Women in Mass-Media: Femininity and Anti-Feminism

Ștefania Bătrînca
University of Craiova

Abstract

A woman's place in the modern society is not a closed topic. However, in the past decade the emphasis switched between fenimism and postfeminism. To understand a woman's role in mass-media, we need to take a look back in history.

Our journey starts in the 1960s when the first feminists began to openly talk about equal rights in employment, political participation, the right to have an abortion and a law against domestic violence. This is a turning point in the fight for emancipation: the women who were engaged in this battle decide that it is time to rise from the domination of men. Step by step, the feminist ideology began to look more like a social and political movement in the modern world.

Keywords: women, mass-media, feminism, feminity, anti-feminism

"Girl Power" was the first slogan, the first step towards a new society where a woman can be respected and paid like a man. The slogan strengthened the role of women in Western countries.

The first wave of feminists tried to pull the woman from the partiarhal model, to determine her to think and feel for her own. In her article, Woman: Group and Identity?, Glynis M. Breakwell argues that when a social identity is unsatisfactory, the individual will seek change in the group. The individual will try to change the social matter of a certain group or even the members. But women could not refuse to be women, and many of them have decided to deny their femininity. They adopted male roles and forms of behavior to gain superiority.

A good example is the Holywood world in the 1970s. Women began to play roles of policemen, detectives, soldiers, being put in a heroic light. The film industry and the media will promote a female model built for many years by the feminists. But it wasn't enough because women dressed male forms, a contradiction with the feminist ideology.

Actually, it was a return to the old norms of femininity, norms analyzed in detail by the psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung. He explained that men seek in women two major qualities: sensitivity and a dose of helplessness. When a woman wants to get rid of them, she adopts male forms, unattractive to the opposite sex. The psychoanalyst highlights that men are fascinated by helplessness, ignorance and innocence of a woman. (Jung 2003)

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The feminists will fight for many years to abolish woman's ignorance and they will achive tremendous victories: equal rights in employment, the right to have an abortion, the right to free speach.

Postfeminism – womanhood and anti-feminity

When the first wave of feminists tried to change the modern world, Romania was struggling with communism. And the women were seen just as workforce, mainly because they represented more than a half of the population of the country. For the communist system that meant one thing: women are a resource that can be exploit extensively in order to achive the „industrial communist world". Moreover, a series of articles from Scînteia magazine (1972) reveil a major problem. In Romania women were poorly paid. Also, in the communist country abortion was a crime punished by law.

In the 1990s Romania was a democratic country in a changed world. It was the right time to argue whether or not the fight for equal rights between men and women is over. Postfeminism ideology was born, a term used for the first time in the 1980s in the media industry. Postfeminism is usually used to refer to the „happy release" from the feminist world considered to be outdated and obsolete. (Gamble 2009)

Even the new edition of the Oxford Concise Dictionary defines postfeminsm as an antonym of feminism. The postfeminists argue that in the new era, women need a new wave of practices that can meet their current problems. The media industry labeled some people postfeminists. Some of them do not consider themselves to be opposed to feminism: "Usually those who are appointed by the media to be postfeminist are not part of an anti-feminist movement", writes Justine Picardie in Independent on Sunday. (Gill 2009)

Postfeminism ideology is based on a simple idea: the struggle for equality is over and now women can enjoy the same benefits as men. A woman can have everything she wants and feminism must adjust to the need of the „modern woman" . Even the word itself suggests that women and society would not need feminism. Some feminists argue that „postfeminism" is an imprecise term that has emerged in the '90s and quickly caught the public, bringing a new model of modernity .

However, some theorists argue whether „postfeminism" is an attack on feminism, considered even anti-feminism. Others have examined the way postfeminism was involved in popularizing feminist ideas, such as American tv-show Oprah. Oprah Winfrey, the host, tried to promote strong female models and come with solutions to various problems. On the other hand, magazines like Cosmopolitan or Glamour have a different point of view. They promote the idea that the feminist ideology is something old and hard to understand in our society and also focuses on the culture of consumption and aggresive marketing.

