CULTURE OF SEX: SEXUAL LINGUISTICS AND DISCOURSE OF COSMOPOLITAN EDITIONS IN THE UNITED STATES, FRANCE AND INDIA

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DEDICATION

I would like to thank my family for all of their support and encouragement. I would also like to thank my husband for his assistance, patience and sense of humor over the last few months.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ........................................................................ ii

LIST OF TABLES ................................................................................ iv

ABSTRACT ......................................................................................... v

Chapter

1. Introduction .................................................................................. 1

2. Literature Review ......................................................................... 3
   - Sexuality and sexual identities
   - Sexual linguistics
   - Sexual discourse
   - Normative
   - Social construction of reality theory

3. Research Questions ....................................................................... 28

4. Methodology ................................................................................ 29

5. Results: Content Analysis ............................................................ 35
   - References to sex
   - References to male and female anatomy

6. Results: Textual Analysis ............................................................... 46
   - Tones
   - Pleasure
   - Discourse
   - Normative versus non-normative behavior

7. Discussion .................................................................................... 71

8. Conclusion .................................................................................... 75
   - Limitations and recommendations for future research

APPENDIX

List of samples .................................................................................. 79

REFERENCES ................................................................................... 81
### LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Sample breakdown per type of article</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. <em>Cosmopolitan, Cosmopolitan France</em> and <em>Cosmopolitan India</em> references to having sex, sex acts and orgasm</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. <em>Cosmopolitan, Cosmopolitan France</em> and <em>Cosmopolitan India</em> references to male and female anatomy</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT

_Cosmopolitan_ is one of the most popular magazines for women, both domestically and internationally; it is published in 28 languages in 45 countries. However, _Cosmopolitan_, especially its sexual content, is subject to change by cultures who maintain social norms and standards different from the United States. This study compared the approaches _Cosmopolitan, Cosmopolitan France_ and _Cosmopolitan India_ use in presenting sexual information. A total of 12 magazines were content and textual analyzed to determine whether their sexual linguistics and discourse differed. This study also examined whether _Cosmopolitan_ and its sister magazines promoted normative behavior or pushed pre-existing social norms and values.

The findings showed that all three magazines used a distinct approach to sex, but not in the way hypothesized. _Cosmopolitan_ and _Cosmopolitan India_ used a prescriptive discourse, one designed to educate the reader and establish a mentor-protégée relationship. _Cosmopolitan India_ was also found to have an explicit, straightforward approach to sex to accommodate an evolving readership. _Cosmopolitan France_ used a descriptive discourse and focused on the self-perceptions and body confidence of the reader. These findings provide insight into how _Cosmopolitan_ and its international editions could accommodate readerships according to established or developing cultural standards.
Introduction

Although *Cosmopolitan* has been in circulation since 1886, it was not until Helen Gurley Brown became editor-in-chief in the 1950s that *Cosmopolitan* took on its role of promoting sexual independence. Now, one of the most popular women’s lifestyle magazines, *Cosmopolitan* provides insight on sexual relationships, health, fitness, beauty, popular culture, vacations and recipes. Printed in 45 countries in 28 languages, *Cosmopolitan* has a readership of roughly 36 million women worldwide (Carr 2002, p.1).

Given its international readership and emphasis on women’s sexuality, however, few studies have been conducted on the sexual language used by international versions of the magazine. Rather, research has focused on the implications of sexual advertising occurring in international editions of *Cosmopolitan* or the effect of sexual language on readers in the United States. In order to fill this gap in research, it is necessary to look at the sexual linguistics and discourse from an international perspective, particularly in such a widely read, sexually themed magazine like *Cosmopolitan*. Conducting such research can contribute to a better understanding of how media depictions of sexuality may vary within different cultural settings.

Research (Wiseman, 1976; Henslin, 1978; Goodenough, 1981; Gilbert & Gubar, 1985; Reinholtz, Muehlenhard, Phelps & Satterfield, 1995) on sexual linguistics and discourse has shown how sociocultural norms shape the way people speak about and perceive sex and their own sexuality. Moreover, research (Kehily, 1999; McNair, 2002; Yang, 2004; Jackson, 2005; Machin & van Leeuwen, 2005; Farvid & Braun, 2006; Gauntlett, 2008) has shown that media can play a significant role in educating or informing people on sex in a way that can reflect local norms and values.
Cosmopolitan, as such a prevalent and popular resource, must adjust to accommodate the cultural needs of its geographically diverse readership. For example, Cosmopolitan must submit to governmental regulations that control how sexuality is presented in China, where sexual language is prohibited. In other places, however, where the culture is open about sexuality, such as in Sweden, the magazine runs fewer sexual articles to accommodate a readership more comfortable with sex (Carr, 1). By studying the differences in how cultures use sexual language, it could help inform how the media is affected by cultural norms.

The purpose of this study then is to look how three international editions of Cosmopolitan – Cosmopolitan (U.S.), Cosmopolitan France and Cosmopolitan India, discuss sex. This study uses content and textual analysis to examine, compare and contrast the sexual linguistics and discourse used by each edition, as each occurs in a culture with, presumably, different norms. Additionally, this study analyzes whether Cosmopolitan, Cosmopolitan France and Cosmopolitan India urge normative sexual behavior or push the boundaries of pre-existing social and cultural norms.
Literature Review

Sexuality and sexual identities

*Cosmopolitan* and its sister magazines present the concept of the “fun, fearless female” as a model for how women should behave, both in the workplace and in their sexual lives (Machin & Thornborrow, 2003). With this model comes a standard for sexuality, such as how a woman should behave on a date and how she should engage in any kind of sexual contact. In a perfect world, this woman has agency and all of her problems can be solved by following *Cosmopolitan*’s sex tips (Machin & Thornborrow, 2003). As *Cosmopolitan* endeavors to educate readers on sex and sexuality, it is necessary to understand what factors, especially cultural norms and media messages, shape how sexual identities and sexuality are developed.

It is important to look at a range of research that has focused on women and sexuality. First, in one case, research has shown what women perceive to be sexuality. Second, research has focused on the way women, including young women, have turned to magazines as teachers of sexuality and sexual identities. This research has also shown the impact of magazines in shaping sexuality. Third, additional research has shown that sexual desire plays a role in sexual identities. Fourth, studies have shown the impact of cultural and societal standards on the development of sexuality. Finally, research has shown the role that *Cosmopolitan* can play in the development of female sexuality. In this research, male sexuality or stereotypes also plays a role in how women perceive their own sexual identities.

In her article, Loe (2008) observed the way junior and senior college students discussed elements of sex – everything from medical marketing to definitions of sexuality
and the ways in which the U.S. provides sex education. Based on the students’ discussion of sexuality, Loe (2008) observed that sexuality is a particularly complex concept, one potentially made more complicated by education and health care messages. For example, as medical markets may promote female sexual dysfunction, or FSD, as primarily physiological and easily treated by medication, sexuality as a whole becomes marginalized as such promotion fails to acknowledge the emotional, mental or pleasurable aspects of it. In this case, based on Loe’s (2008) observations, it seems fair to conclude that sexuality is, above all, a complex concept that is multidimensional, not just physiological.

To continue the discussion of the complex nature of sexuality, it is important to look at how other messages, such as those provided by magazines, may shape or provide information on sexual identities. In her study, Jackson (2005) analyzed the discourse of question-and-answer letters in a young woman’s magazine. Jackson’s study focused specifically on sexual health, especially safe sex, and sexual identities. She noted that magazines, in this case teen magazines, are a particularly influential resource for young women who are developing their sexual identities and exploring sexuality. She asserted that these advice columns provide meaning for women negotiating their identities and have a significant effect on women’s subjectivity about their own sexuality. She found that sex, as it appeared in the question-and-answer articles, was framed as painful, dangerous, safe and technique. Additionally, Jackson asserted that sex is taught; what will have an impact on the role of Cosmopolitan, therefore, will be whether or not Jackson’s observations, specifically about technique and the idea that sex must be learned, can likewise be found in an adult women’s magazine that readily provides sex
information. Jackson came to the conclusion that as a highly significant source of information for sexuality, advice columns and columnists maintain a particularly influential role over women’s development of sexuality and sexual identities.

Like Jackson (2005), Kehily (1999) noted the impact of magazines on young women, particularly the role that magazines can play in teaching sexuality. Kehily also noted that magazines are a cultural resource for young women to learn about sexuality. She asserted that magazines are not only a cultural resource for young men and women, who must then contextualize the material to fit their own lives, but they also create a framework for discussion. Additionally, like Jackson, Kehily noted the impact of “problem” sections, or advice columns, in framing sexuality, emotions and personal problems, and how that contributes to the concept of sexual subjectivity. While Jackson and Kehily both focused on adolescent magazines, their studies are important as they noted the role of magazines as cultural resources in which sexuality can be taught or shaped. What needs to be explored at this point is if adult readers, such as those of *Cosmopolitan*, are likewise affected by or learn about sexuality from magazines.

In examining the impact of adult magazines on women’s sexual identities and sexuality, Yang (2004) focused on the role of international magazines, such as *Cosmopolitan*, *Elle* and *Marie Claire*. Yang determined that not only do these international magazines play a role in negotiating local and global issues, they play a significant role in women’s self-formation, sexually and otherwise. She asserted that sexual identity is the site of struggle, as women must negotiate conflicting discourses of empowerment and disempowerment. What is particularly significant is her assertion that *Cosmopolitan*’s articles on sex and relationships define its international status and
likewise shape local discourse. Although her study focused specifically on Taiwan and its historical influence on the development of women’s sexuality, the impact of magazines remains significant, particularly as Yang stressed that magazines may impact the meanings of sexuality.

As magazines may act as cultural resources for women and take on the role of educator, they maintain a significant amount of influence, especially in how sexuality is framed and shaped. However, up to this point, the research presented has not articulated a clear definition of what sexuality is, only that it is a complex subject which may be shaped or marginalized by media, especially magazines. Therefore, it is necessary to look at other research, especially those involving sexual health and desire, to determine the elements of sexual identity.

Although Loe (2008) touched briefly on sexual dysfunction, especially FSD, or female sexual dysfunction, her observations were limited to how it was framed by medical marketing. Basson (2000) and Levine (2002), on the other hand, focused specifically on sexual desire and its relationship with sexual behavior. Basson concentrated on women’s sexual function and dysfunction within long-term relationships; she presented a new model for representing female dysfunction with the hope that it would help define it. What is significant about Basson’s findings is her assertion that women’s sexual drives and responses are based on a need for intimacy and not necessarily physical stimulation. Levine (2002) came to a similar conclusion in his article. It should be noted, however, that Levine’s article was not presented as research but as observations made by an experienced psychiatrist. Although his assertions were observations, they are important to understanding the nature of sexual desire and how it
relates to sexual identity, especially as *Cosmopolitan* magazine’s question-and-answer articles can include advice on libidos and sexual functioning.

Levine (2002) stated that sexual desire is central to discussions and concepts of sexual identity, as well as sexual function and dysfunction. He went on to explore the various aspects of sexual desire, such as its individual, private nature. Sexual desire, according to Levine, is also affected by a variety of factors, including personal relationships, social situations and age. It is important to note that Levine, like Basson (2000), asserted that sexual desire differs between men and women. While this statement may seem obvious, it is significant in that Levine acknowledges the need for women to feel emotionally involved with a partner and maintain a level of psychological intimacy in order to engage in intercourse. This assertion may not be true for all women, but it is a characteristic of women in general. In addition, Levine made a connection between sexual desire and culture. He stated that how a culture affects a person’s sexual desire and their need to express it may be uncertain, but it is certain that culture has an influence on sexual motivation and the “sexual mind,” as he terms it (Levine, 2002, p. 48).

Based on the research presented, magazines have an influential role in educating women on how to develop their sexual identities. In addition, sexual desire and emotional intimacy play a significant role in how a woman behaves sexually; this concept of sexual desire, according to Levine (2002), is also linked to sexual identity. Therefore, sexual identity can be said to include elements of sexual desire, behavior and emotional intimacy, and it can be learned through cultural resources like magazines. However, as Levine stated that culture has an influence, it is necessary to explore the research surrounding the impact of societal and cultural standards on female sexuality.
Henslin (1978), in particular, focused on the impact of cultural standards on sexuality. Although his research incorporated changing sexual patterns and varying modes of sexuality, he determined that individual sexuality is learned from the collective’s view of it. Essentially, it is the community, or the culture, that determines how an individual learns about sexuality and how his or her innate sex drive and functionality will be developed. Furthermore, he wrote:

Depending on their location, individuals experience differential exposure to the normative-producing effects of their society’s social institutions…In this area would be included differences in ideas of how one ought to express sexuality, of what is considered desirable, undesirable but normal, borderline, or deviant, and how these differing ideas are related to differential exposure to social institutions. (Henslin, 1978, p. 7)

His work recognizes that individuals’ sexuality is determined by their culture and that differences in their backgrounds can determine normative sexual behavior. Henslin went on to state that the dominant perception of female sexuality in a culture can determine how an individual woman perceives her own. He asserted that women then strive to achieve what is the culturally appropriate, prevailing view of female sexuality. What makes Henslin’s statements relevant is that he confirmed that sexuality is learned; previous research (Jackson, 2005; Kehily, 1999) also asserted that women, especially young women, learn sexuality from resources like magazines. Additionally, Henslin asserted that there is an impact of societal views or standards on an individual. Therefore, societal and cultural expectations for sexuality and magazines play significant roles in defining, teaching or shaping sexuality.

Wiseman (1976) also asserted that cultural expectations play a significant role in sexuality. She explained that sexuality, especially across cultural lines, is determined by society’s views and promotion of normative behavior. She wrote:
In one way or another humans have attempted to regulate the sex lives of their fellows since the beginning of time, telling them with whom it is suitable to meet, with whom it is suitable to have intercourse, and with whom it is suitable to marry for the purpose of having a family. (Wiseman, 1976, p. 2)

Wiseman also stated that acceptable sexual techniques and public displays of affection are refereed by socially constructed norms. As these norms determine what is socially acceptable and what is not, the norms themselves will vary across cultures. Similarly, sexual pleasure derived from sexual intercourse must be learned. Therefore, standards for sexuality develop across cultures – though cultures can maintain different standards – and are taught.

