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Maxim is a Bully: Making Women the Victim for Male Pleasure

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Abstract

This study analyzes domestic violence discourse in 72 issues of *Maxim* magazine, an influential and widely circulated publication for young men that is rarely studied because it is not digitally archived or searchable. This discourse reveals culturally entrenched patriarchal attitudes and hegemonic and retrograde references that degrade and marginalize women in an important cultural artefact and a meaningful site of popular culture representations of gender. *Maxim's* commodification of the bullying of women may undergird persistent patriarchal attitudes toward intimate partner violence and reveal an anxious masculine response to feminism. *Maxim's* discourse positioned verbal, if not physical, violence against women as a socially acceptable signal of a desirable masculinity.

Keywords: Domestic violence, Maxim, feminism, men's magazines, masculinity

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Introduction

In articles about domestic violence that appear in leading men's and women's magazines, women have been blamed for the violence that men do.¹ Men's sports and health magazines have minimized the seriousness and impact of domestic violence and often treated it humorously.² But what of the category called "lads' magazines"—magazines that publish images of nearly nude women, along with articles about drinking, cars, video games, and gambling? Might these magazines, often aimed at men in their late teens and twenties, and more frankly engaged in sexual content than are other leading men's magazines, serve as a preparatory foregrounding of the retrograde patriarchal attitudes that have been previously chronicled?

Maxim is perhaps the leading lads' magazine internationally and the leading lads' magazine in the United States. *Maxim* is published in 16 editions in 75 countries, has nine million monthly readers, and an average circulation of 2.5 million.³ Although it is extremely popular and widely consumed (and thus worthy of inclusion in analyses that include magazines with similar circulation numbers) *Maxim* has been a challenging title to include in magazine studies because it is not digitally or physically archived in public and academic libraries. Assembling a meaningful sample that consecutively spans a number of years, and then manually searching those issues for keywords and key topics, has historically presented significant logistical obstacles that have likely limited this title's inclusion in previous studies. This study advances the body of work on domestic violence representation in American magazines by contributing previously missing evidence of how intimate partner violence-related discourse appears in *Maxim*. Additionally, the character of the domestic violence content found in *Maxim* further complicates our understanding of the ideological workings of magazines and of the cultural impact of magazine representations.

This research considers the cultural impact of this coverage through a framework of Stuart Hall's theories of present and absent representations, draws on Raymond Williams' cultural materialism concepts, and is situated within the body of feminist media studies. Building on the extensive domestic violence research already conducted on newspapers and television, this study identifies persistent narratives in *Maxim* of celebrating and naturalizing male violence, "other-ing" and bullying of older or conventionally unattractive women, treating domestic violence dismissively, blurring the line between sex and violence, and holding women responsible for the violence that men do. Before the problem of domestic violence can be meaningfully and effectively addressed, the ways in which it is characterized must be understood. This requires a complete analysis of media coverage of the issue to identify the problem, situate it appropriately within cultural and social contexts, and begin to explore solutions. By illuminating an under-explored area of media narratives, this study reveals current cultural narratives about domestic violence and seeks to contribute productively to illuminated social scripts that are embedded in popularized media. The study addresses these research questions:

RQ1: How are gendered power relations articulated in the domestic violence discourse in *Maxim* magazine?

RQ2: Do these representations resist or reify the dismissive and minimizing attitudes toward domestic violence that are evinced in other men's magazines, as analysed in previous magazine scholarship?

