

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

*Legally Blonde* (2001):

*Elle*: I brought you some necessities. Pink sheets,  
aromatherapy candles, loofah and the bible.  
(holds up *Cosmopolitan*)

### **1.1 Introduction**

The above cinema quote serves as an example to demonstrate the powerful effect that lifestyle magazines, such as *Cosmopolitan*, have on its readers - so much that it is used as a metaphor comparing it to the bible – a religious text that if followed and obeyed will lead to salvation and spiritual enlightenment. This salvation of course is to be reached by following the advice and information columns that pertain to sex/relationships, health, style and beauty topics. These are the characteristics of lifestyle magazines that sometimes use sexist discourse to construct traditional masculine and feminine gender ideologies (Walker, 2000). Van Dijk (1997) defines *ideologies* as self-representations of a group that are organized into mental schemas that include values, tasks, aims, identity, interests, etc. that subvert influence over the beliefs of its members. The habitual readers of a magazine can be considered members of a community that accept (and sometimes reject) the ideologies that the magazine provides (Kehily, 1999). Therefore, the magazine company that owns the title constructs gender ideologies through certain lexical items and sentence and discourse structures that may serve as a means to influence the reader's beliefs about their gender identity (Kehily, 1999; van Dijk, 2006). In order to serve the economic interest of the magazine, the company may manipulate sexist discourse to reproduce and sell gender ideologies that appear to represent 'the truth'. Thus, this will allow its readers (men and women) to reach a sense of enlightenment that

will make them 'better' people (Coulthard-Caldas, 1999; Weatherall, 2002). These ideologies are also produced on a global scale as many North American titles have reached international status such as *Glamour* and *GQ* (Machin and Thornborrow, 2003). The economic interest of magazines began with the post-World War II consumer boom of the 1950s, with the female audience the target of the magazine (Walker, 2000). They marketed domestic products from dish and laundry detergents to advice on marriage and maternity that reproduced female-gender ideologies that were ideal for the economic market. Although it is not strongly supported by some feminists such as Deborah Cameron and Dale Spender, men too have recently become a target audience for lifestyle magazines (Cameron, 1992, Mills, 1995, Winship, 2000). For men, the most popular lifestyle title is *Men's Health*.

Discourse plays an important role in the construction of gender identity from the moment a child is born by asking *Is it a boy or a girl?* (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2003). From this moment forward, the construction of gender identity is on its way to formation with discourse helping to construct its path. From a social constructionist perspective, gender is a *concept* that is created and taught society versus the belief that it is something that is biologically inherited. Nevertheless, the powerful individuals of society claim that biology is an inherent part of gender as a means to justify the separation of men and women that ultimately subordinates and discriminates both sexes (Weatherall, 2002). Sexist discourse aids in producing and reproducing this discrimination that constrains men and women to identify themselves with traditional masculine and feminine ideologies. This thesis concentrates on Western ideologies of traditional masculinity and femininity: women are polite, maternal and sexually repressed while men

are aggressive, controlling and sexually 'wild' (Beynon, 2002). In this thesis I create my own definition of gender construction as the following:

*Gender construction is the social construction of an individual's identity based on their biological sex (male/female). Discourse constructs gender behavior that a particular society deems acceptable.*

The term sexist language derived from feminists during the Second Wave Feminist movement in the 1960s and 1970s (Cameron, 1992). They addressed the concept of how gender was a social construction used to 'box in' women that sexist language helped to maintain. There have been a number of definitions and perspectives on what sexist language is. How it is defined depends upon the basis of the researcher's. In this thesis I use the term sexist *discourse* instead of *language* because I analyze the *production context, content and textual (linguistic) features* of one article from each of the Mexican editions of *Cosmopolitan* and *Men's Health* that construct stereotypical gender ideologies and identities for men and women (Weatherall, 2002). Thus, the definition that I use for sexist discourse for this thesis is derived from the definition by Robertson and Parks (2004):

Sexist language includes words, phrases, and expressions that unnecessarily differentiate between women and men *or* exclude, trivialize, or diminish either gender (p. 233).

