



## Representations of Gender in Magazines

The aims of this Factsheet are to:

- clarify the difference between sex, gender and sexuality
- analyse the gender representations in men and women's lifestyle and specialist magazines
- introduce some of the criticism of gender representations in magazines

### Gender Stereotypes

Before any discussion of the representation of gender in magazine can begin, it is important to be clear on the difference between sex, gender and sexuality.

- **Sex** refers to a person's biological sex, whether they are male or female
- **Gender** refers to the roles or behaviours a person is socialised into according to their sex, whether they are masculine or feminine
- **Sexuality** refers to a person's sexual preference, whether they are heterosexual (straight), homosexual (gay) or bisexual

These categories are linked. For example, according to social norms of behaviour, a man is supposed to be masculine. A masculine man would also be assumed to be heterosexual. However, it is crucial to remember that these are assumptions and it is perfectly possible for a woman or gay man to be masculine or for straight man to be feminine. In our society there are certain attributes and behaviours that are deemed to be more appropriate for one sex or the other, these are called **gender roles**. For example, in terms of drinking alcohol, it is often assumed that women drink wine, liqueurs or alcopops whilst men drink beer and spirits. These **stereotypes** are part of the gender roles which men and women are expected to conform to. Gender roles for each sex are often comprised of opposite traits, as the table below illustrates. (Remember these are stereotypes though and are unlikely to be true of every man and woman.)

Men are / should be:	Women are / should be:
Masculine	Feminine
Tall	Short
Big (muscular and broad)	Small (thin and petite)
Dominant	Submissive
Strong	Weak
Aggressive	Passive
Breadwinner (goes to work)	Domestic (stays at home)
Competitive (works against others / cares about self)	Communal (works with others / cares about others)
Intelligent (thinks about things)	Intuitive (feels things / spiritual)
Rational (solves problems by thinking of solutions)	Emotional (solves problems by comforting others)
Active (does things)	Communicative (talks about things)

Men like:	Women like:
Technology (cars, gadgets and computers)	Fashion (shopping, clothes and make-up)
Casual sex with many partners	Committed relationships with one partner
Comedy and practical jokes	Celebrity gossip (which can be 'bitchy' or mean to women)
Drinking to get drunk (beers and spirits)	Drinking to be sociable (wines and liqueurs)
Computer games like <i>Grand Theft Auto</i> or <i>Call of Duty</i> on consoles like Play Station 3 or Xbox	Computer games like <i>Brain Training</i> on Nintendo DS or <i>Wii Fit</i>
Action / adventure films	'Chick flicks' and romantic comedies



This photograph of Bernie Ecclestone with his ex-wife, Slavica, shows a reversal of the usual gender roles as she is significantly taller than him. (<http://www.flagworld.com/news/wp-content/uploads/2008/11/bernie-slavica-ecclestone.jpg>)

**Exam Hint:-** When you are writing about gender roles and the attributes associated with men and women it is vital that you state you are talking about stereotypes. For example, there will be men who are aggressive and competitive but there will also be some women who exhibit these characteristics.

The important thing to remember is which behaviours are most **socially acceptable** for each group. Using the term 'stereotype' or 'stereotypically' shows you know these ideas are cultural assumptions.

### Content analysis





When looking at gender representations in magazines, content analysis is a good place to start. The simplest way to start is to count how many pages in a specific magazine are dedicated to particular topics. The proportion of the magazine dedicated to each topic indicates its importance to the target audience.







<b>Nuts</b>	Pages	%
	Total	100
Women	25	25
Sports	21	21
Adverts	17	17
Entertainment	16	16
Comedy	9	9
Miscellaneous	7	7
Technology	5	5

<b>heat</b>	Pages	%
	Total	132
Celebrities / Gossip	38	29
Adverts	36	27
Entertainment	30	23
Fashion	21	16
Miscellaneous	7	5

This content analysis supports the gender stereotypes discussed earlier. The fact that a quarter of *Nuts* is dedicated to ‘women’ suggests that heterosexual men are interested in seeing many different women rather than focusing on one woman. Likewise, the fact that *Nuts* features so much sport-related content indicates men’s stereotypically competitive natures. As an opposite to this, *Heat* shows how women enjoy communicating, through gossip, and are interested in fashion and looking good in their quest to find a committed relationship.