Theoretical arguments

Feminist theory recognizes the gender and power inequities and the gender role expectations revealed in domestic violence, and contextualizes that violence within the ways patriarchy functions to prescribe and endorse male aggression.⁴ Political, religious, and economic structures—what Adrienne Rich calls “a pervasive cluster of forces”⁵—make male violence against women possible. Susan Schechter analyzes domestic violence as “an historical expression of male domination manifested with the family” that is reinforced by cultural social and economic institutions.⁶ Patriarchal ideology naturalizes the domination of men over women, particularly in the family system, and social structures assist in reinforcing the persistent, historic narrative that women are subordinate.⁷ bell hooks argues that, unlike other forms of violence, domestic violence “is most overtly condoned and accepted, even celebrated in this culture. Society’s acceptance and perpetuation of that violence helps maintain it and makes it difficult to control or eliminate.”⁸ hooks also argues that “men have a tremendous contribution to make to feminist struggle in the area of exposing, confronting, opposing, and transforming the sexism of their male peers.”⁹ I interpolate men’s magazines into the category of male-to-male communication that may be transformative.

Stuart Hall argued that the act of considering media representation is always culturally situated; thus, looking not only at what is present in media but also at what is not present, can illuminate power structures that are otherwise less visible.¹⁰ Bonnie Brennen and Lee Wilkins suggest that the ways in which a particular topic is addressed—its frequency (or lack thereof), its language, and its tone, for example—“offer useful strategies of analysis that may showcase the process of social change in a society.”¹¹ Building on James Carey’s argument that mass media communicative practices create our realities,¹² Mary Vavrus contends that “media create, maintain, extend, and delimit the content and boundaries of the symbolic environment of our lives.”¹³ Mediated, even ritualized, negotiations with reality have far-reaching public and private consequences, argues Stuart Hall,¹⁴ and such meaning-making extends from observed representations to those that cannot be observed because they are absent. About the power of absent representation, Hall wrote:

It was the silences that told us something; it was what wasn’t there. It was what was invisible, what couldn’t be put into frame, what was apparently unsayable that we needed to attend to.¹⁵

George Gerbner¹⁶ and Gaye Tuchman¹⁷ consider the lack of representation in media as the annihilation of a group, and Lisa Cuklanz notes that feminine voices are often absent

from the very discussions that most affect them, serving to silence resistance to established practices and power relations.¹⁸ Here, feminist theory is applied with Kimberle Crenshaw's perspective of identity politics and intersectionality, understanding that gender subordination intersects and interacts with other sub- and super-ordinations of class, nationality, religion, age, race, sexual orientation, and other identities.¹⁹

This research also draws on Raymond Williams's cultural materialism approach; to understand any culture, he argued, first examine its language.²⁰ The ways in which language describes and addresses an issue, behavior, or attitude are constantly evolving, creative social processes that can be revelatory in illuminating the social attitudes and practices of a particular historic moment. Language, as a shared practice and tool, participates in shaping a culture of common meaning and communicating current and shifting meanings of events and issues in what Williams names a "constitutive social process."²¹ Written language is meaningful material production, reflecting the historical and political conditions under which it is produced, since no writer can be completely free of the ideology and culture of her time and place.²² The language and, by extension, tone and attitude of media coverage of domestic violence, reveal current attitudes and may help illuminate ways in which the public conversation around this issue might be distorted—and, therefore, how that distortion might be helpfully corrected.

The media language with which gender and domestic violence are discussed form social narratives about the conditions under which violence occurs and the reasons for its existence. Concerns over rape culture, which includes domestic violence, have raised issues of the subtle and explicit ways in which patriarchy manifests in cultural institutions, including media, and contributes to an environment that allows rape to occur. Language creates, shapes, and reflects culture, and is created out of specific political, economic, and historic conditions.

Literature Review

This study extends and broadens existing feminist research of domestic violence on newspapers and television²³ and in popular magazines.²⁴ In 1986, Neil Malamuth found connections between men being exposed to violent content in media and then thinking aggressive thoughts about being violent to women.²⁵ Sociologist Nancy Berns studied women's magazines from 1970-1997²⁶ and men's magazines from 1970-1999,²⁷ and identified a pattern of "degendering the problem and gendering the blame"²⁸ in which the attacker's violence appeared gender-neutral but the victim's gender was central and characterized as problematic. This removed domestic violence from being a social issue and repositioned it as a woman's private problem,²⁹ and also played "a central role in resisting any attempts to situate social problems within a patriarchal framework."³⁰ A 2011 study by the author picked up chronologically where Berns' work left off and compared men's and women's magazines published between 1998 and 2008. It found that women's magazines held women responsible for male violence and men's magazines ignored or dismissed the issue. Domestic violence was presented as being frightening to women and amusing to men, and male anger was represented as a natural and unpreventable phenomenon of

