²¹⁶ Under this author's assumption, child rearing should be one of, if not the, most important jobs in American society. Heffner wanted women to be seen as important enough to be educated and to raise children or have a job; it was the ability for women to choose their own path and not feel as if they would face shame for making either decision that was most important to her.²¹⁷

Despite the women's liberation movement and the storm of sexual liberation that pervaded the late 1960s and early 1970s, in 1975 *Cosmopolitan* was still fielding enough questions about what an orgasm was and what it should feel like that the editors decided to include a several page spread detailing the experiences of different readers.²¹⁸ On one hand, this article made it seem as though even though women were supposedly being sexually liberated, many of them were still not experiencing sexual relationships in which they were also receiving orgasms.²¹⁹ On the other hand, a several page article where women could write in and describe how they reached orgasm and what it felt like when they did sounded

²¹³ "The New Mystique." *Cosmopolitan*. August 1975, 42.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ "What is Orgasm Like?." *Cosmopolitan*. August 1975, 161-68.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

incredibly freeing and liberated.²²⁰ The article highlighted the complex nature of achieving sexual liberation in a society that had for so long refused to talk about sex and held it as only to be used within private marriages.

Women, just like numerous articles through *Cosmopolitan* over the years said men did, wanted to have sex simply for the physical pleasure and then go on living their life without any further need for love or romance.²²¹ The 1976 issue had an article teaching women “How to Get a Man to *Not* Stay Over.”²²² According to the author, Sakol, “women no longer ‘traded off’ sex for affection” like they did in the past, so now they did not want their lovers to stay the night.²²³ Sakol argued that before the women’s liberation movement, women attached staying the night after sex to love, but after, they did not feel the need to attach anything to sex anymore.²²⁴ While this article obviously did not resonate with every young woman who read *Cosmopolitan*, it could have been incredibly freeing for those readers who did want sex out of their relationships without the need for dates and potential marriages. The article gave women who wanted sex and nothing more the bolstering they needed to seize their own sexual agency to give and take exactly what they wanted, no more no less.

An article later in the same issue called “Sexual Exclusivity” reminded women that the “sexual revolution” meant that women did not have to adhere to antiquated gendered roles in sexual relationships anymore.²²⁵ Its author, Kosner, asserted that there was “no one

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² “How to Get a Man *Not* to Stay Over.” *Cosmopolitan*. August 1976, 80.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ “Sexual Exclusivity.” *Cosmopolitan*. August 1976, 203-06.

‘right way’ or even typical way to act” in a sexual relationship anymore.²²⁶ Kosner told women that it was acceptable to want “one man or many... one after the other or two or more at the same time.”²²⁷ Despite the hugely progressive tone of her article, perhaps the most important claim in Kosner’s writing came at the close of the article. With the phrase “different women have different emotional capacities for multiple partners,” Kosner broke down the traditional assumption that all relationships should look exactly the same.²²⁸ Every individual was different, according to Kosner, so they should not all treat their relationships in the same monogamous, limited way that works for some because it likely would not work for others.

The July 1977 issue of *Cosmopolitan* featured the famed women’s liberation writer Betty Friedan.²²⁹ Much in the same way that earlier articles berated Friedan for shaming women about their lifestyle choices as mothers and housewives, Friedan’s article took a step back from her previously harsh stance on women within the home to acknowledge the benefit of women having choices.²³⁰ In “Loving to Cook Again” Friedan wrote about her experience in the years following the publication of *The Feminine Mystique* and how fully she tried to distance herself from any roles that could be seen as traditionally feminine.²³¹ She saw the women’s liberation movement as fundamentally necessary for improvement in women’s lives, but she wished she would not have shamed women for taking on roles they genuinely enjoyed, whether those roles were gendered as female or not.²³² She came to this realization

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ “Speakeasy: Loving to Cook Again.” *Cosmopolitan*. July 1977, 72 and 112.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Ibid.

when she was able to cook a full gourmet meal with her son, while at the same time discussing politics in the Middle East.²³³ Friedan realized the reality of the women's movement she had worked so hard to begin: it was more about gaining the ability for women to choose their roles than entirely breaking out of "women's" roles.²³⁴

Friedan's article acknowledged that there was no single "right" way to be a woman in the years following the women's liberation movement. By depicting the complexities of what it meant to be a woman who wanted to raise children or cook for her family or do both of these things while also holding a full time job, Friedan admitted how many varied roles women could play in society without giving up their rights as women. This article articulated that the real issue with "gendered roles" and compulsory femininity came from constraining women from choosing what sort of lifestyle they really wanted to live, not the roles themselves. As Friedan said in her article, it was about learning to "allow those two sides of oneself to coexist" rather than trying to force what society called "traditional femininity" into submission.²³⁵

The 1978 issue of *Cosmopolitan* opened with an article detailing the ways in which society taught young women to mistrust other women and see them as competition. Lynn Caine's article "Can You Trust Another Woman?" explained the ways in which Lynn herself experienced a societal expectation to view other women as competition for male attention and the resulting loneliness when male attention was absent because they did not make meaningful female friends.²³⁶ Lynn argued that women are taught to view all of their relationships as adults through the lens of their husband's friends, so the wives of coworkers

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ "Can You Trust Another Woman?" *Cosmopolitan*. August 1978, 62-64 and 96-98.

and other male friends become the only real female acquaintances women have.²³⁷ When her husband died, Lynn realized she did not truly have any women in her life who knew her well enough to be called a friend.²³⁸ Historically, men were always encouraged to build homosocial bonds with each other because other men could understand them on a level that their wives could not. Lynn argued that women should also strive to build homosocial bonds so that their lives could be full of both romantic companionship and friendship, rather than just relying on the companionship of marriage to fill a need for relationships.²³⁹

In 1978, “The Eastern Way of Love” by Kamala Devi became the first article in the span of this research project to describe and explain, in detail, unusual sex positions for women to try with their partners.²⁴⁰ The article described tantric love, an “ancient hindu practice for making love.”²⁴¹ In all likelihood, using an Eastern and “exotic” practice such as tantric love probably made it easier to introduce “nonnormative” sex positions to American readers because it distanced the reader from the sex positions through a vastly different set of religious and ethnic practices surrounding sex. The article cited American sexual practices as a form of “sexual fascism permitted only in heterosexual coitus in several ‘natural’ positions between formally married persons.”²⁴² This early version of *Cosmopolitan*’s now famous sex tips used foreign practices as an attempt to begin a normalization of “nonnormative” sex practices amongst American readers.