Petras (1973) made a similar conclusion: sexual behavior is governed by social behavior. He emphasized that dating determines sexual behavior and teaches what is acceptable. Although Henslin (1978) and Wiseman (1976) mentioned dating and the influence peers can have on a woman’s perceptions of sexuality, Petras (1973) went more in depth by stating that dating “is one of the most explicit ways for learning that there exists a marked discrepancy between the officially propagated or ‘ideal’ values of society, the ‘real’ values, and the actual behavior that occurs in certain situations” (p. 80). As he asserted that sexuality is first learned in childhood and adolescence, sexual identities will continue to develop into adulthood, though those identities are fluid and dynamic, not static. Therefore, based on his research, societal and cultural expectations for sexuality and social behaviors, like dating and marrying, serve to shape and influence the ways in which people perceive sexuality. As it has also already been pointed, these behaviors must be learned, and one of the cultural resources that exists to teach these
standards is magazines. However, it is important to note the role that *Cosmopolitan* magazine plays in this teaching of societal and cultural norms.

In his study, McNair (2002) examined the impact of *Cosmopolitan* on women’s sexuality. Although his research focused on a more general view of sex within the media, he did note that *Cosmopolitan* plays a unique but influential role in society. He stated that Helen Gurley Brown’s *Sex and the Single Girl* and *Cosmopolitan* ushered in a new generation of sexually assertive, professionally successful women. He further asserted that *Cosmopolitan* “pioneered the frank discussion of female sexuality and the role of women in work” (McNair, 2002, p. 23). *Cosmopolitan*, according to McNair, introduced the sexualized women of the 1990s and embraced more explicit language, both in verbal and visual language. He also wrote that *Cosmopolitan* “assumed a sexually active reader, and routinely advised her on the best methods of giving and getting pleasure, within or outside of a steady relationship” (McNair, 2002, p. 118). Similarly, Gauntlett (2008) noted the impact of *Cosmopolitan* on the ability for women to have a resource for sex. He wrote, “*Cosmo’s* assertion of women’s right to enjoy sex, and to talk about it, was quite radical, and this new discourse brought other changes.” (Gauntlett, 2008, p. 57). He also noted that *Cosmopolitan* offers a variety of articles on sexual positions and techniques, and that, in terms of sexual mores, *Cosmopolitan* has little respect for tradition. Therefore, *Cosmopolitan* became an outlet for women in society to not only seek information about sex but also to talk about it. As such, it is possible that *Cosmopolitan* became, and still is, a cultural resource for women to learn about sexuality.

Farvid and Braun (2006) also noted that *Cosmopolitan* plays a significant role in teaching women about sexuality. As magazines like *Cosmopolitan* can provide ample
evidence of sociocultural messages of sexuality, and femininity and masculinity, the researchers focused their study on the construction and deconstruction of women’s sexuality. They hypothesized that women’s sexuality, as portrayed in women’s magazines *Cosmopolitan* and *Cleo*, the Australasian equivalent of *Cosmopolitan*, is constructed based on depictions of male and female sexuality. As the two genders’ sexuality may occur in tandem, the combination of the two, especially as both may be emphasized in women’s magazines, provide a standard for how female sexuality may be learned and developed. Furthermore, according to Farvid and Braun, *Cosmopolitan’s* emphasis on emancipated sex and its subsequent development of the “fun, fearless female” present feminine sexuality as both desired and dominant. *Cosmopolitan* therefore acts as the medium in which discourses on sexual identity, femininity and masculinity reign supreme. The researchers also examined male sexuality, and found that even though sexuality is a key ingredient in a successful women’s magazine, the emphasis is placed on a man’s sexuality, particularly his pleasure and desires. They concluded that these magazines encourage women to maintain self-confidence in their sexuality and femininity; by doing so, a woman may then be able to manipulate a man into being her partner.

Until this point, what has not been addressed is the impact that a male figure can maintain over a women’s sexuality; in the case of the research presented, this impact is seen through written depictions of male sexuality and stereotypes, particularly as they appear in *Cosmopolitan*.

In addressing male stereotypes, Kim and Ward (2004) assessed reading motivations, femininity ideologies, and sexual attitudes of college-age *Cosmopolitan* and
Seventeen readers. The researchers found that frequent readers of adult-focused magazines were more likely to reject male stereotypes of men being emotionally inept or unskilled and sexual predators. They also found that these adult-focused *Cosmopolitan* magazine readers were less likely to view sex as risky behavior. These frequent readers were also less likely to censor themselves. Conversely, frequent readers of teen-focused magazines had stronger support for male stereotypes and were more likely to equate sex with risk. What Kim and Ward found, however, that reinforces the conclusions of Farvid and Braun (2006), is that the frequent readers of adult-focused magazines who read *Cosmopolitan* solely for sexual advice were more likely to support both the male sexual stereotype and the sexually assertive female role.

Ménard and Kleinpatz (2007) further focused on the sexual content of *Cosmopolitan* and the stereotypes the magazine can present. The researchers used qualitative and quantitative measures to determine the specific content of messages promoting sexual satisfaction used by men’s and women’s magazines. By focusing their study on five components – technical/mechanical/physical factors, variety, relationship factors, psychological factors and pre-sex preparation – the researchers determined that advice on what constituted “great sex” was based on sexual and gender role stereotypes. They also found that this advice was framed in a way that promoted narrow sexual scripts and provided contradictory messages. In the case of “great sex,” women’s magazines promote the idea that such an experience can only occur as a result of the acknowledgment of physiological and psychological differences between men and women. In other words, the experience can only occur if women are in an intimate, caring and long-term relationship that has “chemistry.” In addition, the researchers found that
*Cosmopolitan* provided the most sexual tips, almost double and triple the amount of tips provided by *Glamour* and *Redbook*. In a particularly interesting conclusion, they also found that men’s magazines had few, if any sexual tips, while women’s magazines were filled with “tips;” in this case, the researchers concluded that there is an assumption that men are naturally skilled at providing “great sex.” This conclusion also feeds into the male sexual stereotype earlier identified by Kim and Ward (2004). Based on this research, it would also seem that *Cosmopolitan* takes note of the fact that women need a sense of emotional intimacy when engaging in sexual activities, a point that both Levine (2002) and Basson (2000) made.

In examining the influences on sexuality and sexual identity, some conclusions can be drawn. First, sexuality is a complex concept, one that can be muddied by external messages, like those of medical marketers, or marginalized as primarily physical. However, additional research has shown that emotional intimacy and sexual desire play a role in developing female sexuality. In addition, sexuality is something that must be learned, either from society or a secondary institution, like magazines. As one of those magazines, *Cosmopolitan* has an influential role in how women learn about and develop their own sexuality. Furthermore, *Cosmopolitan* incorporates the role of the male, whether he is stereotypical or not, in helping women develop their sexuality.

**Sexual linguistics**

While it has been established that magazines, such as *Cosmopolitan*, play an important role in teaching women about sexuality, the kind of language that appears in *Cosmopolitan* and what it means has not been explored. Furthermore, as cultural and
societal norms play a significant role in sexuality, they can likewise play a role in the language used to speak about sex. Research has shown that there is a correlation between perceptions of sexuality, cultural and societal standards for sexuality, and language. Furthermore, research has indicated that the use of word choices serve to distinguish language used by men and women and can affect individuals’ perceptions of themselves or members of the opposite gender.

It is important to note, however, that the study of linguistics is complex, and recent research has focused primarily on gender differences in language. The linguistics used by *Cosmopolitan* may not reflect these differences as the magazine is geared toward women. Therefore, in the research that is presented, it is acknowledged that sexual linguistics incorporates gender and queer linguistics, but the emphasis is placed on the importance of word choices and the link between sociocultural standards and language.

Gilbert and Gubar (1985) noted in their essay that culture has long had a hand in shaping sexual linguistics. They wrote

> For if language is a process of cultural artifice that both distances and defines nature, then it would seem that its workings might well embody the bodily differences through which each human being first confronts the fundamental sexuality of his or her own nature (Gilbert & Gubar, 1985, p. 515).

What the writers continued to focus on is the relationship between female and male language and the power struggle that can lie within, as male linguistics have historically dominated discussions of female sexuality. They went on to discuss the impact of the symbolic contract, and how it is influenced by patriarchal cultures’ views of gender difference. While this kind of relationship between male and female linguistics may not
appear in *Cosmopolitan*, Gilbert and Gubar make an important point that sexual language can be shaped by culture.

Bucholtz and Hall (2004) take a deeper look at the relationship between linguistics and sexuality. While their study took on three issues by focusing on queer linguistics, suggesting a desire-centered approach to sexual linguistics rather than an identity-centered one, and examining social subjectivity and intersubjectivity, they noted the connection between language and sexuality. They came to a number of conclusions involving theoretical frameworks of sexuality and the misperceptions of queer linguistics and sexuality; however, they also noted that sexuality, and the resulting linguistics, are based outside of one’s psyche and appear in a cultural, social and political world (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004). While their study was complex and explored a variety of aspects of sexual linguistics, their conclusion touched on how sexual linguistics can be shaped by culture and society.

While Bucholtz and Hall (2004) focused on the thematic frameworks that act as a basis for queer linguistics and the relationship between sexuality and language, Eckert (1998) concentrated on sociolinguistics and word usages. She stated that language is way to communicate referential meaning; what this statement means in terms of society is that linguistics are constructed to reflect expressions of social meaning, such as emotion, attitude and social identity. Therefore, as she points out, language can reflect class, age, gender and ethnicity as well as the linguistic meanings and nuances of community. While her study went on to examine the word choices used by high school students, she noted the differences in word choices, specifically those termed standard and vernacular. Although these are spoken terms, and *Cosmopolitan* uses written words, both are
Goodenough (1981) focused specifically on the relationship between language and culture. He stated that culture is “learned and forms a body of tradition within society” (Goodenough, 1981, p. 49). While this definition may appear simple, Goodenough pointed out that culture, like linguistics, can be complex. Moreover, the material manifestations of what is learned from society are termed “cultural artifacts.” It could be possible that as Jackson (2005) and Kehily (1999) noted the role of magazines as cultural resources, they can also be termed cultural artifacts that represent what is learned in society. Furthermore, Goodenough identified the link between culture and society and linguistics. He wrote

Human societies, then, differ from one another in their linguistic makeup – in the languages and dialects in which their members have some competence and in the extent to which each of these languages and dialects is competently represented (Goodenough, 1981, p. 31).

Although Goodenough focused on the elements of culture, language and society, his establishment of the relationship between linguistics and sociocultural standards is significant. What remains to be seen is how specific word choices may reflect those standards.

Trenholm and Todd-de-Mancillas (1980), however, concentrated on such word choices. They noted that there is a distinct difference on word meanings, such as when a woman is referred to as a “chick” or “girl” rather than as a “woman.” By focusing on the sexism that can exist between men and women, the researchers were able to identify various patterns in word choices and linguistics. While the researchers examined sexist
language and not necessarily sexual language, they noted that linguistics can have an impact on meaning, both in terms of content and the relationship between the speaker and the receiver. What makes Trenholm and Todd-de-Mancillas’s conclusions relevant to the study of sexual linguistics and *Cosmopolitan* is its identification of the impact of word choices, particularly between the two people communicating. Clearly, *Cosmopolitan* is not speaking to someone, but it is conveying a verbal message that the reader receives. The language *Cosmopolitan* uses could then affect the perceptions of the reader towards herself or the sexual content of the magazine.

From the research presented so far, it would seem that there is a link between sexual linguistics and social and cultural norms. In addition, men and women differ in their construction and usages of words, which can serve to reflect or affect their perceptions. What is significant at this point is how word choices can be applied to the sexual linguistics that appear in *Cosmopolitan*.

In examining word choices as they appeared in *Cosmopolitan*, Machin and van Leeuwen (2003) noted the magazine’s use of trendy, sexual words. The researchers found the international editorial teams of *Cosmopolitan* sought to copy the “cool,” streetwise language appearing in the American version of *Cosmopolitan*. In this case, the trendy language became a new way of describing sexual acts that other cultures had yet to use. The researchers also found that the purpose of these words and *Cosmopolitan*’s conversational style was to reclassify normative behavior. In a later study, Machin and van Leeuwen (2005) further explored the linguistic style of *Cosmopolitan*. They focused on the lifestyle of the “fun, fearless female” that *Cosmopolitan* promotes. By analyzing two monthly editions (October and November 2001) of 44 versions of *Cosmopolitan* and
conducting interviews with editorial staff, they concluded that there are three different styles: individual, social and lifestyle. They then analyzed how various linguistic elements – fashion captions, advertising, direct address, the style of the expert, the style of the street and conversational style – use the three identified styles. The researchers came to the conclusion that *Cosmopolitan*’s linguistic style has been deliberately designed, and though each cultural edition of *Cosmopolitan* may use that style in individual ways, it, like the *Cosmo* brand, is global. What has not yet been explored, however, is how cultural editions of *Cosmopolitan* may differ in their use of linguistics, even if they use the overarching *Cosmo* brand.

Based on the research presented, there is a link between sexual linguistics and cultural norms. Additional research has shown that word choices, especially between men and women, can have an impact of perceptions. And, in looking at *Cosmopolitan* specifically and its use of word choices, it would seem that the magazine uses linguistics, especially trendy, cool, streetwise words, to describe sex acts and promote the *Cosmopolitan* “fun, fearless, female” lifestyle. What I do in this thesis, then, is look at the word choices used by *Cosmopolitan* and two of its international editions to see what patterns exist as the magazines are published in three different countries with, presumably, different cultural norms. In specific terms, this paper examines the word choices used to describe sexual acts and male and female anatomy.

*Sexual discourse*

While the research focusing on sexual linguistics has indicated the impact of word choice and its link with sociocultural norms, it is necessary to take a deeper look at sexual
discourse to see if it is similarly linked to such norms. Research has indicated that not only is sexual discourse shaped by norms, it is also strongly affected by the media, including magazines.

In her exploration of the discourse used in describing women in sports, Stevenson (2002) not only noted the relationship between sexual discourse and perceptions, but the powerful role the media plays. She asserted that the discourse involving women is typically sexualized. Historically, when women athletes did not appear to fit the feminine stereotype and looked too powerful, strong or masculine, discourse deemed these women as “other” or sexually ambiguous. On the other hand, for women who did fit the feminine stereotype, they were exploited by the media to promote the sport. In this case, the media played a significant role in how women athletes were perceived. Although her study focused primarily on the discourse of the Australian Open, women athletes’ performances and their subsequent portrayal by the media, Stevenson did establish a link between women, sexuality, discourse and the media.

