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Preface

Long have I looked forward to the day of being at the point of writing this preface, and now here I am. Something that seemed so distantly far off in the future is now here, and I could not be more excited and proud. This process has been challenging, though not as daunting as I once had thought. This is in large part due to the excellent assistance I have been fortunate to receive along the way, and for that I have several people to thank.

First and foremost, I would like to thank my advisor, Terje Borgersen, for generously sharing with me his time and knowledge, and for giving me constructive feedback and guidance. Secondly, I would like to extend a special thank you to *Stella* Editor-in-Chief, Ida Halvorsen Kemp, who showed immediate interest in my project and graciously sent me all the issues of *Stella* that I needed to conduct my analysis.

On a more personal note, a special thank you goes to my family in the United States and in Norway for supporting me throughout this process. I wish to express my immense gratitude to my boyfriend, Thord Setsaas, for always being by my side, for keeping me sane and for reminding me to make time for myself as well. An extra thank you goes to Thord, too, for saving the day when my computer decided that three weeks before my deadline would be a great time to stop working. Thank you to EndNote for saving me countless hours of time and for making my life so much easier, and a tremendous thank you to my wonderful *lesesal* friends for all of the otter, fox and dog videos that got us through the long days. Thank you all for making this year so much fun.

Finally, as odd as it may sound, I would like to say thank you to this master's thesis for helping me to become aware of something that I have discovered I am actually incredibly passionate about. I stumbled quite coincidentally upon the feminism aspect of my topic, and I am so glad that I did, for it has helped me to realize more about myself. I am thankful for having had this opportunity in my life to become more well-versed in and acquainted with something that truly will be a continued, life-long passion.

I hope that all who read this thesis will enjoy it, and maybe, just maybe, even be inspired themselves. Happy reading!

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Abstract

Women's magazines are often filled with beauty tips, romantic advice, and weight-loss tricks to look better in a bikini. This stereotypical women's magazine rhetoric is familiar, but what does all of this mean in terms of a feministic perspective? This thesis aims to conduct a qualitative, case-study analysis of the Norwegian women's magazine *Stella* from a feministic perspective, examining the question of how women and femininity are portrayed in the magazine, analyzed against the backdrop of Naomi Wolf's book *The Beauty Myth* (2002) – a book that has been highly influential in the development of the third-wave feminism movement. In this way, my examination places focus on the portrayal of women in this medium rather than on readers' reception of its content, and seeks to determine to what degree the content of *Stella* does or does not promote and uphold the beauty myth ideals.

My study finds that *Stella*'s editorial content does not promote the ideals of the beauty myth, and that in many cases, this editorial content even works to fight against such ideals. There is, however, a contradiction found in the juxtaposition of *Stella*'s editorial content and *Stella*'s advertisements, which do reflect the beauty myth's ideals. Thus, this works to show a positive example of feministic portrayals within this medium, but also serves to illustrate the conflicted reality that women's magazines today face.

Sammendrag

Kvinnemagasiner er ofte fylt med skjønnhetstips, råd om kjærlighet og triks for å gå ned i vekt slik at man ser bedre ut i en bikini. Denne stereotypiske kvinnemagasinretorikken er godt kjent, men hva betyr alt dette i forhold til et feministisk perspektiv? Denne masteroppgaven har som mål å gjøre en kvalitativ, case-basert analyse av det norske kvinnemagasinet *Stella* fra et feministisk perspektiv, og skal undersøke spørsmålet om hvordan kvinner og femininitet blir framstilt i magasinet. Analysen av magasinet er basert på Naomi Wolfs bok *The Beauty Myth* (2002) – en bok som har hatt stor betydning for utviklingen av feminismens tredje bølge. På denne måten setter undersøkelsen min fokus på fremstillingen av kvinner i mediet, og ikke på hvordan innholdet blir mottatt av leserne, og søker deretter å vurdere i hvilken grad innholdet i *Stella* arbeider for eller imot å forfremme og opprettholde skjønnhetsmytens idealer.

Studien min viser at det redaksjonelle innholdet i *Stella* ikke fremmer skjønnhetsmytens idealer, og at i mange tilfeller jobber dette redaksjonelle innholdet for å kjempe imot slike idealer. Det finnes derimot motsigelser i sammenstillingen av det redaksjonelle innholdet og reklamene i *Stella*, som gjenspeiler skjønnhetsmytens idealer. Dette viser dermed et positivt eksempel på feministiske fremstillinger i mediet, men samtidig illustrerer det også den motstridende virkeligheten kvinnemagasiner står overfor i dag.

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1. Introduction

“If we are to free ourselves from the dead weight that has once again been made out of femaleness, it is not ballots or lobbyists or placards that women will need first; it is a new way to see.” (Wolf, 2002, p. 19)

Women’s magazines are an example of a type of media that has been around for many decades. For generations, magazines have published articles and photo spreads that communicate information to women about how to look and how to be, and though they have changed throughout the years, these types of magazines still fill the shelves of kiosks, newspaper stands and living room-coffee tables to this day. However, this is a medium that works in very close connection with the society that it operates amongst, and society evolves over time. This medium’s reality can be seen as a reflexive relationship, in that magazines are influenced by society at the same time that they have the power to influence society as well. This phenomenon makes women’s magazines a very relevant case to follow throughout changing times – to see how media representations change to reflect modern society, and how this medium can work to depict and promote a certain image of femininity within popular culture.

Often when one thinks of the concept of women’s magazines, the first thing that comes to mind is their triviality and lack of societal value. However, I find it fitting to look at this medium for my master’s thesis because, as previously mentioned, these magazines are in fact very popular, regardless of the stereotypes that may come to mind. I feel that this continued popularity makes them worthy of investigation. Indeed, often times, even the most trivial-seeming phenomena actually work to say something profound about society’s bigger reality.

Both academic and personal motivations have inspired me to look at this topic for my thesis, as I will explain in my methods chapter. I have chosen to look at a concrete case study of *Stella*, a women’s magazine from Norway – a country that is known worldwide for its progress in gender equality. As I will explain more in-depth in the next chapter, I chose *Stella* because it proved to be the best fit for my project’s goals with

consideration to its target audience, the large range of content covered, and its strong focus on editorial content, rather than, for example, fashion exposés alone. For my analysis, I have chosen to use a year's worth of magazine issues to serve as my empirical material.

As I will discuss later in my methods chapter, much of the research into the field of women's magazines thus far has focused on how these magazines are read, received and used by their audiences. This research has provided us with many important findings, however I aim to take a slightly different approach. In my thesis, I intend to look not so much at the effect or result that readers get from reading women's magazines, but rather at how women are represented in these publications. In other words, I intend to focus not on the readers and their experiences with the medium, but rather on the medium and the content itself. *The aim of my thesis is to conduct a case-study analysis of the Norwegian women's magazine Stella from a feministic perspective, examining the question of how women and femininity are portrayed in the magazine, analyzed against the backdrop of Naomi Wolf's cornerstone book, The Beauty Myth.* I will accomplish this by examining various different elements of *Stella*, such as, but not limited to, looking at what topics the magazine takes up, what types of female images *Stella* provides for its readers, and what messages *Stella* gives off about the role of females in society.

