

Pride magazine

(November, 2015)



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Component 1: Exploring the Media

Focus areas:
Media language
Representation
Media contexts

PRODUCT CONTEXT

- *Pride* is a UK monthly women's lifestyle magazine that targets women of colour.
- It has been in publication since 1990 and has a circulation of over 30 000 copies per month and a readership of over 146 000.
- *Pride* is distributed in the UK by COMAG, part of Condé Nast.
- It's easy to see how people may mistake *Pride* for a gay magazine, as this word has become synonymous with the gay community over recent decades. In fact, the modern gay movement has its roots in the black liberation movement of the 1960s with Gay Pride borrowing its name from Black Pride.

PART 1: STARTING POINTS – Media language

Social and cultural context

In the 1950s and 60s, women's magazines moved away from articles on homemaking and moved towards articles on beauty. Fashion also moved up the agenda, with less about how to make it and more about how to wear it. So, with consumption at the top of the agenda, readers were being reminded that they should look and feel the best they could and the best way to achieve this was by purchasing the latest cosmetics and hair care advertised within the magazine's pages. This is still very much the case today and is evident in this magazine.

The 'Uses and Gratifications Model' suggests that audiences interact with texts for different reasons: information, personal identity, social interaction and entertainment. Although all of these reasons could be argued for why *Pride* has such high readership figures, arguably the personal identity aspect is

probably the main one. In fact, its unique selling point is that it is the only black media company that still remains in black British ownership.

Consider how media language creates and communicates meaning:

- **Title** of the magazine, *Pride*, has connotations of self-respect, self-esteem, dignity and strength. There is a subtext of resistance and an affirmation of cultural identity.
- Some of the **masthead** is lost behind the cover star's head, suggesting her dominance and showing how confident the magazine is that their readers will still recognise their brand, despite not being able to see all of the title.
- The **strapline** tells us that the magazine is "celebrating 24 years at the top!". At the top of what, we're not entirely sure, but the phrasing encourages the reader to feel a part of something great. The assumption is that they are reading one of the best magazines of its kind.
- The red and black **colour palette** used for the cover lines helps to support the idea of pride. Red is associated with pride and strength and the black is a strong, bold statement, perhaps representative of their target audience, women of colour.
- The **pose** used by the **cover star**, Harris, with her hand on her hip suggests confidence and sass. It's also a photographer's trick to lengthen the appearance of the torso, helping to make her look taller and slimmer, trying to add to her beauty and further improve her body shape making her figure aspirational to the target audience.
- Harris is **looking directly** at the audience, seemingly making eye contact. This is a common convention of magazines and helps to add to the more personal approach of this format.

Consider how media language portrays aspects of reality, constructs points of view and conveys messages and values:

- Many of the cover lines focus on **body image** reminding readers that they could and should look better, and also that they

will be judged on their appearance.

- One **cover line** references Female Genital Mutilation but uses only its acronym (FGM). There's an assumption then that the reader will understand this and so have a certain level of social and cultural understanding of the practice. It's a controversial topic, illustrating how the magazine is comfortable covering such serious topics through investigative journalism and sees their target audience as mature enough to handle the subject matter, and educated enough to engage with it.
- **Harris' cover line**, "Bond And Beyond", suggests that her role as Eve Money Penny in the Bond film was a defining role for her, and her career has continued to improve ever since. However, it's argued that her defining role was in fact Tia Dalma in *Pirates of the Caribbean*. Perhaps though, this image of her as a voodoo witch doesn't fit with the mainstream ideals of feminine beauty. Whereas Bond females have certain attributes associated with them – those of beauty, femininity and overt sexuality.

Possible areas for further investigation:

- **Genre codes and conventions** of magazine covers: layout, use of cover star, house style, mastheads. Genre conventions of magazines, their ever-changing nature and **hybridity**. For example, lifestyle magazines could be specifically about cookery, fashion or health and fitness and still come under the umbrella term 'lifestyle'.
- **Narrative** – cover lines on the front cover tease people to want to read certain stories within the magazine (could be linked to Roland Barthes – enigma codes).
- The **function** of magazines – linked to media language and cultural context – "to provide readers with a sense of community, comfort, and pride in this mythic feminine identity" ('Media Semiotics', Bignell, 1997, p61). Magazines promote a "feminine culture" and therefore "define and shape the woman's world" ('Feminism and Youth Culture', McRobbie, 2000, p69), so they become a familiar friend for the female filled with advice, entertainment and provide a form of escapism for the reader.