Gauntlett (2008) further emphasized the link between the media, sexuality and discourse. He identified discourse as a “way of talking about things’ within a group, culture or society; or a set of ideas within a culture which shapes how we perceive the world” (Gauntlett, 2008, p. 18). In Cosmopolitan, in particular, Gauntlett noted that the sexually explicit discourse was considered revolutionary as it presented a provocative discussion of sexual matters that may have earlier been perceived as intimate. This shift in discourse may have changed the ways in which women perceived and communicated about their own sexuality, thus making Cosmopolitan an important resource. This
development is an important reason for analyzing whether differences among international versions of the magazine are significant.

In exploring communication involving sexuality, Reinholtz, Muehlenhard, Phelps and Satterfield (1995) delved into the issue of cultural norms and language. They noted that through media, such as magazines and television, cultural assumptions about sexuality are both created and perpetuated. The researchers also acknowledged that modes of communication, like magazines such as *Cosmopolitan*, and the language used not only reflect cultural norms and values but they also shape those norms and values (Reinholtz, Muehlenhard, Phelps & Satterfield, 1995). The researchers went on to indicate the impact of sexual discourse on sexuality; they wrote

Language serves a highly influential role in the creation of a mutually agreed upon reality. Our conceptualization of human sexuality, for example, is a product of our culture and language and reflects but one way of understanding human sexual experience (Reinholtz, Muehlenhard, Phelps & Satterfield, 1995, p. 143).

Although the researchers focused primarily on sexual coercion, their description of the relationship between the media, language and social norms is significant. While this relationship was explored in the examination of sexual linguistics, it seems that it can also be said that sociocultural standards maintain an influence over discourse. What is important is if this relationship can be seen in international editions of a popular magazine like *Cosmopolitan*.

Machin and Thornborrow (2003) focused specifically on the sexual discourse of *Cosmopolitan*. In their exploration of the discursive elements of *Cosmopolitan*, they noted the impact of the magazine’s global brand, which they identified as “a set of representations and values that are not indissolubly tied to a specific product or products”
(Machin & Thornborrow, 2003, p. 454). Although each culture’s version of *Cosmopolitan* might differ, the researchers determined that all magazines contain a common element: the *Cosmo* brand. This “brand” promotes independence, fun and power through sexuality. In addition, they noted that this branding is consistent across cultural lines. What needs to be explored, then, is not how the *Cosmo* brand exists in international editions of *Cosmopolitan*, but how those editions might differ in their approach to discourse.

In looking at one international version, Erjavec (2006) explored the textual devices used in Slovenia’s *Cosmopolitan*. Using critical discourse analysis, she determined that the sex, love and relationship section in *Cosmopolitan* focused on a prescriptive discourse, one that promoted normative sexual behavior. She noted that the discourse used and the conversational style of the articles were an effective means of identifying the boundaries of normal sexual behavior and abnormal sexual behavior. She also found that these articles employed imperative mood and prescriptive vocabulary. In order for *Cosmopolitan* to be useful in Slovenia, Erjavec determined that the magazine uses a common sense construction based on pseudo-intimate, pseudo-scientific and prescriptive discourse. What needs to be seen is if such a pattern of prescriptive discourse promoting normative sexual behavior might occur in other international editions of *Cosmopolitan* magazine.

As sexual discourse may be used by *Cosmopolitan*, it also, as indicated by the research presented, may be shaped by social and cultural norms. Furthermore, as the magazine may promote a frank, provocative and prescriptive discourse, it has a significant influence in presenting to readers what might be normative. As Erjavec (2006)
asserted that one version of the magazine promoted normative behavior, it needs to be
determined if other editions similarly promote normative behavior.

**Normative**

In order to analyze editions of magazines to see if they promote normative
behavior, it is necessary to first look at how normative behavior is structured, what kind
of link it has with sexuality and the media, and how it can be affected by social and
cultural norms. Social and cultural norms, in particular, have played a central role in the
constructions of sexuality, sexual linguistics and sexual discourse as it may shape the way
these three concepts are developed and how they appear in magazines. Therefore, it is
important to note if normative behavior is likewise shaped by these norms as this effect
may be reflected in international editions of *Cosmopolitan*; because these magazines
appear in different cultures, the normative behavior they promote can be shaped by the
existing and potentially different norms and values.

Ajzen (1991) defined “normative beliefs” as those that are concerned with the
likelihood that important individuals or groups – the ingroup – will approve or
disapprove of a given behavior. He also asserted that normative beliefs determine
subjective norms, which are the perceived social pressures to perform a specific behavior.
Based on this statement, it would seem that normative beliefs play a significant role in
how people feel they should behave. What this assertion means for *Cosmopolitan* is that
if the magazine is a cultural resource looked to by women as a way to learn about
sexuality, it holds a significant amount of influence. Therefore, if the magazine presents
normative behavior as it has “approved” it, readers might feel pressured to behave in the
way the magazine encourages. Although Ajzen’s research was grounded in the theory of planned behavior, his definition of normative beliefs and its influence on subjective norms can serve as a basis for determining the kind of normative behavior that *Cosmopolitan* may promote.

However, other research has contradicted some of Ajzen’s (1991) findings. Armitage and Connor (2001) found that the subjective norm has been considered a fairly weak predictor of behavior as actions driven primarily by attitude may be a separate category (Armitage & Connor, 2001). They then stated that a variety of factors of normative conduct may independently determine behavioral intentions. What is emphasized, however, is that, according to the expectancy-value model of the theory of planned behavior, normative beliefs relate directly to how an individual will approve or disapprove of behavior that is held by individuals or groups, such as society as a whole. Therefore, the same assertion could be made of *Cosmopolitan*’s influence; as a resource looked to for guidance and learning, it may reflect the views of “society” and be interpreted as belonging to an ingroup. Readers may then look to the magazine as it promotes normative behavior.

Based on the assertions made by Ajzen (1991) and Armitage and Connor (2001), it has been asserted that *Cosmopolitan* could reflect normative behavior in its pages as readers may view it as a valuable source and member of an ingroup. However, *Cosmopolitan*’s promotion of normative behavior incorporates sexual behavior, which neither Ajzen nor Armitage and Connor addressed. Therefore, it is necessary to determine if there is any kind of link between normative beliefs and any subsequent sexual behavior.
Through surveying 84 women, Hamblin (1983) examined male power and the role of normative behavior in heterosexual relationships by identifying what is “real” or “normal” when couples engage in sexual intercourse. She wrote:

> For women these definitions and expectations are imposed upon us in three ways – first, by constant reinforcement by the culture, secondly, by the actual sexual behaviour of men towards us, and thirdly, by our own internalisation of those beliefs (Hamblin, 1983, p. 109).

Previous research (Ménard & Kleinpatz, 2007; Kim & Ward, 2004) has shown how male roles may be perpetuated in magazines like *Cosmopolitan* and how it may affect women reader’s perceptions. For example, Ménard and Kleinpatz (2007) stated that men were depicted as being wild and animalistic, but defenseless against certain sex tricks while women were depicted as only enjoying sex for her partner’s sake (p. 13). Although Hamblin focused on society and men’s demand as two separate influences, when it comes to a magazine like *Cosmopolitan*, which may reflect cultural standards and provide normative behavior for how men enjoy the sexual pleasure female readers can give them, the two influences may be combined. As stated earlier, if women view *Cosmopolitan* as a resource for learning, it is possible that they may then internalize the magazine’s messages on what is “normal” and “real.”

Normative beliefs and behaviors can be transmitted to individuals as they perceive what behavior society or an ingroup approves or disapproves. As a cultural resource that serves to help readers learn their sexuality, *Cosmopolitan* can be viewed as part of that ingroup. Likewise, as magazines can reflect sociocultural standards, *Cosmopolitan* may also reflect society’s standards. Finally, as the magazine also incorporates male pleasure, it may present to the reader information on men’s views of sex and female behavior during sexual activities. As a result of all of these factors,
Cosmopolitan readers may adjust their behavior to fit what they perceive to be “normal” and “real.” Therefore, in this thesis, normative behavior refers to any behavior that is prescribed by Cosmopolitan.

Social construction of reality

Based on the research so far, social and cultural standards play a significant role in not only the development of sexuality and sexual behaviors, but also in sexual linguistics, sexual discourse, and the perceptions of normative behavior. As a result of these observations, it seems as though Berger and Luckmann’s (1966, 2002) theory of social construction of reality theory can explain the relationship culture has with these concepts.

Social construction of reality theory, according to Berger and Luckmann (1966, 2002), asserts that human behavior becomes embedded in society, therefore making reality constructed by man. Additionally, the control of humans through patterns of conduct is inherent to institutionalization. They wrote, “…Human sexuality is socially controlled by its institutionalization in the course of the particular history in question” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 43). Furthermore, in exploring sexuality in social construction of reality, the researchers also noted that “human sexuality is directed, sometimes rigidly structured, in every particular culture” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 49). Therefore, not only does social construction of reality provide for the theory that sexuality is a creation by society, but it also provides for normative behaviors, specifically those involving sexuality. Based on the research presented, this theory
accounts for the influence of culture on sexual identities and behaviors, and potentially the various expressions of sexuality, such as sexual linguistics and discourse.

Travis and White (2000) asserted that sexuality and sexual behaviors are controlled social constructs. In their analysis, the researchers stated that social construction of reality provides a framework for sexuality. They said that sexuality is “negotiated between people and groups and emerges as a result of normative standards about what is both typical and desirable” (Travis & White, 2000, p. 238). Furthermore, they went on to state

Although sexuality may be experienced as a personal and highly private aspect of the self, social and political frameworks fundamentally shape the ways in which we think about and experience sexuality. These frameworks encompass norms, expectations, labels, habits, customs, judgments, values, and social scripts of sexuality and sexual behavior (Travis & White, 2000, p. 239).

Therefore, it is possible to say that these frameworks, which may be a reflection of society, significantly influence the norms involving sex. Furthermore, while sexuality might be private, it is not excluded from outside influences. Society and culture could strongly shape how sexuality is constructed, both as a concept and in individuals’ lives. What remains to be seen, however, is how this influence of social and cultural standards for sexual normality is seen in Cosmopolitan and its international editions.

Swidler (1986) asserted that culture, which she defines as “symbolic vehicles of meaning, including beliefs, ritual practices, art forms, and ceremonies, as well as informal cultural practices such as language, gossip, stories, and rituals of daily life,” has a causal role in human action (Swidler, 1986, p. 273). She stated that there are two explanations for why people of various cultural backgrounds behave differently in similar situations: people live in “settled lives” or “unsettled lives.” Settled lives account for
strategies of action, while unsettled lives accept existing strategies of action while pursuing new ones. However, she determined these two “lives” are not completely different from each other, and culture is not a static concept, but an evolving one. While she went on to discuss the models of cultural influence, she noted that cultures will seek out resources to determine their actions; in her study, resources were more abstract and provided by the culture. However, in terms of *Cosmopolitan*, which previous researchers have determined could be a cultural resource, it is possible that, in more concrete terms, the magazine provides information that not only reflects culture standards, but also allows readers to develop actions. It should be noted that Swidler did not incorporate magazines in her study and she focused on culture in terms of theory, but her study is important for its assertion of the causal nature of culture.

Based on Berger and Luckmann (1966) and subsequent research, social construction of reality theory, for the purposes of this paper, allows for the assertion that sexuality and human behavior are socially constructed. Moreover, culture plays a causal role in determining behavior. Therefore, *Cosmopolitan*, as the subject of this paper, may reflect the socially constructed norms of sexual behavior and subsequently urge what society deems normative behavior. However, *Cosmopolitan’s* role may not be so easily explained as its international editions may differ in their sociocultural norms, and could be viewed as radical in some countries and conventional in others. What I examine is how *Cosmopolitan* and two of its international editions may vary in terms of sexual linguistics, discourse and prescribed normative behavior, all of which may be influenced by differing social and cultural standards.
Research Questions

The guiding research questions are the following:

RQ1. *How do Cosmopolitan, Cosmopolitan France and Cosmopolitan India magazines differ in their uses of sexual linguistics and discourse?*

RQ2. *In what ways does Cosmopolitan magazine urge normative behavior and push the envelope of pre-existing social and behavioral norms?*

The hypotheses guiding the research are:

H1. Cosmopolitan, Cosmopolitan France and Cosmopolitan India *adjust their sexual linguistics and discourse based upon the norms and values existent in each country.*

H2. Cosmopolitan *is more likely to urge normative behavior by presenting information with an educational discourse and is more likely to push the envelope by framing sexual acts or positions as deviant and provocative.*
Methodology

In this study, I look at the differences in how *Cosmopolitan, Cosmopolitan France* and *Cosmopolitan India* write about sex, analyze word choices and tone, and use a content and textual analysis to examine the normative messages.

The materials used for this study are sexual articles from four issues of *Cosmopolitan, Cosmopolitan France* and *Cosmopolitan India*. These magazines were chosen to potentially show a variety in word choices, tone and messages used in talking about sex.

Overall, I look at the following textual elements of each article:

- References to sex and sex acts
- References to male and female anatomy
- Tones (if *Cosmopolitan* addresses readers as naïve, insecure, manipulative, empowered or health-minded)
- Any emphasis on reader pleasure, male pleasure or mutual pleasure
- Underlying discourse (whether it is prescriptive or other)
- Declarative sentences made by *Cosmopolitan* towards the reader

These elements may vary between articles. For example, some articles may use a variety of tones, and some may only use one or two. Some articles may also emphasize both reader pleasure and mutual pleasure, and some may not emphasize mutual pleasure at all.