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Feminism has now become a word often associated with stereotypes. The „new woman" promoted by the postfeminists is not an independent one. In fact, she is very concerned about meeting the man next to whom she can transform. Thus, she must become more attractive, more appealing for the opposite sex. Magazines like Cosmopolitan promote myths about beauty. Feminist Naomi Wolf believes that this destroys the woman, both physical and psychic. It can even go to the extreme, determine some women to take drastic decisions: diet or plastic surgery.

Joke Hermes, Professor of Media, Culture and Civilization, believes that the current women's magazines include two major trends:

1. A professional journal for domestic tasks: cooking tips, cleaning, cosmetics, etc.;
2. An emotional education, where the woman is advised by „specialists" in various problems (usually about relationships with their partner) .

Cosmopolitan is the best example in this case, a publication who targets North American young women „who know what they want from life". The glossy women's magazine segment has no rival in both US and Europe, including Romania. Globally, Cosmopolitan is not just a simple magazine, but a brand that reaches almost all over the world. It also has a consistent budget that comes from advertising.

Third wave feminist, Rosaling Gill, believes that a women's magazine has three important parts:

1. Intimate management that reveils intimate confessions, advises on how to plan a relationship and a „scientific management" of the emotions;
2. „Menology" or the „science of the man", a space where women learn from experts how to satisfy their spouse;
3. Transformation: tips on how to dress, how to shape the body and how to sexually please a man.

Cosmopolitan states that it promotes women values like power or independence. But these values are betrayed by the content of the magazine. (Gill 2009) The fun and fearless woman is only concerned to sexually satisfy the man. The magazine consider itself a feminist brand, but more actual. „Cosmo is a feminist brand because we believe that women are just as capable as men and can achive anything they want. Our magazine also understands that men are also important. Girls of Cosmopolitan love men" .

On Cosmopolitan covers we see beautiful and famous women, in low-cut dresses or swimsuits. The magazine targets seductive, powerful and feminine women.

Cosmopolitan brand in Romania

From the first cover issued in Romania, Cosmopolitan took a stand against misogyny and „male hegemony" without rejecting the men. The idea has a feminist load, because if we look back in history we see that the first wave

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of feminists fought against masculinity used as a weapon against women. Regarding this, Cosmopolitan is trying to educate their readers in order to cultivate their feminity and to be more actual, anchored in the reality.

Following Cosmo tradition, the romanian issue of the magazine took a strong state against inhibitions. The articles focus on career, health, celebrities, sex, relationships, fashion, beauty, money, movies, books, food or decoration. The magazine has 200 pages and includes the following sections:

- „Beauty and Style" – exclusively dedicated to fashion, makeup and cosmetic products. A „book of beauty";
- „Cosmo Informer" – relationships advices, news about celebrities, music and „everything trending" in that month;
- „Living together" – section that tackles couples life. Readers can find tips on how to have „the perfect relationship". Women can also find various COSMO quizzes with sexual themes;
- „You and yourself" – tackles several topics. A special attention is given to „happiness", the main theme in Cosmopolitan. (published articles like „Survival Guide for timid", „How to get rid of embarrassing situations", „Sarcasm can leave you alone"). Here readers can find what's „Cosmo hot and what's not";
- „Job and Money" – a section with tips on business, economy and career;
- „Shaped Body" - tips on diet, healthy food and how to have a beautiful body;
- „Cosmo Exclusive" – articles with tips on beauty and also life stories of women with various life stories;
- „Cosmo Life" – a place for relaxation: ideas for cocktails, decoration, books, movies, music etc.
- „The Men" – news about famous men, tips;
- „Permanent Section" – includes horoscope, suggestions, portraits of local celebrities;
- A special section of „Tips and Tricks" providing tips on beauty, relationships and sexual life.

The most successful sections are those related to sex and relationship advice. Cosmopolitan reserves considerable editorial space to this idea. The woman should be feminine, appealing, anchored in the modern pattern of beauty in order to attract men. The content of the magazine is an exponent of this idea.