I introduce in the following sections the components that serve as the thesis's theoretical mark on sexist discourse in the construction gender ideology and identity via the two articles from *Cosmopolitan* and *Men's Health*. Next, I provide a justification for carrying out this thesis.

## ***1.2 Justification for Study***

The motivation for this research is to detect sexist discourse in the construction of stereotypical gender ideologies in one article from each magazine. The motivation is to critically analyze sexism that is presented in the two articles that may be negotiated as common sense - *naturalized* - and thus it is not often questioned (Cameron, 1992). It is the magazine companies that exert power to transmit sexist discourse in the production of stereotypical gender ideology that discriminates men and women for their economic advantage.

The majority of language and gender research in relation to magazine discourse have been conducted in the United States and the Great Britain. Such studies include those of Machin and Thornborrow (2003) *Branding and Discourse: The Case of Cosmopolitan* and Stibbe (2004) *Health and the Social Construction of Masculinity in Men's Health Magazine*. In this thesis I analyze another culture and language: Mexico and Spanish. I chose Mexico because there are no known studies that critically analyze magazine discourse from this region in the world. Thus, this thesis serves as a starting point towards the recognition and critical analysis of how magazine discourse in Mexico is capable of reproducing stereotypical male and female gender ideologies and identities to young adults that pertain to the middle-upper class sector of Mexican society.

Sexism can be a sensitive subject to critically analyze for both men and women. There are women that possess anti-feminist ideologies and believe that feminists are disrupting and ridiculing the traditional gender ideologies of men and women (Steuter, 1992). As a limitation to this thesis I do not have the input from the habitual readers of these magazines as to whether they negotiate the discourse to be producing sexist

ideology. I also do not know if they would accept or reject the sexist ideology(ies) if they indeed detected sexism. Therefore, without this perspective (and the fact that I am from North America and not a habitual reader of these magazines), I cannot claim the elimination of sexist discourse from these the Mexican edition of these magazines.

However, what this thesis does offer is a critical analysis of one article from each magazine in order to provide a perspective on how discourse can be negotiated sexist in constructing biased gender ideologies. Nevertheless, it is initially the decision of the members that pertain to these magazine communities to decide if they accept or reject these ideologies as sexist and if they want them to be abolished. By introducing an alternative point of view from the traditional gender ideologies, this may help to reduce manipulation that might occur on behalf of the magazine companies' towards its readers.

### ***1.3 Applied Linguistics and Sociolinguistics***

The study of sexist discourse falls under a larger academic discipline known as Applied Linguistics. Applied Linguistics focuses on how language is applied and put into practice within various subfields of language such as literacy, discourse analysis, critical discourse analysis, first and second language acquisition, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics and pragmatics (Cook, 2003). This thesis includes the sociolinguistics and discourse analysis subfields. Sociolinguistics is the study of how a society uses language as well as shape it based on the interlocutors and social context of the communicative event (Cameron, 1992). Social contexts can include educational settings, doctors' offices, bureaucratic institutions, clubs, bars, houses of acquaintances, parks, intimate settings, meetings, mass media, etc. in which discourse is negotiated and constrained based on the social categorizations of the interlocutors. These include race,

gender, age and economic status to name a few. Discourse can also produce discrimination by stereotyping people based on these categorizations, especially in regards to race and gender. Magazines are a form of literature that is created by society whose discourse produces certain ideologies in regards to various subjects. In relation to this thesis, they are the stereotypical male and female gender ideologies in regards relationships and sex. The social context is the magazine and the interlocutors are the reader and the text producer. *Text producer* is a term I adopt from McLoughlin (2000). She states that the author of an article does not involve only one individual, but rather an entire group that includes the writers, the editorial staff of the magazine and the company that owns it. Hearst Corporation owns *Cosmopolitan* and Rodale Incorporated owns *Men's Health*. I discuss these two companies in *Chapter Two* sections *2.5.1 Women's Magazines: Cosmopolitan* and *2.5.2 Men's Magazines: Men's Health*.

