COSMO GIRLS: THE CONSTRUCTION OF FEMININE DISCOURSE IN *COSMOPOLITAN*

MAGAZINE

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Abstract

This Major Research Paper will examine the ways in which *Cosmopolitan* magazine's cover page headlines have constructed, aligned with, or challenged discourse around femininity in the past decade (2010-2019). The purpose of this study is to make the linguistic devices used to manipulate readers transparent and reveal the media's role in creating and maintaining societal norms – which can be liberating or restricting. A critical discourse analysis will be applied to examine *Cosmopolitan*'s communications to their target audience and how such communication earns social meaning. This paper finds that while *Cosmopolitan* magazine becomes slightly more progressive towards the end of the decade, its content remains heavily focused on sex and beauty which presents women and their interests in a trivial manner. *Cosmopolitan*'s headlines instruct readers on how to become a 'Cosmo Girl', suggesting that any other type of woman is subpar. *Cosmopolitan*'s headlines reveal societal assumptions about women and promote outdated expectations by encouraging readers to prioritize men and romantic relationships. With very little content about education, technology, or other modern topics, *Cosmopolitan* headlines are determined to be limiting.

Keywords: Headlines, Discourse, Gender, Presupposition(s), Interdiscursivity, Intertextuality, Diachrony, Idiom(s), Modal Verb(s), Sex, Relationships, Beauty, Fashion, Lifestyle, Health, Fitness, Career

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Introduction

"Curb Your Cravings! Without Eating Your Face" – Cosmopolitan

"Flatten Your Abs – FAST!" – Cosmopolitan

"Try Our Awesome Confidence Boosters!" – Cosmopolitan

Eating disorders, issues with body image, and low self-esteem are only a few of the consequences that stem from the irresponsible depiction of femininity in the media (Osod'an & Hanna, 2015). For most young girls, encountering headlines that shout sexist and misogynistic stereotypes is a regular occurrence. While it doesn't happen overnight, years of consuming such content results in girls growing into women who have internalized these stereotypes to be true. It is often assumed that media institutions provide a neutral space for public discourse and that "they give the perceptions and arguments of the newsmakers" (Wodak & Meyer, 2001, p. 6). However, a critical discourse analysis can expose the fallacy of such assumptions and reveal the role the media plays in determining societal norms (Wodak & Meyer, 2001, p. 6-7).

'Glossy magazines' are known for producing and reproducing harmful feminine stereotypes and *Cosmopolitan*, a top-selling women's magazine with a total readership of over 32 million, is an example (Tobitt, 2019). Women's magazines commonly portray stereotypical gender socialization, representing women according to traditional hegemonic constructs (Saraceno & Tambling, 2013; Gupta, 2008). This research paper will examine how *Cosmopolitan* magazine constructs gender socialization, while revealing the ways the magazine contributes to the construction of feminine discourse. Through the analysis of cover page headlines from 2010-2019, this paper will contemplate how *Cosmopolitan* headlines construct discourse around femininity and whether or not such discourse has evolved alongside society. After the collection and thematic organization of *Cosmopolitan* headlines, conclusions will be

drawn. Headlines will be examined for linguistic patterns which will provide insight that can

help answer the questions posed in this research paper (see Research Questions, p. 7).

A Brief History of *Cosmopolitan* Magazine

In order to evaluate how *Cosmopolitan*'s discourse participates in the clichéd depiction of females and femininity, it is important to understand the magazine's history with this issue. First published in 1886, *Cosmopolitan* has an extensive history writing for a domestic audience (Britannica, 2020). Having been in circulation for more than a century, *Cosmopolitan* magazine is no stranger to pivoting content to meet changing societal attitudes. With the rise of second-wave feminism in the 1960's "[*Cosmopolitan*'s] articles on childrearing and homemaking, once the norm, were starting to be perceived as inadequate and condescending to women" (Hunsberger, 2017, p. 17). With Helen Gurley Brown as the new editor-in-chief, *Cosmopolitan* was given a complete makeover and sex was now front and centre. The epitome of risqué, *Cosmopolitan* liberated twentieth century women of their domestic shackles and encouraged readers to "embrace single living, sex outside of marriage, and enjoy domesticity based on self-interest rather than family" (Hunsberger, 2017, p.18). While these ideas were progressive at the time, *Cosmopolitan*'s subject matter has remained relatively static nearly sixty years later. Society is becoming increasingly progressive and inclusive and autonomous spaces for females and femininity is now commonplace. But the question remains, has *Cosmopolitan* become increasingly progressive too?

Literature Review

It is necessary to explore the themes in existing literature about women's magazines in order to accurately analyse *Cosmopolitan* headlines and position the magazine among its contemporaries. The following literature review has been organized thematically. The chosen themes appeared to be most prominent throughout the literature studied.

Gender Binaries and Norms

Scholars agree that the media perpetuates dominant societal discourses and is in need of "dynamism" – alternative discourses to challenge dominant power relations (Demirhan & Cakir-Demirhan, 2014; Machin & Thornborrow, 2003). The advertising industry "has historically legitimized differences between the sexes by portraying gender norms in both idealized and stereotypical ways" (Lay, 2018, p. iii). Despite being written 'for women', women's magazines commonly typecast femininity as empathetic, maternal, non-verbal, and heterosexual, among other things (Wood, 1994; Skrynnikova et al., 2017). In magazines, gender binaries "are manifested in [linguistic] content and structure" (Skrynnikova et al., 2017, p.309). Linguistic patterns that reinforce male and female norms may influence an individual's gender identity, inducing change in accordance to specific societal expectations (Skrynnikova et al., 2017). Studies suggest male stereotypes are being reduced at a greater rate within media than female stereotypes (Lay, 2018). Despite societal attempts to become more progressive, advertisers will "often resort to stereotypical depictions of [femininity] in hopes that such portrayals will render recognition, identification, and acceptance among target audiences…" (Lay, 2018, p. 19). Thus, nullifying attempts made by social activists to eliminate binary gender classifications. The media employs gender stereotypes to promote consumerism, encouraging women to conform to, rather than complicate, the status quo (Conradie, 2011; Machin & Thornborrow, 2003). Antoinette

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Gupta (2008) suggests that *Cosmopolitan* reinforces traditional gender socialization, where males are physical, independent, and competitive, and women are sensitive, empathetic, and helpful. Adele Hassinoff's (2009) research takes this notion one step further, arguing that *Cosmopolitan* "[advises] women to accept men's overstated bad behaviors as genetically predetermined" (p. 269). Just as "caveman masculinity" is biological, the same is implied for submissive femininity (Hassinoff, 2009, p. 276).

The (Under)Representation of Women

Cosmopolitan is perceived by contemporary readers to be "edited for a woman who cannot feel alive without being in love and giving to a man" (Hunsberger, 2017, p.23). Scholars argue assumptions about femininity are "linguistically manifested" throughout *Cosmopolitan* (Conradie, 2011, p. 407). By cleverly positioning positive and negative adjectives, using pronouns strategically, and addressing the "naïve reader" with the personal 'you', *Cosmopolitan* assumes their reader is immature and unknowledgeable – in need of guidance (Machin & Thornborrow, 2003; Conradie, 2011). By linguistically declaring an instructive role, readers take the articles at face-value and thus internalize and replicate the stereotypical discourse presented. In addition, *Cosmopolitan* articles are male-centric at the cost of female autonomy with subject matters that broadly cover "how to get a man, how to keep a man, [and] when to date a man", all while encouraging the female reader to improve her looks in order to earn male attention (Hunsberger, 2017, p. 20). Representing women as peripheral characters results in their underrepresentation in a market that claims to be made specifically for them. Julia Wood (1994) suggests that the underrepresentation of women "falsely implies that men are the cultural standard and women are unimportant or invisible" (p. 31). It is important to recognize that the underrepresentation of women, in women's magazines and beyond, is not necessarily the fault of

a single company or publication. The underrepresentation of women is the result of a fundamentally flawed society – one where women have been systematically oppressed for centuries.

The Societal Role of Women's Magazines

Advertising impacts societal perspectives, attitudes, and beliefs. The discourse of the press also "constitutes, maintains, and reinforces the socially constructed stock of common knowledge shared by the members of society" (Chowdhury, 2019). Thus, in subtle ways, "the advertising industry can vindicate which gender norms are most appropriate" (Lay, 2018, p.19). Women's magazines, alongside other women-targeted media, "instruct women what to think and do about themselves, their lovers, husbands, parents, children, colleagues, neighbours, or bosses" (Chowdhury, 2019). The more readers accept the messages communicated, the further the influence penetrates. An article that influences a single woman can be "multiplied many times through a mother's influence on her children, a wife's influence on her husband, a lover's influence on her partner, and a women's influence on one another" (Chowdhury, 2019). Modern media suggests the 21st century woman is educated, savvy, and autonomous. However, the representation of such women is still "deeply embedded in the dominant ideology" and the critical study of such representations can reveal the "underlying, naturalized gender stereotypes which still hold the supposed 'liberated' women captive" (Chowdhury, 2019). With the above in mind, is important to question whether women's magazines are truly made for women. Perhaps these magazines are made for the benefit of patriarchal society and do not benefit women at all. Despite claiming to be 'for women', these magazines may only offer psychological manipulation, distorting reality and keeping profitable gender inequalities in place.

Research Questions

In order to reveal the ways *Cosmopolitan* magazine contributes to the construction of feminine discourse, this research paper will explore the following research questions (RQs):

RQ 1: How do linguistic concepts function within *Cosmopolitan* cover page headlines to represent femininity?

RQ 2: How have representations of femininity in *Cosmopolitan* cover page headlines evolved over the last decade (2010-2019)?