Additionally, as this study focuses on the differences between *Cosmopolitan, Cosmopolitan France* and *Cosmopolitan India*, the elements are compared to each other as they may reflect general trends in each country’s magazine. In addition to being
compared, each of these elements are analyzed and discussed in terms of the context in which they appear. For example, *Cosmopolitan* might frequently address readers as being insecure, both in sexual and relationship situations, while *Cosmopolitan France* might address readers as being insecure in terms of their body image. However, references to sex acts and male and female anatomy are quantified and presented in tables. They are then discussed to determine whether there are any patterns in the word choices that appear in *Cosmopolitan, Cosmopolitan France* and *Cosmopolitan India.*

As this methodology uses textual analysis, I do make some interpretation. According to McKee (2003), the researcher makes an educated guess at what the most likely interpretations of the text might be. Therefore, the foundations for this study are standards set by previous researchers. For example, when analyzing the underlying discourse, I look to Erjavec (2006), who said that prescriptive discourse “instructs or teaches the readers how to have good sex…and defines the boundaries between normal and pathological female sexual behavior” (p. 46). In looking at the variety of tones and pleasure, I look to Machin and Thornborrow’s (2003) findings. In their analysis of 44 editions of *Cosmopolitan*, they noted that in the context of sex articles, the magazine addressed a naïve reader, transgression, pleasing the other and go-getting. Based on their descriptions, I look at how the three editions of *Cosmopolitan* might address naïveté, insecurity, manipulation, empowerment, health and pleasure as it applies to the reader. In examining word choices and the context in which they occur, I rely on the standard set by Farvid and Braun (2006). Their analysis of *Cosmopolitan* and the socially constructed role of sexuality used a thematic analysis that included any reference to sex and sexuality and the context in which it occurred. Although I am not using a thematic analysis, any
reference to sex and its context are analyzed as they appear in Cosmopolitan, Cosmopolitan France and Cosmopolitan India.

The ways in which Cosmopolitan and its sister publications address the elements presented may be shaped by cultural norms. Research has shown that these norms play a significant role in how sexuality, sexual linguistics and sexual discourse are formed. These norms have also played a role in affecting normative behavior as individuals will behave in the way they perceive society will approve. As Cosmopolitan, Cosmopolitan France and Cosmopolitan India are published in countries that may have different cultural and societal norms, the sexual content and messages may vary. Therefore, it is expected that Cosmopolitan, Cosmopolitan France and Cosmopolitan India have distinctly different approaches to sex.

The United States is the birthplace of Cosmopolitan and as part of the “West,” it has helped set the standard for the sexual content of the magazine. Grewal and Kaplan (2001) noted that “the United States and Europe are figured as modern and thus as the sites of progressive social movements, while other parts of the world are presumed to be traditional, especially in regard to sexuality” (p. 669). Although their study focused more on lesbian and gay sexuality, their study encompassed transnational views of sexuality. In this case, the United States appears to be more sexually progressive than countries outside of the West, and the content of Cosmopolitan can likewise reflect this difference.

Carr (2002) also pointed out the United States sets the stage for the sexual content of Cosmopolitan. He wrote that Hearst, the publisher of the magazine, is tapping into the international market. By doing so, it has had to make certain adjustments as it can be difficult to translate sell lines into 28 languages, though the universal message of the
“fun, fearless female” remains. Furthermore, certain concessions for cultural standards must be made. In India, for example, no articles detailing sex positions are published, though India is the birthplace of the Kama Sutra (Carr, 2002). In France, on the other hand, the perception is much different. Carr noted that “in France, the editor, Anne Chabrol, also confronts a readership very comfortable -- even bored, she says -- with sexual matters” (p. 1). Based on the fact that United States promotes the sexual messages and content that appear in the international versions of *Cosmopolitan*, it acts as the standard by which France and India’s *Cosmopolitan* publications are measured. It should be noted, however, that Carr is not a researcher but a journalist; his assertions and observations are viewed within a journalistic context and not necessarily a scholastic one.

France, a country recognized for its liberal sexual attitudes, was chosen for its potential contrast in sexual explicitness with the U.S. and India. In her analysis of “puritan” American views on sex versus “promiscuous” French views on sex, Saguy (1997) found that the French are more tolerant toward marital infidelity, sex under the legal age of consent, homosexuality and prostitution. In addition, the study found that the French are more in support of “complete sexual freedom.” Although she noted that the U.S. and France are not extremes of each other when the study controlled for religiosity, class, gender and age, the two countries do appear in contrast with each other in terms of attitudes toward sex. Therefore, in this study, it is expected that *Cosmopolitan France* has more explicit language and encourage more provocative sexual practices and promiscuity.

India, a predominately Hindu society, was chosen for its contradictory view of sex and women. India is the birthplace of Kama Sutra, and society is more patriarchal. John
and Nair (1998) asserted that female sexuality in India has been mainly relegated to sexual assault, as female sexuality has been subject to patriarchal sexual practices. However, in Hindu myths, female sexuality is seen as excessive and threatening (John & Nair, 1998). Female sexuality is something that should be controlled; however, with its ancient and popular Kama Sutra and its predominately Hindu society, India presents a unique approach to sexuality. Additionally, Khanna and Price (1994) asserted that this control of sexuality began during British colonization of India; since that time, women in India have been fighting this traditional view of sexuality, which is still dominant. Sexuality has also taken on a different role of being viewed as “pleasurable, yet dangerous,” yet it is still controlled by long-held beliefs (Khanna & Price, 1994, p. 32). Finally, as asserted by Grewal and Kaplan (2001), countries outside of the West, like India, could be less progressive in terms of sex and sexuality. In this study, therefore, *Cosmopolitan India* is expected to use more conservative language, such as implicit references or euphemisms, and encourage more sexually conservative behavior.

Four issues each from *Cosmopolitan, Cosmopolitan France* and *Cosmopolitan India* are analyzed. These issues span the time period between April and September of 2009 and were the most recently available texts at the time of analysis. From *Cosmopolitan*, the June, July, August and September are examined; from *Cosmopolitan India*, which is written in English, the April, May, June and July issues are looked at; from *Cosmopolitan France*, the April, May, June and September issues are analyzed. *Cosmopolitan France* is written in French and was therefore translated by the researcher. Within these issues, sexual feature articles, sexual articles, and sexual question-and-answer columns are examined. Sexual feature articles are at least four pages long with a
full-page graphic or illustration. Sexual articles are between one and three pages and consist primarily of text. Sexual question-and-answer columns include “Ask him anything,” where female readers seek advice on sex or relationships from a male agony aunt, and “Ask Cosmo anything,” where female readers are given advice by Irma Kurtz.

The overall process involves carefully reading each article and marking any word references to sex acts and anatomy and any declarative sentences. These elements are then analyzed according to their context and meaning. The references are also then counted and organized into tables. Additionally, each article is carefully read and phrases or passages are marked if they appear to use a certain tone, promote an individual’s or mutual pleasure, and encourage specific behavior.
Results: Content Analysis

A total of 32 articles from 12 issues were analyzed for this study. Of these, *Cosmopolitan* had the most number of articles (16) and *Cosmopolitan France* had the least number of articles (5); *Cosmopolitan India* had 11 articles.

Table 1: Sample breakdown per type of article

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sexual feature</th>
<th>Sexual article</th>
<th>Sexual Q&amp;A</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cosmopolitan</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cosmopolitan France</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cosmopolitan India</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What is surprising about the breakdown of the articles is that it was expected that *Cosmopolitan France*, as a sexually open country, might have a substantial sex section. Contrary to this expectation, the magazine had only one sexual feature article per issue. While the magazine also had one sexual article, “Blog d’amour,” it was discontinued after the April 2009 issue. Additionally, *Cosmopolitan France* had no sexual question-and-answer articles; however, two of its sexual features stories, “Sexe: 5 complexes à laisser tomber,” or “Sex: 5 complexes to drop,” and “Qu’y entre l’orgasme et moi?” or “What’s between me and my orgasm?” addressed reader problems and insecurities about sex.

Another surprising development was the amount of articles in *Cosmopolitan India*. This magazine was expected to have a conservative approach to sex, but the magazine had the most number of sexual question-and-answer articles. One reason this
magazine had so many is that one is written from the perspective of a man, “Ask him anything,” and one is written from the perspective of a woman, “Ask Cosmo anything.” Cosmopolitan India was the only magazine to have “Ask Cosmo anything.” With the exception of the July 2009 issue, which did not have “Ask him anything,” these advice columns appeared in every issue.

All of the sex articles appearing in Cosmopolitan were written by Cosmopolitan staff writers. Similarly, all of the sex articles appearing in Cosmopolitan France were written by Cosmopolitan France staff writers. In Cosmopolitan India, however, only two of the articles, “We asked 115 guys what makes a girl hot” and “Ask him anything” were written by the Cosmopolitan India staff; the three remaining feature articles were taken directly from Cosmopolitan, though edits were made. Additionally, “Ask Cosmo anything” appeared to have been taken from the British version of Cosmopolitan. While this column has not appeared in Cosmopolitan for several years, it does still appear in some international editions. This borrowing of articles is talked about in the “Discussion” section.

References to sex

The following table illustrates the frequency of Cosmopolitan, Cosmopolitan France and Cosmopolitan India’s straightforward and euphemistic references to sex acts, intercourse and orgasms.
Table 2: *Cosmopolitan, Cosmopolitan France* and *Cosmopolitan India* references to having sex, sex acts and orgasm

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>References to having sex</th>
<th>References to sex and sex acts</th>
<th>References to orgasm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Euphemism</td>
<td>Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cosmopolitan</strong></td>
<td>52.3%</td>
<td>47.7%</td>
<td>59.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cosmopolitan France</strong></td>
<td>46.2%</td>
<td>53.8%</td>
<td>52.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cosmopolitan India</strong></td>
<td>44.8%</td>
<td>55.2%</td>
<td>72.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As *Cosmopolitan* had the most number of articles, it had the greatest number of references to sex. Although the magazine had a number of euphemisms that referenced having sex, many only appeared once. The actual verb, “to have sex,” appeared the most frequently at 52.3 percent; because of this tendency, it is possible to conclude that *Cosmopolitan* tended to favor the straightforward term.

In referencing sex and sex acts, *Cosmopolitan* covered a number of sexual activities, more than either *Cosmopolitan France* or *Cosmopolitan India*. However, *Cosmopolitan*’s use of the word “sex” dominated the linguistics; it appeared a total of 59 times and contributed to straightforward terms appearing 59.7 percent of the time. While other words for sex, such as “quickie,” were used, they only appeared a handful of times. Similarly, *Cosmopolitan* included different kinds of sex, such as “shower sex” and “phone sex,” and sex positions, like “woman-on-top,” but only a few times. Finally, given that *Cosmopolitan* had the greatest number of sex articles, it is logical that the magazine likewise included several sex acts, such as “dirty talk” and “69.” Despite the variety of sex acts, the majority appeared as straightforward terms, not euphemisms.
Like its references to sex and sex acts, *Cosmopolitan* tended to favor straightforward descriptions at 74.4 percent when referring to having an orgasm. While the euphemisms, such as “take you to O-town” are creative, and it is possible they could have been used to make the text more appealing, it seems fair to conclude that the magazine preferred using them sparingly in favor of clear-cut terms.

*Cosmopolitan France*, unlike *Cosmopolitan*, had the fewest number of articles, and therefore had fewer references to sex. In terms of percentages, as well, *Cosmopolitan France* deviated from the pattern set by *Cosmopolitan*, especially in terms of references to having sex and orgasm. Moreover, as *Cosmopolitan France* is written in French, the meanings of some of the terms used to describe sex are somewhat unclear. For example, the translation of “ébats” is best related to “frolic” or “cuddle,” while the translation for “câlin” is “cuddle with an affectionate, loving manner.” Likewise, “étreintes,” was best translated as “embraces.” None of these terms directly points to sex, but given the context of where they appeared, it was determined that they best referred to sex. Additionally, the verb “to have sex” is “avoir les relations sexuelles,” which never appeared, or “coucher avec (quelqu’un),” which only appeared twice; rather, “faire l’amour,” or “to make love” appeared to be the primary verb used to reference having sex. Additionally, “faire l’amour” implies that feelings are involved between the partners. However, the differences in how the magazine used terms were small (46.2 percent versus 53.8 percent), which leads to the conclusion that *Cosmopolitan France* did not strongly favor straightforward terms over euphemisms; rather, the two were used in almost equal proportion.
Like *Cosmopolitan*, *Cosmopolitan France* included references to descriptive sex positions. Additionally, the magazine included references to sex acts like role-playing and dirty talk, and tended to follow the pattern set by *Cosmopolitan* in terms of straightforward terms versus euphemisms. Although the magazine used euphemisms, like “harcèlements verbaux,” which refers to dirty talk, the percentages indicate that *Cosmopolitan France* used such euphemisms in almost equal measure with clear-cut terms. This conclusion, however, is important as it contradicts the expectation that *Cosmopolitan France* would have more explicit language. Rather, the linguistics of the magazine does not appear to point to directly explicit or implicit word usage.

The percentages referencing sex and sex acts have indicated that *Cosmopolitan France* does not strongly use explicit or implicit language. However, when it comes to references to orgasms, the magazine appears to take some sort of preference. “Plaisir” or “pleasure” appeared most frequently at 18 times; as a general term, plaisir can refer to any type of pleasure, though within the context of where it appeared, it referred specifically to orgasmic pleasure. Likewise, “orgasm” appeared more frequently than other descriptive verbs, like “lose yourself” or “exaggerate sexuality.” Additionally, “simuler” and “surjouer la sexualité” referred to faking one’s orgasm; however, when *Cosmopolitan France* did reference it, the magazine urged against simulating one’s pleasure.

Based on these findings, it seems fair to conclude that *Cosmopolitan France* did not use explicit language like expected, and did not appear to favor straightforward language or euphemisms. With the exception of references to orgasms, the magazine used both straightforward and euphemistic language in roughly equal measure.
Cosmopolitan India had several references to sex, though some have different meanings. “Hook up,” “fool around” and “mess around” can be vague terms that refer to anything from mild foreplay to actual intercourse. Based on the context in which they occurred, they appeared to reference sex; in most cases, the magazine included first-person testimonies to certain pleasurable techniques used while the woman and her partner were “hooking up” or “fooling around.” For example, in “Yes, you have a G-spot,” Cosmopolitan India quotes one girl as saying, “While we were messing around, my guy put one finger inside my vagina and then tilted my hips upward with his other hand” (May 2009, p. 134). On the other hand, terms such as “roll in the hay,” “do it,” “hump,” “go full-speed ahead” and “sleep with” directly reference sex. Like Cosmopolitan, Cosmopolitan India appeared to slightly favor the straightforward term of “to have sex” as it appeared 44.8 percent of the time. As a whole, Cosmopolitan India appeared to use straightforward terms more often than the euphemisms, some of which only appeared once.

In terms of referencing sex as noun, Cosmopolitan India seemed to prefer “sex,” which appeared 72.1 percent of the time. Like the other two magazines, Cosmopolitan India included references to sex positions, such as “from behind” and “missionary position,” and oral sex. However, Cosmopolitan India also referenced stripteases and lap dances, which neither of the other two magazines did. Based on the numbers that appeared, Cosmopolitan India did prefer “sex” over the over euphemisms, though the magazine was not euphemism-free when it came to sex or sex acts.