In a 1979 “Analyst’s Couch,” a reoccurring series where women could write in to have their questions answered by a psychologist a woman described her fears about having

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ “The Eastern Way of Love.” *Cosmopolitan*. August 1978, 180-82.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Ibid.

faked orgasms with her partners and confessing her fabrications to him.²⁴³ Dr. Appleton's main concern was the writer's reason for faking orgasms in the first place.²⁴⁴ He reminded her that she should "fearlessly" ask for what she needs in bed because there should be an open line of communication between sexual partners.²⁴⁵ He urged her to guide her partner to help her achieve *real* orgasm rather than continuing to fake pleasure, which would lead to pent up frustrations and sexual tension later on in the relationship.²⁴⁶ Appleton's advice showed women that they should not shy away from finding mutual pleasure in sex and that there was no shame in asking their partner to help them reach orgasm rather than letting embarrassment cause the need for months of fictional pleasure in the bedroom.

An article called "Speakeasy" later in the same issue laid out the reasons that many women in the late 1970s refused to self-identify as feminists despite wholly agreeing with the rights for women that the feminist movement was fighting.²⁴⁷ Women were unwilling to completely adopt the feminist label because they did not want to be seen as "manly and bossy" by other people, and especially not by men.²⁴⁸ The author, Brown, said that many women worried that labeling themselves as feminist would cause them to "relinquish their individuality."²⁴⁹ However, in reading the article, it seemed much more like women were too scared to stand up for their own rights because they feared how male friends, coworkers, and bosses would respond if they did so. Despite women wanting rights equal to those of the men in their lives, they also wanted to retain working, friendly, and romantic relationships with

²⁴³ "Analyst's Couch." *Cosmopolitan*. August 1979, 86.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁷ "Speakeasy." *Cosmopolitan*. August 1979, 96.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

these men so they feared committing fully and losing their chances at jobs, friendships, and marriages.

Cosmopolitan in the 1970s presented readers with articles encouraging them to join the workforce, date around, and explore their sexuality. It moved away from the chastity and abstinence taught in *Seventeen* to speak to the young women of the women's liberation movement who believed that a part of gaining women's rights was gaining sexual freedom for women. Women were taught to expect sexual pleasure from their relationships and to ask for their needs when having sex at the same time as they were told to expect respect from bosses and coworkers and to ask for the salary and benefits they felt they deserved in the workplace. *Cosmopolitan* was a magazine for women who wanted to know their rights and refuse to back down from what they wanted or deserved from society and from romantic partners.

1980s

Early in the August 1980 issue of *Cosmopolitan* an article called "The Sexual 'Secret' Every Woman Should Know" also focused on pleasure.²⁵⁰ The main point of the article is that many women were not orgasming simply because they did not know their own bodies enough to know how.²⁵¹ Like many articles found in 1970s *Cosmopolitan*, the author encouraged readers to have open and honest communication with their partners in order for mutual sexual satisfaction to occur.²⁵² She explained, "that's what sex should be: mutually gratifying."²⁵³ However, this author, unlike those before her, blamed the older generation for

²⁵⁰ "The Sexual 'Secret' Every Woman Should Know." *Cosmopolitan*. January 1980, 94.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Ibid.

this problem among young women.²⁵⁴ She noted that many mothers were more than happy to take their daughters to a doctor to obtain a prescription for birth control because it meant there would not be unwanted pregnancy, but they refuse to explain their daughter's anatomy to them.²⁵⁵ This article was further proof that sexual liberation had to be about more than simply allowing girls to have sex outside of marriage; it also needed to be about teaching girls that sex could and should be pleasurable for both partners in a sexual relationship.

Later in the same issue, an article explained to readers "What it's Really Like to Have a House-Husband."²⁵⁶ The article promoted traditional ideas about what it meant to switch traditional gendered roles and leave a man in charge of the children and housework while the woman of the house went to work.²⁵⁷ According to the author, men only said yes to arrangements like this if they were lazy and would end up "taking advantage of the woman."²⁵⁸ Despite the women's movement being about ensuring that women would be on an equal playing field with men, this article tore apart any argument for equality and rebuilt traditional ideas of why women had to do housework and men should be forced to leave the house for work. This article seemed break down any progress the women's movement had made and instead encourage women to keep their roles within the home because if they tried to reverse the gendered roles they would end up being taken advantage of.²⁵⁹

"Straight Talk About Sex" was an article that took questions about sex sent in by readers and answered them anonymously within the magazine so that women who were

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ "What It's Really Like to Have a House-Husband." *Cosmopolitan*. January 1980, 153.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

embarrassed to ask their questions could find answers.²⁶⁰ Many of the questions centered on abortions, number of sexual partners, and masturbation, but a few outliers covered venereal diseases and contraceptives.²⁶¹ The author of the article began by encouraging young women to speak up and ask their own general practitioners about these questions because their doctor would know much more about the patient's medical history and situation.²⁶² This article demonstrated that despite the women's movement and sexual liberation, sex remained a taboo subject which women found difficult to talk about, even in a clinical setting such as with a doctor. It spoke to the work that still needed to be done before women could talk about their anatomy comfortably and without shame about their bodies and bodily functions.²⁶³

An article in the August 1981 issue called "Saying Yes, Saying No, Saying Maybe," was a continuation of many previous articles encouraging open communication between sexual partners, however this article does not use gendered pronouns, and therefore does not necessarily assume the gender of the reader or the partners in the relationships.²⁶⁴ The author reminded readers that the only way to get what you wanted in bed was to tell your partner what you wanted.²⁶⁵ They also encouraged partners to say why they did not want to have sex rather than just saying no, effectively clearing up any miscommunication that may have occurred.²⁶⁶ Most importantly, the author reminded readers that just because they said yes to

²⁶⁰ "Straight Talk About Sex." *Cosmopolitan*. August 1980, 222.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*

²⁶² *Ibid.*

²⁶³ Rape within a marriage or relationship was not a criminal act until legal action in 1994, meaning that to an extent, once a woman said yes, that partner was allowed to take what he wanted, when he wanted it until their relationship ended.