Research Methodology

Critical Discourse Analysis

In order to apply this method, it is necessary to understand how the critical discourse analysis framework is used to investigate the linguistic construction of gender ideology (Conradie, 2011). Critical discourse analyses are useful because they expose and challenge the dialogues which create and maintain societal assumptions (Conradie, 2011; Renaldo, 2017). Critical discourse analyses view texts as "artefacts that do not occur in isolation … socio-political and socio-historic contexts contribute to the production and interpretation of text" (Fatin et al., 2017, p.360-361). By examining "structures of text and talk", critical discourse analyses reveal underlying motivations and allow audiences to "understand the conditions behind a specific problem" (Mogashoa, 2014, p.105). Dominant discourses maintain societal power by occurring and reoccurring in ordinary text and talk, while underrepresented discourses develop into discursive gaps – subject matters that lack prominence because they are not considered socially significant (Demirhan & Cakir-Demirhan, 2014; Van Dijk, 1993). Societal conditions determine which discourses are retained and have major cultural impacts (Fairclough, 2006). By making the biases that occur in discourse transparent, issues with the representation of women can be addressed and repaired (Fatin et al., 2017).

There are a variety of different linguistic elements that can be examined during a critical discourse analysis. This paper will examine the linguistic elements defined below:

Presuppositions – A presupposition is an "implicit assumption about the world or [a] background belief" that exists within discourse (Wikipedia, 2019). As such, the analysis of presuppositions "is crucial for uncovering naturalised ideologies and underlying discourse, and examining manipulative functions of discourse" (Polyzou, 2009).

Modal verbs – Modal verbs indicate modality – likelihood, ability, permission, request, capacity, suggestions, order, obligation, or advice (Wikipedia, 2020). The principal modal verbs in the English language are can, could, may, might, shall, should, will, and would (British Council, 2020). The examination of modal verbs as part of a critical discourse analysis can reveal whether information is conveyed as a fact, possibility, or opinion, reflecting the speaker's attitudes towards society and the world at large (Given, 2008). *Cosmopolitan*'s use of modal verbs will also be examined for patterns in agents. Agents are those who carry out the action denoted by the modal verb. Identifying who *Cosmopolitan* grants agency to can reveal further implications of their discourse. In sum, the examination of modal verbs reveals how a speaker constructs, aligns with, or challenges discourse.

Frequent Words – Headlines from each theme will be analyzed for the use of frequent words – words that were used most by *Cosmopolitan* throughout the decade. These words will provide insight to which ideas the magazine places an emphasis on through repetition.

Text size – Increased text size is one of many visual techniques that can signify importance within written text (Wilberg, 2017). Examining *Cosmopolitan*'s largest headlines can provide insight into which content the magazine places an emphasis on.

Intertextuality – Intertextuality is the relationship between texts and the examination of how texts selectively draw upon existing discourses. Intertextuality draws attention to a text's dependence upon discourses shaped by society and history (Fairclough, 1995, p.188). For the purposes of this study, a specific type of intertextuality has been selected for examination – idioms. An idiom is a phrase or expression that has a figurative or non-literal meaning attached to it (Wikipedia, 2020). These figures of speech are surface-level illustrations of deeply engrained discourses shaped by society and history. These phrases have become accepted statements within society, despite the

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cultural harm they may inflict. The figurative meaning associated with an idiom can be interpreted by consulting societal norms and behaviours.

Interdiscursivity – Interdiscursivity is the combination of discourses associated with different social or institutional meanings in a single text (Fairclough, 1995, p.134). In this section, headlines will be analyzed for different or opposing discourse.

Diachrony – A diachronic analysis is the study of a given subject's change over time. Identified patterns will be examined for connotative and denotative meaning throughout the decade, as well as micro and macro relevance.

These linguistic aspects were specifically chosen to ensure a well-rounded analysis. This paper assumes *Cosmopolitan* magazine is an interaction between different discourses, genres, and linguistic styles (Wodak & Meyer, p. 126). A successful critical discourse analysis detangles the various interactions within a single publication (Wodak & Meyer, p.126). Thus, the textual and societal lenses defined above provide a comprehensive approach to this research.

Data Collection

Cover page headlines were specifically chosen for their visibility – that being, front page headlines reach a broader audience and not only those who purchase the magazine and read inside. Research was conducted by sampling cover page headlines from the 120 *Cosmopolitan* issues published between 2010 to 2019. A total of 908 headlines were collected. Upon collection, inductive coding was used to generate a series of themes that was used to categorize the headlines. All but 5% of *Cosmopolitan* headlines aligned with the following themes:

Sex and relationships – Includes content about dating, relationships, and sexual intercourse.

Beauty and fashion – Includes content about makeup, jewelry, clothes, shoes, and handbags –
how to style them, where to buy them, and which brands are best. Also includes hair care and
hairstyles.

Lifestyle – Includes content about social behaviour such as how to act in public, how to build
confidence, and how to handle uncomfortable or unsafe situations. Also includes quizzes and
horoscopes.

Health and fitness – Includes content about women's gynecological health, popular diets, how to
improve your figure, exercise tips, and how to deal with anxiety.

Career and finance – Includes content about work culture such as how to navigate the
workplace, job interview advice, how to find a job, and how to make more money.
The 47 headlines that did not align with these categories were considered outliers and not
included in this study. This brought the total number of headlines being examined to 861.

These themes provide preliminary insight as to how *Cosmopolitan* represents femininity.
With each monthly issue, *Cosmopolitan* reiterates the importance of these themes for 21$_{st}$ century
women, and over time, generates a distinct discourse around the subject matter. The following
critical discourse analysis is governed by the five themes identified. Headlines in each category
will be examined for patterns in presuppositions, modal verbs, frequent words, text size,
intertextuality, interdiscursivity, and diachrony. Together, this research will provide possible
answers to the proposed research questions.

Analysis and Discussion

Sex and Relationships

Sex and relationships is the most popular theme across *Cosmopolitan* cover pages between January 2010 and December 2019. The theme makes up 47% of content throughout the decade.

Presuppositions

Headlines such as, "75 SEX TIPS FROM GUYS: Sizzling, Sinful, and Surprising Things They're Craving Right Now", "What Men Find Hot: They Rate Their Favorite Looks", and "MAKE HIS SEX WISHES COME TRUE: And they're not what you think!", share a common presupposition: women must sexually satisfy men and are in need of advice to do so (Cosmopolitan, 2010). These headlines are only a few of the hundreds that appear throughout the decade, creating a toxic discourse around the relationship between femininity and sexuality. *Cosmopolitan* encourages its female audience to prioritize male pleasure during sexual encounters, subtly perpetuating the age-old presupposition that it is a woman's duty to serve her man. While the above headlines may be digested by readers for their literal denotation, exposing their associated connotations is a first step towards dismantling the discourse disseminated by the magazine. It is also important to note that with *every* headline in this category, *Cosmopolitan* presumes their audience's heterosexuality. Even as current as December 2019, the magazine does not acknowledge the LGBT+ social movement. By representing women's sexuality in such a limiting manner, *Cosmopolitan* allows outdated discourse to exist in modern society – nullifying decades of social activism that has tried to dismantle it.

Modal Verbs

54% of modal headlines throughout the decade belonged to the sex and relationships theme. These headlines feature four acting agents: *Cosmopolitan* readers (64%), male partners (30%), *Cosmopolitan* themselves (3%), and *Cosmopolitan* readers' friends (3%). *Cosmopolitan* headlines only grant women partial autonomy, splitting the rest between three other agents. Examining the other common agents can reveal who and what *Cosmopolitan* proposes women consider important. According to *Cosmopolitan*, men have roughly half as much agency over women as themselves. While this irresponsibly circulates notions from existing patriarchal discourse, its existence within the sex and relationship theme is of particular importance. *Cosmopolitan* validates the idea that a woman in a heterosexual relationship will either be governed by or destined to serve her man. With more agency than any other actor, besides the woman herself, *Cosmopolitan* supports men having significant influence over a woman. *Cosmopolitan* themselves is the next most common agent. By assuming agency to inform and instruct their audience, *Cosmopolitan* manipulates readers into internalizing a need for the magazine. These headlines ultimately suggest that all a woman needs is a man, *Cosmopolitan*, and 'Cosmo Girl' friends. The importance of a woman's relationship to her family, coworkers, coaches, and other – perhaps, less glamorous – influences in her life are not considered of value. Thus, it appears that *Cosmopolitan*'s discourse perpetuates harmful stereotypes that hinder feminist progress by reducing women to boy-crazy 'Cosmo Girls' who read the trivial and taboo content published by *Cosmopolitan*.

In addition, *Cosmopolitan*'s modal headlines were examined for whether they conveyed information as fact, possibility, or opinion. This can offer insight into *Cosmopolitan*'s attitudes towards society and the world at large. With 70% of sex and relationships headlines conveying

information as fact, *Cosmopolitan* represents themselves as a knowledgeable and trustworthy source of information. By presenting headlines as fact, readers may unconsciously internalize them as just that – without question. This linguistic manipulation likely encourages readers to embrace the magazine's ideologies without question. 20% of content is presented as an opinion. It is important to recognize that the two most common methods to present information places *Cosmopolitan* in an authoritative position. When the magazine isn't offering fact, they present readers with their opinion, which is never challenged. With only 10% of modal content presented as a possibility, *Cosmopolitan* strengthens their persona as a teacher or mentor and encourages naïve readers to embrace their discourse.

Frequent Words

The table below details the most frequent words used in *Cosmopolitan's* sex and relationships headlines and how often they occur throughout the decade. Through the analysis of repeated words, assumptions can be made about *Cosmopolitan*'s representation of women and sex, and whether or not this representation is socially progressive.

Table 1

Frequent Words Used in Sex and Relationships Headlines

WORD	FREQUENCY
SEX	136
LOVE	65
HOT	56
SEXY	44
NAUGHTY	23

Perhaps unsurprisingly, "sex" claims the top spot occurring 136 times throughout the decade (Cosmopolitan, 2010-2019). With only 120 issues published, this means there is one headline mentioning sex per issue at minimum. With an ongoing emphasis on the topic, *Cosmopolitan* consistently associates femininity with sex, insinuating that you cannot be one without having the other. The other frequent words are adjectives synonymous with sex. Interestingly, most of these words can be reduced to an action or state of being. The words *Cosmopolitan* associates with sex and relationships are more often than not, physical. *Cosmopolitan*'s emphasis on physical pleasure and attraction in a relationship appears to be outdated, with modern relationships favoring emotional connections.