masculinity.³¹ Lucia Lykke considered domestic violence coverage through a lens of intersectionality and found media accounts to be gendered and racialized and men's magazines to be in denial of the importance of sexual violence as a problem.³²

Both women's and men's magazine articles that discuss rape tend to characterise the crime, victims, and perpetrators in ways that reiterate traditional gender expectations. Susan Caringella-MacDonald characterised magazine portrayals of rape as being firmly "hegemonic, buttressing the patriarchy that undergirds structural inequality and sexism and the rampant rape that these engender."³³ When rape and domestic violence are reported as if they were perpetrated by only a few, errant men, then individuals become demonized and responsibility is thereby shifted away from patriarchal social systems that allow and foster widespread male violence.³⁴ This assists in deflecting "attention away from the influence of hegemonic centres of power and control," contended Suzanne Marie Enck-Wanzer.³⁵ By reflecting rather than interrogating this cultural blindness, Meyers found, media reinforce the invisibility of those assumptions "and thereby contributes to the perpetuation of violence against women."³⁶ Russell argued that treating rape as an act of an individual deviant is inaccurate, and that violence against women actually conforms to ideals of masculinity.³⁷ In his documentary about male violence, *Tough Guise 2*, Jackson Katz contended that the very term "violence against women" seemed to indicate a cultural attitude that violence, perpetrated by no one in particular, just happens to women—thus screening male culpability and the gendered nature of domestic violence.³⁸

Most crimes are the fault of a criminal, but in two types, media blame victims: rape and domestic violence. Newspaper articles blame murdered women for being in the wrong place or remaining in a relationship that ultimately ended in violence.³⁹ Often, the responsibility of the attacker is minimized or overlooked and the victim is blamed for what happened to her.⁴⁰ The crime of domestic violence is itself overlooked in media coverage, according to Bullock, and "ignoring men's violence against women is perhaps media's most fundamental way of reinforcing the patriarchal status quo."⁴¹ Patriarchal power structures pertaining to family law and property ownership are protected by the propagation of rape narratives that blame women for the violence done to them. Projansky found that "rape narratives help organise, understand, and even arguably produce the social world; they help structure social understandings of complex phenomena such as gender, race, class, and nation."⁴²

Magazines and media play essential roles in producing hegemonic masculinity 'ideals' for men and women.⁴³ Prushank determined that teen magazines represented adolescent boys as being a mixture of loving and cruel, likely to express rage through physical domination. Media so naturalize the patriarchal characteristics of masculinity, she argued, "that men find the domination and exploitation of women and other men to be not only expected, but actually demanded."⁴⁴ These media narratives of how men and boys behave work to reify and reinscribe ideas that rage and violence are essentially linked to masculinity⁴⁵ and teach teenage boys how to treat women.⁴⁶

Methodology

This qualitative intertextual narrative analysis combines critical cultural studies with feminist theory to identify the discursive aspects of gender, race, and class present in this text, interrogate the ideological valences and the hegemonic forces revealed within, and identify tropes and themes that emerge and consider these in light of social and cultural attitudes and norms.⁴⁷ Narrative analysis of multiple media texts—intertextual analysis—can be useful in identifying persistent narratives that may go unnoticed or appear minor in an individual text but may be revealed when viewed as a contextualized aggregate.⁴⁸