In referencing orgasm, Cosmopolitan India was similar to both Cosmopolitan and Cosmopolitan France in that it used the straightforward term, “orgasm,” more than any
euphemism. In addition, *Cosmopolitan India* used several creative descriptions, such as “double-your-pleasure” and “toe-clenching,” but when it came to actually referencing orgasms, the magazine preferred a direct use of the term.

Based on these findings, *Cosmopolitan India* closely paralleled the findings with *Cosmopolitan*, a logical conclusion as many of the articles in *Cosmopolitan India* originally came from *Cosmopolitan*. Although *Cosmopolitan India* did not appear to significantly or strongly use straightforward terms over euphemisms, the magazine did appear to have a tendency to use clear terms more frequently. This conclusion is important as *Cosmopolitan India* was expected to approach sex conservatively and with implicit language; the nature of the terms and the frequency in which they appear indicate that this expectation was wrong.

*References to male and female anatomy*

The following table details each magazine’s use of anatomically correct vocabulary versus euphemisms in terms of percentages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>References to male anatomy</th>
<th>References to female anatomy</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Euphemism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cosmopolitan</strong></td>
<td>88.7%</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cosmopolitan France</strong></td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>80.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cosmopolitan India</strong></td>
<td>71.4%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As *Cosmopolitan* appeared to use more straightforward terms than euphemisms when it came to sex, sex acts and orgasms, it was expected that this pattern would
continue with references to male and female anatomy. *Cosmopolitan* used several references to male anatomy, and the vast majority was straightforward and anatomically correct at 88.7 percent. What is significant about *Cosmopolitan*’s use of straightforward terms and the quantity of those terms is that, as a potential cultural resource, *Cosmopolitan* takes on a role of educator for readers who may not be aware of what constitutes male genitalia. Additionally, when *Cosmopolitan* used these terms, especially “meatu,” “corona,” “perineum,” “frenulum,” “glans” and “scrotum,” the magazine was educating the reader on where they were, what they looked like, and how to stimulate them during sexual activity (*Cosmopolitan*, September 2009, p. 134). Based on the frequency of straightforward terms, it seems fair to conclude that *Cosmopolitan* preferred those terms over euphemisms.

Like its references to male anatomy, *Cosmopolitan* used very few euphemisms to female anatomy, though they did appear. However, the clear, medically correct terms for female anatomy dominated the magazine’s references to anatomy at 96.4 percent. One aspect that is different between *Cosmopolitan*’s references to male and female anatomy is quantity. *Cosmopolitan* used many more terms for male anatomy, most likely due to the fact that magazine was presenting information on male genitalia and male pleasure for the reader, especially in articles like “100 naughty sex questions” and “50 ways to touch him there.” When writing about female anatomy, *Cosmopolitan* tended to reference body parts only in how they could be pleasured, perhaps under the assumption that female readers are more familiar with their own bodies than their partners’ bodies. Overall, *Cosmopolitan* appeared to prefer using clear, medically correct terms over euphemisms.
Unlike *Cosmopolitan*, *Cosmopolitan France* actually had very few references to male anatomy, and all of them referenced a man’s penis. Because *Cosmopolitan France* was different than *Cosmopolitan*, it is possible that *Cosmopolitan France* addresses a different readership, one that does not need to be educated on male anatomy.

In an interesting result and in complete contradiction to the pattern in *Cosmopolitan*, *Cosmopolitan France* addressed female anatomy more than male anatomy; in terms of percentages, however, *Cosmopolitan France* had a smaller percentage of straightforward terms. With articles like “Sexe: 5 complexes à laisser tomber” and “Qu’y entre l’orgasme et moi?” *Cosmopolitan France* addressed reader insecurities, particularly their body issues. Therefore, it is logical that *Cosmopolitan France* would appear to prioritize female anatomy over male anatomy. However, it is also true that the magazine potentially focuses more on reader issues involving their own anxieties and pleasure than issues involving male pleasure.

*Cosmopolitan India* had very few references to male anatomy; of those that did appear, one was a euphemism, which accounts for the magazines use of medically correct terms at 71.4 percent. Additionally, as to why *Cosmopolitan India* does not follow the pattern of *Cosmopolitan* in concentrating on male physicality at a higher percentage, it is possible that the magazine might focus more on educating women on their own pleasure. Although such a conclusion cannot be determined without further exploration into how *Cosmopolitan India* promotes pleasure, it is a possible reason.

Unlike *Cosmopolitan*, *Cosmopolitan India* appeared to frequently address female anatomy with straightforward terms at 91.4 percent. While *Cosmopolitan France* similarly addressed female anatomy, it is possible that each magazine did so in different
ways. *Cosmopolitan France* focused on body insecurities in two of its articles, which could be a reason why female anatomy was referenced. With *Cosmopolitan India*, it is possible that the magazine frequently addressed these body parts as a way to educate women on their own bodies, and not necessarily their body confidence. In articles like “Yes, you have a G-spot” and “What guys know about sex that you don’t!” readers were educated on their own bodies and masturbatory techniques. Therefore, it could be that *Cosmopolitan India* then focused on female body parts as a way to teach potentially naïve readers. This issue is further analyzed in the presentation of tones and discourse.

In answering part of RQ1 (*How do Cosmopolitan, Cosmopolitan France and Cosmopolitan India magazines differ in their uses of sexual linguistics and discourse?*), H1 said that *Cosmopolitan, Cosmopolitan France* and *Cosmopolitan India* adjust their sexual linguistics and discourse based upon the norms and values existent in each country. Based on the linguistic findings – the references to sex, sex acts, orgasm, male and female anatomy – H1 was correct to a degree. *Cosmopolitan, Cosmopolitan France* and *Cosmopolitan India* did use linguistics in different ways. *Cosmopolitan* tended to favor using straightforward terms and made more references to male anatomy than female. The reasoning behind this pattern could be that *Cosmopolitan* takes on an educating role, as it could act as a resource for women developing their sexuality. Moreover, as *Cosmopolitan* is the mother magazine and the standard by which the other magazines are compared, it is not surprising that it had the greatest quantity of references.

*Cosmopolitan France*, however, was expected to be markedly more open in its approach to sex. However, contrary to this expectation, *Cosmopolitan France* did not appear to frequently reference sex. Furthermore, the magazine did not significantly use
straightforward terms over euphemisms; rather, *Cosmopolitan France* used them in almost equal measure, indicating that the magazine uses less explicit language, at least in the samples examined. Finally, *Cosmopolitan France* did not appear to focus on male anatomy; rather the magazine focused more on female anatomy, indicating that it may focus more on the reader than on her partner. It is also possible that *Cosmopolitan France* concentrated on the female body in terms of reader insecurity.

*Cosmopolitan India*, on the other hand, was expected to be more conservative than *Cosmopolitan* in its references to sex and anatomy. However, as *Cosmopolitan India* took three of its sexual feature articles from *Cosmopolitan*, it defied the expectation and did not address aspects of sex and body parts in an implicit, careful way. Rather, *Cosmopolitan India* followed the pattern set by *Cosmopolitan* in its tendency to use straightforward terms over euphemisms. However, in referencing female and male anatomy, *Cosmopolitan India* focused more on female anatomy, perhaps as it might address naïve readers who may not be aware of how to please themselves.

Each magazine’s use of linguistics did differ from each other, but not in the expected ways. Although they contradicted the expectations, the magazines were unique; therefore, H1 was correct to a degree. However, because *Cosmopolitan France* and *Cosmopolitan India* were so different than expected, the ways in which they accommodate their readerships, and social and cultural norms, needs to be examined. This issue is further explored in the analysis of discourse.
Results: Textual Analysis

Tones

*Cosmopolitan, Cosmopolitan France* and *Cosmopolitan India* were analyzed to determine the tones they used when addressing readers. Based on Machin and Thornborrow’s (2003) descriptions of the ways in which *Cosmopolitan*’s sex articles addressed to readers, I noted the magazines wrote to readers as being naïve, insecure, empowered, manipulative and health-minded. It should be taken into account that the sample size was 32 articles; however, this number constitutes one-third of *Cosmopolitan*’s articles for the year, as the magazine is published monthly. Therefore, these findings are framed as a patterns found within the samples; in a larger sample, these findings could vary. Additionally, as textual analysis includes making an educated guess in interpreting the texts, my interpretations could be different from another researchers. However, my interpretation is based on previous research.

In addressing the naïve reader, I looked to Machin and Thornborrow’s (2003) analysis. According to the researchers, the naïve reader is unaware of her sexual prowess, though she is sexually active and has agency, and is the recipient of information provided by the sex articles in *Cosmopolitan* (Machin & Thornborrow, 2003). The researchers, however, focused specifically on “you” statements, as well as the integration of a series of discourses: personal accounts by other women, expert opinions and step-by-step instructions (Machin & Thornborrow, 2003). In the samples examined, “you” statements were present, as well as the integration of discourses, but not in every sample. Additionally, some “you” statements and the integration of discourses were better suited
to an insecure reader than a naïve reader. Therefore, statements assuming the
inexperience of the reader, though she may be sexually active, and her lack of knowledge
were classified as “naïve.” In the samples examined, the naïve reader is advised on how
to negotiate sex acts and pleasure with her partner, under the assumption that she might
be sexually experienced, but is not sexually skilled or very knowledgeable.

*Cosmopolitan* tends to address the naïve reader in terms of providing advice on
how to behave sexually and in relationships. In the “Ask him anything” column,
*Cosmopolitan* provides advice for the reader under the assumption that she lacks
knowledge in how to please herself or her partner. For example, in answering a reader’s
question about her new boyfriend’s insecurity over her ex-boyfriend’s well-endowed
penis, Jonathon Small, *Cosmopolitan*’s columnist, instructs

> Don’t compare your guy to your ex by beginning sentences with “You’re so much better than….” or “That was way more amazing than…” Instead, when you tell your boyfriend how good he is in bed, use superlatives like “You’re the best ever” or “That was the most amazing sex I’ve ever had.” And I don’t care if it’s a lie or not – you should definitely tell him “You’re the biggest I’ve ever seen” (*Cosmopolitan*, June 2009, p. 122).

In this case, the columnist is addressing “you” and a reader who is clearly sexually
experienced; however, she is considered “naïve” because she is unaware of how to
reassure and please her boyfriend in bed. In other articles, *Cosmopolitan* gives the naïve
reader information on her partner’s body parts and on how to perfect certain sex moves
and actions. In “50 sexy ways to touch him there,” *Cosmopolitan* informs the naïve
reader about her partner’s body parts and how to treat them. Even included in this article
is a chart of male genitalia, what it looks like, where it is located and how it should be
stimulated during sex. Additionally, in “100 naughty sex questions,” the reader is
couraged to “Go slowly, and allow your jaw frequent breaks during which you use
only your tongue” when giving oral sex (July 2009, p. 100). Again, in this case, the naïve reader is sexually experienced, but still lacking in essential knowledge, which

*Cosmopolitan* provides for her.

In addition to providing information for the reader on how to perform certain sex acts and please her partner, *Cosmopolitan* gives her information on how to enhance her own sexual experiences. Although she is experienced, the reader might lack confidence and knowledge or the ability to engage fully in sex. In “Yoga tricks that help you climax,” *Cosmopolitan* instructs

Nothing snuffs an orgasm faster than wondering whether you unplugged your hair straightener. To get back into the moment, try centering… You don’t need to have your eyes open the entire time (that would feel weird), but focusing on one spot initially will help you get in the zone (July 2009, p. 108).

In this case, the naïve reader is participating in sex, but is unable to concentrate on her pleasure or on the sex itself. With *Cosmopolitan*’s help, however, she is able to center herself and fully enjoy the experience. What is also interesting about this passage is *Cosmopolitan*’s use of familiar phrasing, such “You don’t need to have you eyes open the entire time (that would feel weird)…;” the magazine appears to be reaching out to the reader, perhaps trying to empathize with her feelings and establish a relationship.

In *Cosmopolitan*, the naïve reader is sexually experienced, but unknowledgeable; based on the samples, it is possible that *Cosmopolitan* takes on an educational role, informing the naïve reader not only how to discover ways to please herself, but also how to learn about her partner’s genitals and how to please him, both in and out of the bedroom. *Cosmopolitan India* likewise informs a naïve reader, though within different contexts and to a lesser degree.
Instead of just providing information, *Cosmopolitan India* at times takes on a condescending tone. For example, in the “Ask him anything” column, which is written by a *Cosmopolitan India* staff member, Jamal Sheikh, a reader wants to know why drunken males mistake her affectionate gestures for her wanting to initiate sex. Sheikh writes, “Um, what part of drunk don’t you understand?” (*Cosmopolitan India*, April 2009, p. 44).

In another article, “His biggest sex secrets,” *Cosmopolitan India* writes, “It’s a no brainer really that most men enjoy wild animalistic sex” (April 2009, p. 98). In these cases, it appears that the reader is addressed as though she is lacking in basic knowledge.

*Cosmopolitan India* also addresses the naïve reader with comfort. For example, in the “Ask Cosmo anything” column, the columnist writes

> You are a beautiful young person with the world before you; you deserve someone a whole lot more devoted and tender than a two-timing, self-indulgent jerk who doesn’t have the brains to know how lucky he is to have you (*Cosmopolitan India*, May 2009, p. 46).

In these cases, *Cosmopolitan India*, despite its condescending tone, also provides comfort and reassurance for the naïve reader, who may not be aware of her own self-worth, especially in relationships.

Finally, while *Cosmopolitan India* appears to be occasionally sensitive to the naïve reader and tries to establish a familiar, kind tone that encourages her to consider her own well-being, there are times when the naïve reader is counseled on how to please her man, much like in *Cosmopolitan*. In “His biggest sex secrets,” the magazine counsels the reader on how to behave in bed; she should be creative and enthusiastic, but not too aggressive as she might scare her partner away.

As a whole, *Cosmopolitan India* approaches the reader from three directions: explaining concepts and actions in a condescending manner, instructing how she should
behave in a relationship and how she may please her man, and guiding her on how she should behave in the bedroom as an individual. This approach, which, like *Cosmopolitan*, uses second person addresses and assumes the naïve reader’s experience, is different in its tone (both condescending and comforting) and context.