Text Size

Figure 1   **Figure 2**   **Figure 3**

An astounding 79% of the largest headlines on *Cosmopolitan* cover pages between 2010 and 2019 belong to the sex and relationships theme. *Cosmopolitan's* emphasis on sex and relationships supports the conclusion that the magazine creates an interdependence between femininity and sexuality, aligning with historically taboo stereotypes and hindering a societal shift towards progressive definitions of femininity. To view yearly text size data, please consult Appendix A.

Intertextuality

"Talking Tricks that Draw Him In", "The Touch That Locks Down His Love", and "12 love moves THAT TURN HIM TO MUSH", are a few of many sex and relationships idioms featured on *Cosmopolitan*'s cover pages (Cosmopolitan, 2011, 2012). These idioms figuratively suggest that if a woman acts in a certain manner, she can secure the hard-to-get man of her dreams. These messages support the notion that women are desperate to settle down, while men are determined to remain single. *Cosmopolitan*'s use of idioms reveals that the magazine assumes a universal understanding of their messaging. Idioms rely on an audience's understanding of the connotations associated with their discourse. Thus, by repeatedly using idioms that negatively portray women and femininity, *Cosmopolitan* implies that these notions are accepted and understood by society. Moreover, by publishing oppressive discourse from a position of power, *Cosmopolitan* validates these ideas and hinders societal progress towards gender equality.

Interdiscursivity

Fortunately, there is a shift in discourse regarding sex and relationships towards the latter half of the decade. Headlines that once promoted the sexual satisfaction of a woman's male partner changed to headlines that encouraged women to sexually satisfy themselves and demand sexual satisfaction from their partners. For example, headlines from the beginning of the decade read, "100% HOTTER SEX: Thrill Every Inch of His Body Using a Move No Woman has Dared to Try on Him Before", "75 SEX MOVES MEN CRAVE: Guys Confess Naughty Desires They Never Had the Balls to Tell Their Exes", and "78 WAYS TO TURN HIM ON: These Words Will Make His Pulse Pound Hard" (Cosmopolitan, 2010, 2011). These headlines instruct female readers to focus solely on their male partner during sex, forfeiting their own pleasure.

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However, later in the decade headlines read, "Thrill Your Hot Spots! Trust Us, These Moves Will Have You Smiling for a Week ☺", "SEX You Crave! Daring Moves That Feel EXTRA Awesome For You", and "48 Sex Tweaks: You didn't know you needed" (Cosmopolitan, 2018, 2019). These headlines prioritize the pleasure of the reader by directly addressing them with variations of the second-person pronoun "you", encouraging them to explore their own bodies, and providing them with pointers on how sex with their partners can be more enjoyable (Cosmopolitan, 2018, 2019). Although *Cosmopolitan*'s discourse regarding sex and relationships has improved over time, this change is not absolute. The number of headlines prioritizing male pleasure still significantly outweigh those that do not. While this is an improvement, there is still more progress that needs to be made.

Diachrony

To conclude, an overview of sex and relationship's occurrences throughout the decade will be provided, followed by a discussion of significant findings. Below is a year-by-year visualisation of the data.

Figure 4, *Cosmopolitan* **Cover Page Thematic Occurrences, Sex and Relationships**
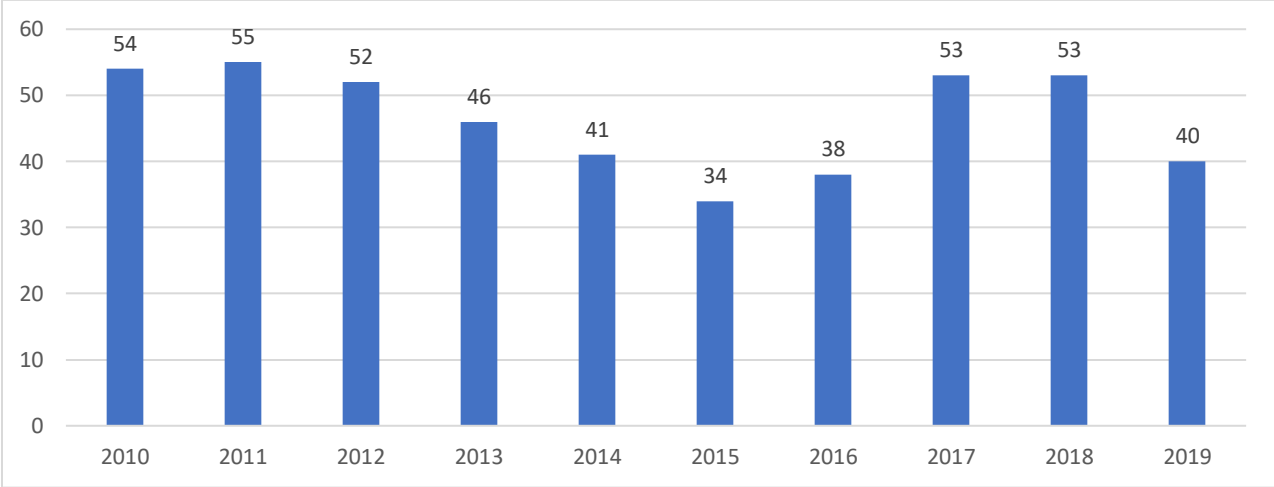
The sex and relationships category dominated *Cosmopolitan* covers throughout the decade, being as much as 55% of cover page content and only ever as low as 34%. At any percentage, sex and relationships is always the central theme. In total, the theme makes up 47% of *Cosmopolitan* cover page content between 2010-2019. This data supports the notion that *Cosmopolitan* constructs a link between femininity and sex and relationships. This notion is further legitimated by the magazine's discourse supporting patriarchal ideals.

Beauty and Fashion

Beauty and fashion is tied for the third most popular theme across *Cosmopolitan* cover pages between January 2010 and December 2019. The theme makes up 14% of the content throughout the decade.

Presuppositions

Headlines such as, "LOOK SEXY! MAKEUP THAT FLIRTS FOR YOU", "Party Dresses that Flirt For You", "LOOK SEXY NOW. MAKE THEM OBSESSED WITH YOU!", and "FAST BEAUTY: HOW TO GET SEXY IN SECONDS", all presuppose that women dress for others and seek attention (Cosmopolitan, 2011, 2015, 2016). By teaching readers how to look "sexy", *Cosmopolitan* implies that there is an opposite appearance (Cosmopolitan, 2011, 2015, 2016). This may make readers hyperaware of their 'unsexiness' when they are not following *Cosmopolitan* guidelines. In addition, the implication that women need to wear something that "flirts for [them]" strips away their agency (Cosmopolitan, 2011, 2012). *Cosmopolitan*'s headlines suggest that women cannot flirt for themselves and must rely on secondary factors. These headlines also attribute looking a certain way with gaining attention from "them" – which is most likely a male, but could be any potential onlooker (Cosmopolitan, 2015). Perhaps these messages manipulate readers into accepting that looking "sexy" is done for someone or

something else (Cosmopolitan, 2011). On a micro-level, these headlines may be perceived as too minor to result in significant societal damage. However, the reoccurrence of these headlines for centuries – from *Cosmopolitan* and beyond – have likely contributed to macro-level misogyny, creating and propagating harmful discourse about what it means to be a woman who does not align with societal constructs.

Modal Verbs

Only 9% of modal headlines throughout the decade belong to the theme of beauty and fashion. These headlines only feature one acting agent, *Cosmopolitan* readers. This is to be expected, as *Cosmopolitan*'s beauty and fashion content is directed towards cisgender women only. However, it is important to question why a popular theme makes up only 9% of modal verb content. As previously concluded, *Cosmopolitan* magazine does not grant their audience complete autonomy. Instead, this autonomy is shared by those equally deserving of it. I hypothesize that the reason this theme makes up for such little modal content is because with women as the only acceptable agent – according to *Cosmopolitan* – headlines within this theme would provide women their own agency. Given the analysis thus far, it appears that *Cosmopolitan* accepts and contributes to a misogynistic discourse that binds women to outdated societal perceptions. A lack of modal content that can challenge such notions further strengthens these assumptions.

Whether *Cosmopolitan* conveyed beauty and fashion modal headline content as fact, opinion, or possibility was also examined. 60% of content was expressed as fact, while 20% was expressed as opinion and the remaining 20% was expressed as a possibility. Once again, *Cosmopolitan* represents an overwhelming majority of information as fact which may linguistically manipulate readers into accepting their headlines to be true. By consistently

educating their audience with 'facts', *Cosmopolitan* establishes an authoritative persona which

likely indoctrinates their audience into accepting their discourse.

Frequent Words

The table below details the most frequent words used in *Cosmopolitan*'s beauty and

fashion headlines and how often they occur throughout the decade. Through the analysis of

repeated words, assumptions can be made about *Cosmopolitan*'s representation of femininity and

whether or not this representation is socially progressive.

Table 2

Frequent Words Used in Beauty and Fashion Headlines

WORD	FREQUENCY
BEAUTY	31
BEST BEAUTY UNDER $_	31
SECRET	26
TRICKS	24
HAIR	21

Similar to previous conclusions made about the diction *Cosmopolitan* favours, these

words reveal an emphasis on physicality. *Cosmopolitan* exposes "secrets" and "tricks" that must

be applied to their audience's hair, face, or other physical elements (Cosmopolitan, 2010-2019).

Beauty is not represented by *Cosmopolitan* as something inherent to all. Instead, it is reduced to

a tangible item with a dollar value – something that can be applied and removed. These

conceptions may be perceived as outdated by contemporary readers.

Text Size

Figure 5   **Figure 6**   **Figure 7**

With 15% of the largest headlines on *Cosmopolitan* cover pages between 2010 and 2019

relating to beauty and fashion, the theme comes in second place behind sex and relationships.