For example, in an article publised in the online edition of the magazine, the COSMO woman is advised to be very careful about the way she looks in order to feel attractive to the opposite sex and not to lose her spouse . Cosmopolitan editors assume that their readers have found their dress style but not the perfect makeup or hair style: „Of course I feel more seductive when I wear an outfit that suits me 100%. Well, so is the beauty kit. Choose the hair

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style and the makeup that goes perfectly with your outfit and you will look a million". The article has pictures with „sexy" female models.

In fact, Cosmopolitan promotes the idea that women can be „feminine", „modern", „down to earth", but not necessarily sexy. That is a quality that needs to be learned. Thus, the magazine offers advices for the feminine, the modern and the „down to earth" women.

The „feminine" women have a natural look, the „good girls" who like romance. The „modern" ones are those who set the tones in fashion: „You set the trends! You were the first one who put glitter on your nails. Everything fits perfectly on you!". This colloquial language has one purpose: to capture the reader's attention with no intellectual effort. The „down to earth" women are also sexy but the editor chooses to emphasize that the modern woman is the favourite: „You're down to earth and men love that. Remember that sometimes this can be boring. You like wearing your hair wavy and that's sexy (a la Sarah Jessica Parker in Sex and the City)". Apparently the role model in Cosmopolitan is the protagonist of the movie Sex and the City, a woman extremly concerned about her appearance and sexual life, always looking for the perfect man.

In September issue of 2010, Cosmopolitan publishes a series of articles concerning diet, exercise and health. The editors are warning their readers that if they don't follow certain tips (often provided by Cosmopolitan) they may face serious problems in their lives. For example „sponge-woman syndrome" , a condition that can endager women's happiness: „Do you often cry when watching the news about a natural disaster? If you're able to absorb the world's problems, beware. You could be a victim! Many women suffer from what psychologists call sponge-woman syndrome or hyper-responsiveness. For those who face this, it means that you feel excessive empathy for others." The article admits that such women face a gap in the process of maturing, reaching to absorb the problems of others and suffering more than „normal". A serious problem fixed very simple with COSMO tips: „Yes, life will be unfair. Yes, there will be starving children, people struggling in dictatorship, natural disasters, but you need to learn to let go if you want to have a healthy mind. We're not saying that you need to become insensitive, but just understant that people are not gods. You can't solve the world's problems!" (Cosmopolitan 2011). The solution is simple: resign from this thoughts and return to a simple lifestyle, unconcerned with global or national issues. Politics, economics require time to think, to reflect, to analyze. For the Cosmopolitan woman this is a burden and it may cause the „sponge-woman syndrome". Basically, sadness is not a quality amongst the values promoted by the magazine. Cosmopolitan editors acknowledge that being a woman in today's society is a difficult thing. In „Eight misconceptions about women", the article tackles the gender stereotypes: „They say we are slanderers, overspenders, emotive. This is a cheap analysis of feminine psychology. Some clishés are as old as the Earth

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despite the empowerment of women." Although the author recognizes that women are judged wrongly, she then begins to talk about „gender flaws". The article induces the idea that we can't fight these flaws and sometimes the clishés may have some truth in them. For Cosmopolitan a woman must be in a permanent search of happiness. Clothes, fashion, jewelry are building the happiness for the COSMO girls. The magazine teaches their readers to explore their emotional intelligence, to develop skills in order to understand others feelings (particularly men). Cosmopolitan endorses theorists and philosophers who consider that women are part of the subconscious, unable to develop pure cognitive capacities. The main section in the magazine is the emotional life of the young woman, who is in a constant battle when it comes to find the perfect man . We find little culture in Cosmopolitan, and the readers intellect is not „tested". In The Routledge Companion to Feminism, Sarah Gamble believes that the modern woman has an attitude of a show girl. Feminist ideas can be found in women's magazine, but many theorists consider that this kind of feminism is a fraud.

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