As a brief introduction to my thesis, I would now like to give an abridged overview of the content that is to come, as well as what each of the coming chapters will include.

In my second chapter, I will examine the methodology behind my analysis. First, I will discuss both the academic and the personal motivations for why I chose to look at this topic. I will then present an overview of previous research that has been conducted in this field, both in the Nordics as well as internationally, and examine where my research work finds its place amongst this. Next, I will work through the process and criteria for choosing my empirical material, as well as take a deeper look at the magazine I chose to use as my empirical material – namely, *Stella*. Finally, I will say a few words about the

methods I chose to use for my study, how I have gone forward in my process and why these methods fit my study's purpose.

In my third chapter, I present the theory I will use when conducting my analysis. It is here that I will establish the basis for my feministic perspective on women's magazines, using a variety of sources and supporting examples. I will briefly discuss some of the changes that the portrayal of women and women's roles in magazines have undergone over the years, and examine how the sector of commercial industry has reacted to these shifts. During the entirety of my thesis, one source will stand central throughout my theoretical and analytical discussion. Throughout my thesis, I will use Naomi Wolf's cornerstone book *The Beauty Myth* as my central source. This book approaches women's magazines from a feministic-theoretical standpoint, and presents readers with a feministic-based approach for understanding the content of women's magazines, thus making it a perfect fit for my research with *Stella*. In *The Beauty Myth*, Wolf discusses how, as the ideology of the housewife was fading out, the beauty myth rushed in to replace it, creating an extra requirement of beauty work which women must fulfill in order to succeed in society (Wolf, 2002). This, Wolf argues, functions as a modern means of oppression used to uphold male societal dominance. This book has been pivotal in shaping both my and others' feministic understanding as a whole, and specifically as it relates to how women and women's issues are presented in women's magazines. Thus, I will discuss Wolf's ideas at length, both in terms of the overall picture as well as in relation to women's magazines specifically. I will then connect these discussions to other theoretical concepts and ideas as well, so as to lay the groundwork for my analysis of *Stella*.

In my fourth chapter, I will conduct my analysis of *Stella*. I will begin by situating this publication within the magazine and media culture of today, and argue for why the magazine medium can be seen as having a larger relevance in today's media world than in previous times. From there on, I will conduct my analysis, focusing on one main area for analysis at a time. These areas that I will examine are the front and back covers, the magazine spine text, letters from the editor and the inside contents. Throughout my

analysis, I will work to relate my observations back to the theoretical concepts presented in the previous chapter, and I will place specific emphasis on how *Stella* works together with my main source of theory.

Finally, in my fifth chapter, I will briefly review and then summarize my previously discussed findings, and I will then explore what they mean in the bigger picture. Here I will provide my concrete evaluation of how women are portrayed in *Stella* from a feministic perspective, going off of what I discussed in my analysis chapter. I will discuss what I feel is positive with *Stella*, as well as any possible improvements I feel can be made. Finally, I will conclude this chapter with some of my thoughts on possible directions for further research into this area, as well as some general thoughts regarding the future of this medium in our society.

2. Methods

2.1 Academic motivations for my topic choice

I chose to look at this topic for a number of reasons. First off, from a purely academic standpoint, I feel that the genre of magazines can be and often is overlooked in today's media studies. While magazines have previously had more of a high point when it comes to academic discussion, when research is done on media topics today, it is very often concerned with digital media, or new media. This is demonstrated by the fact that many of the previous studies done on these topics which I have examined for my current research, were done upwards of 15 years ago. While studies on new media are extremely important in our increasingly digital world, print magazines are still very much alive, and I would argue that they are indeed still an influential genre in our society.

I feel that print magazines are an interesting case amidst all of this discussion, because it is a traditional print medium, yet in my opinion still holds much bearing on media consumers. A look at bladkongen.no, where one can subscribe to many different national and international magazines, shows that there are a total of 84 magazines listed under the category of women's magazines. This is an impressively high number and it shows that this medium still holds a good amount of power and influence within society. It shows that while print media in general may be facing a crisis, women's magazines still have a market. Thus, while some may say that it is a very old-school practice to study print media such as magazines, print publications such as women's magazines still hold relevance, in large part due to their niche element, which still has the power to secure an audience.

In her doctoral thesis "Women's magazines and their readers: Experiences, identity and everyday life," Brita Ytre-Arne argues that general interest women's magazines have become more important as the magazine landscape has become more niched. She cites that while magazine readership between 1991 and 2010 stayed relatively the same, the number of magazine titles available increased by almost three fold (Ytre-Arne, 2011b, p. 82). In addition, she cites how, compared with newspaper

reading which shows almost no difference based on gender, magazine reading is overwhelmingly conducted by women (Ibid, p. 81). Even so, she points out that while studies have been conducted on women's magazines, the extent is nowhere near that of the attention given to other, arguably similar, areas such as tabloid journalism. This shows the need for further research into this field, and serves to actualize my study's relevance.

Another reason women's magazines still hold relevance in today's society is because of their pleasing aesthetics. In her cornerstone contribution *Inside Women's Magazines*, Janice Winship notes that magazines' formal qualities, such as the feel of the paper, the size of the publication and the vivid colors all help create the pleasurable physical aesthetics that characterize women's magazines (Winship, 1987, p. 52). Ytre-Arne's study confirmed this fact, by concluding that readers felt that their experience with online women's magazine content could in no way replace the experience with a paper copy, even in a world dominated by the internet (Ytre-Arne, 2011b, p. 95). This, together with magazines' niche elements works to explain why print magazines find themselves in a different situation than, for example, print newspapers. Thus, women's magazines do not appear to be going anywhere anytime soon, thereby showing how they, as a medium, are still relevant for study. However, there are also many other, content-based reasons why these publications are vital for study.

Women's magazines as a genre are often written off as unserious sources of unserious information. However, as I will discuss later, there is more to these magazines than meets the eye. Women's magazines serve as an important source for relaying information regarding social change and women's movements, function as an important outlet for shared women's culture, and are extremely skilled at being more than just a magazine, and rather taking on a sort of sisterhood function, or the role of a trusted advisor (Wolf, 2002, pp. 70-75). They play a fundamental role in the materialization of women's social progress, or lack thereof, as we will see through an analysis of Naomi Wolf's book *The Beauty Myth*. In other words, women's magazines matter, and it is for these reasons mentioned above that I wish to delve into this topic.