Aligning with previous conclusions, the emphasis on beauty and fashion suggests that

Cosmopolitan assumes it is important to readers. In fact, the top two categories (sex and

relationships and beauty and fashion) make up 94% of *Cosmopolitan*'s largest cover page

headlines throughout the decade. This leaves only 6% of cover page space to be filled by

lifestyle, health and fitness, and career and finance content. The overwhelming prominence of

physical relationships and physical beauty on *Cosmopolitan* cover pages implies that the

magazine is not concerned with challenging outdated discourse around femininity. Instead,

Cosmopolitan provides a platform for its dissemination within society – a society that has

attempted to outgrow such stigmas. To view yearly text size data, please consult Appendix A.

Intertextuality

Idioms such as "Juicy New Lip Colors", "MILE HIGH HAIR: Fast Updos Every Girl

Can Nail", and "Tons of SIZZLING Holiday Looks" all depict a woman's physical appearance

as a means to an end (Cosmopolitan, 2011, 2012, 2016). These idioms imply that by altering her

appearance, a woman can impress any onlooker. Ultimately, Cosmopolitan reduces a woman's

social success to the impact of her appearance. *Cosmopolitan*'s idioms present a stereotypical discourse that is deeply engrained in western society. Again, *Cosmopolitan*'s use of idioms reveals that the magazine assumes their audience comprehends its associated connotations. With idioms that objectify and belittle women, *Cosmopolitan* insinuates that these notions are commonplace within society and hinders societal progress by aligning with anti-feminist discourse rather than challenging it.

Interdiscursivity

Unfortunately, there does not appear to be a shift in beauty and fashion discourse throughout the decade. Messaging remains static, encouraging readers to use their physical appearance to attract a partner or make friends. For example, headlines from the beginning of the decade read "Revamp Your Closet with 8 Sexy Pieces" and "Flirty Clothes, Foxy Makeup", and headlines from the end of the decade read "Your Sexiest Summer: Beachy Hair, 30 Fire Swimsuits" and "Cute Hair…Even When it's 100º: 5 Styling Tricks" (Cosmopolitan, 2010, 2011, 2018). *Cosmopolitan* does not waiver from the importance of beauty and fashion when living the 'Cosmo Girl' lifestyle.

Diachrony

To conclude, an overview of beauty and fashion's occurrences throughout the decade will be provided, followed by a discussion of significant findings. Below is a year-by-year visualisation of the data.

Figure 8, *Cosmopolitan* **Cover Page Thematic Occurrences, Beauty and Fashion**
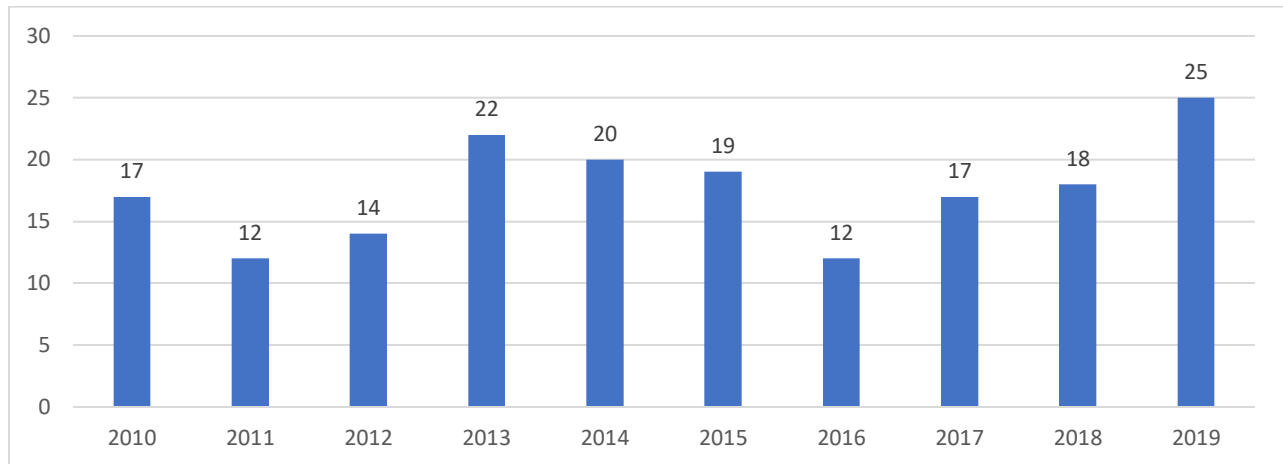
Throughout the decade, beauty and fashion content was emphasized on *Cosmopolitan* cover pages, generally making up for 20-25% of its content. In total, the theme makes up 14% of *Cosmopolitan* cover page content between 2010-2019, coming in third place behind sex and relationships and lifestyle. These statistics suggest that, as a result of its emphasis on each cover page, *Cosmopolitan* considers beauty and fashion one of few important subject matters for readers, creating a narrow and shallow definition of femininity. This conclusion is further supported by discourse that endorses women dressing for men's satisfaction.

Lifestyle

Lifestyle is the second most popular theme across *Cosmopolitan* cover pages between January 2010 and December 2019. The theme makes up 17% of content throughout the decade.

Presuppositions

Headlines such as, "How to Deal With a Jealous Bitch … When That Jealous Bitch is You", and "How to Outsmart a Bitch", presuppose that women are in competition with one another and embody the stereotypical "Bitch" trope. (Cosmopolitan, 2010, 2011). *Cosmopolitan* rarely addresses the reader as anything beyond the second-person pronoun 'you', but in both instances where the magazine attributes a name to their reader the word "Bitch" is used

(Cosmopolitan, 2010, 2011). Since the denotation of the word is not relevant in this instance (on a literal level 'bitch' means a female dog), its connotation is of particular importance (Cosmopolitan, 2010, 2011). Bitch is pejorative slang for a controlling or aggressive woman – a subordinate (Wikipedia, 2020). Recently, feminists have attempted to reclaim the word and use it in a celebratory manner. However, the negativity of these headlines suggest that the magazine did not intend to use the word in this way. While some may interpret these headlines as *Cosmopolitan*'s attempt to relate with readers as a friend, the connotation of the word "Bitch" escalates the severity of the societal implications these headlines have (Cosmopolitan, 2010, 2011). These headlines manipulate readers into accepting that while some women are "bitches", others are not, creating a hierarchy of womanly status within society – with "[bitches]" at the bottom (Cosmopolitan, 2010, 2011).

In addition, headlines including "8 Ways to Fake Epic Confidence" and "Confidence Now =)" presupposes that women are inherently unconfident and are in need of advice to improve selflove (Cosmopolitan, 2013, 2016). By suggesting women "fake" confidence, it is assumed that women cannot truly achieve confidence (Cosmopolitan, 2013). Although subtle, these assumptions are globally distributed to millions of readers, perhaps making women aware of their unhappiness or lack of confidence which may have not been previously perceived.

Modal Verbs

18% of headlines that used modal verbs belonged to the lifestyle category. These headlines featured two acting agents which equally occurred 50% of the time: *Cosmopolitan* readers and *Cosmopolitan.* Similar to previous data, *Cosmopolitan* does not grant its audience autonomy over their lives. In this instance, *Cosmopolitan* is just as influential an agent as the readers themselves. With such few actors, the magazine proposes that in order to maintain a

'Cosmo Girl' lifestyle all she needs beyond herself is *Cosmopolitan* magazine. The 21st century woman is known to have it all – a family, a career, extracurricular passions, a close circle of friends, and beyond. Yet, *Cosmopolitan* portrays their readers as horoscope-readers who rely on the magazine to make decisions for them up to 50% of the time. Such discourse is certainly not progressive and, once again, aligns with archaic assumptions that must be challenged by modern literature – not promoted.

In addition, 70% of content is presented as fact, 10% of content is presented as opinion, and 20% of content is presented as a possibility. Conveying 70% of lifestyle headlines as fact, *Cosmopolitan* once again takes on a position of authority. This strengthens existing societal discourse that suggests women are in need of guidance or advice in order to successfully navigate through life. It appears that *Cosmopolitan* skilfully employs a linguistic strategy that manipulates their audience into passively accepting and internalizing their discourse.

Frequent Words

The table below details the most frequent words used in *Cosmopolitan*'s lifestyle headlines and how often they occur throughout the decade. Through the analysis of repeated words, assumptions can be made about *Cosmopolitan*'s representation of womanhood and whether or not this representation is socially progressive.

Table 3

Frequent Words Used in Lifestyle Headlines

WORD	FREQUENCY
FUN	23
CRAZY	16
CONFIDENCE	14
HAPPY/HAPPINESS	9
TRUST	4

These words represent womanhood in a more positive light than the frequent words studied previously. Words like "confidence" and "happy"/"happiness" attribute a certain self-awareness and selflove to *Cosmopolitan* readers. However, while these words are less blatantly negative, a few problematic connotations are still evident. There appears to be a childlike naiveté associated with women's lifestyles. Together, words like "crazy" and "fun" insinuate that women can't enjoy themselves without going over the top or acting irresponsible (Cosmopolitan, 2010-2019). Moreover, the infrequent use of empowering diction – with words like "trust" being the least frequently occurring – suggests that *Cosmopolitan* would rather represent womanhood in the frivolous way it has been historically recognized (Cosmopolitan, 2010-2019).

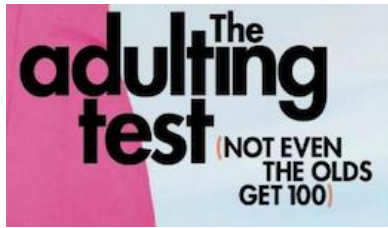*Text Size*

Figure 9   *Figure 10*   *Figure 11*

Lifestyle comes in third place with only 5% of the largest headlines on *Cosmopolitan*

cover pages between 2010 and 2019 belonging to the theme. Typical of *Cosmopolitan*'s

representation of lifestyle content, it is prevalent throughout the decade but not of particular

importance. With content that discusses social behaviour, building confidence, and navigating

through uncomfortable or unsafe scenarios, it is perhaps no surprise that theme is not valued by

the magazine. *Cosmopolitan*'s cover pages consistently favor physical relationships or physical

beauty – two stereotypical elements of femininity. By doing so, content that may be more

inclusive or relevant is underrepresented. This strengthens the notion that *Cosmopolitan*

constructs a superficial discourse about femininity, which inadequately represents the modern

woman. To view yearly text size data, please consult Appendix A.