In a sense, all texts, as Roland Barthes held, are in conversation with all texts already in existence.⁴⁹ Intertextual narrative analysis focuses this idea to identify common themes across related texts, thereby disclosing otherwise difficult-to-discern nuances and complexities in embedded attitudes toward gender, sexuality, and power, and allowing for nuanced parsing of ideological tropes present in texts. Narrative analysis focuses on how a story is told, and, following Hall,⁵⁰ this study also focuses on how a story is *not* told. It is critical to read silences and absences in gendered discourse because the implications and assumptions within them may be powerful statements of hegemonic forces. Hall's work recognizes the profound importance of identifying what is missing from media messages:

We had to develop a methodology that taught us to attend, not only to what people said about race but... to what people could not say about race. It was the silences that told us something; it was what wasn't there. It was what was invisible, what couldn't be put into frame, what was apparently unsayable that we needed to attend to.⁵¹

Feminist theory informs this method by revealing layers of power, dominance, and gendered social and cultural practices present in textual representations and by adding the perspective of intersectionality to interpretations of identified tropes. This analysis contributes to feminist media studies and to studies of domestic violence representations in magazines by identifying key narratives across six years of a magazine that has rarely been studied and by documenting recurrent and persistent attitudes toward women present in this under-examined publication. In social and cultural conversations, the missing or silenced voices can sometimes be the very voices most affected;⁵² the perspectives that are missing from media conversations can reveal deeply held beliefs and values, and these perspectives can be revealed through narrative analysis.

Maxim magazine is critical to study because it is a leading lads' magazine, both internationally and in the United States. *Maxim* is published in 16 editions in 75 countries, has nine million monthly readers, and an average circulation of 2.5 million.⁵³ Although these circulation rankings indicate significant popularity and potential impact on popular culture, *Maxim* has rarely been included in studies, almost certainly for logistical reasons. It is not digitally archived nor is it searchable in databases. Archives of print copies are uncommon in public and academic libraries, and acquiring a full complement of an unbroken decade of back issues presented significant logistical and economic challenges. An academic archive was

located that provided a rare opportunity to research this publication. The archive included most print copies of 72 issues published between 2006 and 2012, but was missing issues here and there. These issues were acquired on eBay, but funds for purchasing back issues were limited and did not allow for expanding the sample beyond these six years. These physical conditions prescribed the parameters of this study to 72 issues in six years from 2006 to 2012. Since only hard copies were available, articles could not be searched digitally for keywords and were manually scanned for content related to domestic violence or violence involving women. From these 72 issues, 147 articles that mentioned domestic or intimate partner violence, or violence against women, were identified.

Intertextual analysis articulates connections between discourse in various texts and makes meaning of the relationships between style, language choice, narrative, theme, and other observable and interpreted elements. This required in-depth readings and re-readings of each of the 147 texts, identifying not only the denotation present in content but interpreting and uncovering possible connotations. Hall's initial step in qualitative and quantitative methodology of a "long, preliminary soak"⁵⁴ in the texts preceded identification of patterns and categories of discourse and common threads of narrative structure with the goal of helping to make explicit the underlying assumptions, stereotypes, and prejudices about female sexuality, appearance, age, and similar factors and to show how these meanings articulate to the ideology of gender and masculinity.

Methodology that allows for parsing both implicit and foregrounded content and meaning is required, particularly if narrative similarities are to be usefully drawn between texts that reinscribe and reiterate power relations between genders, sexualities, and types of masculinities, as do these from *Maxim*. Toward this end, interrogating the texts with feminist methods of analysis allows more useful exposure of the multi-layered nature of these texts. In preparation for reading and analyzing these texts, selected questions based on Foss's⁵⁵ feminist analytical protocols and focused on domestic violence were employed to focus on the gender relations and power assumptions in the material, including: What is presented as "normal" and appropriate behavior (and in particular, violence) of men toward women? What is presented as unacceptable behavior for either women or men? When are women present and when are they absent? Does the text present a preferred perspective from which to view domestic violence and gender power relations?