The next step in content analysis is to look closely at specific parts of the content to see what it ‘says’ about representations of gender. The two magazines, *Nuts* and *Heat*, have been chosen as they are both weekly TV listings magazines and can be easily compared in terms of content and how this relates to stereotypes of gender.

	<b>Nuts</b>	<b>heat</b>
Target audience	Demographics	Male, aged 16 – 34, employed, skilled working class to middle class
	Psychographics (likes, needs and desires)	Socialising, watching football, playing computer games (especially action, sport and driving games), watching films and using mobile phones (for Internet access as well as calls and texts)
Media platforms	Print media – <i>Nuts</i> magazine Broadcast media – <i>Nuts TV</i> (Freeview channel 42) E-media – <a href="http://www.nuts.co.uk">www.nuts.co.uk</a>	Print media – <i>Heat</i> magazine, <i>Heatworld</i> magazine Broadcast media – <i>Heat</i> radio E-media – <a href="http://www.heatworld.com">www.heatworld.com</a> , <i>Heat</i> mobile
Name	The name ‘ <i>Nuts</i> ’ confirms that the magazine is for men as it can be linked to the slang term for testicles or the colloquial phrase: “it’s the nuts” to indicate something is good.	The name ‘ <i>Heat</i> ’ can be linked to the celebrity content of the magazine and the fact that the content is ‘hot gossip’ and up-to-date.
Front cover	 <p>(14 – 20 May 2010)</p> <p>The cover features Lucy Pinder, a model regularly used by <i>Nuts</i> and other similar men’s magazines. The focus of the cover is her breasts. This is where the light has been directed and it is the only part of her that is not partially covered text. The use of only her first name as the anchorage text suggests the audience are familiar with her already. The cover image is from a shoot purposely for <i>Nuts</i> magazine.</p>	 <p>(6-12 February 2010)</p> <p>The cover features two contrasting images of Angelina Jolie. The focus is on her face in both and the opposing emotions she is apparently expressing in each. These images were not taken for <i>Heat</i> but are existing photos either from Jolie’s modeling past or from the paparazzi. The ‘Innocent to Insecure’ headline suggest this is focusing on negatives, which can be seen as ‘bitchy’ or women being mean about other women.</p>
TV listings	 <p>The programmes <i>Nuts</i> have chosen to feature conform to the stereotypes of men. <i>Family Guy</i> is a comedy, which links to men’s enjoyment of jokes. Formula 1 links to men’s love of sports and <i>Storm World</i> and <i>24</i> are action packed appealing to men’s stereotypical liking of being active.</p>	 <p><i>Heat</i> includes features <i>Dancing on Ice</i> which involves fashion (in the elaborate costumes) and dancing, which is an activity associated with women.</p> <p>The two featured films: <i>The Devil Wears Prada</i> and <i>The September Issue</i> are both about the fashion industry</p>

	<b>Nuts</b>	<b>heat</b>
News	The news section in <i>Nuts</i> features articles about: Portsmouth Football Club, a plane crash, the star of a hip-hop video in her underwear, the 'first look' at <i>Call of Duty</i> 7, naked celebrities and the Audi R8 GT car. This section of the magazine uses the stereotypes of men liking technology, women and sports.	The news section of <i>Heat</i> is much smaller than <i>Nuts</i> and features only two articles, one about Britney Spear's depression and the other about Jordan's relationship with Alex Reid. Both articles rely upon women's stereotypical interest in celebrity gossip and real life drama.
Health product advert	 <p>The advert for <i>Head and Shoulders</i> in <i>Nuts</i> features images of two 'sexy nurses', a clichéd sexual fantasy for men.</p> <p>The suggestion is that using <i>Head and Shoulders</i> will make a man smell so good women will want to kiss him, as one nurse is doing in the image.</p>	 <p>The <i>Head and Shoulders</i> advert for women in <i>Heat</i>, focuses on how the product will give the user 'kissable' hair, indicated by the lip imprints.</p> <p>Both adverts hinge on the idea that using <i>Head and Shoulders</i> will make the opposite sex want to kiss you but the female version is more about looking good too.</p>
Entertainment advert	 <p>The horror genre is stereotypically masculine so the advert for the remake of <i>Nightmare on Elm Street</i> fits with this stereotype.</p> <p>The inclusion of an advert for a film at the cinema also links to men enjoying socializing with friends and having fun.</p>	 <p>There are no film adverts in <i>Heat</i> but there are several adverts for TV programmes. This could be seen to refer to women being linked to the home.</p> <p><i>The Vampire Diaries</i> is also in the horror genre but the focus of this advert is on love and relationships rather than death and horror.</p>
Food advert	 <p>There are very few adverts for food in <i>Nuts</i> compared to <i>Heat</i>.</p> <p>This links to the stereotype that men are not domestic and have a woman to prepare their food. In this advert for <i>Extreme Pringles</i>, the emphasis is on being brave enough to try them and taking on the challenge.</p>	 <p>The food adverts in <i>Heat</i> are mainly for chocolate-based products.</p> <p>In this advert, the association of women with chocolate is coupled with the stereotypes that women care about their looks, especially their weight. The calorie content displayed is a clear sign of this.</p>