*Cosmopolitan France* was not found to address a naïve reader; rather, it appears that the magazine focuses primarily on an insecure reader. Although Machin and Thornborrow (2003) do not point directly to *Cosmopolitan* addressing insecurity, a model was developed based on the naïve reader. The “insecure reader” is addressed with “you” statements, but is more than sexually active; she is sexually experienced, but suffers from a lack of confidence in her body or her performance in bed. The guidance provided by *Cosmopolitan, Cosmopolitan France* and *Cosmopolitan India* does not address male pleasure, but focuses on building the insecure reader’s self-confidence and provides information to help her avoid embarrassment or shame in the future.

*Cosmopolitan France* focuses completely on the insecure reader with little to no mention of her partner, her partner’s actions or her partner’s perceptions. Rather, the magazine concentrates primarily on the reader’s physical insecurities and how to enhance those attributes or feel more confident about them. In “Qu’y a-t-il entre l’orgasme et moi,” *Cosmopolitan France* reassures a reader who feels self-conscious of her stretch marks after having a baby; the magazine tells her, “either you learn to live with your faults, knowing that they are only a small part of you, or you get rid of them in sports, diet, medicine or care products” (*Cosmopolitan France*, April 2009, p. 132). Similarly, in “Sexe: 5 complexes à laisser tomber,” *Cosmopolitan France* addresses various body concerns. The magazine advises women feeling anxious about their bodies, especially
their breasts or buttocks, to use flattering lighting and don supportive lingerie. In these situations, *Cosmopolitan France* reaches out to the insecure reader to assuage her fears about her own body. In some of the tips, *Cosmopolitan France* is encouraging; in others, the magazine urges the reader to engage in sexual positions that magnify her “erotic power” (*Cosmopolitan France*, May 2009, p. 136).

*Cosmopolitan* was found to address the insecure reader within the context of her performance in bed. The magazine gives her tips on how to feel comfortable and confident while utilizing various sex positions to take attention away from sensitive body areas. In “100 naughty sex questions,” *Cosmopolitan* writes, “Lean in close, so you’re face-to-face. That way, your belly and breasts won’t jiggle as much” to a reader who feels body-conscious when having woman-on-top sex with her partner (July 2009, p. 102). In addition to counseling insecure readers on how to feel more body-confident, *Cosmopolitan* also provides information for how to avoid embarrassing or self-conscious moments, like “queefing,” during intercourse.

*Cosmopolitan India* provides guidance for the insecure reader on how to deal with her partner’s sex drive, or lack thereof, and her own insecurities during sexual intercourse. The magazine tells the reader to pay attention to her boyfriend’s behavior, especially when he turns down sex. While having sex, the reader is told to keep her eyes trained on him and his sexy body parts in order to avoid feeling insecure about her own. Unlike *Cosmopolitan* and *Cosmopolitan France*, however, *Cosmopolitan India* also advises the reader on her insecurities in a relationship. The reader is told to be fun, trusting and not suspicious of her partner; she should learn how to deal with both any potential jealousy and her confidence (*Cosmopolitan India*, June 2009, p. 38).
While Machin and Thornborrow (2003) do not specifically identify a “manipulative reader,” they do touch on women using manipulation both related to their sexuality and drawn from tips in *Cosmopolitan*. In this study, one specific passage was marked as being manipulative. In the “Ask him anything” column in *Cosmopolitan*, the columnist, Jonathon Small, answers a reader’s question about why her boyfriend refuses to kiss her unless they are having sex. He gives the reader specific instructions on how to train her boyfriend to behave in the manner she chooses. Moreover, the columnist compares her boyfriend to a dog and proposes that she use positive reinforcement methods in order to change his behavior. Other statements throughout the samples encourage a reader to employ various types of mild tricks (e.g. spritzing her boyfriend’s pillow with her perfume so he is reminded of her), but the above example is the only that is clearly manipulative. In this situation, by acting manipulative, the reader is, in some sense, taking control of her situation by using the solution provided by the magazine. In this case, *Cosmopolitan* provides information that appears to allow a reader to feel empowered, though she is simultaneously being manipulative.

Machin and Thornborrow (2003) note that in first-person narratives, women are taking on empowered and emancipated roles, though what women have power over is still being debated. *Cosmopolitan*, for example, was noted for encouraging women to enjoy sex. In “Great relationship but sucky sex?” *Cosmopolitan* writes

> When he makes you happy in a zillion other ways, it can be tempting to convince yourself that being unsatisfied in bed really isn’t that big a deal. But we’re here to tell you that hell yes, it is [sic] (July 2009, p. 112).

In this case, the magazine appears to not only encourage readers to make a good sex life a priority, but they should also not be ashamed of prioritizing sex.
Cosmopolitan France and Cosmopolitan India take similar approaches for bolstering women’s confidence by making them feel empowered and emancipated in having a sex life. Cosmopolitan France, in “Sexe: 5 complexes à laisser tomber,” reassures a reader by telling her to be herself and not exaggerate her sexuality. In the same article, the magazine counsels the reader to remove her clothing and look at her partner; by seeing his delight, she will feel liberated. Similarly, Cosmopolitan India advises a reader to realize creative ways to feel good and proud of herself. The magazine writes, “Discover creative and satisfying ways that not only bring you admiration but make you feel good about being you” (Cosmopolitan India, May 2009, p. 46). Both Cosmopolitan France and Cosmopolitan India put a greater emphasis on a woman’s empowerment in embracing her desirability and confidence in sexual situations; Cosmopolitan, on the other hand, while encouraging readers to feel empowered, puts the focus more on prioritizing one’s own sexuality.

Finally, Machin and Thornborrow (2003) do not identify a “healthy reader” in their study, but I observed one in the samples examined in this study. Cosmopolitan France and Cosmopolitan India, in some instances, would urge the reader to seek a doctor or therapist’s help. Cosmopolitan did not address the reader’s health in any of the sexual articles, other than to recommend that she use lubricant; however, Cosmopolitan, unlike Cosmopolitan France or Cosmopolitan India, has a health section that provides gynecological and cancer-related health tips.

All three instances of Cosmopolitan India speaking to a reader about her health appear in the “Ask Cosmo anything” column. In the first instance, a reader is given advice about her possible sex addiction; the columnist advises her to seek counseling to
get to the root of her addiction. In the second instance, a reader is counseled on how to approach her boyfriend about his erectile dysfunction. The columnist advises her to have her boyfriend seek a doctor or therapist’s help, and, if necessary, attend therapy sessions with him. The last instance involves a reader who had indulged in a threesome, but had subsequently lost her sex drive. Should her sex drive fail to come back, the reader should seek counseling. All of these instances involve a reader, or her partner, dealing with the emotional aspects of physical or sexual issues.

-*Cosmopolitan France*, on the other hand, focuses on a physical problem in advising the reader. In “Qu’y a-t-il entre l’orgasme et moi;” the magazine tells a reader plagued by yeast infections, “One order: See your gyno” (*Cosmopolitan France*, April 2009, p. 132). Although the healthy reader was seen only a handful of times, *Cosmopolitan India* and *Cosmopolitan France* did give instructions for the reader to see a doctor or therapist, either for mental or physical reasons.

**Pleasure**

As *Cosmopolitan* writes about sex, a great deal of its content revolves around pleasure: the reader’s pleasure, her male partner’s pleasure and mutual pleasure. In analyzing the reader’s pleasure, I look to Machin and Thornborrow’s (2003) identification of the “go-getter” reader, who is encouraged to pursue her own gratification, happiness and needs. At times, the encouragement is not straightforward, and the reader tends to act alone (Machin & Thornborrow, 2003). Machin and Thornborrow assert that the “getting what you want” discourse constitutes only a small part of sex articles and usually appears at the end, but in the samples examined, there
were several appearances of *Cosmopolitan* and its sister magazines encouraging the reader to prioritize her own pleasure.

*Cosmopolitan* appeals to the reader and her pleasure several times, especially in articles like “Take your orgasm to a new level,” “Yoga tricks that help you climax,” “Turn him into the orgasm whisperer” and “100 naughty sex questions.” In these articles, *Cosmopolitan* provides tips and instructions for how the reader can teach or instruct her partner how to give her maximum pleasure. As such, she is acting as a “go-getter” by pursuing her own pleasure. In some instances, she is told to ask her partner to perform certain acts or use specific techniques. For example, she is advised “Ask him to caress the tip of your clitoris gently with his finger or his tongue, using quick strokes” (*Cosmopolitan*, June 2009, p. 102). While the reader is being proactive by pursuing her own pleasure, she is told to ask, not make or manipulate her partner into doing what she wants.

In some cases, however, *Cosmopolitan* also urges the reader to “make” her partner perform techniques or acts; in these cases, the reader is encouraged to ask more aggressively. She is pushed to show her partner what to do, which appears to imply that she is not only aware of what gives her pleasure, but that she also needs to take on an educational role in order to ensure that her partner can give her what she wants. For example, the reader is told to “Kiss him fiercely, then move him into whatever position you want. We know he’ll obey” (*Cosmopolitan*, July 2009, p. 102). Additionally, the reader is advised to masturbate and take advantage of various sex positions. *Cosmopolitan* not only encourages this behavior, but provides step-by-step instructions for how the reader can learn about her genitalia and manually stimulate herself. Based on
these instructions, *Cosmopolitan* appears to vary between encouraging the reader to be active and passive, with the end goal being her own pleasure.

*Cosmopolitan India*, like *Cosmopolitan*, had several instructions addressed to the reader and her pleasure, primarily in “Yes, you have a G-spot.” Previous assertions (Carr, 2003) noted that *Cosmopolitan India* refrained from mentioning sex positions, but this was not the case in the May 2009 issue of *Cosmopolitan India*. In this issue, especially in its sex feature article, the magazine educates and guides the reader on how to maximize her pleasure and achieve both clitoral and G-spot orgasms by trying various techniques and positions. In a clear description of a sex position, *Cosmopolitan India* writes

Don’t discount missionary position. Go with this modified version in which you’re on your back with your knees bent and feet resting flat on the bed. Raise your pelvis by propping a few pillows under your butt. Your guy should sit up and enter you so he’s thrusting at a slightly upward angle, which gives his penis access to your upper vaginal wall (May 2009, p. 132).

In this example, the magazine is contradicting the expectation by not only including a sex position, but providing an educational description of it so the reader and her partner may try it. The issue of why *Cosmopolitan India* so contradicted Carr’s (2003) assertion is analyzed further in the “Discussion” section.

Additionally, like *Cosmopolitan*, *Cosmopolitan India* appears to promote masturbation under the assumption that it will teach a reader about her own pleasure; by knowing what pleases her, the reader can potentially then make her own sexual experiences more satisfying. Furthermore, in encouraging masturbation, *Cosmopolitan India* provides step-by-step instructions using anatomically correct terms, educating the reader on what she should do while exploring her own genitalia. Along those lines, *Cosmopolitan India* also encourages the reader to practice Kegel exercises, a simple
muscle exercise she can do while at the office or in her car that will also improve her sexual pleasure. By promoting these sexual exercises, and providing tips for how the reader can take advantage of sex positions, *Cosmopolitan India* appears to be putting responsibility on the reader to learn about her own pleasure. It is possible, then, that *Cosmopolitan India* is following a pattern identified by other researchers (Ménard and Kleinpatz, 2007; Kim and Ward, 2004) that women’s magazines assume men are already sexually experienced; therefore, it is up to the female reader to create a situation in which “good sex” can happen.

*Cosmopolitan France*, unlike *Cosmopolitan* and *Cosmopolitan India*, does not frequently address the reader’s pleasure; in the samples examined, only three instances were noted. In each of these cases, all of which appear in “Sexe: 5 complexes à laisser tomber,” the reader is encouraged to discover what gives her pleasure, either through masturbatory exercises or with the help of her partner. For example, the magazine writes, “Tame your body: when you learn to lead yourself to an orgasm, you’re more at ease to guide another to what gives you both pleasure” (May 2009, p. 136). The magazine appears to encourage masturbation so the reader can learn how to please herself and how to create mutual pleasure. While this conclusion may not seem consequential, it is important in that, again, *Cosmopolitan France* does not talk about sex in the way that was expected; instead of potentially encouraging promiscuity or various provocative sex positions and acts, the magazine only promotes masturbation. What remains to be addressed, however, is how, and if, the magazine discusses male pleasure.

Machin and Thornborrow (2003) identify a “pleasing the other” discourse. However, all references of “the other” appear to be men as *Cosmopolitan* refers only to
heterosexual relationships, at least in the samples examined. Machin and Thornborrow acknowledge that, like the reader pursuing her own pleasure, there is a “go-getter” discourse involved with pleasing a partner; however, the basis behind the “go-getter” or “getting what you want” discourse is the idea that pleasuring a man also brings power and pleasure to his partner, the woman (Machin & Thornborrow, 2003). Additionally, the researchers note that while the woman may feel empowered by giving pleasure to her partner, she is also naïve, vulnerable and dependent on her partner’s pleasure for her own self-esteem. In the cases of the samples examined, Cosmopolitan and Cosmopolitan India provide information for how the reader can physically please her partner, while Cosmopolitan France, which only has two instances of addressing a man’s pleasure, encourages the reader to emotionally support her partner as a way to please him.

Cosmopolitan provides several tips for pleasing a man, especially in articles like “50 sexy ways to touch him there” and “100 naughty sex questions.” In every tip, Cosmopolitan gives the reader instructions on how to physically stimulate her partner to maximize his pleasure. By following the steps and tips to please her partner, the reader is encouraged to become confident and empowered; some tips even include phrases like “confidently” and “enjoy yourself.” However, she is, like Machin and Thornborrow (2003) found, still naïve, especially when Cosmopolitan uses phrases like “Watch your teeth!” (September 2009, p. 134).

Following Cosmopolitan’s example, Cosmopolitan India provides tips focusing on a partner’s pleasure. The magazine concentrates primarily on physical stimulation, providing tips and tricks for how to give a man pleasure. In providing these tips, Cosmopolitan India employs an educational tone, though it appears to be somewhat
limited by the fact that there are only a handful of tips given to a reader looking to please her partner. Furthermore, *Cosmopolitan India* only refers to the male’s emotional investment in intercourse, not the female reader’s. For example, *Cosmopolitan India* writes, “…if you notice he’s having a hard time peaking, assuage his concerns by not making his orgasm the end goal” (April 2009, p. 96). The magazine has a great deal fewer tips geared toward pleasing a partner. In this case, it seems as though *Cosmopolitan India* focuses on a partner’s pleasure as secondary, but the reader’s pleasure, especially how she may learn and pursue it, is primary.