This study makes a meaningful contribution to research regarding domestic violence magazine coverage and advances information from a particular section of *Maxim's* publication history, but future studies that are more expansive are called for and would broaden the field's understanding of lad magazine discourse, particularly should *Maxim* become digitally archived and searchable in data bases.

Results

The nature of the domestic violence discourse over six years of *Maxim* was found to be in alignment with the dismissive, humorous, and minimizing attitudes found in previous

research of other magazine and newspaper coverage,⁵⁶ addressing research questions 1 and 2. Stylistic discourse referent to intimate partner violence and toward women in general were a large part of overall content in *Maxim* and those attitudes fell into one of two categories: veneration of supermodels and attractive actresses, and bullying and disdain for women who were not considered conventionally beautiful (by *Maxim*) or who were older than its readership. Among the 147 articles over 72 issues, six recurring micro-genres were identified. First, these texts are described, grouped into these six thematic areas. Then, they are analyzed theoretically in the Discussion section.

Male violence is naturalized and celebrated. A masculinity cult is constructed in *Maxim* that celebrates violence as an essential characteristic that is uniquely tolerated and understood by men. The dominant writing tone is a smirking, wink-wink voice that repositions male violence as homosocial bonding—acts of hitting, killing, slapping, and humiliating women are cast as playful behaviors that men, among themselves, understand. Presented as unquestioned assumptions about gender and roles, this framing enables sexist and patriarchal attitudes to exist in media content without being questioned. *Maxim* establishes the injuring of a woman as something men do to blow off steam, and positions women as objects men may feel entitled to use for that purpose.

Some article topics focus on violence—for example, an article about how to be a “successful” murderer⁵⁷—and sometimes violence appears in articles where it seems unnecessary, such as a list of New Year’s resolutions that includes “give up serial killing.”⁵⁸ The solution for catching your girlfriend with the plumber is “snuffing them both.”⁵⁹ An article about knives praises a “badass new blade. Masculinity restored!”⁶⁰ A comedian’s dying wish is to participate in the world’s largest gangbang.⁶¹ A music review says, “After a bad day, Luda wants to slap people. (Don’t we all.)”⁶² Film, television, and music reviews praise media that feature “babes, bullets and blood!”⁶³ Descriptions of violence are graphic and detailed: “watch them pound each other into new levels of slurred speech and blurred vision.”⁶⁴ Occasionally, articles offer explanations for male violence, such as an article on post-traumatic stress disorder and the changed brain chemistry of male soldiers who may be unable to suppress urges they know to be harmful or wrong.⁶⁵ Another article about a violent military man who killed his wife blames her and the military, but not him.⁶⁶ In one article, scientific explanations are offered concerning which parts of the brain make men act like “jerks” and form angry mobs.⁶⁷

Violence against women is justified if the goal is noble, as in a television review that describes Jack Bauer as “a man so hell-bent on saving the world he’ll shoot women.”⁶⁸ Rarely, men are held responsible for being violent, and male violence is treated as individual pathology, unrelated to social structures or cultural attitudes. Inconsistently and rarely, perpetrators are identified and disciplined, as in the 2009 “Year in Douche”: “Chris Brown: Beat up sexiest singer on Earth. If Biggie or Tupac were still alive, he wouldn’t be.”⁶⁹ A man accused of murdering three women is censured: “Sam is a fucking bitch for doing that to those girls. If he really did it, I hope he rots in hell.”⁷⁰ This might be read constructively as male disciplining of aberrant behavior if it did not include a gendered insult. Non-violent men are presented as unlikable and less than masculine, and most tellingly, their non-

violence moves them into the category of women at risk of being attacked. Figure skater Johnny Weir is characterized as annoying because he has a “delicate neck” and would get his ass whipped in a fight against Tonya Harding.⁷¹ An article describes a man with “ripped-out hair from worrying about the beating wife will give him.”⁷² A man who carries pepper spray “deserves to be mugged and beaten.”⁷³