In regards to the text producer, it is possible that the some of its members possess a less powerful position in the editorial hierarchy and do not realize that they are including sexism in the articles that they help to compose. This is known as *subtle sexism* and I discuss this further in section *2.4 Sexist Discourse and Gender Construction*. However, it is also possible that the individuals that belong to the less powerful sector are *told* what to write from those who own the magazine and are conscious of its sexist ideology. I discuss this further in sections *1.6 Gender and Discourse* and *2.5 Previous Studies on Gender and Discrimination*. In regards to this thesis I argue that the text producers of *Cosmopolitan* and *Men's Health* do produce sexist ideology on occasion. I discuss this further in *Chapter Two* sections *2.5.1* and *2.5.2*.

#### ***1.4 Discourse Analysis (DA)***

The study of discourse within Applied Linguistics is a relatively new discipline that surfaced during the late 1960s (Coulthard, 1985). Before this time the two academic disciplines that dominated language and linguistics were *behaviorism* and the psycholinguistic studies of *generative grammar* by Noam Chomsky. Chomsky refuted the theory of behaviorism, which stated that language acquisition was a process of imitation. Instead he argued that all humans are born with a generative grammar and a language acquisition device (LAD) that filters and stores language, making them linguistically competent (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). However, Chomskian linguistics focuses on what John Lyons (Lyons, 1967 as cited in Coulthard, 1985) calls *idealized speech*. Chomskian linguistics focuses only on what are grammatically correct, idealized utterances that are regularized, standardized and decontextualized. Therefore, this line of thought does not consider natural speech to be apart of their data analysis due to its erroneous nature that include false starts and hedges. This is known as *performance data* because it is not scripted or planned in advance, therefore there is a more probably occurrence of grammatical errors being produced. However, this thesis analyzes written discourse that has previously planned and edited its content. Thus, although performance data does not constitute a part of this thesis, I find it important to mention in regards to the development of discourse analysis.

As language studies advanced in the late 1960s, many linguists began to shift from psycholinguistics to sociolinguistics. Linguists began to investigate beyond Chomsky's idealized grammar by applying language to social contexts to study *how* language was being used, in *what* contexts and to *whom* by *whom*. This developed into

*Discourse Analysis* (DA). Discourse analysts research the muddled and untidy characteristics of natural speech and apply it to how it is used by institutions and categorizations of individuals in context. As discourse analysts began to study the social components of natural speech, some analysts such as, Teun van Dijk and Norman Fairclough began to notice that discourse was used to exert and produce power in order to subordinate certain social groups of people (van Dijk, 2004). This can be seen in van Dijk's research on racist discourse in newspaper literature. Further discussion on what DA analyzes is seen in *Chapter Two: Literature Review*. Thus, as discourse analysts began to critically analyze written and spoken discourse, *Critical Discourse Analysis* (CDA) was born.

### ***1.5 Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)***

CDA was recognized as a formal science in the 1990s, however its practice dates back before World War II with the Frankfurt School (van Dijk, 2001). In the late 1970s, predominantly in the UK and Australia, *critical linguistics* between language and discourse surfaced. Michael Halliday's *systemic functional linguistics* in 1978 identified how organizations used language. CDA also took part in other academic disciplines, especially in psychology and the social sciences during its emergence in the late 1960s and early 1970s. During this period, the racial and gender revolutions of the United States also became a breeding ground for critically analyzing discourse. In this case, sexist discourse (Titscher, Meyer, Wodak and Vetter, 2002). It must be made aware that CDA is method, not a theory, and does not belong to any particular school of thought. Its main focus is to elucidate that discourse that produces discrimination within society and try to change it by offering alternatives (van Dijk, 2001). There are two methods of CDA



that discourse scholars, Norman Fairclough, Teun van Dijk and Ruth Wodak base their analysis (Titscher, Meyer, Wodak and Vetter, 2002). Fairclough bases his CDA method on the work of Michael Halliday while the method of van Dijk and Wodak concentrates more on the psycholinguistic side of discourse processing based on cognitive models such as the: mental event and context. Despite the various methods of CDA, it embodies the same goal: “to deal primarily with the discourse dimensions of power abuse and the injustice and inequality that result from it” (van Dijk, 1993, p. 252). It focuses on the relationship that exists between the social practice of discourse and power with dominance and social inequality. Van Dijk defines *dominance* as the inequality that the society’s elite institutions exert on less-powerful social groups based upon their culture, socioeconomic class, ethnicity, race and gender. In regards to magazines, the power that is held by the magazine companies appears to have psychological control over its readers by eliciting sexist discourse so that they conform to their ‘assigned’ gender identity.