PART 2: STARTING POINTS – Representation

Social and cultural context

Black Lives Matter (BLM) is an international

activist movement which originated in the African American community. It campaigns against violence and systematic racism towards black people. The movement started in 2013, with the spread of the hashtag #blacklivesmatter after the controversial acquittal of George Zimmerman in the shooting of Trayvon Martin. It then became nationally recognized through social media and street demonstrations following two more black deaths in 2014. The dominance of this movement on social media may possibly have something to do with the huge number of twitter followers and Facebook likes *Pride* magazine now has. According to their website, they have 300% more followers and likes than any other title in the ethnic market – (<http://pridemagazine.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Pride-MediaPack2015.pdf>)

Historical and political context

Around the time of The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, Black Pride was a response to dominant white cultures and ideologies that encouraged black people to celebrate black culture and embrace their African heritage. At this time, the Afro hairstyle, which was associated with everything natural, came to symbolise Black Pride and Power, in contrast with the artificial hairstyles of those wearing wigs or having relaxed hair, both of which were seen as pandering to European notions of beauty. Interestingly then, this text has a cover line which references "The wig revolution" and Harris herself has straight hair rather than her natural curls. Could this have something to do with the consumerist context of the magazine, a text most likely filled with adverts for hair care products such as relaxers, and featuring photographs of black women with long, flowing, straightened hair?

Consider the representation of ethnicity and gender:

- Using a successful, black, British **cover star** as their dominant image, *Pride* is presenting a **role model** for its readers but, importantly, someone from their community. Harris was raised in a single-parent household and came from a working class background. This very 'normal' upbringing makes it easier for the readers to aspire to be like her. The magazine declares itself to be "the face of this new young black Britain; outgoing, confident and ambitious, whilst still maintaining pride in their culture and origins" (<http://pridemagazine.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Pride-MediaPack2015.pdf>), so having Naomie Harris, who appears to epitomise all of this, works very well.

- **Stereotypical representation of femininity**, especially in relation to body image:
 - » Harris is also attractive and slim – this is no coincidence. For women, it is a constant struggle to be successful by holding down a job, whilst also looking good and dressing fashionably. The very essence of all women's lifestyle magazines is consumerism, and so the images and cover lines will always seek to support this. This is just as true of *Pride* as it is of *Vogue*, *Marie Claire* and *Elle*.
 - » Cover lines like “How far would you go to be beautiful?” suggest that the reader cannot already be naturally beautiful, there is always room for improvement. Therefore, black women reading or starring in *Pride* are represented as having just as many beauty problems as their white peers. The importance of body image and consumerism doesn't change just because of skin colour.
 - » In *Pride*, readers are reminded that they could and should look better and that they will be judged on their appearance – “objectified, sexualised, mocked. Black women's bodies examined.” The subtext of all of this is no different from any other lifestyle magazine – you are inadequate.

Consider the representation of issues:

- It's also worth considering the representation of the issue of FGM. The initial belief that the magazine is including some hard hitting journalism doesn't completely hold together when you read the second line, stating that it is happening on Harley Street, an area of London well known for cosmetic procedures. From this, we could argue that the magazine's only angle when covering this issue is wholly focused on beauty and body image.
- However, perhaps it could still be seen as a brave move to put it on the cover of a popular lifestyle magazine, bringing a very serious topic into the public domain.
- Furthermore, the exclamation mark makes the magazine's point of view on the topic clear, illustrating a tone of shock. The statement suggests that, for some people, the practice is more about aesthetics than religion, culture or tradition. This is another way that the magazine is able to engage with their target audience as, for them, the idea that some women are paying for FGM at expensive clinics is shocking.

Possible areas for further investigation:

- **Theoretical perspectives** on representation (could reference theorists, e.g. Stuart Hall) –stereotyping, selection and perhaps how, in some ways, this magazine seeks to move away from the typical representations of ethnicity and gender, but in other ways cannot help but reinforce them.
- We might want to consider the **image as a commodity**. Most of the images used on a women's magazine cover are produced to sell and advertise the magazine. If there wasn't an attractive figure on the front, the magazine may not stand out and sell as many copies.