2.2 Personal motivations for my topic choice

The field of magazines lies near and dear to my heart. For me, these magazines have always been something to collect, something to be able to reflect more upon later, and to refer back to for later knowledge. They have been sources of art that I strategically fan out onto my living room table, and which I simply cannot ever get enough of.

I have been so fortunate in my life so far to be able to take this personal love of magazines and work with it as a career in different aspects. Whether it's a glossy title like Los Angeles Confidential Magazine in Beverly Hills or the more rugged, grassroots-feeling of The List Magazine here in Trondheim, I have had the opportunity to work in the offices that create these prized goods I love so much. I have a sincere interest in the workings of a magazine, and while I have experience with the production and creation of several different titles, I feel that focusing on this topic for my master's thesis will give me an insight into a new aspect of the workings of a magazine. Namely, it will allow me to look at how the contents of a women's magazine work to convey specific messages about identity and purpose. As someone who wants to continue my career in the field of magazines, I truly feel that this insight will be a positive addition that ties my academic life into my career life.

This being said, despite my personal background with this medium, I will throughout this entire thesis distance myself from the subject by taking on my academic glasses, and letting the theoretical side steer my examination. I will read *Stella* from an academic perspective rather than a personal one, so as to not let my experience place me too close to my research subject. It is for this reason that I will hold myself to the theory put forth by Naomi Wolf and others, rather than being guided by my own personal understanding. Similarly, this is why during my analysis, elements such as the letters from the editor will be of interest. As a "normal" reader, content elements such as these would not be so important to me. However, since I am here to conduct a critical analysis of *Stella*'s material, such elements are of great value and importance when looking at this topic from an academic-research perspective.

Finally, as a member of society in 2017, I often feel conflicted about these publications in terms of their messages about female identity. I consider myself to be very progressive, yet I love reading the glossy articles that tell me five tips for making my lipstick last longer. At times, it can seem as though these are conflicting parts of my identity. But are they really? And do these magazines I love so much only promote one ideology, or is it more complex than that? All of these questions have fueled my interest to examine this material. And when choosing which example to examine, it was easy to choose a Norwegian women's magazine since I am inherently curious about them. Having moved to Norway from the United States just four years ago, I am very interested in looking at the treatment of the feminist identity here, while using my background for comparison. One might easily believe that since these magazines exist all over the world, they must be the same all over the world – that they are all just glossy publications that show a lot of pretty pictures. However, I can attest to the fact that this is not true. There are indeed differences and these magazines do not have to be as superficial as one might believe. *Stella* is a Norwegian magazine, written in Norwegian for a Norwegian culture, and directed towards a Norwegian audience. My American background gives me the opportunity to look at these magazines' content with a different set of eyes, and to see the culture from both the outside as well as inside.

2.3 Overview of previous research

Throughout the process of my researching and writing, I have found the landscape of previous research on this topic to be mixed. Overall, there are many things written about women's magazines. However, there has not been an overwhelming amount of scholarly and legitimate research conducted on this topic. In addition, many of the studies that have been done, are focused on other aspects of these publications than what my study aims to focus on. Even so, I would now like to present those studies that I feel are relevant for my study, and show how I will use them as a springboard for my own direction. My aim is not to provide a comprehensive overview of all studies conducted in this field, but rather to examine select research that I feel is relevant for my study at hand. I will then use this

previous research as a means of situating my study, and what I have chosen to do differently.

The research done into the area of women's magazines is comprised of a mix of scholarly studies, feministic examination and popular culture debates. One such scholarly study is Brita Ytre-Arne's doctoral thesis (and its supporting articles) from the University of Bergen in Norway. In this thesis, Ytre-Arne focuses on women's magazines as texts, and argues that the act of reading women's magazines can most accurately be described as an *experience*, rather than consumption or reception (Ytre-Arne, 2011b). Thus, she aims specifically to examine women's *experience* of reading women's magazines. Ytre-Arne focuses on looking at women's motivations for reading these magazines, and how women experience these publications. She discusses these issues in light of a few selected topics, including identity and the public sphere, and her findings in both this doctoral thesis as well as other studies she has conducted on the topic of women's magazines, have been informative for my study, as will be discussed in my theory chapter. Her study argues for why print magazines are still relevant, and for the fact that women evaluate these texts in regards to relevance to their lives (Ibid). However, while Ytre-Arne focuses her analysis on the Norwegian magazines *KK*, *Tara*, *Henne* and *Kamille*, I have chosen to examine a relatively new magazine, *Stella*, which first came out in 2011. Her focus is primarily on women's experience of reading these texts, whereas I am curious to examine the portrayals of women in these texts from a feministic perspective.

A revolutionary study at the time, still with cornerstone contributions to the field today, is Janice Winship's 1987 book *Inside Women's Magazines*. Here, Winship takes an analytical focus of looking at women's magazines historically, from their early days to the 1980s, the time of her writing the book. Winship takes an inherently British focus in her analysis, as this is her cultural standing point, however the overarching conclusions she draws can be applied to women's magazines in general. Winship takes a feminist approach and focuses on analyzing the "female" aspects of women's magazines, what women's reading practices look like and how the feminine concepts fit in with a male-dominated world. She examines how women's magazines create their appeal and how

they work with relating to women and current events. Winship argues that women's magazines are strongly connected to free time and pleasureable "escapes" for women, and that these publications have served as a necessary outlet for identity-strengthening among a general women's culture (Winship, 1987). She talks about the encouragement-function that profile-pieces featuring different women overcoming adversity can have, the intentionally inclusive yet, in reality, very limiting and exclusive "we women" tone magazines tend to take in an effort to create a sense of feminine unity, and the development of magazine content over time (Ibid). She conducts case studies on three British magazines – *Woman's Own*, *Cosmopolitan* and *Spare Rib* – looking at similarities and differences in the presentation and treatment of issues, whereas I aim to broaden the cultural spectrum by examining these issues from the perspective of the Norwegian magazine *Stella*. Despite its increasing age, Winship's book serves as a cornerstone contribution within the field of research on women's magazines to this day. My study will aim to examine similar concepts in 2015/2016 issues of the Norwegian magazine *Stella*, to see how a modern magazine fairs in these regards.

Another study similar in nature is Joke Hermes's 1995 *Reading Women's Magazines*, which looks at how women read and use these publications (Hermes, 1995). Along the same lines, Ros Ballaster et al.'s 1991 *Women's Worlds: Ideology, Femininity and the Woman's Magazine* investigates why women read these publications, what their appeal is and how readers react to their contents. This type of reception-analysis study has been widely performed throughout the years on the topic of women's magazines. My study will aim to focus more on analyzing the content of these magazines, rather than the readers' experiences with them.