Intertextuality

Idioms including, "KILLER CONFIDENCE", "ARE YOU LETTING YOUR DREAM

LIFE GET AWAY?", and "YOUR SUMMER BUCKET LIST – GET ON IT!" reinforce the

notion that women are in need of advice or motivation to improve their current lifestyle

(Cosmopolitan, 2010, 2012, 2013). This messaging strengthens *Cosmopolitan*'s position as a

mentor, helping immature and inexperienced readers acquire the 'Cosmo Girl' lifestyle. This

may be *Cosmopolitan*'s way of ensuring woman remain subject to patriarchal authority. *Cosmopolitan*'s use of idioms exposes the magazine's assumption that misogynistic discourse is universally accepted, as idioms rely on an audience's understanding of their connotations. Once again, *Cosmopolitan* cover pages feature idioms that support the discoursal oppression of women.

Interdiscursivity

As with beauty and fashion, lifestyle content remains stagnant throughout the decade. Lifestyle headlines consistently complicate readers' relationship with selflove and self-confidence, encourage them to spend their days taking quizzes with girlfriends, and offer trivial ways to improve their lives, despite remaining oppressed by *Cosmopolitan*'s own patriarchal discourse.

Diachrony

To conclude, an overview of lifestyle's occurrences throughout the decade will be provided, followed by a discussion of significant findings. Below is a year-by-year visualisation of the data.

Figure 12, *Cosmopolitan* Cover Page Thematic Occurrences, Lifestyle
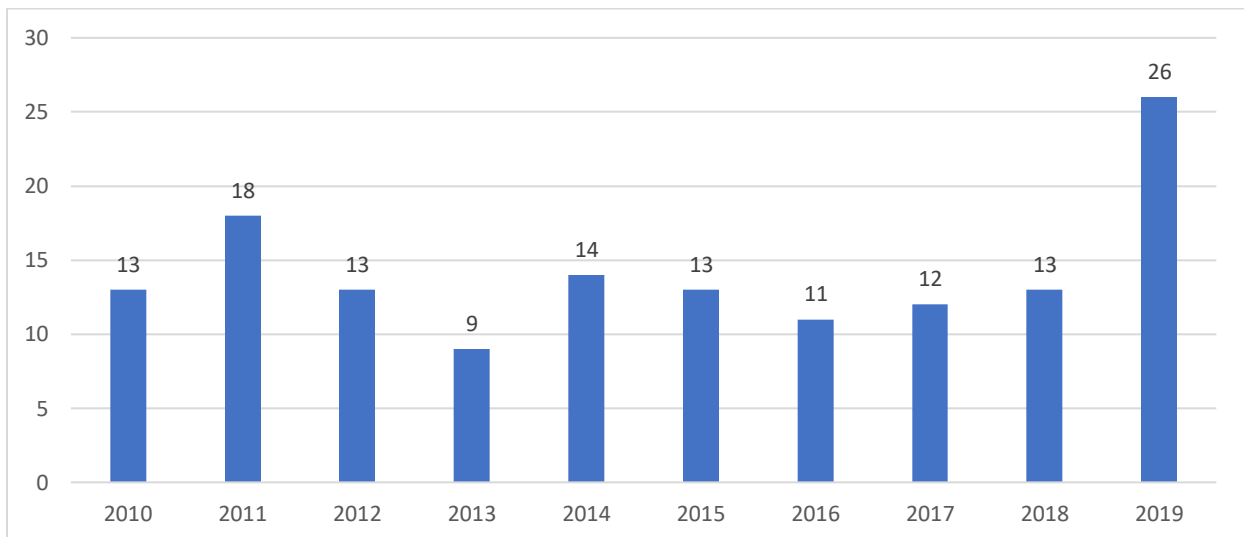
Lifestyle content is frequently found on *Cosmopolitan* cover pages, usually occurring between 10-15% of the time. In total, the theme comes in second place behind sex and relationships, making up 17% of *Cosmopolitan* cover page content between 2010-2019. However, the spike in occurrences in 2019 may signify a future where themes other than sex and relationships dominate *Cosmopolitan*'s covers. The magazine's emphasis on subject matter that linguistically oppresses the modern woman strengthens the notion that *Cosmopolitan*'s assumptions about femininity are engrained in an oppressive and misogynistic discourse.

Health and Fitness

Health and fitness is tied with beauty and fashion for the third most popular theme across *Cosmopolitan* cover pages between January 2010 and December 2019. The theme makes up 14% of content throughout the decade.

Presuppositions

Headlines such as, "VAGINAS UNDER ATTACK: Don't Let a Greedy Gyno Talk You Into This Horrible Mistake", "WHAT YOUR VA-JAY-JAY IS DYING TO TELL YOU", and "GYNO WARNING: A Winter Risk Your Doc Hasn't Told You About", presuppose that medical professionals are unreliable and to a certain extent, unknowledgeable. These headlines also presume that women do not understand their own bodies (Cosmopolitan, 2010, 2011, 2017). In these headlines, *Cosmopolitan* takes on the role of a doctor, sharing medical information with readers that they assume medical professionals have not yet shared. By representing doctors as "Greedy" or unknowledgeable, it is presupposed that *Cosmopolitan* is a more trustworthy source of information than certified medical professionals (Cosmopolitan, 2010). This may leave readers conflicted with whom they can trust. In addition, *Cosmopolitan* presupposes that a woman's relationship with her body is in need of mediation, as their headlines frequently take on

the role of a woman's body part and expresses what it is in need of. On a micro-level this may seem like nothing more than a witty headline. However, when combined with decades of similar messaging, these notions can evolve into macro-level discourses that society digests and accepts at the cost of their physical health.

In addition, headlines including, "So You Ate a Cupcake? Fast Moves to Burn it Off!", "The Secret Calorie Bomb: Are You Eating it?", "The Bikini BODY PLAN. 4 Steps to Smokin'!", and "NO-FAIL WAYS TO DROP 5 LBS" all presuppose that women are guilty after eating and must maintain a slimmer figure than they currently possess (Cosmopolitan, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2016). By instructing readers on how to lose weight and secure a "bikini body", *Cosmopolitan* insinuates that the opposite is not desirable (Cosmopolitan, 2014). Readers who may have been comfortable with their current physique or unphased by their eating habits have now been informed that something different is better. In addition, women who have already internalized such notions may turn to *Cosmopolitan* and alike media outlets for a quick fix. *Cosmopolitan* offers problematic solutions to issues created and perpetuated by the magazine itself, preying on readers' insecurities.

Modal Verbs

15% of modal cover page headlines belong to the health and fitness theme. The most common acting agents found in these headlines are *Cosmopolitan* readers and doctors. These appear to be appropriate agents for the subject matter, as readers are in control of their bodies 90% of the time and the only other individual granted agency is a medical professional which occurs 10% of the time. In fact, given *Cosmopolitan*'s history with claiming authority and negatively representing doctors, it is surprisingly responsible that the magazine did not appear as an acting agent.

Regarding the way these headlines convey information, 78% is presented as fact, 11% is presented as opinion, and 11% is presented as a possibility. Aligning with previous observations, *Cosmopolitan* presents most data as factual information – regardless of whether it is or not. While this is can be dangerous when providing medical advice, leaving agency with the reader and their doctor may balance out the negativity associated with this.

Frequent Words

The table below details the most frequent words used in *Cosmopolitan*'s health and fitness headlines and how often they occur throughout the decade. Through the analysis of repeated words, assumptions can be made about *Cosmopolitan*'s representation of femininity, and whether or not this representation is socially progressive.

Table 4

Frequent Words Used in Health and Fitness Headlines

WORD	FREQUENCY
BUTT/ASS	26
BODY	21
ABS	17
NAKED	13
HEALTHY	2

Unfortunately, the words *Cosmopolitan* frequently associates with health and fitness are not socially progressive. Similar to previous analyses, *Cosmopolitan* reduces the meaning of health and fitness to a woman's physical appearance. With an emphasis on bodily attributes such as "butt"/"ass" and "abs", the magazine implies that a body without these features is not 'Cosmo approved' (Cosmopolitan, 2010-2019). *Cosmopolitan* presents health and fitness as an

unattainable goal, something that women must diet and sweat for. By modern definitions, health

and fitness focuses on mental and emotional stability and physical wellbeing – irrespective of

weight. Yet, the word "healthy" occurs only twice throughout an entire decade – across 120

issues (Cosmopolitan, 2019-2019). Once again, *Cosmopolitan* seems to be out of touch with the

times, aligning with an oppressive discourse instead of joining modern society in challenging it.

Text Size

Figure 13

Figure 14

Figure 15

In fourth place is health and fitness, making up only 1% of *Cosmopolitan*'s largest cover

page headlines between 2010 and 2019. As with the other themes, this underrepresentation is

typical of the magazine. However, as a theme dominated by discourse that supports unhealthy

diets, over exercising, and an obsession with weight and size, it is perhaps to readers' benefit that

such messages are not enlarged and increasingly accessible. Physical and emotional wellbeing is

vital for readers to live the exciting, impulsive lifestyle that *Cosmopolitan* promotes. However,

the magazine reduces the theme to nothing more than dropping a few pounds and perking up

your butt. The unhealthy representation of health and fitness and its negligible presence

throughout the decade supports that *Cosmopolitan* is uninterested in encouraging a discoursal

shift, where modern women are not limited by societal perceptions of the past. To view yearly

text size data, please consult Appendix A.

Intertextuality

"Flatten Your Belly: The New Water Sipping Trick That Crushes Hunger" and "Are You Eating Your Feelings?", are only some of the many health and fitness idioms featured on *Cosmopolitan* cover pages (Cosmopolitan, 2011, 2014). These idioms figuratively allude to the cliché that women have unhealthy relationships with their weight and/or body image. Róbert Osad'an and Rania Hanna (2015) state that a "number of studies have been developed in the past several years that have determined that the media does indeed have negative influences on [women's] self-esteem, body-image, and ideas of self-worth (p. 37). Ironically, by constructing a discourse that has damaged women's relationships with their bodies and produced associated stereotypes, *Cosmopolitan* can profit by publishing content that promises to mend the damage they caused in the first place. Idioms rely on an audience's understanding of their connotations. Thus, *Cosmopolitan*'s use of idioms that negatively portray a woman's relationship with health and fitness suggests that such discourse is accepted by modern society.