²⁶⁴ "Saying Yes, Saying No, Saying Maybe." *Cosmopolitan*. August 1981, 80.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

sex once did not mean they had to continue saying yes to sex.²⁶⁷ The article made sure to remind readers that sex should be pleasurable, not something to do out of obligation or to be coerced into.

An article late in the magazine called “The Delicate Girl” asserted that the “look for this fall is to be delicate.”²⁶⁸ It encouraged girls never to open doors for themselves, light their own cigarettes, or pour their own wine.²⁶⁹ This was juxtaposed by many previous articles encouraging young women to stand up for themselves, be strong and independent, and act as equals to men in order to gain the equality the women’s liberation movement strove for. This article challenged all of those earlier articles where young women were told to act like equal members of society rather than second-class citizens who needed men’s help and approval to get things done. This article highlighted changing opinions about the women’s liberation movement as the 1980s continued.

An article in the August 1982 issue of *Cosmopolitan* encouraged women to find sexual gratification where they could, even if that meant in extramarital affairs, but it cautioned them to find a place where they would not form attachments or get caught.²⁷⁰ The author of “Sinfully Convention-al Sex” played upon the new idea of women in the workplace, traveling to conventions, and leaving their husbands for a few days at a time.²⁷¹ The author argued that conventions were the perfect place for affairs because there are already hotel rooms and everyone operated under the assumption that they would never see

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ “The Delicate Girl.” *Cosmopolitan*. August 1981, 206.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ “Sinfully Convention-al Sex.” *Cosmopolitan*. August 1982, 84.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

each other again, so attachments were not formed.²⁷² While this did technically fit into the liberated sexual ideal of having sex outside of marriage, this article also crossed the moral boundary of encouraging sex outside of marriage while one was legally married. It went farther than to teach women that they should explore their sexuality and encouraged them to have an affair while knowing they held a legal contract of companionship with another person.

A later article in the same issue called “Sex Drive” attempted to describe the male sex drive to the female readers of *Cosmopolitan*.²⁷³ However, the author depicted men, when aroused, as animalistic and thus not in control of their sexual needs at all.²⁷⁴ This article not only forced full sexual responsibility for chastity and having protected sex on women, but it also made men seem like unequal and irresponsible partners in a sexual relationship.²⁷⁵ Readers would either have come away from reading the article with the assumption that men could not control themselves or that men were not capable of holding any responsibility in a sexual relationship. The author tipped the scales away from healthy sex between consenting partners because she stripped all sexual agency from men by telling young women that they were not in control of their bodies.²⁷⁶

An article in the July 1983 issue, a male author wrote an article for the readers of *Cosmopolitan* called “How to Seduce a Man.”²⁷⁷ Though the article did switch the traditional gendered roles from men being the seducers and women being the seduced and thus allowed women to seek out their own sexual fulfillment, it did so by criticizing the sexuality of many

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ “Sex Drive.” *Cosmopolitan*. August 1982, 193.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ “How to Seduce a Man.” *Cosmopolitan*. July 1983, 90-96.

men.²⁷⁸ The author, Masello, asserted that “men operate with the complexity of a rubber band,” so most of the time seducing them would not be very difficult.²⁷⁹ When the man needed a bit more to get him going, Masello suggested the woman dress sexily, implying that men needed nothing more than to see a little female skin to become aroused.²⁸⁰ Despite all of this deprecation of men, Masello did encourage open communication on the woman’s part about her sexual intentions and encouraged the woman to ask what her partner wanted and to tell him what she wanted in return.²⁸¹ So, on one hand the article encouraged women to embrace their own sex drives, but on the other, it made the sex drives of men seem far less complicated than they actually were and oversimplified what should be an intimate and open relationship and conversation between two people.

Later in the same issue, Judith Arcana reminded women that every woman’s sex drive was different and each individual’s sex drive would go through phases over the course of her life.²⁸² In “The Waxing and Waning of the Female Sexual Appetite,” Arcana is careful to point out that every woman’s body was different so variations among women should not be a cause for alarm. She also encouraged women to know their own bodies well enough to know when something was wrong.²⁸³ She then prompted women to be the partner to initiate sex sometimes, reminding readers that women had just as much right to sexual pleasure as their male partners did.²⁸⁴ Lastly, as many articles in *Cosmopolitan* did, Arcana encouraged women to talk openly about their wants and needs with their partners, telling them that

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

²⁸² “The Waxing and Waning of the Female Sexual Appetite.” *Cosmopolitan*. July 1983, 194-97 and 246.

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

talking with one's partner only made the relationship more comfortable over time and helped sex become more enjoyable.²⁸⁵ This article took a step away from the less celebratory articles of the last few issues of *Cosmopolitan* about female sexuality and encouraged women to learn about their bodies and get the most out of sexual relationships.

In the 1984 "Your Body" article, author Susan Okie answered questions sent in by readers about their bodies.²⁸⁶ One woman wrote to ask if having an abortion would affect later chances of getting pregnant.²⁸⁷ This was important for a couple of reasons; the first being that the author ensured readers that "modern, legal" abortion had not been proven to cause future problems.²⁸⁸ This showed the beginning of the normalization of conversations surrounding abortion following the *Roe v. Wade* decision by the Supreme Court. It also proved growing acceptance of women's autonomy in controlling their own bodies and their own reproductive rights. *Cosmopolitan* offered an article about reproductive rights concerning abortion, where *Seventeen* discussed contraception as a last resort to abstinence and would never have published an article in which abortion was an option.