A classic cornerstone in this field is Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, first published in 1963. Again, though old by today's standards, Friedan's thoughts on and approach to feministic thought and women's magazines had a revolutionary and lasting impact. Friedan posits that due to the oppression women have been subjected to, they rely on the images of femininity presented in women's magazines because they are so insecure about knowing their own identity (Friedan, 1965). The premise of her book

revolves around her examining this notion of a feminine mystique, which says that women should be housewives and mothers instead of (not in addition to) having a career. Friedan's book served as a pivotal voice for the feministic movement in her time, and though she focuses more on feministic ideology in general, her thoughts have inspired much of the research into women's magazines and how femininity is presented that we have today.

Several studies have been conducted into the area of gender construction and representation in the media, such as Rosalind Gill's 2007 *Gender and the Media*, Liesbet van Zoonen's 1994 *Feminist Media Studies*, and her 1991 article published in *Mass Media and Society* entitled "Feminist Perspectives on the Media," in both of which van Zoonen examines female representation throughout the media in general (Liesbet van Zoonen, 1994; Liesbet van Zoonen, 1996). In "Feminist Perspectives on the Media," van Zoonen attempts to map out the variations of feminist expression and discusses how gendered media traditionally works to uphold the patriarchal order of society. However, she also advises that we must be careful not to create too large of a gap between "they," the consumers of media such as women's magazines, and "us" feminists, as this would be to deny a popular aspect of female culture, as well as denying the people who enjoy it (Liesbet van Zoonen, 1996). While van Zoonen focuses on the feministic (or non-feministic) representation of women in the media in general, my study will aim to examine female representation in the specific example of *Stella*, seeing what messages, feministic and/or non, it presents.

One of the most comprehensive examinations of the field of study into women's magazines, albeit from a British perspective, is Anna Gough-Yates's 2003 *Understanding Women's Magazines*. Here, Gough-Yates reviews several of the studies I have previously mentioned as well as others, and gives an overview of the different trends research has focused on throughout the years. Gough-Yates argues that many early studies focused on the representation of women in women's magazines, and that the majority of these studies' conclusions were critical, sometimes negative, to the publications at hand (Gough-Yates, 2003). She maps how the focus of studies into this field as well as the

magazines themselves have shifted over time, bringing us to where we are today with much of the research being concerned with the culture surrounding the reading of women's magazines. She then makes her own conclusions by arguing that both cultural and economic factors were at play in influencing the development of women's magazines during the 1980s and 1990s.

One of the key elements of her study is looking at how femininity is constructed in the "new" magazines in the 1980s and 1990s and how this served to change the landscape of women's magazines as a whole. Thus, her study has been very relevant for reflection when conducting mine. While she approaches this ideology from a British standpoint a couple of decades ago, my aim is to use the Norwegian *Stella* as the reference point of my study, looking at the latest year's publications. This will allow my study to have relevance for me both culturally and in a modern timeframe. While I do not aim to situate the female representations within a historical or deeply cultural context as Gough-Yates has done, I do aim to look at the representations themselves, as well as how they are constructed throughout the magazines, and to see how they may situate within a knowledge of the Norwegian culture.

In regards to Norway specifically, in 1999, Jostein Gripsrud of the University of Bergen published a report titled "*Ukepressens kulturelle og samfunnsmessige betydning*," [The weekly press's cultural and societal significance; my translation] which has been hailed as one of the most thorough reviews of the weekly press in Norway to date. By weekly press here, Gripsrud does not exclusively refer to publications that come out once a week, but also other publications that come out at more seldom, but regular intervals (Gripsrud, 1999, p. 5). By that definition, this would then imply the inclusion of my analysis object, *Stella*. Gripsrud takes on the history of these publications in Norway, focusing much of his report on tracing this history from the early 1800s to his present day. Thereafter, he discusses the functions of the weekly press in society, positing that the two main uses readers derive from these publications can be classified as 1) life help and information-gathering, and 2) the acquirement of knowledge in different areas from a cultural and moralistic standpoint (Gripsrud, 1999). With this he argues that the weekly

press has enormous relevance for culture and society, and that the differences between these weekly press publications and other printed media, such as newspapers, are not as drastic as traditionally perceived. In addition, Gripsrud discusses how, over the years, the general development of magazines in Norway has become more and more niche-oriented, which would allow a publication to direct its attention towards one particular target group, and which in theory would attempt to ensure the availability of something for all interests. This same view is also confirmed in Ytre-Arne's writings.

Gripsrud's findings are informative for my study in terms of getting an idea of the overall picture of Norwegian print media and contextualizing these topics in a relevant and historical perspective. Norway is a country that has a long and rich history in terms of news and print media. Since this report is considered one of the most thoroughly compiled reviews of the Norwegian weekly press landscape to date, it was essential to include an examination of it in my research. However, while Gripsrud's report aims to give an overview of the Norwegian weekly press's history and an assessment of its significance in society, my research aims to examine the ways in which a select one of these publications (*Stella*) as a whole portrays female identity, and to see how this works alongside feministic thinking. My research will have connections, however, with Gripsrud's study in terms of identity representation and ways in which women's magazines like *Stella* can have significance for their readers' lives.

Also coming out of the Nordic region is the 2011 seminar-based collection of research findings titled "*Skjønnhet og helse: det ytre og indre*," [Beauty and health: the outer and inner; my translation] which features a collection of 11 different research studies by 14 different Norwegian and Swedish researchers working both solo and collaboratively. In this collection of research, the authors discuss topics such as one's appearance's meaning in society, body ideals, and the relationship between one's clothes and their expression of identity, amongst other topics (Roos & Rysst, 2011). Throughout the different research pieces, the authors conduct analyses of phenomena in the context of real-life case studies, and they research a wide array of topics relating to health and

beauty issues in contemporary society, both in terms of children and teenagers, as well as adults. Their research takes on topics and issues that women deal with daily, and discusses their origins and how these phenomena affect us as social participants. This research collection gives a wonderful insight into many common aspects of modern health and beauty debates. However, while this collection of research takes a more phenomenological focus, my work will focus on examining one magazine case study in practice. I will aim to use the ideological concepts that they present in their examinations and see how they apply to *Stella*.

In addition, there has been some previous research done on the field of women's magazines through the means of master's theses. In 2005, Sigrun Lossius Meisingset wrote her thesis entitled "*Identitet i glossy innpakning*" (Identity in glossy wrapping; my translation) for the completion of her masters in *Medievitenskap* (Media Studies; my translation) at NTNU. Here, Meisingset examines the American women's magazine Marie Claire, and analyzes it with respect to the ideas of a few choice theorists including Douglas Kellner, Roland Barthes and Pierre Bordieu, amongst others (Meisingset, 2005). In this way, Meisingset's study has several similarities to mine in that we are both examining theoretical concepts through the analysis of a specific magazine, and in that we make some similar observations about how women are presented in these publications. However, Meisingset puts her focus on looking at Marie Claire in terms of how visual representations of females in the magazines lead to female identity construction, as well as looking at how the magazines work with the idea of a consumer society.