Interdiscursivity

There is a positive change in health and fitness discourse, with headlines promoting unhealthy diets and an emphasis on physical appearance changing to headlines promoting mental and physical wellbeing. For example, headlines from the beginning of the decade read, "Shrink Your Inner Thighs! IN SIX MINUTES A DAY", Flatten Your Abs: IN 4 EASY STEPS, and "4 Steps to a Sexy Ass" (Cosmopolitan, 2011, 2012). These headlines establish an association between skinniness and sexiness. While headlines later in the decade read, "OUTSMART STRESS: How to Find the Right Ambition Formula for You", and "PMS+ANXIETY: Why You Feel Cray Before Leak Week & How to Chill" (Cosmopolitan, 2018). These headlines are less concerned about physical appearance and instead focus on improving the readers overall

wellbeing. *Cosmopolitan*'s discourse is modified throughout the decade, from aligning with a

misogynistic discourse that reduces a woman's value to her physical attractiveness, to

constructing a more inclusive discourse that favours a supports a woman's general wellbeing.

While this progressive content is outnumbered, its existence on *Cosmopolitan* cover pages

represents a small but positive change.

Diachrony

To conclude, an overview of health and fitness's occurrences throughout the decade will

be provided, followed by a discussion of significant findings. Below is a year-by-year

visualisation of the data.

Figure 16, *Cosmopolitan* Cover Page Thematic Occurrences, Health and Fitness
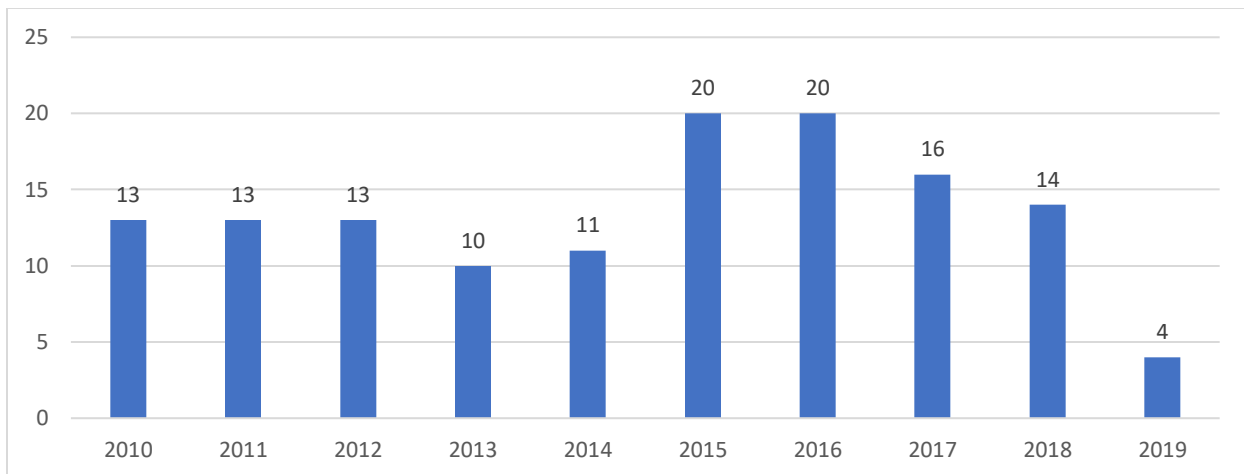
Health and fitness is largely underrepresented on *Cosmopolitan* cover pages throughout

the decade, with a high of 20% and an abysmal low of 4% of cover page content. In total, the

theme makes up 14% of *Cosmopolitan* cover page content between 2010-2019. While the theme

appeared to be increasing in presence in 2015 and 2016, it seems this is not a new norm with a

sharp decrease in 2017 that is sustained until the end of the decade. In fact, 2019 marks health

and fitness's least represented year. Once again, this may be a sign that *Cosmopolitan* refuses to

evolve with the times. The dismissal of this category in contrast to the embrace of categories like

sex and relationships and beauty and fashion reveals *Cosmopolitan*'s desired depiction of the 'Cosmo Girl' – a girl who favours physical appearance over internal wellbeing. This reinforces previous conclusions that *Cosmopolitan* does not adequately represent the modern woman and confines her to *Cosmopolitan*'s own discourse.

Career and Finance

Career and finance is the least popular theme across *Cosmopolitan* cover pages between January 2010 and December 2019. The theme makes up 8% of content throughout the decade.

Presuppositions

Headlines such as, "SHE DID WHAT AT WORK?", "#WORKFAIL THE MOST EMBARASSING STORIES EVER", and "I Sexted My Boss! Hilarious Auto-Corrects That'll Make You Cry With Laughter", all presuppose that women are unable to excel in professional settings (Cosmopolitan, 2013, 2014, 2016). Women have been historically delegated to the private sphere, where cooking, child rearing, and other domestic chores were their responsibility. Over time, social progress has allowed women to penetrate the public sphere and excel in professional, traditionally male-dominated settings. However, headlines like those cited from *Cosmopolitan* above, limit a woman's ability to succeed in the public sphere and contribute to an outdated perception that women are less professionally competent than men. Instead of celebrating a woman's success in the workplace, a majority of *Cosmopolitan*'s career and finance headlines focus on a woman's negative experience or impact. Society is becoming increasingly progressive, but *Cosmopolitan*'s headlines maintain an outdated discourse that hinders a woman's ability to escape the boundaries of the past.

Modal Verbs

Only 4% of modal cover page headlines belong to the career and finance theme. This is unsurprising considering the topic's neglect throughout the decade. The only agent evident in these headlines is the *Cosmopolitan* reader. Once again, in a category where women have complete autonomy over their actions, there is a miniscule amount of content to support and encourage them. This ensures that the emphasis of each *Cosmopolitan* cover remains on categories that oppress women, instead of liberating them.

It is of interest that this is the only theme where headlines were not overwhelmingly conveyed as fact. Instead, 50% of headlines were fact and 50% were a possibility, with 0% of headlines stating an opinion. However, I do not believe this deviation is a positive one. By refraining from asserting facts about women in the public sphere, *Cosmopolitan* places an emphasis on content that suggests a woman's success in the public sphere is only a possibility. For a magazine that can guarantee following their advice will land readers a man, a six pack, and a lifetime of enjoyable sex, it seems inconsistent that they cannot guarantee success in the workplace. However, considering, once again, that *Cosmopolitan* has a history of favouring patriarchal discourse, it perhaps does not come as a surprise that the magazine does not encourage women to lead successful and professional lives.

Frequent Words

The table below details the most frequent words used in *Cosmopolitan*'s career and finance headlines and how often they occur throughout the decade. Through the analysis of repeated words, assumptions can be made about *Cosmopolitan*'s representation of women in the workplace and whether or not this representation is socially progressive.

Table 5

Frequent Words Used in Career and Finance Headlines

WORD	FREQUENCY
MONEY	13
JOB	10
STRESS	9
CAREER	4
WORK	3

Upon examination, most of these words do not offer grounds for an extended analysis. However, particular attention should be paid to the recurring word, "stress" (Cosmopolitan, 2010-2019). As the only word signifying a feeling, it is of importance that the feeling is negative. *Cosmopolitan* implies that a woman who "works" at a "job" and makes "money" from her successful "career" must be "stressed" (Cosmopolitan, 2010-2019). This implication is, again, outdated. 21st century women are encouraged to fight against the systemic sexism that exists in many professional settings and demand the respect they deserve. Yet, in a magazine supposedly made for 21st century women, age-old stereotypes and discouraging messages are the norm.

Text Size

Figure 17　　　　　*Figure 18*　　　　　*Figure 19*

SNEAKY WAYS TO SAVE MORE CA$H

3 Easy Ways Your Phone Can Make You Richer

Upgrade Your Job, Cash Flow, Friendships & More

0% of *Cosmopolitan*'s largest cover page headlines belonged to the career and finance theme between 2010 and 2019. While an underrepresentation of career and finance may have been anticipated, its complete exclusion is shocking. It appears a modern lifestyle where women juggle a career, a family, close friends, and extracurricular passions, is not 'Cosmo-approved'. The absence of bold headlines encouraging readers to take control of their professional lives amplifies the underrepresentation of 21st century women on *Cosmopolitan* cover pages. *Cosmopolitan* regurgitates archaic assumptions about women in the workplace by simply erasing them from their magazines. To view yearly text size data, please consult Appendix A.

Intertextuality

Regarding career and finance, idioms such as "Innocent Mistakes That Blow a Job Interview", "Is Your Friend Holding You Back at Work?" and "How to BOUNCE BACK FROM AN OFFICE 'OOPS'" all align with the assumption that women are unable to succeed in a professional environment (Cosmopolitan, 2012, 2013). Given career and finance's lack of representation on *Cosmopolitan* cover pages, it is unfortunate that when it does appear, it presents women in an unprofessional, incompetent manner. *Cosmopolitan*'s idioms require societal context to be comprehended. Similar to their effect in previous themes, *Cosmopolitan*'s use of idioms that suggest women do not belong in workplace settings reveals that these ideas are commonplace in society.

Interdiscursivity

Career and finance headlines positively transform throughout the decade. At the beginning of the decade, Cosmopolitan's discourse contributed to sexist notions that women did not belong and could not succeed in professional settings. Some headlines that exemplify this are, "CAREER CISIS: You CAN Bounce Back!", "FINALLY: STOP LIVING PAYCHEK TO

38

PAYCHECK" and the headlines previously cited above (Cosmopolitan, 2012, 2013). However, this messaging changes later in the decade with headlines like, "SCORE A JOB YOU'LL REALLY LOVE", "Cosmo Careers: Your Surprise Secret Weapon for Success", and "The Career Move That'll Change Everything" (Cosmopolitan, 2016, 2019). However, as with previous conclusions, this change it is still too minor to be considered significant. Patriarchal discourse remains most prominent discourse on *Cosmopolitan* cover pages. However, any attempt to dismantle the sexist discourse that western society is founded upon is certainly a step towards progress.