A Kiki Olson article called "Sending Out Sexual Signals," was a how-to for women who wanted to find sexual partners but could not seem to send the "right" sexual signals.²⁸⁹ The subheading for the article read "Now that everyone knows women want sex, indeed actually *like* it, we should easily be able to fill all the wonderfully lusty urges... right?"²⁹⁰ This acknowledged that the sexual freedom women have begun to find in their lives, may be hampered by their inability to act upon these freedoms because of decades of gendered

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ "Your Body." *Cosmopolitan*. August 1984, 62.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ "Sending Out Sexual Signals." *Cosmopolitan*. August 1984, 102-108.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

expectations that seemed insurmountable. The author encouraged readers not to be discouraged if they were turned down in the first few times they tried to seduce men and to continue trying or their role in sexual relationships would never really change.²⁹¹ This article told women that they were allowed not only to embrace their sexuality and the desire to have sex, but that they could initiate sex as well. This allowed women to negotiate their new role in sexual relationships following the women's liberation movement and the sexual liberation movement.

At the end of the August issue of 1984, there was an article detailing how women could learn to have the best possible handshake.²⁹² "The Art of the Handshake" asserted that women would never truly fit in for job interviews and in the workplace until they learned firm and assertive handshakes.²⁹³ This projected an idea that in order to be accepted in the workplace, women had to adopt the most outwardly notable way of asserting masculinity: the handshake. Although the article was meant to empower women and assist them in finding ways to advance their careers, it chose to do so by teaching them a stereotypically male action through which to assert themselves in a workplace. Because of this, it seemed like a woman had to become more like a man to fit into an office rather than allowing her the freedom to act as she naturally would. The article implied that the workplace in the late 1980s, despite the women's liberation movement was still a place dominated by men, where women needed to blend in with men as closely as they could to be taken seriously.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² "The Art of the Handshake." *Cosmopolitan*. August 1984, 160-62.

²⁹³ Ibid.

The most notable article in the August 1985 issue of *Cosmopolitan* fell under a “Dear Abby” section called “Agony.”²⁹⁴ A reader asked how best to tell her boyfriend about a “lesbian affair” she had while in college.²⁹⁵ The author asserted that telling her boyfriend would be a difficult challenge to navigate because even the most “forward-thinking” men in the 1980s would be taken aback by an admission of same sex affairs.²⁹⁶ This article stuck out because the author was able to write about “lesbian affairs” as if these affairs were no different than any “normative” heterosexual affair.²⁹⁷ Even so, it was interesting in that both the writer of the letter and the author of the article referred to the affair as “lesbian” because both lacked the word “bisexual”²⁹⁸ to explain the woman’s openness to sex with both men and women.²⁹⁹

In August 1986, *Cosmopolitan* published an article in the “Your Body” section, which reminded women that they should not compare their sexuality to their male partners *or* their female friends.³⁰⁰ A woman wrote in because her boyfriend told her that her sex drive was too low and that she should see a doctor about it.³⁰¹ This went directly against so many of the earlier articles that taught women how to find men to fulfill their healthy sex drives, but it also pointed out an anatomical and hormonal difference between men and women. The author reminded the woman that women naturally have lower sex drives than men do, but

²⁹⁴ “Agony.” *Cosmopolitan*. August 1985, 62-64.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ According to the Oxford English Dictionary, “bisexual” was not used as a clinical term to describe sexual attraction to people of both genders until the late 1990s.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ “Your Body.” *Cosmopolitan*. August 1986, 52.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

they also reach their peak sexuality much later in life than men do.³⁰² She asserted that the only real way to surmount this issue in a relationship would be to have frank and open communication about what both partners desire in bed for the problems to be worked out.³⁰³

A 1987 “Agony” article attempted to answer a young woman’s problems with being labeled a feminist.³⁰⁴ The young women said that being labeled a feminist “seemed to be scaring the men around her.”³⁰⁵ The author reminded the woman that she was expecting to be a new, modern girl in a world that was still filled with men who still wanted their “age-old entitlement to a supportive wife and tended household.”³⁰⁶ This article showed the breakdown of second wave feminism as the conservative movement and the AIDS crisis in America pushed against the women’s movement. Young women who read *Cosmopolitan* in the late 1980s had been raised amongst stories and news coverage about the women’s movement, so they held certain expectations about how they were going to live their lives, but the world pushed back against them.

An article in the 1988 issue of *Cosmopolitan* told the story of one man’s experience with “Unveiling the Sex Secrets of the Orient.”³⁰⁷ Though the article destabilized the idea that “Eastern” sex could save relationships as it added variety to sex lives, it may have helped readers realize that they were not alone in stagnant love lives.³⁰⁸ The author portrayed the people who went to the class on “Sex Secrets of the Orient” with him as a diverse group

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ “Agony.” *Cosmopolitan*. August 1987, 48-52.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³⁰⁷ “Unveiling the Sex Secrets of the Orient.” *Cosmopolitan*. August 1988, 84-90.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

made up of all ages, genders, races, and classes together in a high school classroom.³⁰⁹ This showed readers that despite what they may have previously thought, many struggled with variation in their sex lives. It empowered readers to accept this issue in their love lives and work to add variety and fun to sex rather than ending their relationships.

The August 1989 “Agony” section spoke to a woman who desperately wanted a relationship now that she had reached 30 years old.³¹⁰ Interestingly, her reason for wanting to find a boyfriend was not for marriage or children, but because “virginity nowadays is so unacceptable.”³¹¹ This supposed by the end of the 1980s, at least in young people, there was a discussion surrounding the acceptability of virginity. While the societal expectation was that sex should be kept within a marriage relationship, the woman’s peers were obviously pressuring her to lose her virginity, maybe even before she was ready for marriage. The article showed an American obsession with virginity, or lack thereof, and societal attempts to control the sex lives of young people. This implied that somewhere over the course of the 1970s and 80s, and somewhere between the age group who read *Seventeen* and the age group who read *Cosmopolitan* there was an unspoken expectation: you should not be a virgin anymore. However, exactly where that line is does not become clear in the two magazines.

Later in the same issue, an article called “How to Keep Your Man Monogamous” claimed to answer all of women’s questions about ensuring that their men would be faithful.³¹² The subheading read “Make him feel wanted, understood, important- more potent sorcery than the other woman can conjure!”³¹³ This text was problematic for two major

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ “Agony.” *Cosmopolitan*. August 1989, 58-60.