In my analysis, I aim to examine more broadly the way in which women and femininity are talked about. In doing this, I look not only at the visual representations of females, but also at the texts and the messages about women that are presented there. Meisingset makes it clear that her thesis is largely about how the portrayals of female identity in women's magazines work together with consumerist culture, however my focus is rather to examine how the representations of females in *Stella* are from a

feministic perspective. Of course, some elements of how these aforementioned representations relate to consumerist culture come with the territory, but this is not my main focus. In addition, Meisingset takes the opposite approach that I do, in that she is a Norwegian analyzing an American magazine, whereas I as an American am wanting to examine a Norwegian magazine. Thus, my study will work to shed light on how women are portrayed and discussed in a Norwegian women's magazine.

A variety of other master's theses have also been written on the topic of women's magazines, including specifically throughout the Nordic region. In 2008, Camilla Tuborgh Nielsen published her thesis entitled "Women's Magazines & Body Images: An empirical case study of the Danish fashion magazine *Costume*," in which she examines the messages the magazine portrays about body image, how these messages are received by women, and how they influence the women who read them (Nielsen, 2008). While Nielsen also takes a feministic approach, she is examining a Danish magazine that is known for focusing on fashion. Therefore, my analysis of the Norwegian *Stella* will give not only insight into a Norwegian women's magazine, but also a women's magazine that focuses on more editorial content, rather than just fashion images.

In addition to the master's theses that focus entirely on women's magazines, such as the examples named above, there also exist theses that touch upon the subject of women's magazines in other contexts, such as the thesis by Jessica Mary Elsie Cummings, entitled "The effect(s) of the visual media upon female body image," which examines the effects that representations of the female body in visual media have, of which magazines are arguably one part of said visual media (Cummings, 1998). Furthermore, there are numerous other theses that take on related topics, such as John Nicholas Holladay's thesis, "Portrayals of Power: A Content Analysis of Gender Dominance in Magazine Advertisements," which takes on one specific element present in magazines and examines that in a more in-depth study (Holladay, 2010).

As we have seen, though studies have been conducted into the subject of women's

magazines, much has been focused on audience-reading, reception and usage, as well as women's general representation in the genre. My study, however, will not look at how these magazines are perceived by readers, but rather aim to be a concrete case study of the depiction of women throughout the contents of the Norwegian women's magazine *Stella*. It will focus on the material itself, rather than its reception by consumers, and it will do so for my specific case rather than the genre as a whole. In this way, my study will build upon the already available findings to see how these concepts are exemplified in a concrete example.

2.4 Criteria for choosing my empirical material

When working with the question of which magazine I would choose for my analysis, I thought about a number of criteria. First, I needed to determine what target group I wanted to look at, and thus, which magazines had said target group as their audience. I decided that I wanted to look at a magazine that has reach into both younger readers as well as more middle-aged readers. This decision helped to rule out several choices, since several of the contenders had target audiences starting in their thirties and up, thus not capturing a young-enough audience. At the same time, this helped to eliminate some choices on the other side, as some magazines had the early thirties as the upper end of their target audience, and thus did not capture an old-enough audience. With a target audience of ages 25-45 years, *Stella* fit perfectly into the target group I wanted to capture (Bonnier Media, 2017).

The next aspect I needed to take consideration to was the actual content of the magazine. I took my starting point in the distinction that Ytre-Arne makes in her doctoral thesis about what constitutes a women's magazine for her purposes. While Ytre-Arne acknowledges that women's magazines can include all magazines directed at women, including topical magazines such as cooking magazines or wedding magazines, she (and I) decided to concentrate our studies on a more general definition of what constitutes a women's magazine. Ytre-Arne uses the classification "glossy general interest women's magazines," and defines them as "magazines that explicitly and primarily address women

as women, rather than taking a special interest area as a starting point,” (Ytre-Arne, 2011b, p. 49). This more overarching brand of women’s magazines is what I wanted to look at in my study, and her definition was a helpful guide for distinguishing different “types” amongst my magazine choices.

There are many women’s magazines to choose from in Norway, however each one has its own niche and content style. Even within the more broadly defined category of general interest women’s magazines, some titles focus mainly on fashion, trends and style, while others have more of a focus on editorial content. I decided that I wanted to look at a magazine that had a stronger focus on editorial content and which took up more topics than purely fashion alone. Since I set out to examine how a women’s magazine works with the portrayal of women, choosing a magazine with more editorial content gave me the opportunity to examine this over many different areas of everyday life, rather than, for example, fashion alone. With a focus on “health, beauty, fulfillment and fashion,” *Stella* covers many different areas including, but not limited to, fashion, makeup, skincare, exercise, food, psychology and career (Bonnier Media, 2017, my translation). This, along with the target audience as mentioned above, made *Stella* a fitting choice for my analysis. Additionally, by choosing *Stella* as my analysis object, I have been able to research a magazine that is relatively new on the Norwegian women’s magazine market. As previously mentioned, *Stella* was first given out in 2011, situating its release as being after the majority of studies on this topic were conducted. This gives me, therefore, the opportunity to contribute something new to the field of research on Norwegian women’s magazines, as many previous studies take more established magazines for their analysis.

Finally, I needed to determine the time period I would use for my study of *Stella*. For this, I started with how many times a year *Stella* comes out with a new issue. *Stella* is produced every other month, leading to six issues per year. Thus, to have a representative sample size of material, I chose to look at a years’ worth of magazines. This will give me enough material to allow me to draw conclusions about actual trends present in the magazine, without confusing them as being coincidences. As for the exact dates I would

examine, I wanted to keep my study as current as possible. Thus, I took a year's worth of issues ending in the month of my study's start so that I could include the most recent issue. This gave me the period from issue number 06, 2015 (October/November) through issue number 06, 2016 (October/November) and resulted in a total of seven issues of *Stella*.

In conjunction with my thesis, I took contact with Ida Halvorsen Kemp, the editor-in-chief of *Stella*. She expressed excitement that I had chosen to write my master's thesis on *Stella*, and said that she would be more than happy to supply me with whatever materials I needed for my project. Thus, I was able to obtain my seven issues of *Stella* directly from her, and I have permission to use the magazines for my analysis.

2.5 More in-depth about *Stella*

As stated in their advertising information, *Stella* seeks to reach a target audience of women between the ages of 25 and 45 who are “modern” and “mentally urban” (Bonnier Media, 2017, my translations). “What is important for the *Stella*-woman is to be the best edition of herself and utilize her entire potential. She is an adult, yet still young, and is ambitious in all areas of life. *Stella* speaks to smart, lively women! It's about giving recognition and cred. *Stella* is cool and stylish – one you listen to and are inspired by,” (Bonnier Media, 2017, my translation). The magazine describes itself as having readers who are strong females with opinions they stand for, and prides itself for offering a higher amount of readable content (Bonnier Media, 2017).

