

Editor's Reflection: Musings on Power and Normativity

Miglena Sternadori, University of South Dakota
miglena.sternadori@usd.edu

An 11-minute French film titled *Oppressed Majority* recently made the rounds on social media, becoming viral in a matter of days. As often happens, I heard about it from a student. The movie presents an edgy, satirical inversion of contemporary gender inequities: Men push strollers, cover their heads, and get raped and then blamed for their provocative dress. Meanwhile, women jog around topless and engage in benevolent sexism by calling guys “cute” and offering them help with heavy lifting.

Consistent with the tradition of European filmmaking, the short offers casual nudity and vulgar language filtered through a lens of intellectual sophistication, but what struck me most was how believable it all seemed (thanks, of course, to excellent acting and directing). The idea that anything can be believable when negotiated as normal was incredibly poignant. I was reminded of how popular magazines, strategically positioned in the checkout aisle at stores, serve as cornerstones of our contemporary “normalcy.” Few other media forms are as direct and explicit in telling audiences how to look, how to dress, and how to live. Even those with elite readerships, such as *The New Yorker* and *Harper's*, are talented framers of niche audiences' reality. No wonder Condé Nast makes good business selling framed *New Yorker* covers.

This issue of the *Journal of Magazine & New Media Research* tackles magazines' involvement with power and normativity from a lot of different angles. In the in-depth research section, David Weiss presents the case of Anna Wintour, *Vogue's* editor-in-chief, as a unique example of one media personality's influence over not only consumers but also designers of fashion. Shu Yueh-Lee and Naeemah Clark offer a longitudinal analysis of the normalization of cosmetic surgery through the pages of popular magazines over the course of several decades. Finally, Laura Privera and Linda Kean present the story of white-normed diet advice pouring from the pages of magazines aimed at black audiences.

No less interesting is the reports-and-essays section, which begins with a paper by Susan Currie Sivek about the limitations faced by indie magazines seeking distribution through Web and mobile platforms. Jon Arakaki and Bill Cassidy uncover the exclusive “normalcy” constructed through the covers of *People* magazine featuring mostly white elites, such as celebrities and royalty. In the same section, Joy Jenkins explores the pressures facing online editors at city and regional magazines, who experience the “new normal” in the media landscape—more work for less pay.

Journalistic norms require that I circle back to the first paragraph. In a postmodern fashion, the French film's ending is ambiguous. A woman walks down a dark street, hearing insults and catcalls. It is unclear whether she is imagining what it feels like to be a man in

this feminist society, or whether she has been imagining the feminist society itself. This issue's content offers a similar question: Are our authors exposing magazines' normative power or only the illusion of such?

The answer is in the minds of the audience.