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² “How to Keep Your Man Monogamous.” *Cosmopolitan*. August 1989, 170-73.

³¹³ Ibid.

reasons: it pitted women against other women, and it left all of the responsibility for stable relationships to the female partner while the man held no responsibility for his actions. In saying “than the other woman,” the author blamed the infidelity on the other woman rather than on the man who refused to be faithful, this successfully drove a wedge between women rather than female partners whose men could not be trusted.³¹⁴ The article also implied that women would have to “keep their man monogamous” because he would not be able to remain faithful on his own. It left all of the pressure of relationships with the woman and implied that the male partner could do as he pleased.³¹⁵

Cosmopolitan presented readers with a magazine through which they could find sexual and societal empowerment in the 1970s and 80s. Women were told to ask for what they wanted in bed, wait to marry if and when they decided they were ready to marry, and climb the career ladder if they chose to. However, much of the pressure in relationships stayed with women because it was still assumed that men could not be held responsible for their sex drives so it fell to the strong women of the women’s liberation movement to keep their men in line or kick them to the curb when the time came. Though *Cosmopolitan* taught women that they could and should ask for their needs both in the bedroom and at work, much like *Seventeen* the magazine left women with much of the responsibility for asking, which implied that men were not at the same level of liberation in which they should ask what women wanted or needed.

³¹⁴ Ibid.

³¹⁵ Ibid.

Advertisements

The advertisements printed within both magazines are important because the ads were the way the publishing company covered the costs of printing that selling copies of the magazines could not cover. The commercial companies purchasing advertisement space in *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan* understood the difficult position of women in the 1970s and 80s. Women were straddling a line between private, liberated sexuality and the necessity of femininity in the workplace. Products were sold to make young women seem more “natural,” while also asserting to readers that looking/smelling genuinely natural was not societally acceptable. The ads strove to push at the boundaries of what was permissible in the 1970s and 80s as they tried to make women more appealing to men, but did so in an attempt to make it easier for women to act on their sexual urges to sleep with men.

A study titled “Marketing, Gender and Feminism: A Synthesis and Research Agenda,” published in 2005 argued that companies used stereotypical representations of women in advertising much of the time because consumers of both sexes responded to such representations.³¹⁶ According to the study, women respond to these images because they have been raised to picture themselves within the stereotypically feminine role.³¹⁷ Men, on the other hand, respond well to these ads because such representations of women reinforce their gendered idea of male superiority.³¹⁸ The key to such advertising, according to the authors of the study, was to find the balance between using enough of the stereotyping that men, the individual with the presumed economic power, would encourage the purchase of the product, while women identified enough with the stereotyped woman in the ad that she, the individual

³¹⁶ Andrea Beetles and Lloyd Harris. “Marketing, Gender, and Feminism: A Synthesis and Research Agenda.” *The Marketing Review*, vol. 5, 2005, 205-31.

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

with the presumed purchasing power, would feel connected enough with the product to purchase it.³¹⁹ It was, the study proved, the companies that best found the balance between the two sexes, who did the most business.³²⁰

A second article titled “Looking through Gendered Lenses: Female Stereotyping in Advertisements and Gender Role Expectations” recognized the gendered stereotyping pointed out in “Marketing, Gender, and Feminism,” and asserted that such advertising reinforced negative stereotypes for consumers of such advertisements.³²¹ The author argued that consumers who viewed gendered advertisements were more likely to behave in stereotypical ways and adhere to traditional gendered roles than those who were not exposed to such ads.³²² This promotion of stereotypically feminine roles can be seen throughout *Seventeen* magazine over both decades studied, while such ads disappeared from *Cosmopolitan*. *Seventeen* was typically read by girls at a much more impressionable age, so by the time readers were old enough to read *Cosmopolitan*, they had already been infused with years of the negatively stereotypical advertisements.

The analysis in this essay thus concludes with a close look at advertisements in *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan*. The ads in *Seventeen* show the various ways in which they restricted adolescent sexuality and promoted compulsory heterosexuality. The advertisements in *Seventeen* included items such as sets of china, sets of flatware, and engagement rings, sprinkled throughout the more expected ads selling clothing, makeup, and perfumes. It was these ads for seemingly grown up items, being sold in a magazine marketed to 11-17 year-old

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ Sue Lafky. “Looking Through Gendered Lenses: Female Stereotyping in Advertisements and Gender Role Expectations.” *Journal and Mass Communication Quarterly*, vol. 73, no. 2, 1996, 379-88.

³²² Ibid.

girls that proved society's desire to teach girls that marriage and motherhood were their best options moving forward in life.

Seventeen

One ad in the August 1972 issue of *Seventeen* showed a young girl, dressed as and wearing the makeup appropriate for a young reader of the magazine.³²³ The print read “You start being sexy when you stop trying;” the ad was selling Johnson's baby powder to the readers of the magazine.³²⁴ This ad was important for a number of reasons, the main one being that the entire magazine spends hundreds of pages teaching girls how to grow into their changing bodies. This Johnson's ad halted that progress by reminding girls that they did not need to be “sexy,” which was a characteristic that readers were being taught to strive for because it would attract male attention.

Smaller print near the bottom of the ad warned readers that the stronger the perfume and the heavier the makeup they chose to wear, the more boys would stop liking them as much because males preferred girls “who don't try so hard.”³²⁵ The narrative line of this ad stressed to young readers that every choice they made about their appearance should be for the benefit of seeking male attention. The ad stole female autonomy from makeup and perfume decisions, and instead tried to prove to young girls that the more innocent and child-like they looked, the more male attention they would attract. The Johnson's ad effectively tried to negate the need for all of the perfumes and makeup advertised throughout the magazine in favor of the simple, adolescent use of baby powder instead.