Structuring the contents of *Stella* are certain staple sections that act as overarching parts of each issue. These sections include “Sense,”¹ which describes itself as taking up topics such as culture, fashion and news, “*Stella* Meets/Portrait,” which always profiles a prominent female figure, “Style,” which covers the topics of fashion, news and shopping, “Life” which describes itself as taking up topics such as self-development, career and relations, “Glow,” which covers topics about makeup, hair, skin and fragrance, and finally “Pulse,” which discusses topics such as exercise, diet and food. The content of

¹ All section names are of my translation.

each issue is organized into these sections, as well as a handful of other regular pieces, including a column by Norwegian comedian and host Sigrid Bonde Tusvik, to create the overall structure and coverage of the magazine.

According to their advertiser information, *Stella* has a circulation of 21,857 with a total of 70,000 readers (Bonnier Media, 2017). In addition, *Stella* has a gross exposure probability, or GEP, of 129,000 (Bonnier Media, 2017). GEP is a measurement of magazine readership that takes into account three factors: Average Issue Readership (AIR), Number of Reading Occasions (NRO), and Average Readership Engagement Score (RES) (Møglestue, Undated). A TNS Gallup study on several magazines showed that in 2014, it was reported that during that latest round of measurement at that time, *Stella* had the largest increase in GEP of those in the women's magazine segment, totaling a 40.4% increase – more than 10% higher than *Costume*, which sat in second place (Krøvel, 2014). A 2015 study from Bonnier Media, who owns *Stella* as well as many other leading magazines on the Norwegian market, also showed that *Stella* had a 25% increase in readership and a 23% increase in GEP, making *Stella* the women's magazine from Bonnier with the biggest increase in both areas at that time (Bonnier Media, 2015). As for readership, 87% of *Stella*'s readers are women and 13% are men, 57% of readers are aged 20-39, 20% aged 12-19, 19% aged 40-59 and 5% aged 60+.² 87% of *Stella*'s readers say they are interested in beauty and self-care, 88% are interested in a healthy diet, and 76% are interested in fashion (Bonnier Media, 2017).

2.6 Choice of methods

My study aims to conduct a qualitative, case-study analysis of *Stella*, with the purpose of examining a specific aspect – namely, how women and femininity are portrayed in the magazine. In order to do this, I have gone forth by conducting theoretical research on the topic, and then continuing on to analyze the issues of *Stella* out from that. I have chosen to examine various aspects of the magazines, including but not limited to

² This and all information throughout the rest of this section was retrieved from Bonnier Media, 2016.

examining what topics the magazine takes up, what types of female images *Stella* provides for its readers, and what messages *Stella* gives off about the role of females in society. Further, I have chosen to break down my analysis into five elements for examination throughout the seven issues of *Stella* that make up my empirical material. These are: the front covers, back covers, magazine spine text, letters from the editor and inside content.

This methodology is very much situated within the field of humanities, which is appropriate for my particular examination. Being that the goal of the humanities is to examine and explain cultural phenomena, it is thus fitting that I utilize a humanistic research approach in my analysis of examining how a particular example of a medium portrays a particular cultural group. Additionally, my study utilizes a qualitative methodology, rather than a quantitative methodology, in that it seeks to take an in-depth look at a carefully-chosen selection of materials. In her doctoral thesis, Brita Ytre-Arne touches upon both Ann Gray's and Barbara Gentikow's understanding of the value of qualitative methods when she explains the following:

Comparing qualitative methods to surveys, Gray (2003:16) argues that qualitative methods are particularly important when one aims to understand texts or practices in relation to everyday life and identity...Qualitative methods aim to reflexively explore and interpret the depths, nuances and ambivalences of people's experiences, as explained in their own words and as situated in social and cultural contexts (Gentikow 2005a: 37-55). (as quoted in Ytre-Arne, 2011b, p. 57)

Thus, a humanistic, qualitative approach provides the perfect methodological means for my purposes. This methodology will allow me to examine a cultural and social phenomenon (how women are portrayed) within a cultural context – namely, that of the Norwegian women's magazine *Stella*. My background in media allows me to approach this subject from a media-theoretical perspective, in addition to the theoretical and phenomenological knowledge of feministic perspective which conducting this thesis has given me.

3. Theory

3.1 The Beauty Myth – Naomi Wolf

Women's magazines have long been discussed with disdain in discourses both in the academic sphere as well as in personal conversations. Its content has been ridiculed as being less valuable and of a lower standard – something trivial and not at all to be taken seriously. After all, what deeper meaning could an article about lipstick shades possibly have? Naomi Wolf has a lot to say about this. Wolf is an author, journalist and maybe most of all, a feminist. She first became known for her book *The Beauty Myth* in 1991 (later republished in 2002), which has been credited for helping to launch the third wave feminist movement (Hix, 2005). In *The Beauty Myth*, Wolf discusses exactly what the title would insinuate – the idea of a beauty myth in our society. She explains how this myth is at work in several areas of our daily lives, including within the cultural phenomenon of women's magazines.

I chose to look at this particular book by Naomi Wolf in large part because of the fact that this book specifically has had a significant influence on individuals and cultural products that have come after it. As mentioned above, this book helped to kick start the third wave feminist movement, and thus, in turn worked to influence feministic thinkers in all areas of society, including women's magazine editors and writers. This book helped to inspire a new way of thinking, and provided individuals with a new way to see. It gave us a new way to talk about women that could be carried on by the voices of the future.

In many ways, Wolf's book sets itself apart from other sources used throughout my thesis. Wolf's writing comes from a transparently feministic viewpoint, and when she writes, she is writing for a broad and general audience. This differs from, for example, the work of Brita Ytre-Arne, who directs her writing towards a strictly academic audience. In this way, Wolf's book speaks more broadly about culture and feminism, and how women's magazines relate to these concepts. Thus, while I realize that *The Beauty Myth* is written from a more journalistic standpoint rather than an academic standpoint, Wolf's work is still highly relevant for my study in that she presents a position that points

to some very interesting and pertinent ideas within this medium and within the society in which this medium operates. She employs critical thinking and puts forward interesting approaches to analyzing women's magazines. This book has meant a lot for today's ideology regarding feminism, and its arguments are of both relevance and interest for my examination of *Stella*.

3.2 What is the beauty myth?

In order to understand what the beauty myth is, we first need to keep a general idea of women's rights history in mind. Second-wave feminism brought Western women much progress. Wolf discusses how protection under labor laws, free choice over one's own body and an active challenging of women's role in society are all among the results that arose out of this period around the 1970s (Wolf, 2002, p. 9). She maps how the idea of the woman being a housewife, cooking and cleaning for her husband, was being challenged in many Western societies, and how the idea of women being active, self-sufficient, intelligent and powerful actors in society was beginning to gain footing. While the housewife idea has yet to be fully abolished even to this day, this shift led to an increase in equality and a decrease in the power gap between men and women, and judging by this standard, Wolf posits that it would seem as though women today are more free than they have ever been. However, she argues that upon closer examination, this is not the case. She writes how even though women are more educated and liberated than ever before, it is nearly impossible to ignore the feeling that women are lacking in freedom from things that should be without meaning.