One of the social groups that began to take a stand against their own oppression was feminists (predominantly white, middle-class) during the 1960s Second Wave Feminist Movement in the United States (the first one being the Women Suffrage movement of 1920). They began to notice that their oppression was caused by the reproduction of sexist language (Cameron, 1992). They began to critically analyze discourse that was producing stereotypical gender ideologies and identities of men and women.

### ***1.6 Feminist Stylistics***

Critical linguistics makes up the basis for feminist stylistics. It is a theoretical approach that critically analyzes texts that use discourse to discriminate women *or* men based upon

their gender (Mills, 1995). The goal of feminist stylistics is to criticize texts for sexist discourse and to bring awareness of the stereotypical gender ideologies of men and women as if they were natural or common sense. Mills (1995) warns that the feminist analyst cannot analyze a text solely based on the content because this would lead to *close reading techniques*, “the reader concentrates on small sections of the text and analyses the language very closely in order to help her come to an interpretation” (p. 204). This occurs when the analyst relies purely on their intuitions and this can be subjective because there is no criteria in which to base the analysis. It is also at risk to reproducing the ‘common sense’ style of reading. In order to avoid this, Mills presents a feminist stylistics model to analyze a text that I present in *Chapter Two: Literature Review*.

### ***1.7 Gender and Discourse***

Similar to discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis, the study of gender and discourse is a relatively new discipline in Applied Linguistics. Before the Women’s Movement in the 1960s, it was assumed that the study of language automatically correlated to men’s use of language because men were the prototype subject while the woman as considered to be ‘the other’ (Coates, 2004). This sentiment also existed in medicine. As late as the eighteenth century, the medical profession only acknowledged the male sex as being the one true sex. This demonstrates that the female sex was considered to be just a ‘copy’ to that of the superior male. This biological ‘evidence’ legitimized the inferiority of women and their lack of importance within the larger patriarchal society.

Nevertheless, during the Feminist movement of the sixties, linguists such as Robin Lakoff and Dale Spender challenged the idea of male-only linguistic studies by

introducing the concept of how men and women speak *differently* and how language has *silenced* women. The concept of speaking differently brings about the awareness that society creates discourse which in turn teaches, and/or constrains, how men and women speak. Deborah Tannen discusses this in her book, *You Just Don't Understand* (Tannen, 1990 as cited by Coates, 2004). However, gender and discourse analysts did not only analyze the differences in male and female discourse. They also began to critically analyze literary texts such as novels and magazines that used sexist discourse to produce stereotypical gender ideologies that subordinated women. One of the first works on the subject was carried out by Betty Friedan's 1963 book, *The Feminine Mystique* (Friedan, 1963 as cited in Walker, 2000). Friedan was a writer for a woman's magazine in the 1950s and decided to do a study based upon sexist discourse towards women of that era. This supports the argument that it is possible for some of the members that composite the less powerful sectors of the text producer to be aware of the sexist discourse that the magazine produces.

However in relation magazine discourse studies, many of them, like Friedan's, have focused on middle-class, white women from North America and Great Britain. Studies that pertain to gender must now recognize these social factors as well as investigate how gender discrimination also affects women (and men) of different ethnicities and social classes. This thesis takes into account young adult (18-30 years of age), middle-upper class Mexican women and men.

### ***1.8 Sexist Discourse and Gender Construction***

As I have previously mentioned, there are a variety of definitions as to what sexist discourse is as well as providing my own. Sexist discourse is any form of

communication in which it discriminates or trivializes an individual based on their biological sex (Robertson and Parks, 2004). Originally sexist discourse only referred to the discrimination of women. However, it now also incorporates men (Mills, 1995). Feminists began to criticize the popular belief that gender was an inherent characteristic of biological sex (Cameron, 1992; Weatherall, 2002; Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2003). They stated that gender is an identity that an individual *performs*. They stated that society *constructs* gender and discourse helps to produce this ideology that may discriminate and oppress men and women. Thus, instead of people *being* a gender they are *doing* gender. However, through continual socialization, gender begins to appear as a natural part of the biological make-up of men and women. This is known as *conditioning* and obscures gender discrimination in discourse (Cameron, 1992). This opaqueness allows for the reproduction the stereotypical gender ideologies that are held by those in power as means to subordinate men and women. This power is held by the magazine companies that may exploit sexist discourse by telling its readers how to perform certain gender identities so that they can be more attractive and successful individuals. This tactic helps to market and sell the magazine (Mills, 1995; Winship, 2000).