³²³ Johnson & Johnson. “You Start Being Sexy When You Stop Trying.” Advertisement. *Seventeen*. August 1972, 110.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*

³²⁵ *Ibid.*

In the August 1973 issue of *Seventeen*, one ad demonstrated the perceived privacy of magazines over other forms of advertisement and information sharing.³²⁶ The advertisement was selling FDS Feminine Hygiene and Deodorant Spray with the tagline “We could never tell you this on television.”³²⁷ While not directly related to ideas of compulsory heterosexuality, this ad was intriguing because it was selling a product that was strictly related to women and their anatomy. The ad seemed to assert that while makeup and other such products can be sold on television because they are not related to women’s intimate bodies, the deodorant spray could only be sold to girls in private because to promote such a thing on television, where men could also see the ad, would be crossing a line in the gendered world of advertising. Women’s were supposed to be “natural,” but the natural odor of the vagina was unacceptable to society, so they had to find ways to cover it up.

The very first ad in the January 1980 issue of *Seventeen* was for a china set, despite the fact that readers of this magazine- perhaps with the exception of a few 16 and 17 year-old readers- would be much too young to give serious thought to getting married and starting a home where a china set would be necessary.³²⁸ The print read “Love Leads to Lennox,” implying that love should always lead to marriage, and marriage should always lead to a domestic female role in which the wife should own china on which she could host dinner parties like the one pictured in the ad³²⁹. Ads like this one instilled in women, from a very young age, an ideal of femininity that included heterosexual marriage as their main option for love and domesticity as their only available role within said heterosexual marriage.

³²⁶ FDS. “We Could Never Tell You This on Television.” Advertisement. *Seventeen*. August 1973, 263.

³²⁷ Ibid.

³²⁸ Lenox. “Love Leads to Lennox.” Advertisement. *Seventeen*. January 1980, 1.

³²⁹ Ibid.

An article/advertisement called “Now You’re Cooking” later in the same issue promoted various foodstuffs to the young readers of the magazine through the inclusion of recipes for their families and their romantic partners.³³⁰ Ads such as this one instilled a couple of stereotypically feminine roles in young readers as they prepared girls for their lives as domestic wives and mothers. The ad promoted brand name foods as it prepared young girls to be the primary grocery shoppers in their future homes as wives, while the other article taught girls to use these foods to create meals large enough for entire families.³³¹ Both of the projected roles in the ad/article pushed girls towards a life of domesticity where they played housewife, rather than allowing that men might be just as involved in the process of buying and preparing food as they were.

An ad in the August 1980 issue of *Seventeen* for Arnel perfume asserted that girls should “act romantic/natural/sensual/innocent/etc.” which was a conflicted list of contradictory behaviors for a young girl to navigate through.³³² Girls were being given an impossible set of ideals to live up to; how can a young girl act both innocent and sensual at the same time? The word “act” was also interesting in this ad because it implied that girls should pretend to be these things, but should not actually be any of the things listed.³³³ The ad promoted behaviors that girls could “act” like to win the favor of boys, not things that they should be doing for themselves. The girls were being taught to act certain ways for boys rather than just acting how they naturally would. This meant that girls were taught to live

³³⁰ “Now You’re Cooking.” Advertisement. *Seventeen*. January 1980, 35.

³³¹ Ibid.

³³² Arnel, “Act Romantic/Natural/Sensual/Innocent/Etc..” Advertisement. *Seventeen*. August 1980, 118.

³³³ Ibid.

most aspects of their lives to find a male romantic partner rather than making the decisions they genuinely wanted to make.

In the August 1984 issue of *Seventeen*, there was an ad that seemed jarringly out of place amongst all of the other ads encouraging innocence and girlish charms selling “Midnight Musk” by Bonne Bell.³³⁴ The tagline read, “My daddy always said nothing good happens after midnight. Daddy was wrong.”³³⁵ The ad was wholly sexual compared to the other ads encouraging innocence as the best way to attract boys. This ad- which showed a picture of a young woman in the arms of a man- was most compelling because it implied not only that the young woman was intimately involved with the man, in a magazine that preached sex within marriage only, but also because it asserted that the young woman had gone against some sort of unspoken rule laid out by her father.³³⁶ This went against all rules usually laid out by *Seventeen* in which girls were taught to abide by the rules of their parents until they married, at which point they would live by their husband’s rules.

In the September 1988 issue of *Seventeen*, a Tampax ad attempted to teach young girls about their bodies and answer a question that girls apparently could find the answer to without having to ask their mothers or other women of whom they would be embarrassed to ask such questions.³³⁷ The ad posed the question “Are you sure I’d still be a virgin?” about using a tampon for the first time.³³⁸ The ad quickly dispelled the myth that using a tampon would somehow disrupt a girl’s virginity, but opened up an unspoken conversation about

³³⁴ Bonne Bell. “Midnight Musk.” Advertisement. *Seventeen*. August 1984, 91.

³³⁵ Ibid.

³³⁶ Ibid.

³³⁷ Tampax. “Are You Sure I’d Still be a Virgin?.” Advertisement. *Seventeen*. August 1988, 95.

³³⁸ Ibid.

what it really meant to be a virgin.³³⁹ The readers of *Seventeen* were being taught so little about their sexuality that they are not sure exactly what it meant to be a virgin, but they knew that in their world it was very important to remain a virgin until marriage.

Issues of *Seventeen* steered away from teaching girls what sex was and how to have safe sex, instead spending pages reminding girls that sex should be saved for a marriage relationship and showing them the consequences if they were to have sex before marriage, such as articles about unwanted pregnancy. That said, with the combination of lacking sex education in most schools in the U.S. in the 1970s and 80s, and lackluster sex education in *Seventeen*, young readers were not really sure what made them a virgin and what did not. When they were told that penetration of their vagina meant they would no longer be a virgin, it made perfect sense that young girls would be afraid to use tampons and risk the social stigma of having lost their virginity. Perhaps the most compelling thing about this ad was that, while obviously trying to sell product, it did take an actual manufacturer of tampons to dispel the myth rather than the magazine itself assuring girls that using a tampon would not rob them of their virginity.

Cosmopolitan

Continued analysis will come from the advertisements in *Cosmopolitan* magazine from the same years as were used before. Unlike the advertisements in *Seventeen*, the ads in *Cosmopolitan* featured everything from condoms to birth control to pregnancy tests to alcohol. The difference between the “grown up” domestic items found in *Seventeen* and the more illicitly adult items found in *Cosmopolitan* was noteworthy because it highlighted the

³³⁹ Ibid.

change in content allowed by the authors from the magazine for girls to the magazine for young women.

