

Close Reading Women's Magazines

Due date: September 28, 2007

This assignment asks you to report on the content of three women's magazines from the same month/season and year.

One of those magazines must be either: *Bitch*, *Bust*, or *MS. Magazine*. The Stockton library has current subscriptions for all three magazines.

The other two magazines can be of your choosing, as long as they are identifiable "women's magazines." Readership, the magazine's title, marketing, bookstore placement, and content are all clues to what fits into the "women's magazine" classification. Personal readership is NOT a reliable indicator: for example, I subscribe to *Outside Magazine*, but it is generally categorized as a men's magazine.

Step One: Select your three women's magazines for analysis.

- One magazine must be from this list: *Bitch*, *Bust*, or *MS. Magazine*. The Stockton library has current subscriptions for all three magazines.
- Select two other women's magazines.
- Make sure all three magazines were published during the same year and month/season
 - For example, a spring issue of one magazine should not be compared with the December issue of another magazine.
 - You should NOT compare an April 2006 magazine with an April 2007 magazine.

Step Two: Complete the following worksheet for each magazine:

Women's Magazines Worksheet

Directions: Type your responses/notes for each of the following question sets. Be sure to use specific examples to illustrate and support your findings. You do not need to address every question in the set; however, you need to provide information on each of the following five topics: basic information, covers, table of contents, advertisements, and articles.

1. **Basic Information:**
 - What is the magazine's title?
 - When was this issue published?
 - How do you know it is a women's magazine?
2. **Covers:** What do the covers (front and back) look like?
 - How do the covers visually catch a reader's eye?
 - What kind of text appears on the front cover?
 - Would you know from looking at the front cover that this magazine is primarily written for women? How? Why not?
 - **Include a photocopy of each of your three magazine covers with your final report.**
3. **Table of Contents:** What kinds of stories appear in the table of contents?
 - Are they national? International? Local?
 - Are they primarily focused on politics? Fashion? Homemaking? Food?

- What kind of language do the titles employ? Do the word choices invoke any emotions in the read? Is the language strong or weak? Funny or serious?
 - **Include a photocopy of each of your three tables of contents in your final report.**
4. **Advertisements:** What kinds of advertisements, if any, appear in the magazines?
 - What products are being sold?
 - Do people appear in the advertisements? What do the images suggest about their age, race, class, gender, and sexuality?
 - How are the advertisements appealing to their readers?
 - Do the advertisements seek to make the reader feel good about herself? How? Or, why not?
 - Do the advertisements seem to have anything to do with any of the stories?
 5. **Articles:** Is there a theme throughout the magazine or are the stories not connected to each other?
 - How long are the articles?
 - What kinds of images appear with the stories? What impression do they give?

Step Three: Type up your notes for each magazine, include photocopies of the magazines' covers and tables of contents in your final report.

Step Four: Once you've completed your three individual reports, ask yourself:

Ideology: Can you draw any conclusions about the magazines' priorities by comparing their front covers, advertising, and table of contents?

- If you see that magazines have stories in common, are those stories treated the same way?
- Would you describe the magazines as feminist? Why or why not?
- If the magazine's ideology is not feminist, what is it? What set of beliefs or values does it promote? Does it, for example, promote consumerism? Race consciousness? Religious values? Environmentalism? Something else?
- What kind of evidence from your reports supports this characterization?

Readership: What kinds of women do you think primarily read and enjoy these magazines? Do the magazines, for example, seem to be targeting a specific class, race, gender, age, and/or sexuality?

- Is the readership the same or different among the three magazines?
- Would men enjoy reading the magazines, too? Why or why not?
- Are any of the magazines more in line with your own priorities than the others? How so?
- What kind of evidence from your reports supports your readership analysis?

Step Five: Write a short, 2-page paper (typed, double-spaced, 1-inch margins, 10 or 12-point Times font) that addresses one or both of the above analysis topics: ideology and/or readership.

- Be sure to cite specific examples in your paper to support your analysis.
- Before passing in each paper I encourage you to drop by my office hours to chat about your paper, look over your thesis statement, etc. **No revisions will be allowed.** Put your very best effort into the final drafts.