This is where we meet the beauty myth. Wolf describes how as women have broken through more and more societal boundaries, they have become more and more plagued by the beauty ideals placed upon them (Ibid, p. 10). Wolf says that while women have more money, power and protection of rights than ever before, they may in fact be worse off than their ancestors of earlier times when it comes to issues of body and appearance. This certainly would appear to be true, because in our modern society, it seems that being satisfied with one's appearance as it currently is feels like a rebellious act. But why is that?

We are in the midst of a violent backlash against feminism that uses images of female beauty as a political weapon against women's advancement: the beauty myth...As women released themselves from the feminine mystique of domesticity, the beauty myth took over its lost ground, expanding as it waned to carry on its work of social control. (Ibid, p. 10)

In this way, she describes how just as the oppressive ideology of the housewife was on its way out, the beauty myth was ushered in as the new version to replace it, showing how each generation, including our own, has fought against its own version of oppressive thinking against women. "At once, the diet and skin care industries became the new cultural censors of women's intellectual space, and because of their pressure, the gaunt, youthful model supplanted the happy housewife as the arbiter of successful womanhood," (Ibid, p. 11). She describes how endless housework became exchanged for endless beauty work (Ibid, p. 16). Similarly, in 1999, Alexandra Starr wrote an article in *Washington Monthly*, arguing that women's magazines today promote the same "happiness equals securing a man" formula that they did 50 years ago, but that today the tool used to secure this is great sex rather than fabulous cooking skills (Starr, 1999).

In this way, we see the connection and continuation of many generations of feministic struggles come together to form our current-day situation. Wolf argues that the beauty myth works to maintain male societal dominance and society's oppression against women, only in a different form than, for example, the notion of the housewife that dominated in the 1950's. In Ytre-Arne's doctoral thesis, she quotes Rosalind Gill in saying how gender representations in women's magazines are intended to naturalize gender differentiation and continued male authority, even when these messages are presented in the feministic language of freedom, choice and sexual liberation (as cited in Ytre-Arne, 2011b, pp. 20-21). I will come back to this idea of an ideological contradiction later in this chapter. However, according to Wolf, this upholding of the societal order occurs through the messages women's magazines emphasize about who women "should" be. "In assigning value to women in a vertical hierarchy according to a culturally imposed physical standard, it is an expression of power relations in which women must unnaturally compete for resources that men have appropriated for

themselves,” (Wolf, 2002, p. 12). It is this extra condition and requirement that women must meet that works to maintain an oppressive order in society, even amidst so much progress for women in other areas.

In the piece, “Survival of the fittest,” within the research collection “*Skjønnhet og helse: det ytre og indre*,” [Beauty and health: the outer and inner; my translation] Annechen Bahr Bugge and Kjersti Lillebø describe how the ideal presented in women’s magazines is to be an independent actor that makes your own decisions, but nonetheless stays within a strictly defined frame of what beauty “should” be (Bugge & Lillebø, 2011, p. 47). The authors relate the messages in women’s magazines to Pierre Bourdieu’s idea of physical and social capital, saying that women’s magazines aim to steer readers in directions that can increase their physical and social capital, which in this case means to become more beautiful. Further, by “beautiful,” what is meant is the once again strictly-confined definition of beauty – namely, being skinny, taut and strong. The authors argue that women’s magazines thrive on the message that increasing one’s physical and social capital in this way will lead to one being more successful. According to their research, they explain how a commonality in the presentation of all of the magazines they studied is that it was very obvious that having a body that is in line with modern beauty standards is essential to succeed in social circles. This supports Wolf’s concept of the Beauty Myth, and women having to fulfill additional requirements in order to succeed.

All of this begs the question – is it bad, then, to be genuinely interested in the style and beauty ideas presented by the magazines? I argue that interest in these topics itself is not a negative thing. As Wolf says, women’s interest in dressing up makes them more susceptible to the ideals of the beauty myth (Ibid, p. 75). However, the real issue is not that women are more interested in fashion and beauty, but rather that participation in these areas is treated by society as a condition that needs to be met. It is here, in the societal-requirement aspect, that the difference lies. “Does all this mean we can’t wear lipstick without feeling guilty? On the contrary. It means we have to separate from the myth what it has surrounded and held hostage,” (Ibid, p. 271).

This idea of using appearance as an extra condition is something I want to look at in my analysis of *Stella*, to see if messages that support this appear at all, or to what extent such messages appear in the magazine's editorial content. In addition, I want to see how *Stella* operates in regards to Alexandra Starr's arguments about women's magazines today promoting the idea of using sex as a means to secure a man, and thus, secure happiness. From my perspective, this is absolutely an argument that I can agree with as being true for women's magazines today in general, and especially for some of the women's magazines that are more famous for making such arguments, such as the notorious *Cosmopolitan*. However, if we look at *Stella*, a women's magazine from one of the most progressive countries in the world in regards to gender-equality, is this uniformly the case?

3.3 How the beauty myth works with women's magazines historically

Now that we have reviewed why the beauty myth has been introduced into society, we can look at how it works with the genre of women's magazines. With women's magazines, as with any other type of major publication, advertisers play a large and central role in the financing, structuring and selection of content for the magazines. This relationship is and has been crucial for the livelihood of the magazines at hand. Dating back to the 1950's, advertisers realized a strategy that could work in helping to ensure that women would buy their products – namely, to creatively and strategically use the concept of guilt (Wolf, 2002, p. 65). Advertising messages that claim one will be the best version of one's self by using product X, or that a look isn't complete without product Y, work by implicitly saying the opposite – that if one does not have product X or Y, they are doing themselves a disservice and are not living up to their full potential. This ultimately works by guiltting the reader enough to ensure that they walk away feeling insufficient without the product being advertised, thus leading to a purchase of said product. It is a feeling I believe many women can relate to having experienced, as these types of advertisements surround us in our daily lives, both in women's magazines and on other platforms such as the Internet, TV commercials and posters at the bus stop.

When trying to understand this ideology, it is important to keep in mind an aspect of women's role in consumer society that may not be so obvious. Traditionally, women have been very strong consumers in the market of goods and products (Ibid, p. 66). However, as Wolf says, what may often be forgotten is that within this role of the housewife lay a strong consumerist tie, in that in order to be a "good housewife," one needed to purchase all of the products this would require, which made women a crucial



("Kenwood Chef [Advertisement]," 1960s)

target audience for advertisers through the means of, for example, women's magazines. Thus, one can understand how much of a worry it was to advertisers when women began their movement out of the housewife role, as that meant a movement away from their place as a vital advertising audience for a whole sector of products.