An ad for Norform's Feminine Odor Solution in the August 1971 issue of *Cosmopolitan* stepped away from placing women into feminine or masculine roles and simply allowed them to exist as confused teenagers, looking for answers about the changes women's bodies go through.³⁴⁰ The tagline, "a woman's body should come with instructions," reminded young readers that they were not the only ones who were unsure of what puberty was doing to their bodies.³⁴¹ The ad in no way pointed to men, boys, or to using the product to attract a partner of any kind, instead preferring to acknowledge that growing up could be confusing. This was especially compelling in a magazine such as *Cosmopolitan* where many of the articles attempted to explain such confusion, both about anatomical and sexual changes, to young readers.

The August 1974 issue took reinforced compulsory heterosexuality with the inclusion of an ad for Love's Baby Soft.³⁴² The ad introduced the product for the first time, which was noteworthy because everything the product is about went directly against the ideals of the women's movement that was happening at the same time. The ad's tagline, "because innocence is sexier than you think" reverted back to an impossible ideal that a girl could be innocent and sexual at the same time.³⁴³ Baby Soft was marketed to girls as a spray on scent that would make them appealing to men, but it got its "innocence" from its smell: baby

³⁴⁰ Norform. "A Woman's Body Should Come with Instructions." Advertisement. *Cosmopolitan*. August 1971, 189.

³⁴¹ Ibid.

³⁴² Love's. "Introducing Love's Baby Soft." Advertisement. *Cosmopolitan*. August 1974, 27.

³⁴³ Ibid.

powder.³⁴⁴ *Cosmopolitan*, in running this ad, allowed readers to buy in to the idea that smelling like a baby, the poster child for virginal innocence, would somehow also make them alluring and sensual for men. An impossible double standard was being formulated for girls during the 70s and 80s in which they had to figure out how to be these two competing things- innocent and sensual- at once.

A 1980 ad for Ortho personal lubricant took a completely different turn as it marketed a product used for sexual pleasure to readers.³⁴⁵ Not only was lubricant a very adult product to see advertised in a magazine when one compared *Seventeen* to *Cosmopolitan*, but the tagline “what it does for you” also made sex and sexual pleasure a woman’s business.³⁴⁶ *Seventeen* published articles and advertisements in which young women were denied their sex drive and convinced that it was their main job to protect their chastity by fending off male sexual advances until they could safely satisfy their husbands in their marriage beds. This Ortho ad eliminated the male element of sex altogether, instead placing value on female pleasure during sex. In this way, the ad placed some of the sexual agency robbed from readers in their formative years, back into the hands of women who were learning to embrace their sexualities.

In the August 1980 issue, there was an ad for *Playgirl* magazine.³⁴⁷ The tagline read, “Of course I read *Playgirl*... because of him.”³⁴⁸ While this may not seem entirely sexually liberating because it implied that the narrator only read the magazine for her sexual partner,

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

³⁴⁵ Ortho. “What’s New- What It Does for You.” Advertisement. *Cosmopolitan*. January 1980, 58.

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

³⁴⁷ Playgirl. “A Woman Says ‘Of Course I Read Playgirl!’.” Advertisement. *Cosmopolitan*. August 1980, 199.

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

its subtext is worth examining. Despite reading it to know what a male partner may like in bed, the ad left it up to the reader to decide if the narrator was a married woman or not. If she were not, reading *Playgirl* allowed her to have enjoyable sex with a man because she had the sexual agency to do so. If she were married, *Playgirl* still had the ability to be a liberating text for female readers because it allowed women to seize an active role in their own sex lives, rather than existing as passive sexual objects for their husband's pleasure. Either way, ads encouraging women to read *Playgirl* encouraged women to find freedom in the bedroom that would have been impossible before the women's movement.

An E.P.T. ad for a pregnancy test in the 1981 issue showed a picture of what appeared to be a 30 to 40 year old couple rather than a 20 to 30 year old couple.³⁴⁹ After pages and pages of ads in *Seventeen* reminding girls that their biggest goal in life was to get married, furnish a home, and start a family, this pregnancy test ad depicted a couple who were much older than the girls reading *Seventeen* were led to believe they would be when starting their own families.³⁵⁰ This ad understood that the readers of *Cosmopolitan* were of the women's movement generation who wanted to go to college, get jobs, and date around before they settled down to start a family. The couple in the ad reflected the "modern" girls' wish to postpone motherhood until they were ready to settle down, not only until society said they should be ready to be mothers.

The August 1982 issue began with an ad selling Virginia Slims Cigarettes.³⁵¹ The ad was noteworthy because it depicted a woman from the 40s or 50s ironing laundry next to a

³⁴⁹ E. P. T. "Pregnancy Test." Advertisement. *Cosmopolitan*. August 1981, 179.

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

³⁵¹ Virginia Slims Cigarettes. "You've Come a Long Way, Baby." Advertisement. *Cosmopolitan*. August 1982, 72.

woman from the 80s in business casual with the caption “You’ve come a long way, baby.”³⁵² The ad was picking up on the same marketing strategy stereotypes mentioned earlier in this essay, but in doing so, was breaking down a stereotype of the past in order to build a new image of what a woman should look like. In the 1920s, cigarettes had been a symbol of female empowerment as flappers began to smoke, where before only prostitutes smoked. Because the ad was selling cigarettes, a gendered product, to women rather than to men, women now held the power to change the way they viewed themselves in the stereotyped hierarchy of power because they could now be successful working women with their own purchasing power and no need for male approval of their new role in society.

Early in the 1984 issue of *Cosmopolitan* there was an ad for Nuance perfume. A female with well-manicured nails held a bottle of perfume in front of a female body wearing seductive nude lingerie.³⁵³ The tagline read “nuance always says yes, but you can always say no.”³⁵⁴ This ad was tailored to the young women of the 80s who wanted to play with their sexuality while at the same time assert their right to have sex if and when they want to. The ad empowered women by reminding them that they can wear seductive clothing and smell like perfume if they want to, allowing them to be sexy if they wanted to. However, at the same time, it also reminded women that they did not owe sex to any man and it was their choice whether or not to have sex.