### ***1.9 Social Constructionist Theory***

Social constructionism is a theoretical basis that seeks to discover how the “social experience is created and gives meaning” (Turnbull, 2002, p. 319). In this thesis I seek to analyze how sexist discourse in the two articles reflects the power of the magazine companies in the production of traditional gender ideologies. As a part of social constructionism, it is concerned with how society shapes discourse to construct the world view of its members. Gergen (1999, as cited in Turnbull, 2002) states that discourse are a

set of conventions that shape the lives of individuals. It is through discourse that helps to construct the manner in which individuals think, posit and interpret the world and themselves. In this thesis I adopt a social constructionist perspective.

### ***1.10 Outline of Research Strategy***

(a) *Assumptions*: I assume that there is sexist discourse in *Cosmopolitan* and *Men's Health* that is directed towards men and women. I base these assumptions from previous studies on the North American and Great Britain editions that I listed section *1.2 Justification for Study*.

(b) *Research Questions*:

- i. What are the lexical elements, sentence and discourse structures used that make up sexist discourse in the construction of stereotypical masculine and feminine ideologies of men and women in the two articles of the Mexican editions of *Cosmopolitan* and *Men's Health*?
- ii. What are the gender identities and ideologies that the two articles construct via sexist discourse?

I decided to ask these questions in particular in order gain a perspective as to which lexical elements and sentence and discourse structures use sexism to produce gender identity and ideology in one article from each magazine. I believe that these two questions will lay the groundwork (and inspire) for future critical discourse studies in magazines of Mexican origin. I hope that this thesis will be able to contribute to the academic fields of sociology (gender studies) and applied linguistics (critical discourse studies) so that there may be further elucidation of gender prejudices. I hope that this elucidation provides its habitual readers with a perspective in regards to how the

magazine may produce sexist ideology and based on that information they can decide for themselves if they accept or reject the ideologies. As a result, it may help to reduce the possible manipulation from the text producer towards the reader.

(c) *Possible Outcomes:*

It is possible that I find usage of sexist discourse directed towards men and women in the two articles from *Cosmopolitan* and *Men's Health*. Although sexist discourse traditionally targets women, it is possible that there is a higher level of sexist discourse directed towards men. If this is the result, I would not consider it a positive outcome because sexist discourse is not a positive trait. However, it will be positive in the sense that it could demonstrate that sexist discourse does exist in *some* of the magazine's discourse.

Also, it cannot be ignored that it is possible that the coders do not identify any sexist discourse in either of the two articles. This is one of the limitations to this thesis in that it only includes *one* article from each magazine, thus increasing its probability. As I mentioned in the previous paragraph, I would consider this a positive outcome in the sense that the texts do not produce biased gender ideologies. Nevertheless, I would also see it as a negative outcome because this study would not help to support the argument that lifestyle magazines sometimes produce sexist discourse in the construction of gender ideologies and identities. However, just because I do not find it in this study does not cancel out the possibility that it exists.

(d) *Research Strategy:*

This thesis is a qualitative study that critically analyzes the discourse in one article from each magazine, *Cosmopolitan* and *Men's Health*. A table is created to analyze the data based upon Mill's (1995) *Feminist Linguistics*. It also incorporates three female Mexican codifiers trained in Applied Linguistics and discourse analysis to reduce my own bias. More on the methodology is discussed in *Chapter Three: Methodology*.

I discuss in the following chapter the theoretical foundation that serves as a basis of the thesis. Previous studies of similar thematic content and theory are also discussed. Based on this literary foundation, the reader will have an understanding as to what the analysis of the thesis contains.