Diachrony

To conclude, an overview of career and finance's occurrences throughout the decade will be provided, followed by a discussion of significant findings. Below is a year-by-year visualisation of the data.

Figure 20, *Cosmopolitan* Cover Page Thematic Occurrences, Career and Finance
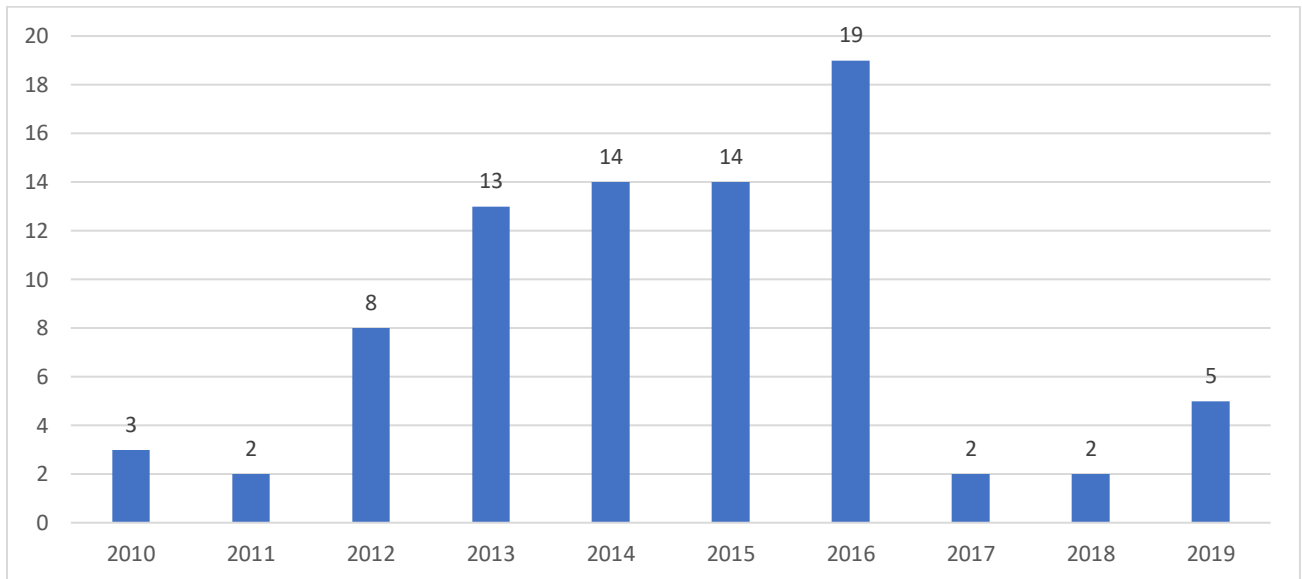
Career and finance is consistently disregarded by *Cosmopolitan* magazine, accounting for a one-time high of 19% and a frequent low of 2% of cover page content. In total, the theme

comes in last place and makes up only 8% of *Cosmopolitan* cover page content between 2010-2019. By dismissing categories like career and finance and health and fitness, readers are likely internalizing the oppressive discourse from other themes instead. Unfortunately, topics that are truly of interest to modern readers are not on the 'Cosmo Girl's' radar. While perhaps a minor issue now, *Cosmopolitan*'s consistent dismissal of women's interest in non-stereotypical subject matter may result in macro-level consequences. When instructed that sex and beauty are the only topics of importance, women may internalize these messages and slowly conform to the societal standards being taught to them. This series of events has long begun, and perhaps its origins can be traced to the inception of women's magazines. Sadly, with magazines like *Cosmopolitan* contributing to the issue, an end may be farther than anticipated.

Limitations and Opportunities for Future Research

While cover page headlines were chosen due to their increased visibility, such a narrow selection is also a limitation. Perhaps *Cosmopolitan* headlines did not adequately represent the content inside the magazine, which may have been more progressive and inclusive. In addition, a diachronic study of *Cosmopolitan* headlines from the magazine's inception may have yielded more accurate results. Unfortunately, given the nature of this paper, this was not a possibility. Possibilities for future research may include the examination of *Cosmopolitan*'s discourse alongside specific social movements. For example, investigating whether there is a link between cover page headlines and the discourse surrounding the second wave feminist movement, or more recently, the #MeToo era. This may reveal whether *Cosmopolitan*'s content is influenced by societal changes, or if *Cosmopolitan*'s content remains static and thus influences society.

Conclusion

As a result of the exploratory analysis above, possible answers to the proposed research questions can be concluded. First, how do linguistic concepts function within *Cosmopolitan* cover page headlines to represent femininity? *Cosmopolitan* headlines participate in an outdated discourse, representing women as boy-crazy, naïve, and emotionally driven beings. *Cosmopolitan* achieved this by employing linguistic strategies that manipulate their reader. With headlines that inherit meaning from archaic presuppositions, the use of modal verbs to amplify a lack of female autonomy, the repetition of words that stereotypically describe womanhood, the emphasis of sex through text size, the figurative sexism implied by idioms used, and the minimal change in discourse over time, all work together to construct a harmful discourse around femininity and align with patriarchal discourse from the past. With an overwhelming majority of cover page content associating women with sex and fashion, *Cosmopolitan* strengthens sexist discourse by suggesting that topics such as health and fitness or career and finance would not be of interest to a 'Cosmo Girl'. Second, has the nature of *Cosmopolitan* headlines evolved over the last decade? Slightly. There is a slow progression towards equal thematic representation over the decade – meaning, headlines are less dominated by sex and relationships and other themes have greater representation. In addition, *Cosmopolitan* headlines slowly shift agency from the man to the woman. Instead of instructing the reader on how to live life alongside their male counterpart, headlines later in the decade suggest that women can lead their own independent and successful lives. For the most part, however, *Cosmopolitan* content is male-focused – even in a magazine that claims to be written for women – rendering the positive effects of any linguistic changes to be negligible. In fact, these changes are likely undetectable to the average reader. As a whole, the magazine perpetuates more stereotypical representations of women than not. However, it is

important to recognize that *some* progress has been made, and perhaps over the next decade these small changes will become more substantial. In the words of Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer, "Power does not derive from language, but language can be used to challenge, power, to subvert it, to alter distributions of power in the short and long term" (2001, p.11). Unfortunately, *Cosmopolitan's* language does not adequately challenge the power of historically dominant discourse. Ultimately, *Cosmopolitan* headlines align with harmful societal assumptions about women and femininity and appears to have no place in the increasingly liberal 21st century.

Appendix A: Largest Cosmopolitan Headlines by Theme

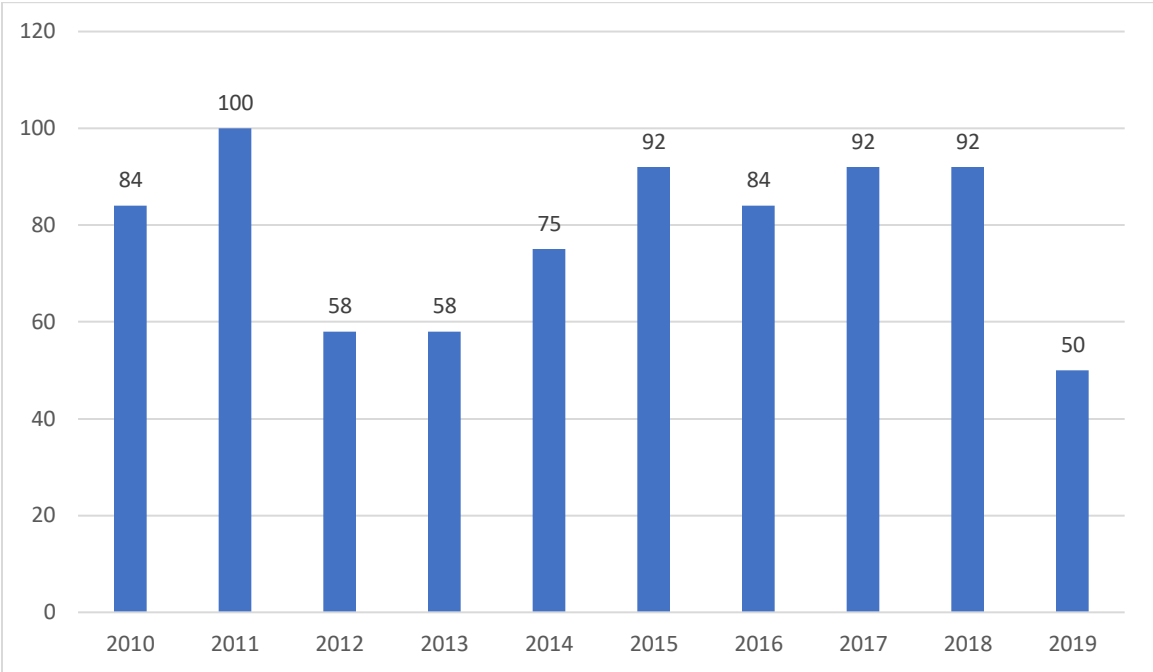**Figure 1, Largest *Cosmopolitan* Headlines by Theme, Sex and Relationships**