Violent women are crazy. In *Maxim*, violent men are portrayed as desirably masculine, but when women are violent, they are treated as if they are insane. Male violence is the distinct purview of men, but female violence is characterized as unpredictable and bizarre. Readers are cautioned against sex with ex-girlfriends because “psycho girls” might end up throwing a chair at you.⁷⁴ A former Texas police officer tells a story: “That crazy bitch ran my limo into a tree because she was drunk, chasing me through a pasture. She totalled it on purpose! I was hiding in the woods thinking, *Man I hope that bitch is dead!*”⁷⁵ In another story, facing down an angry woman is equated with facing a charging bear.⁷⁶

Violence against women is funny. Violence against women is routinely employed by *Maxim* as grist for its humor mill, returned to again and again as a seemingly inexhaustible source of laughter and enjoyment. The joy in seeing women attacked or even killed is unrepentant and unequivocal. Treating violence toward women as something humorous or funny works to strip female victims of their humanity and reduces them to objects of amusement—objects that cannot feel pain or don’t mind dying, if it makes for a good joke. This light-hearted approach constructs an ideology that naturalizes violent thoughts and impulses, argues against inhibiting them, and may support enacting them. References to domestic violence and stalking appear as one-liners: “The California real estate market has taken more hits than a date with Chris Brown”⁷⁷; “I’ve been watching her from a Dumpster outside her apartment for three days;”⁷⁸ “Just lock your wife and your dog in the trunk of your car and see who’s still happy to see you after you let them out an hour later.”⁷⁹ In a joke, a wife asks, “Can you pass the butter?” Her husband replies, “You bitch, you’ve ruined my life!”⁸⁰ A story of comedian Fatty Arbuckle dismisses his famous legal case as “a little scandal: rape with a wine bottle and a dead showgirl.”⁸¹

The lines between violence and sex are blurred. Violence and sex are often conflated in *Maxim* and both are represented as desirable and interchangeable. Violence involving women—as either victim or perpetrator—is sexualized: “[she has] the ability to kill a man with just a look;”⁸² “Kurt Russell tries to kill assorted lovelies;”⁸³ “models could have murdered someone during this photo shoot, and we’d have happily helped you bury the body;”⁸⁴ a Bond girl is “scary hot” because she crushes men between her legs.⁸⁵ Women are quoted as saying they love being dominated by men,⁸⁶ are eager to try rape fantasies,⁸⁷ and “love being called a dirty slut.”⁸⁸ The magazine’s vocabulary carries double meanings of sexuality and violence: “she slays us,”⁸⁹ “hit it,”⁹⁰ “smack that.”⁹¹ One article suggests that women recovering from physical abuse might heal themselves by becoming actresses in pornographic films.⁹²

Women are responsible for male violence. In keeping with previous research (Berns, Nettleton, etc.), articles about abused and murdered women blame the victim, not the

abuser. Women are guilty for choosing a violent man; men are not guilty of being violent. In a story about Kamisha Block, an Army specialist who was falsely reported as being killed by friendly fire but was murdered by her abusive sergeant-boyfriend, Block is criticised for not taking her boyfriend's bad behavior seriously.⁹³ A story about violence linked to Craigslist listings blames victims for not being careful.⁹⁴ Male abusers are not held responsible for their behavior and women are expected to anticipate future actions and successfully avoid being attacked or killed. This is an extension of the magazine's position that male violence is naturally occurring and unavoidable. If this is true, then men need do nothing to change the course of biology; that job falls to women.

Women are bullied. *Maxim's* sexual objectification of young women who are hegemonically attractive contrasts sharply with its pointed "other-ing" of women who are older or judged by the magazine to be unattractive. The slavish, obsequious treatment awarded to models and actresses has a dark side: rage at and fear of women who appear uninterested in appealing physically to men. Such women are sharply "othered" and the male fear of them is palpable. Brennen and Duffy suggest that the framing of certain groups as "other" in media representations serves to promote particular ideological positions and foster a climate of fear.⁹⁵ Women who do not care about appealing to men cannot easily be controlled by men, so encountering such women may make readers feel stripped of power. Getting even with these women is a persistent narrative throughout all six years of *Maxim*.