*Cosmopolitan France*, like *Cosmopolitan India*, includes information on the partner’s feelings. In the one instance that appears in *Cosmopolitan France*, the reader is advised to encourage or use positive reinforcement to make her partner feel more confident. In “Qu’y a-t-il entre l’orgasme et moi,” *Cosmopolitan France* writes, “Show your pleasure by emitting small signs of satisfaction when he is exactly where he should be” (April 2009, p. 133). *Cosmopolitan France* also does not appear to provide information on how the reader can physically please her partner. Therefore, the magazine does not seem to focus on reader pleasure or her partner’s pleasure to the degree that its sister magazines do. In this case, *Cosmopolitan France* not only takes on a different perspective of sex, but it also does not act as expected. What this observation leads to is a conclusion that *Cosmopolitan France*, in its sex articles, does not really talk about sex, its mechanics or techniques. Rather, it appears as though the magazine focuses entirely on the reader and her insecurities involving sex, and not the act itself. Therefore, *Cosmopolitan France* strongly contradicts the expectations as it does not talk about promiscuity, sex acts or even sexual techniques.
Finally, in analyzing how pleasure is presented in *Cosmopolitan* and its sister magazines, I noted some instances of mutual pleasure. *Cosmopolitan* appears to unite both reader pleasure and partner pleasure by emphasizing mutual pleasure as ideal. While a reader’s pleasure or her partner’s pleasure may be explored, the primary goal seems to be mutual pleasure; that being said, if mutual pleasure, such as simultaneous orgasm, is not possible, *Cosmopolitan* appears to prioritize the reader’s pleasure as a good second option. In pursuing this pleasure, the reader is encouraged to take advantage of provocative games and sex positions, such as those appearing in “*Cosmo’s* naughty sex-dare game.” *Cosmopolitan* also provides instructions for both the reader and her partner; for example, the magazine encourages the “69” position and an exploration of each other’s bodies. *Cosmopolitan* writes, “Fully explore each other’s erogenous zones, rather than zeroing in on the bull’s-eye right away” (June 2009, p. 102). What makes *Cosmopolitan* unusual is that out of the samples examined, it is the only one to provide multiple messages on mutual pleasure; while *Cosmopolitan France* appears to encourage it when talking about a partner’s pleasure, that example was the only appearance. Although this concept, especially the simultaneous orgasm, is viewed as the “holy grail” of sex life, *Cosmopolitan* still promotes it, framing it as ideal.

**Discourse**

In analyzing the discourse used by *Cosmopolitan* and its sister magazines, I look to Erjavec’s (2006) findings of the magazine using a prescriptive discourse. Erjavec asserts that *Cosmopolitan* creates an illusion in which normal and pathological female
sexual behavior is presented as a way for the magazine to pursue a hegemonic, authoritative position.

Based on the samples examined, *Cosmopolitan* does appear to maintain an authoritative role, perhaps inevitably as it attempts to present information in the simplest, clearest way possible. For example, in the magazine’s explanation of male anatomy, *Cosmopolitan* writes

> [The] scrotum [is] the wrinkly skinned pouch that holds the testicles. In order to keep your guy’s sperm at prime fertility, the skin actually expands or retracts depending on whether his boys need to cool down or heat up (September 2009, p. 134).

Furthermore, as touched on by Erjavec, *Cosmopolitan* attempts to simultaneously establish solidarity with the reader while being authoritative. For instance, in “Great relationship but sucky sex,” an expert says that out of fear of rejection, women feel they can’t be provocative in bed while in a long-term relationship. *Cosmopolitan* counters this statement by writing, “Banish that worry from your brain. You can totally have both a healthy relationship and wild sex. It just requires some communication” (July 2009, p. 114). By trying to set up a relationship with the reader, *Cosmopolitan* is able to create a dialogue with her, one that enforces the magazine’s role as an authoritative but friendly figure for a naïve or insecure reader. However, while Erjavec focuses on the commonsense view of this position, it would seem from the samples examined that *Cosmopolitan* attempts to establish this rapport as a way to present information. In addition, it appears as though the magazine can entice readers to return as it becomes the primary source for a woman seeking answers on essentially any sex question, from “I’m short. My guy is tall. What’s a good position for us?” to “What can I say midbooty that isn’t too tame or too raunchy?” (*Cosmopolitan*, July 2009, p. 100). Therefore,
*Cosmopolitan* appears to act as a cultural resource (Jackson, 2005; Kehily, 1999) or a primer of sex, presenting textbook information, such as what constitutes male genitalia or how to manually stimulate a partner, in an easy-to-understand format.

As a primary source for information, *Cosmopolitan* approaches sex by focusing on the mechanics, body parts, and ways to maximize physical pleasure. This information is identified as being basic and normative as it concentrates specifically on technical facts. One of the techniques that *Cosmopolitan* appears to employ is the use of hints or tips within parentheses, such as in “50 sexy ways to touch him there.” Within these parentheses, *Cosmopolitan* utilizes similes and metaphors to make sexual techniques seem easier. As an example, the magazine suggests that in performing manual stimulation, the reader should pretend she’s wringing a towel dry or trying to start a fire. These parenthetical techniques appear to reinforce *Cosmopolitan*’s strategy of reaching out to a reader, recognizing her lack of knowledge or skill, and providing information on a basic level.

*Cosmopolitan India* also follows a pattern of creating an authoritative but friendly relationship with the reader. This approach is not surprising as the magazine takes a number of articles from *Cosmopolitan*. By focusing on the basic mechanics of sex, particularly in articles such as “Yes, you have a G-spot,” “His biggest sex secrets” and “What guys know about sex that you don’t,” *Cosmopolitan India* appears to educate readers on the fundamentals of sex. What is important to note, however, is that even though the magazine might use a similar discourse as *Cosmopolitan*, the fact that it is published in a country with different sociocultural standards could mean *Cosmopolitan India* appeals to a unique audience. While *Cosmopolitan* is published in the United States
and appeals to sexually active, if naïve or insecure readers, *Cosmopolitan India* is published in a society that research (John & Nair, 1998; Kakar, 1989; Khanna & Price, 1994) has indicated attempts to control sexuality. Therefore, as *Cosmopolitan India* might also be a cultural resource, it could be particularly informative to women who, in a more conservative society, may not have access to information presented in such an easy-to-understand and available format. *Cosmopolitan India* is further explored in the “Discussion” section.

Finally, *Cosmopolitan France* does not appear to use such a prescriptive discourse. While *Cosmopolitan* and *Cosmopolitan India* focus on the mechanics of sex and how to master various techniques, *Cosmopolitan France* does not appear to make significant references to the mechanics of sex. Rather, in helping a reader to feel better and more confident about herself, *Cosmopolitan France* uses an empowering discourse. The reader is encouraged to embrace her sexuality and to be self-confident about what it is she wants from a partner. She is encouraged to take control of sexual situations and to become aware of her own desirability and pleasure. For example, *Cosmopolitan France* writes, “Once you remove your bra, dare to look at your partner…you will feel more desirable than ever. In general, it is the beginning of a great liberation” (May 2009, p. 136). In this case, the magazine does prescribe how a woman should feel about herself within the context of sexual activity, but it does not prescribe how a woman should perform various sexual techniques. Moreover, *Cosmopolitan France* does not present information in a technical, easy-to-understand format. Instead, the magazine appears to focus on the emotional and mental aspects of sex, including body confidence; this focus is reflected in the text, particularly as the language appears more implicit. For example, in
“Qu’y a-t-il entre l’orgasme et moi,” *Cosmopolitan France* writes, “Certaines vont aimer que la pièce soit plongée dans la pénombre…” (April 2009, p. 132). I translated this sentence to “Some will love that the piece is plunged into semidarkness;” in this case, “piece” refers to penis, “plunge” refers to penetration and “semidarkness” refers to an unwaxed vaginal area. Unlike *Cosmopolitan* and *Cosmopolitan India*, *Cosmopolitan France* therefore does not make frank, honest statements about sex. The discourse appears to be more descriptive.

In answering the second half of RQ1 (How do *Cosmopolitan*, *Cosmopolitan France* and *Cosmopolitan India* magazines differ in their uses of sexual linguistics and discourse?), it seems that, again, the hypothesis is correct, but only to a certain extent. *Cosmopolitan* and *Cosmopolitan India*’s discourse does differ from that of *Cosmopolitan France* in terms of how it prescribes sexual activities and emotions. However, in an unexpected finding, *Cosmopolitan* and *Cosmopolitan India*’s discourses were nearly the same. This result could be due to the fact that *Cosmopolitan India* takes some of its sexual feature articles from *Cosmopolitan*; however, *Cosmopolitan India* does make certain edits, which are presented in the “Discussion.” Moreover, *Cosmopolitan India* is published in a country with, presumably, different sociocultural standards from the U.S.; one possible reason it uses the same discourse, then, could be that *Cosmopolitan India* is educating women on sex in a situation where information may not be readily available.

**Declarative sentences**

In looking at the declarative sentences used by *Cosmopolitan*, *Cosmopolitan France* and *Cosmopolitan India*, I noted that, together, there were 231 that appeared. The
context and meaning of these declarative sentences have been organized into how they encourage behavior. Many of these declarative sentences have been presented already within the context of tones and pleasure. The statements that are relevant at this point are those that were noted as promoting normative behavior and those that appeared to push boundaries. In order to make this distinction, I look to Ménard and Kleinpatz (2007), who examined the sexual satisfaction messages in men’s and women’s magazines. They noted that in achieving “great sex,” magazines had a number of themes, including learning sexual techniques and incorporating variety, such as sexual experimentation. What they describe as improving and learning sexual techniques appears as normative in the samples examined. However, what Ménard and Kleinpatz’s described as messages encouraging “variety” appear to push boundaries in the samples examined, particularly in how they were framed. To clarify, it seems that normative phrases include commands using “should,” while commands framed as provocative or creative appear to push boundaries.

*Cosmopolitan*, with the most sex articles, has the greatest appearances of normative and boundary-pushing commands. In many cases, the magazine presents normative behavior as how a woman should use or know sexual techniques. For example, *Cosmopolitan* writes, “Obviously, you shouldn’t limit your repertoire to just a few moves, but keeping these in mind will help you add extra oomph when you need it” (July 2009, p. 114). One of these tips that women should incorporate into their repertoire includes “Move the pad of your index finger in circles against the base of his shaft. Your finger should just barely tickle the top of his scrotum” (*Cosmopolitan*, September 2009, p. 134). In these cases, the reader is told how she should use sexual techniques; the word
“should” is important as it seems to imply that the behavior described is socially acceptable or “normal.” Additionally, Cosmopolitan advises the reader on normative behavior involving feeling stimulated during sexual activity. The magazine writes that when engaging in sexual activity, the reader and her partner should take a break to calm down; during that time, they can manually stimulate each other. Cosmopolitan then adds, “When you jump back into the action, you should be even more riled up than before” (June 2009, p. 102). These appearances of “should” statements all involve how a women should feel or act during sexual activity. The magazine also encourages this kind of behavior by providing instructional tips and tricks, thereby telling the woman what is “normal” or “real” during sex.

Cosmopolitan also encourages some behavior that was noted as pushing boundaries. While this sexual behavior does increase sexual variety, as Ménard and Kleinpatz (2007) assert, its framing appears to indicate that it is not what a woman “should” do. For example, in “Cosmo’s naughty sex-dare game,” the magazine frames ideas as being “creative,” “naughty” and “dirty,” which appears to indicate that they are not sexually appropriate. One tip is, “Tie your guy’s hands together with a scarf, and ever so slowly strip off your clothes in front of him, giving him a show he will never forget. Don’t untie him until he begs for mercy” (Cosmopolitan, August 2009, p. 112). Another is “He’s your sexual servant; you’re the dirty diva. Tell him exactly what to do to you, and see how well he can follow your naughty directions” (Cosmopolitan, August 2009, p. 112). By framing these as “naughty” or “dirty,” the magazine appears to make these activities more provocative and, therefore, not normative.
It should be noted, however, that declarative sentences promoting normative behavior occur in a greater frequency than those appearing to push boundaries. The majority of these statements were analyzed in terms of tones and pleasure and noted for their educational presentation. Based on these findings, it is possible to answer part of RQ2 (In what ways does Cosmopolitan magazine urge normative behavior and push the envelope of pre-existing social and behavioral norms?); the magazine appears to follow H2 (Cosmopolitan is more likely to urge normative behavior by presenting information with an educational discourse and is more likely to push the envelope by framing sexual acts or positions as deviant and provocative), especially when it comes to instructions on sexual techniques and “naughty” games. It should be noted as well that this study does not incorporate how readers respond to these messages. It is possible that readers might view even the normative statements as pushing boundaries or even as pornographic as the magazine readily describes sexual activities in a frank, straightforward manner.

As asserted earlier, Cosmopolitan France does not appear to focus on sexual techniques, but on women’s emotional issues involving their bodies during sex. However, as the magazine attempts to comfort the reader by giving her techniques to feel more confident or get what she wants, Cosmopolitan France does make some normative statements. For example, in advising a woman who feels that her vagina is “dirty,” Cosmopolitan France writes, “Ask your partner why he likes to perform oral sex on you. His response should reassure you...” (May 2009, p. 134). In this situation, the reader is advised on her emotions involving sex, further cementing the fact that Cosmopolitan France takes more of an emotional stance on sex.
Cosmopolitan France also presents some ideas as being provocative. These ideas appear in one article, “45 Idées pour pimenter ma vie sexuelle,” in which women write in their sex tips. Cosmopolitan France does not frame these tips as being “naughty” or “provocative;” rather, the magazine introduces them with the phrase, “Because it’s exquisite to surprise and be surprised, you can show a little imagination” (Cosmopolitan France, September 2009, p. 122). In most cases, these tips involve wearing clothing that can be seductive, such as a bikini or an oversized shirt, and hygiene, like having soft, fragrant skin. One or two tips, however, appear to be more provocative. For example, one tip is

I organize a treasure hunt in the apartment, a sexy version. Some of the questions: my favorite position, the place where we made love for the first time, our fondest sex memory… The treasure at the end? It’s me (Cosmopolitan France, September 2009, p. 124).

However, Cosmopolitan France does not frame these tips as naughty or creative; therefore, even though they may not be promoting normative behavior, they are not clearly promoting behavior that could push the boundaries of French culture.