An ad in the August 1986 issue selling Xerox typewriters went against the feminist tone of the magazine as it stereotyped the role of women in the workplace.³⁵⁵ The ad showed

³⁵² Ibid.

³⁵³ Nuance. “Nuance Always Says Yes, but You Can Always Say No.” Advertisement. *Cosmopolitan*. August 1984, 21.

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

³⁵⁵ Xerox. “6020 Memory Writer.” Advertisement. *Cosmopolitan*. August 1986, 57.

a male boss and a female secretary working with a non-Xerox typewriter and a Xerox typewriter.³⁵⁶ Print at the top of the ad read “If your boss had to do your job with a typewriter from you-know-who, he’d get you a new 6020 Memory Writer from Team Xerox.”³⁵⁷ This ad implied that women mainly did secretarial work under the thumb of a male boss, which projected an expected gendered role for women that directly contradicted the ideal of women advancing their careers in the 1980s. The ad did align with the usual articles in the magazines promoting women who valued their careers and refused to settle for “women’s work.” This ad implied that despite new places for women in the workplace following the women’s liberation movement, women still needed to either play upon their femininity or assert masculine-like traits to be successful in the workplace.

The final ad from the August 1989 issue that will be analyzed was an ad for Jonel nail strengthening solution.³⁵⁸ The ad showed a picture of a well-manicured female hand running its fingers down the toned back of a man.³⁵⁹ The text at the top of the page read “Nail Him Tonight.”³⁶⁰ Despite the product the ad was selling- nail strengthener-, which had nothing to do with sex or sensuality at all, the text of the ad directly used sexual innuendo to sell a product. This proved the changing opinion about the ability to talk about sex without fear of being taboo that was taking place among young people in the 1980s. There was not such a large social expectation of refusing to talk about sex in public, so now sex could be openly talked about and even used in advertisements for unrelated things.

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

³⁵⁸ Jonel. “Nail Him Tonight.” Advertisement. *Cosmopolitan*. August 1989, 91.

³⁵⁹ Ibid.

³⁶⁰ Ibid.

The ads in both *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan* promote societally expected gendered roles for women in the 1970s and 80s. *Seventeen*'s ads promote a heterosexual marriage as the future goal of all girls reading the magazine, using ads to teach young readers how to attract someone of the opposite sex who could eventually become a husband. *Cosmopolitan*'s ads were less obvious in their projection of the ideal female, but they promoted a kind of womanhood in which women could own their sexuality as long as it was in private and not in the workplace. Because the ads paid for the magazines and the commercial companies buying space in magazines pandered to an audience that strove to be societally accepted, the ads were much firmer examples of compulsory heterosexuality than many of the articles in the magazines were.

Conclusion

After reading through a few decades of the magazines girls and young women were reading to gain their knowledge about sex and desire and their role in society, it became clear to me that the two magazines served very different functions in American society in the 1970s and 80s. *Seventeen* provided a vehicle for the idea of compulsory heterosexuality, reminding young girls that they should only desire men and that their desire should only be sexually fulfilled once they have been married. Because the readers of this magazine were much younger than those of *Cosmopolitan*, the authors of *Seventeen* could work to instill these ideas at an impressionable time in the life of young girls, just as they reached puberty and began to feel sexual desire for the first time.

Cosmopolitan offered the counterpart to *Seventeen*'s inability to indoctrinate the ideals of abstinence until marriage and marriage to one man for life. Because *Cosmopolitan* was marketed for an older audience, authors did not have to fear awakening adolescent sexuality when writing provocative articles about sex and desire, both inside of marriage and out. The lack of hesitation to talk about previously taboo subjects such as female sexuality and desire made it possible for *Cosmopolitan* to encourage female desire and empower its older readers as female embracing their sexuality.

Seventeen promoted "normative" sexuality, that is to say, girls are taught to have crushes on boys, date boys, marry men, and have babies with men. In a closer analysis, *Seventeen* strove to indoctrinate "traditional" womanhood in which girls would marry, keep house, raise children, and never think of divorce. The only female anatomy discussed within the magazines is practical in that it explains how girls become pregnant or how menstruation occurs. The magazine for younger readers leaves out any mention of how women feel sexual

pleasure or that sex should be mutually gratifying for both partners. It only deviated from this heteronormative ideal in the form of cautionary tales about how having sex outside of marriage will cause pregnancy and hardship for girls that give in to sexual temptation. Each article of *Seventeen* strove to promote abstinence as the best policy for girls until they were married. Any mention of contraception is used to ensure that girls would not find themselves pregnant when they decided not to make the “smart” decision to abstain from sex. Lastly, *Seventeen* promoted gendered roles for men versus for women for their young readers. Girls read the magazine and knew that they should learn to cook and clean, maybe go to college and have a job for a while, but then retire to the domestic sphere when they married so they could care for the house and husband and start a family.

Cosmopolitan, offered a very different version of what womanhood should be. Readers were encouraged to know their bodies, know their sex drive, and ask for what they want in bed. It encouraged women to go to college, work, and make the decision for themselves whether or not they wanted to give up their career in order to take care of a home and start a family. Although marriage was still talked about as an option, it was no longer the *only* option women had. Numerous articles and advertisements talked about how women could divorce and begin their life as a single woman, either alone or by jumping back into the dating world.

Cosmopolitan did not adhere to the same ideal of “normative” sexuality that *Seventeen* did, encouraging women to find sexual pleasure both in non-marital relationships and in unconventional ways within the contract of marriage. Readers were taught that sex should always be mutually pleasing and if it was not, they should either find new partners or speak up about what was lacking in their relationships. Unlike the magazine for younger

readers, *Cosmopolitan* rarely tries to teach readers about abstinence, focusing rather on the types and benefits of various contraceptive methods which would allow women to be much freer sexually than they had been in the decades leading up to the 1970s. While allowing that women should be able to choose the domestic sphere if that was where they were most comfortable, *Cosmopolitan* encouraged women to find jobs and work outside of the home if they wanted to. The authors and editors made it clear that part of the women's movement needed to be the choice to live the kind of lifestyle that best suited you.