The magazine frequently publishes short jokes, and many of them have old or overweight women as the punchline or punching bag. Pushing an old woman over at an ATM⁹⁶ and tasing your grandmother⁹⁷ are presented unapologetically as being hilarious, and if these acts of violence could be performed by "a hot chick with big boobs,"⁹⁸ all the better. A story suggests killing a zombie by "throw[ing] Kirstie Alley or Rosie O'Donnell at it. Then let's see who eats who."⁹⁹ In a magazine filled with images of nearly naked young women posed provocatively, a clear distinction is rendered between women who are subjects of derision and bullying and women who are sexually desirable. Treating attractive women with adoration (however temporary), while "other-ing" and marginalizing women who are aged, married, or perceived as unattractive, categorizes these women as non-human objects and establishes their physical appearance as their chief value to their families and society. The adoration of attractive women rings hollow when a change in circumstance—marriage, a few birthdays, childbirth—swiftly shifts a woman from the category of desirable conquest into the category of women who can be bullied for male fun.

Discussion

Maxim creates in its pages a lad culture that endorses and naturalizes male aggression while celebrating violence as a shared masculine thrill and a means of bonding with other men. This articulation of violence to hegemonic masculinity distinctly reifies patriarchal attitudes, and contributes to foreclosing possibilities that men, as bell hooks argues, might contribute meaningfully to the feminist cause. The masculine perspective and sensibility is

foregrounded while the experiences of women are silenced or inhibited to the point of censure.

Again and again, the narrative of *Maxim* texts situates the power of judging the value of women as existing in the hands of men—in the case of this readership, young men. Texts explicitly harass and shame women who do not align with popular, hegemonic ideals of supermodel femininity, but underlying, implicit messages signal troubling assumptions and ideology: women exist to please men, and have little other value or redeeming qualities. When women are not physically desirable to men, then they (in some texts in this study, literally) become fodder for bullying, harassing, stalking, and violence. Even in texts without direct physical violence, there is violence in the represented attitudes of young males toward women, in the multiple layers of gendered power relationships, and in the nuances connoted in the assumptions that mocking women is humorous to all men.

While this study's findings align closely with previous scholarship of other men's magazines mentioned earlier, this study complicates our understanding of this discourse with representations aimed at a younger male audience whose gender ideologies may not yet be completely formed, and which may be aspirational to readers who are at the developmental stage of beginning to form their initial, meaningful pair bonds. The dissemination here of such starkly gendered representations of roles, and such unforgiving parameters of attractiveness (the ticket that buys a woman out of being a potential victim), perpetuates implicit and explicit hierarchies of power and gender in a key site for learning how to behave as an adult man. This study also expands intersectionality to include the category of female unattractiveness as a site where power can be imposed and subordination endured.

It is critical to read silences in gendered discourse because, within such absences, important implications and assumptions about hegemonic forces are often embedded. The absences in these narratives illuminate subtle (and not so subtle) manifestations of patriarchy. No article advises young men to think critically about cultural attitudes toward violence. No article lists ways readers might diffuse or channel their anger. No mention of patriarchy ever occurs. No article spells out the consequences of being violently attacked or of being the violent attacker. Domestic violence appears as an event without consequences. There are no ambulance rides to the emergency room, no terrified children, no broken bones, no permanent brain damage. No article treats domestic violence seriously, and making it a constant joke minimizes the pain and injury of actual abuse and renders the consequences (to both women and men) invisible. There are no serious discussions of domestic violence in *Maxim*: no narratives about how men might protect women and family; no narratives that responsible, mature men do not resort to physical violence, particularly on family members; no narratives critique the relationship between violence and men, interrogate alternate possibilities, or celebrate men who lead lives without violence.