Figure 2, Largest *Cosmopolitan* Headlines by Theme, Beauty and Fashion
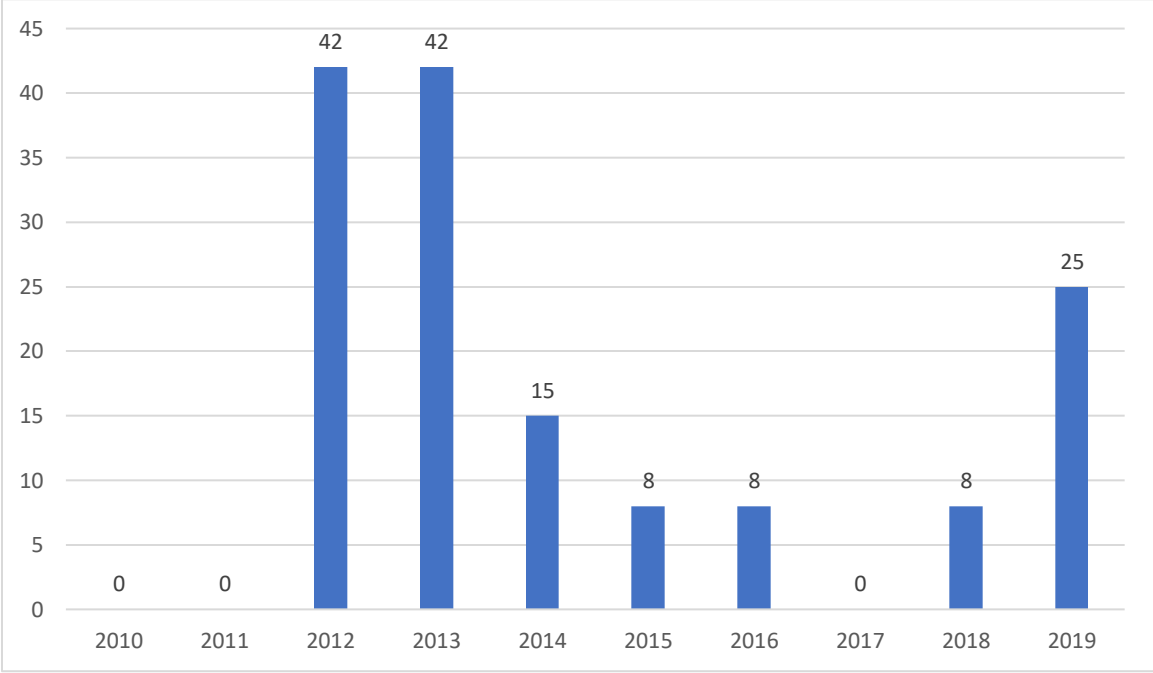
Figure 3, Largest *Cosmopolitan* Headlines by Theme, Lifestyle

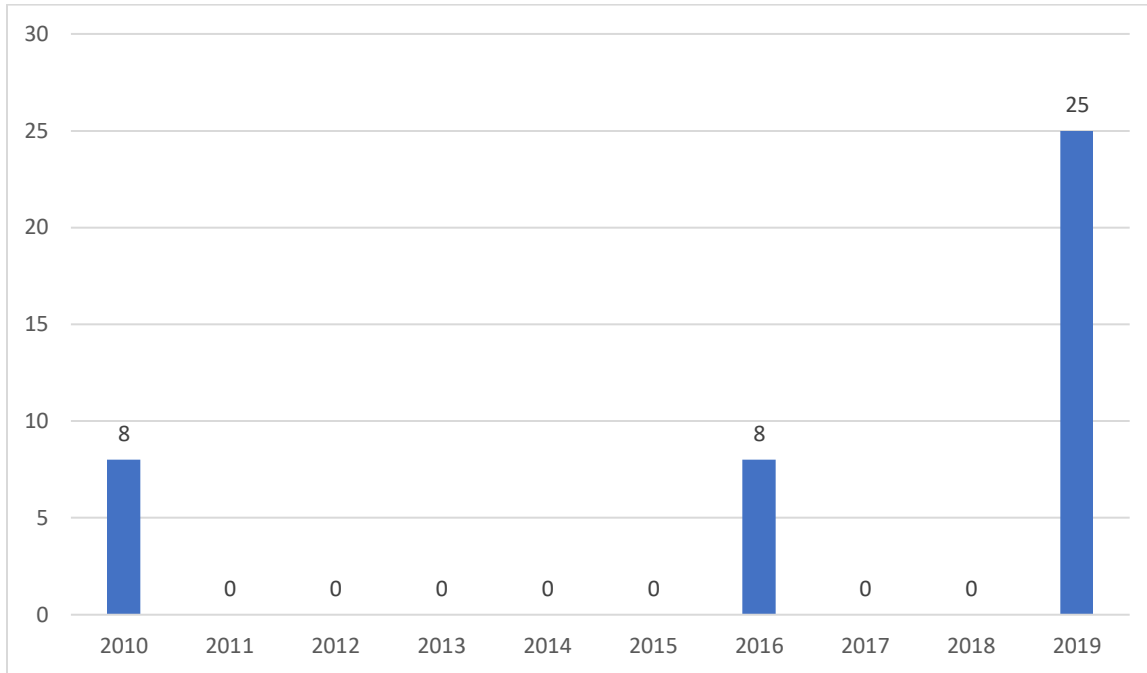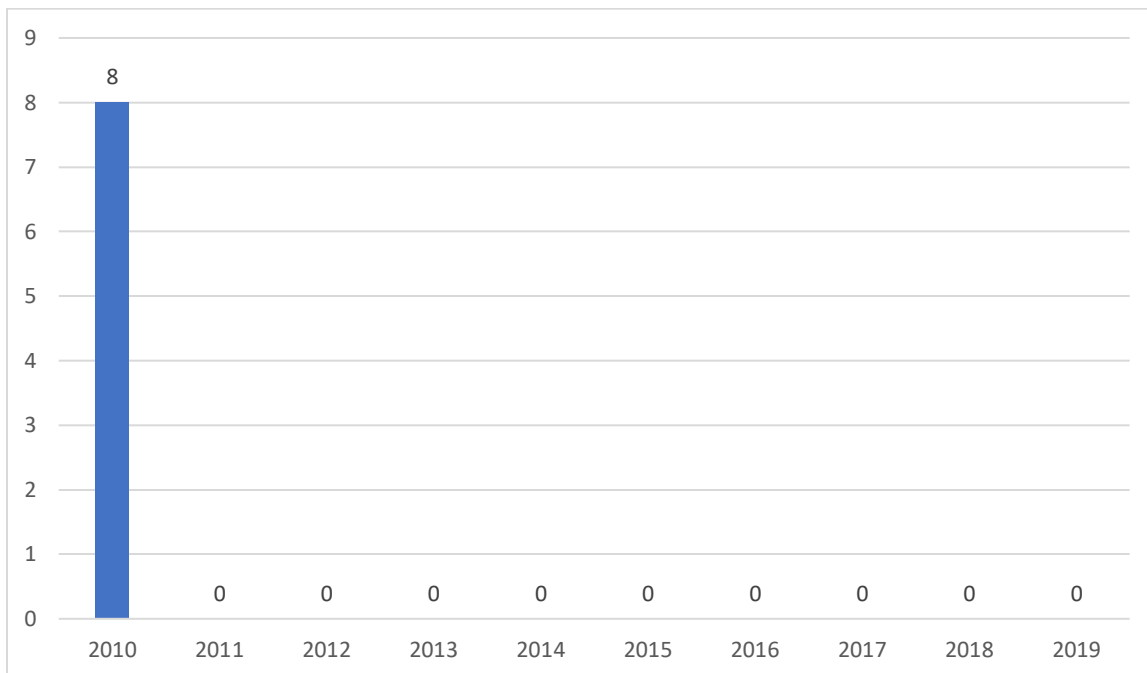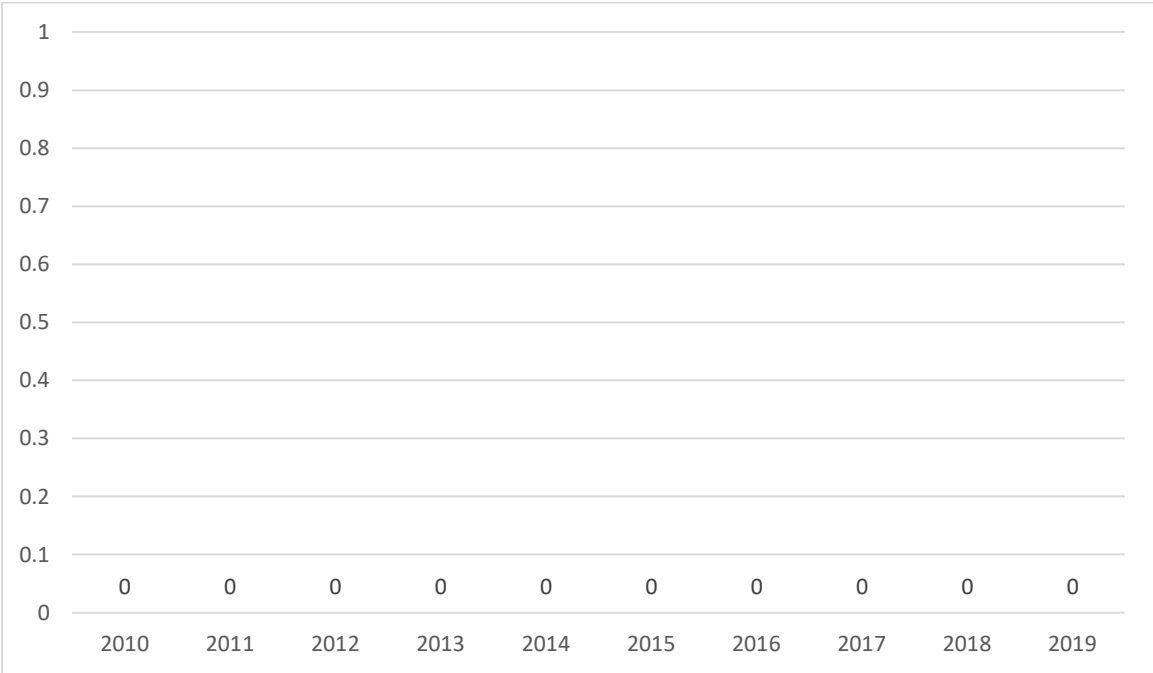**Figure 4, Largest *Cosmopolitan* Headlines by Theme, Health and Fitness**

Figure 5, Largest *Cosmopolitan* Headlines by Theme, Career and Finance

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
1										
0.9										
0.8										
0.7										
0.6										
0.5										
0.4										
0.3										
0.2										
0.1										
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

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