*Nuts* logo from [http://en.academic.ru/pictures/enwiki/78/Nuts\\_logo.jpg](http://en.academic.ru/pictures/enwiki/78/Nuts_logo.jpg)

*Heat* logo from [http://fi-mode.o2.co.uk/images/logo\\_heat.jpg](http://fi-mode.o2.co.uk/images/logo_heat.jpg)

All other *Nuts* images scanned from 14 – 20 May issue and all other *Heat* images scanned from 6 – 12 February issue

### Activity

Using the *Nuts* and *Heat* content analysis as a basis, conduct your own content analysis of two magazines, one targeted at women and one at men. The following pairings could be used:

- *Zoo and More*
- *Cosmopolitan and GQ*

**Exam Hint:-** Examiners will want to see that you have engaged with your research into magazines so make sure you use recent issues as examples. You will also need to be very familiar with the contents of your chosen texts. You should look closely at the types of products advertised, the subject matter of the articles and the portrayals of men and women in the images.

The content topics identified in *Heat* are not exhaustive for women's magazines. In fact, *Heat* is very limited in terms of its content as it focuses so heavily on celebrity gossip. There are many magazines available for women of all ages but the content of them all is remarkable similar. In contrast, magazines for men across a similar age range offer a much more diverse selection of content.

	<i>Cosmopolitan</i> (June 2010)	<i>Woman's Weekly</i> (13 April 2010)	<i>Yours</i> (20 April – 3 May 2010)
	16 – 35	30 – 50	55+
Relation- -ships			
Sexual	✓		
Friends	✓	✓	✓
Family	✓	✓	✓
Body Image / Diets	✓	✓	✓
Fashion / Make-up	✓	✓	✓
Semi-naked men	✓		
Celebrities / Gossip	✓	✓	✓
Real Life Stories	✓	✓	✓
Horoscopes / Tarot	✓	✓	✓
Cooking / Recipes	✓	✓	✓
Careers / Success	✓		
Problem Page	✓	✓	✓
Letters from Readers	✓	✓	✓
Competitions / Puzzles	✓	✓	✓
Fiction	✓	✓	✓
Weddings	✓		
Holiday / Travel	✓	✓	✓
Crafts	✓	✓	

These three examples, *Cosmopolitan*, *Woman's Weekly* and *Yours*, span the age range of magazines for women but they all contain much the same content.

The only significant differences are the lack of content related to sexual relationships (including images of semi-naked men) and careers in magazines for older women. It could be assumed that this is because, stereotypically, women will be expected to be 'settled down' with a family in their 30s so have no need for advice on how to get a man or get a fulfilling job.

Similarly, the inclusion of crafts, such as knitting, and fiction in magazines for older women links to the idea that the women will be at home and in need of leisure pursuits which fit in around their domestic life, such as reading a short story with a cup of tea.