Finally, there are no articles that explore alternate masculinities to the one that embraces and enacts violence. This absence is a symbolic annihilation¹⁰⁰ of types of masculinity that do not exhibit violence and rage. Treating all men as a homogenous group that uncritically accepts hegemonic masculinity at its violent and sexist extremes forecloses

the possibility that men can healthily express emotions and conduct themselves within legal and ethical boundaries, magnifying the misogynist attitudes of one group into the attitudes of an entire gender and sexuality. If mass media communicative practices help create our realities, as James Carey argues, and if the influence of those realities extend in public and personal spheres, as Stuart Hall contends, the meaning-making from *Maxim*'s discourse may have significant social, cultural, and personal results. When media position certain behaviors, however repugnant, as aspirational steps toward a desired goal of, say, masculinity, the messages embedded in such media acquire particular power. Recurrent, persistent narratives of gender and gender roles—such as women being held responsible for the violence that men do, or that enacting violence is amusing and even enjoyable for men—have the power to form social narratives about the conditions under which violence occurs, the reasons for its existence, and whether or not it deserves any of our concern.

I read *Maxim* magazine over the period of 2006–2012 as an important cultural artifact and a meaningful site of popular culture representations of domestic violence that reveals significant, bullying attitudes toward women that may contribute to the naturalization of male violence against women and that offers compelling evidence of embodied gender attitudes in magazine media for men. I argue that *Maxim*, during this period, participated in the commodification of the bullying of women, employing language, situations, and humor that position women as subordinate to men, a commodification which may serve to undergird persistent patriarchal attitudes toward intimate partner violence. I also argue that *Maxim*'s discourse contributed to linking certain behaviors of some men, such as derogatory treatment of women, stalking, and violence, to the achievement of elevated status regarding masculinity, a linkage that is particularly troublesome in a publication aimed at readers at an especially formative time in their development. And, I argue that *Maxim*'s discourse positioned verbal, if not physical, violence against women as a socially acceptable signal of a desirable masculinity.

Notes

¹ Nancy Berns, "My Problem and How I Solved It: Domestic Violence in Women's Magazines," *Sociological Quarterly* 40 no.1 (1999) 85-108; Nancy Berns, "Degendering the Problem and Gendering the Blame: Political Discourse on Women's Violence," *Gender & Society* 15 no. 2 (2001) 262-281; Nancy Berns, *Framing the Victim: Domestic Violence Media and Social Problems*, (Hawthorne, N.Y: Aldine de Gruyter, 2004); Pamela Hill Nettleton, "Domestic Violence in Men's and Women's Magazines: Women Are Guilty of Choosing the Wrong Men, Men Are Not Guilty of Hitting Women," *Women's Studies in Communication* 34 (2011), 139-160.

² Nettleton, 2011.

³ "Biglari Holdings Inc. Acquires MAXIM," last modified Feb 27, 2014, <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/biglari-holdings-inc-acquires-maxim-247666641.html>

⁴ Ellen Pence and Michael Paymar, *Education Groups for Men who Batter* (London: Springer, 1993).

⁵ Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," in *Feminist Theory: A Reader, 2nd Edition*, ed. W. Kolmar and F. Bartkowski (New York: McGraw Hill, 2005), 349. (Originally published in Adrienne Rich, *Blood, Bread and Poetry: Selected Prose, 1979-1985* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1986).

⁶ Susan Schechter, *Women and Male Violence: The Visions and Struggles of the Battered Women's Movement* (Boston: South End Press, 1982), 209.

⁷ R. Emerson Dobash and Russell P. Dobash, *Violence Against Wives: A Case Against Patriarchy* (New York: The Free Press, 1979).

⁸ bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center, 2nd Edition* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1984 and 2000), 120-1.

⁹ hooks, 83.

¹⁰ Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices* (London: Sage, 1997).

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