To answer RQ2 in regards to Cosmopolitan France, it would seem that the magazine urges normative behavior by telling the reader how to feel better and in what situations she should feel better (e.g. when her partner tells her why he likes to perform oral sex). However, Cosmopolitan France, based on the standards set by Cosmopolitan, does not appear to push cultural norms in its presentation of sexual behavior. Rather, tips vary in nature and none were framed as provocative. Additionally, while Carr (2002) asserted that Cosmopolitan France must negotiate with a readership “bored” with sex, it is possible that the magazine presents an emotion-centered view on sex as a way to entice readers. Moreover, it is also possible that the magazine may not take a more “blasé”
approach to sex, but rather approaches it in a unique way to accommodate its readership. This issue is discussed further in the “Limitations.”

*Cosmopolitan India*, like the other magazines, presents information that appears to promote normative behavior. However, what is unique about *Cosmopolitan India* is that it uses articles from *Cosmopolitan*; by doing so, it is possible that what the magazine presents as normative could actually be pushing the boundaries in India. For example, in “Yes, you have a G-spot,” the magazine outlines sexual positions that the reader should try in order to achieve a G-spot orgasm. In addition, what is unique about *Cosmopolitan India* is the article, “We asked 115 guys what makes a girl hot!” This article is the only feature article written by *Cosmopolitan India* staff; therefore, it can lend some insight into normative behavior. In the article, readers are told what men believe to be attractive. For example, one man says, “She should smell great,” while another man says, “She shouldn’t have too much attitude” (*Cosmopolitan India*, July 2009, p. 83). A third man states, “And she shouldn’t be hideous! Not necessarily a goddess, but pretty works” (*Cosmopolitan India*, July 2009, p. 84). Other normative statements provided from a male perspective include that a woman should be outgoing, but she shouldn’t cross the line from being feminine to one of the guys. These statements indicate that in being attractive and sexy, women should be good-looking, but feminine and possibly demure. There were no statements on how a woman should behave sexually; in that sense, *Cosmopolitan India* may fill the gaps by presenting behavior for the reader in terms of how she can learn sexual techniques and positions. Additionally, there were no declarative statements noted for pushing boundaries by framing activities as naughty or creative. Rather, in answering RQ2 for *Cosmopolitan India*, it could be that the normative behavior itself
pushes the boundaries in India because the magazine presents a Western view on sexuality by taking articles directly from *Cosmopolitan*.
Discussion

*Cosmopolitan India* was unique in the fact that it strongly contradicted the expectations regarding its sexual content. While *Cosmopolitan France* also contradicted the expectations, its lack of focus on sex could be tied to having a readership almost bored with sex due to the culture of a sexually open country. *Cosmopolitan India*, on the other hand, approached sex from the opposite view: based in a fairly conservative country when it comes to sex, *Cosmopolitan India* did not approach sex in a similarly conservative manner. Rather, the magazine readily and openly discussed sexual positions, sexual actions and sexual techniques, from masturbation to oral sex. Not only is it significant that *Cosmopolitan India* contradicted the expectations, but that the literature was contradictory in describing the approach to sex in *Cosmopolitan*.

Machin and van Leeuwen (2003, 2005) both included *Cosmopolitan India* in their studies on discourse and linguistics; however, the researchers gave a variety of views about the nature of the magazine and India itself. In their 2003 study, the researchers stated that *Cosmopolitan India* uses the tongue-in-cheek approach to sex, and takes it to extremes, as if “to make it absolutely clear that it’s only a game, accompanied by much nervous laughter and giggling” (Machin & Thornborrow, 2003, p. 592). The researchers went on to point out that, compared to the U.S., India is still male-dominated and a place where *Cosmopolitan* has not been fully accepted. However, both of Machin and Thornborrow’s studies stated that the linguistics of *Cosmopolitan India* is somewhat extreme. They observed that *Cosmopolitan India* adopts the “cool, streetwise” language of the U.S. version of *Cosmopolitan* and uses an extensive amount of slang. For example,
the researchers noted phrases like “‘vamp varnish’ for nail polish, ‘mane’ for hair, ‘smoochers’ or ‘pouters’ for lips, ‘chicas’, ‘sirens’, ‘vixens’, ‘babes’ and ‘chicks’ for girls, and so on” (Machin & van Leeuwen, 2005, p. 592). They also cited the magazine using statements like “you get low down and dirty and snag your man” (Machin & van Leeuwen, 2003, p. 497). In these cases, the magazine supposedly takes a tongue-in-cheek, giggly view of sex, but also uses a significant amount of slang. However, these assertions were not found to be completely accurate based on the samples examined. 

_Cosmopolitan India_ does not use a great number of euphemisms or slang, and does not appear to approach sex with a tongue-in-cheek manner; rather the magazine uses a fairly straightforward approach with straightforward language.

In fact, in regard to its use of language and its substantial “Love and lust” section, Mala Sekri, the publishing director of India Today, said in a recent interview that the magazine does not shy away from “talking straight” (Pen Drive, p. 1) She stated that she frequently encounters adult women who remark that they wish _Cosmopolitan India_ had existed when they were young, as they had no way to become informed on sexual issues. As _Cosmopolitan India_ is only a decade old and is trying to adjust its content to fit the needs of its readership, it is possible that in recent years, particularly in the four years after Machin and van Leeuwen (2003, 2005) conducted their studies, the readership has desired a more straightforward discussion of sex. Additionally, according to Sekri, women’s roles in Indian society have been changing; women are becoming more independent, financially and individually, and taking on the role of decision-maker. As such, _Cosmopolitan India_ has been trying to reflect this change. Therefore, in negotiating the needs of an evolving readership, _Cosmopolitan India_ has used more “straight talk.”
In using this “straight talk,” *Cosmopolitan India* echoes the educational discourse of *Cosmopolitan*. Furthermore, as it has been noted, *Cosmopolitan India*, in the samples examined, took sexual feature articles directly from *Cosmopolitan*. By doing so, not only does *Cosmopolitan India* completely embrace the “Western” discourse and slang that Machin and van Leeuwen (2003, 2005) identify, but it also makes the assumption that an evolving readership would prefer a more open, straightforward discourse like that in *Cosmopolitan*. However, with that being said, *Cosmopolitan India* does make editing changes, either taking out phrases or inserting their own, to the articles, specifically in “His biggest sex secrets” and “What guys know about sex that you don’t.” For example, *Cosmopolitan India* inserts phrases such as

> But sometimes, he wants to just do away with all the romantic preludes and just take you into himself—hard and really quick without really trying to make an effort to keep it slow paced. It’s a no brainer really that most men enjoy wild animalistic sex (*Cosmopolitan India*, April 2009, p. 98)

and

> The constant pressure of the warm water can be even better than letting your fingers go to work (anyway you look at it, it’s definitely less work and more pleasure for you). The sensations you will feel after that will leave you asking for more! (*Cosmopolitan India*, June 2009, p. 78).

What is interesting about these phrases is that they are not more or less explicit than the phrases taken from *Cosmopolitan*. While there could be number of reasons why *Cosmopolitan India* makes these edits – inserting the voice of Indian women into Western discourse or changing the articles slightly so they do not appear to be taken directly from *Cosmopolitan* – it seems fair to conclude that *Cosmopolitan India* keeps the tone of the articles the same as a way to satisfy the needs of a developing readership. However, by doing so, they are also promoting U.S. standards, as they appear in the
articles, onto a group of women who may or may not be comfortable with those standards.

As *Cosmopolitan India* could be addressing an evolving readership, one that looks to it for information, the magazine maintains a degree of power. With high circulation, *Cosmopolitan India* has the power to reach a variety of women, though given its publication in English and its price, it is more likely that middle to upper-class women are the primary readers. However, the magazine could take on different feature stories in order to educate women on sexually related topics, such as human trafficking. Typically, *Cosmopolitan* and its sister magazines tend to cover more light-hearted topics or those that could be directly related to its readers, such as binge drinking or domestic violence. Other magazines, such as *Marie Claire*, *Elle* and *Glamour* regularly and consistently cover more serious, international issues, like human trafficking, that directly affect women. Should *Cosmopolitan India* take on a more serious story that these other women’s magazines include, it could inform more women about crucial issues. In this case, *Cosmopolitan* could be playing a part in women’s rights, which according to Harcourt (2009), directly involves sexual issues and women fighting sexualized appearances.
Conclusion

This study attempted to determine the difference between sexual linguistics, discourse, content and normative behavior of *Cosmopolitan*, *Cosmopolitan France* and *Cosmopolitan India*. Differences were found in how each magazine approached sex and the types of words used to describe sex. *Cosmopolitan* and *Cosmopolitan India* closely paralleled each other in terms of linguistic usage and underlying discourses; this similarity can be attributed to *Cosmopolitan India* using sexual feature articles from *Cosmopolitan*. *Cosmopolitan India* was also found to be less conservative than anticipated. Additionally, while *Cosmopolitan* promoted both normative behavior and behavior framed as “naughty” or “dirty,” *Cosmopolitan India* only promoted normative behavior; however, given that *Cosmopolitan India* uses the Western discourse of *Cosmopolitan*, the normative behavior presented could actually be more deviant in India. These finding can be attributed to *Cosmopolitan India* being a fairly young magazine and attempting to appeal to a growing population of independent women.

*Cosmopolitan France*, on the other hand, was less explicit than anticipated. The magazine had more of a unique voice as the sex articles were written by *Cosmopolitan France* staff writers, and it was distinctly different from both *Cosmopolitan* and *Cosmopolitan India* in its assumptions about the reader and the perspectives of sex it explored. Rather than focusing on specific sex acts and techniques, *Cosmopolitan France* tended to address confidence and body issues, at least in the samples examined. Furthermore, although *Cosmopolitan France* was not as comparable with *Cosmopolitan* or *Cosmopolitan India* (who were comparable with each other), analyzing how a more
open culture might approach sex was necessary. Future research can also be conducted on how more open countries talk about sex in a way that does appear boring or blasé.

Therefore, each of the magazines, when assuming their different sociocultural standards, were different from each other, but not in the ways anticipated. Although they all might act under the *Cosmo* global brand, each must adjust to readerships in different ways. *Cosmopolitan France* must adjust to a bored readership while *Cosmopolitan India* must adjust to a developing one. What will be significant is how *Cosmopolitan* might reflect the changing attitudes toward female sexuality in its international editions, especially if a female population is undergoing a sense of liberation.

*Limitations and Recommendations for future research*

The research poses one primary limitation and obstacle: language. Although *Cosmopolitan* and *Cosmopolitan India* are written in English, *Cosmopolitan France* is written in French. Therefore, having studied French for 10 years, I determined the accuracy of translation and the judgment of the quality of translation; however, I am not a native speaker of French, so another interpreter could have a different translation.

I am also a product of American society and am primarily knowledgeable on American sexuality. As such, it is possible that cultural nuances appearing in the international versions of *Cosmopolitan* could have been misinterpreted. In addition, because the methodology was based on textual analysis of the sexual discourse present in the samples, I completed some interpretation. Although the interpretation of sexual discourse was based on the standards provided by Machin and van Leeuwen (2003) and
Machin and Thornborrow (2003), it is possible that another researcher could interpret the texts differently.

The research also focused on how the sexual linguistics and discourse promoted normative behavior. It did not attempt to identify how readers will respond to specific content. Because the study examined linguistics and discourse only, it did not attempt to predict reader behavior or the readers’ emotional responses associated with sexual acts. However, by examining normative behavior through social construction of reality, it is possible to identify the standards promoted by the magazine, which is, essentially, an institution. Therefore, it can reflect habitualized sexual behavior of the culture in which it appears. Additionally, future research on how relevant *Cosmopolitan*’s sex advice is could provide information as to whether the normative messages the magazine promotes are legitimate and relevant or if the magazine is potentially out of touch with its readers.

Although this study focused primarily on sex and sexuality, it is important to note that sexuality can incorporate a woman’s self-perceptions and her potential role within a relationship. Furthermore, this research focused on the “lust” articles in *Cosmopolitan*’s “Love and lust” section. Should future research be conducted on both the sexual articles and the love articles, particularly those that promote normative behavior, such as “Get hit on all the time” (*Cosmopolitan*, September 2009), a more in-depth definition of female sexuality could be developed.

Moreover, some of the articles examined were written by women and some were written by men. Although this thesis did not examine the differences in how men and women writers discussed sex and provided advice, future research on this topic could be both interesting and valuable to the study of queer linguistics and gender differences.
The issue of *Cosmopolitan India* could serve as a basis for future research on a variety of topics. First, *Cosmopolitan India* takes several of its articles from *Cosmopolitan*; this borrowing of articles is not limited to the sexual feature articles. Therefore, it is possible that the United States and Western discourse, as it appears in *Cosmopolitan*, may have significant influence over India. Future research conducted on the United States’ possible influence over India, especially through media, could lend insight into how India – its media, culture and perceptions – is affected by external influences. Second, the readership of *Cosmopolitan India* appears to be evolving. How the magazine appeals to widowed or single women as well as vulnerable women, especially those subject to strict family obligations, could provide further information as to how women are viewed and treated, even empowered or disempowered, in India. Finally, as mentioned in the discussion, *Cosmopolitan India* could potentially have a platform for making political statements. Should future research explore how India’s readership reacts to stories involving female oppression or human trafficking, it would be possible to detail the power the magazine has to educate and inform readers.

Finally, this research focused on the differences in how magazines of different cultural centers explore sexuality and the subsequent patterns that emerged. The research did not explore the causes or reasons behind how and why *Cosmopolitan, Cosmopolitan France* and *Cosmopolitan India* included the information in it did in the sex articles. Therefore, future research on the specific cultural norms and values of each country could lend significant insight into how *Cosmopolitan* and its sister magazines develop their sex articles.
List of Samples

2. “Qu'y a-t-il entre l'orgasme et moi?” April 2009, *Cosmopolitan France*.
14. “What guys know about sex that you don’t!” June 2009, *Cosmopolitan India*.
23. “Great relationship but sucky sex?” July 2009, *Cosmopolitan*


25. “The *Cosmo* sex poll: 6000 horny guys tell all,” August 2009, *Cosmopolitan*

26. “*Cosmo*’s naughty sex-dare game,” August 2009, *Cosmopolitan*

27. “Turn him into the orgasm whisperer,” August 2009, *Cosmopolitan*

28. “First time sex bloopers,” August 2009, *Cosmopolitan*


30. “50 sexy ways to touch him there,” September 2009, *Cosmopolitan*

31. “Why you should leave the lights on during sex,” September 2009, *Cosmopolitan*

References