	<i>Front</i> (July 2010)	<i>GQ</i> (January 2010)	<i>Men's Health</i> (March 2010)
	16 – 35	25 - 40	25 - 45
Sexual relationships	✓	✓	✓
Women			
Glamour	✓		
Fashion		✓	✓
Fitness / Health			✓
Fashion / Grooming	✓	✓	✓
Sport	✓		✓
Science / Research			✓
Cooking / Recipes		✓	✓
Careers / Success			✓
Problem Page	✓		✓
Letters from Readers	✓		
Competitions			
Technology	✓	✓	✓
Comedy	✓		
Holiday / Travel		✓	
Fiction		✓	
Celebrity interviews		✓	✓
Entertainment	✓		

Of the three magazines analysed, *Front*, *GQ* and *Men's Health*, the only content that was evident in all three magazines was advice about heterosexual relationships and fashion.

This suggests that the behaviours considered acceptable for men are much more wide-ranging than for women. For example, both *GQ* and *Men's Health* include articles on cooking but none of the women's magazines include content about technology or science.



**Representation of gender in specialist magazines**

The magazines that have been discussed so far are examples of lifestyle magazines as they feature advice on how to live your life (what clothes to wear, how to behave in relationships etc.) However, there are also examples of specialist magazines, which are about one particular topic (usually a hobby or special interest), that are also heavily reliant upon gender stereotypes.

**Representation of masculinity in specialist magazines**

*Big Carp*  
(Vol. 28 Issue 164)



*Fast Bikes*  
(May 2010)

**Big, muscular and strong** – in order to land a big fish or to control a power motorcycle, a man would need to be physically strong, which is shown to be a desirable trait in these magazines.

**Competitive** – there is an element of being better than others in both these sports: catching the biggest fish or driving the fastest.

**Dominant** – connected to the idea of being competitive, winning makes the man the dominant participant, something which is desirable

**Active** – both magazines feature pastimes that involve being out of the house and doing something that can be physically straining.

**Aggressive** – the aggression may not be overt but both pastimes involve the need to be physically dominant in order to win, that is conquer the fish or dominate the race course.

**Representation of femininity in specialist magazines**

*Paper Craft*  
(April 2010)



*House & Garden*  
(April 2010)

**Domestic** – both magazines are connected to the home, either in making it a pleasant place to be or by having the hobby as something which does not require the woman to leave the house.

**Communal** – the home is a place where, stereotypically, the women cares for other people and tends to their needs. *Paper Crafts* is about card making and scrap booking, both of which include other people either as recipients of the cards or the subjects of the scrapbook.

**Communicative / Emotional** – the home is a place where outpourings of emotion are acceptable and problems are shared and talked about. Likewise, the products of paper crafts are linked to events such as birthdays, weddings and anniversaries, all of which are emotional and based upon communicating with others.

**Activity**

*Do you think it is possible for any magazines to be unisex (aimed at both men and women)? Consider the following examples: Lonely Planet, Fortean Times, BBC History, XBOX 360*

**Criticisms of representations of gender in magazines**

The previous analyses of magazines have shown that the gender roles used can be limited, especially for women. This is one criticism of magazines targeted at men and women, that they encourage the reader into narrow and pre-defined gender roles.

Lamb and Brown in *Packaging Girlhood* (2006) suggest that magazines 'train' girls to shop and to follow feminine gender roles that present being thin and attractive to men as the ideal at the expense of the desire to succeed. The fact that female models in magazines are heavily airbrushed is also cited as a problem as it creates body image issues and an unattainable ideal for women. In May 2010, Britney Spears insisted that 'before and after' images of a photo shoot she had done for an advertising campaign be made public to illustrate the extent to which images are altered.

Another criticism of magazines aimed at young men, often referred to as 'lad mags', is the objectification and denigration of women. In May 2010, there was a negative response to an advice column in *Zoo* magazine written by the actor Danny Dyer. Known for his 'hard man' image and his stereotypically masculine way of speaking, Dyer was a perfect fit for *Zoo*. However, the advice he gave one reader who was struggling with the breakdown of a relationship to try: "getting on the booze and smashing anything that moves. . . . the other option is to cut your ex's face, and then no one will want her" caused outrage as it seemed to condone violence against women. The column has since been cancelled and *Zoo* has agreed to run a series of articles to raise awareness of domestic violence.



Britney Spears' 'before and after' airbrushing images in *Reveal* magazine.