Wolf describes how advertisers needed a new way to create these same feelings of insecurity amongst this large and important advertising group, so as to maintain the revenue they brought in (Ibid, p. 66). Wolf takes feminist Betty Friedan's expressions about the housework of the older days' housewife figure and creates a modern-day version about its replacement with beauty work:

A new ideology was necessary that would compel the same insecure consumerism; that ideology must be, unlike that of the Feminine Mystique, a briefcase-sized neurosis that

the working woman could take with her to the office. To paraphrase Friedan, why is it never said that the really crucial function that women serve as aspiring beauties is *to buy more things for the body*? Somehow, somewhere, someone must have figured out that they will buy more things if they are kept in the self-hating, ever-failing, hungry, and sexually insecure state of being aspiring “beauties.” (Ibid, p. 66)

This made way for the consumerist grounds for the development of the beauty myth, which helped to protect advertisers and, thus, women’s magazines, from crippling damage during the evolving role of the woman.

Wolf describes that the main shift began with a 1969 issue of *Vogue* focusing on the “nude look,” which immediately created self-consciousness throughout women’s popular culture regarding the actual body itself, no longer just the clothes upon it (Ibid, p. 67). With that, the advertising industry eliminated the threat that women’s liberation posed to their revenue by dawning a new generation of advertising focus based off of insecurities directed at women and their physiques in a personal way. The trend grew strongly, as Wolf sites that in 1979 there were a total of 60 dieting articles in the weekly press, whereas in 1980, there were 66 dieting articles in the January month alone (Ibid, p. 67). Focus on appearance was drastically increased as women moved more into the workforce, and advertisers were saved from their potential crisis.

I believe that Wolf’s understanding about these issues is correct. Just as women’s magazines were filled with advertisements for kitchen appliances during the era of the housewife, it would seem accurate based on my knowledge of women’s magazines as we know them today that these have been exchanged for advertisements for “beauty work” products, and that much focus has been shifted towards perfecting the body and appearance. This is something that I want to look at in my analysis of *Stella*. Are these ideas present in the content there? And if so, to what extent is the magazine is affected by these ideas.

3.4 How the beauty myth works with women's magazines today

Now that we have examined the transition from the days of the housewife, with magazines filled with advertisements for kitchen products and ways to “please your husband,” to the days of the beauty myth, with advertisements directed towards endless work to perfect one's body and appearance, we can look more closely at how today's women's magazines operate within this structure. Marta Breen, Norwegian feminist, journalist, and blogger for the blog “*Hele Norge baker ikke*,” [Not all of Norway bakes; my translation] discusses her frustration about how women's magazines are filled with mixed messages (Veka, 2013). Breen gives an example from the Norwegian women's magazine *KK* where in one moment the journalist says how sad it is that so many women are dissatisfied with their bodies since this isn't what determines how much others like us, yet goes on to give an overview of the body parts women are most dissatisfied with, along with advice on how to improve these parts (Breen, 2013). It is such blatant contradictions such as these that Breen expresses contempt for. She says how, “In the one moment they write concernedly about the tyranny of beauty and anorexia, but on the next page it's about juice diets and slimming,” (Veka, 2013, my translation). Nurse and writer Ingeborg Senneset likens this mixed-message communication to a psychopath's relationship with their partner, keeping them dependent by employing a constant cycle of tearing them down, then comforting and lifting them up, then tearing them down again (Ibid). These double messages can result in, as Runi Børresen, associate professor at the *Høgskole* in Buskerud and professional director for eating disorders at *Sunn Jenteidrett*, puts it, total confusion, and suggests that the magazines should start a trend where women are satisfied with themselves just as they are (Ibid).

I, as a regular consumer of this medium, can attest to the roller-coaster feelings and mixed messages that women experience. In one moment, I cling to messages about “loving one's curves” and embracing one's figure as it is, and in the next moment, I feel driven to start dieting so that I can lose 10 pounds and look better in a bikini. Both of these messages exist in society, and both can even be present in the same publication.

Wolf, however, offers an explanation in the spirit of the beauty myth for why these mixed messages are so.

Wolf says that today's women's magazines are stocked with some very positive and progressive messages, encouraging self-development and individual action (Wolf, 2002, p. 63). However, she explains that in order to uphold this double-edged sword of the socially-imposed beauty myth and satisfy advertisers, the magazines must also contain a degree of the opposite, which I will discuss more in depth in the coming pages. "In diet, skin care, and surgery features, it sells women the deadliest version of the beauty myth money can buy," (Ibid, p. 69). It is this ever-present contradiction of content that Wolf argues represents the current situation for women's magazines today. In this sense, we can begin to see women's magazines as a middleman, caught between the progressive and empowering ideology they want to promote, and the beauty myth content their advertisers require them to include. I posit that this idea of mixed messages is indeed generally true for the reality of women's magazines today, and I want to see if it holds true for *Stella*. If it does, I also want to look at the balance between the two to see how much of each competing side exists, and if one dominates over the other.

Another aspect of the beauty myth at work in today's women's magazines can be represented by these magazines' skilled creation of the dream life. Through the presentation of desirable, but often out of reach products, aesthetically crafted photographs and interviews with "the women who have it all," women's magazines can create a heightened desire to purchase consumer goods (Ibid, p. 70). Sometimes, the images presented create a desire for products the reader never before knew that she "needed." When describing the power these picture-perfect images in women's magazines have to awaken a desire within women to achieve or purchase perfection in all areas of life, Wolf describes it as the work of a fairy godmother who visits the magazine reader while she sleeps:

When she [the reader] awakens, her bathroom will be full of exactly the right skin-care products, with step-by-step instructions, and palettes of exactly the required makeup. The kindly phantom will have colored and cut the sleeper's hair to perfection, made over her

face and painlessly nipped and tucked it. In her closet she will discover a complete wardrobe arranged by season and occasion, color-coordinated and accessorized on shoe trees and in hatboxes. (Ibid, p. 70)

In this way, these messages in women's magazines go along with the ideas Erving Goffman discusses in his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Goffman discusses the concepts which he calls "front stage" and "back stage," which center around an individual attempting to control their appearance and the impressions they give off when meeting other people, so that they will be perceived by others in the way that they want others to perceive them (Goffman, 1990). Goffman speaks first and foremost about face to face communication, however I argue that this concept also applies to women's magazines. This is because much of the content in women's magazines deals with how to "control" or "improve" one's appearance, or "front stage," and one's appearance is tightly bound together with the impressions one gives off to others. Indeed, as Naomi Wolf argues, it is unequally tightly bound for females compared to males, as females must jump through extra hoops and meet extra criteria in order to be granted the same permissions as their male counterparts.

Janice Winship describes how women's magazines supply a mix of survival skills to help deal with womanly issues, and daydreams that allude to these survival skills truly working to create one's best possible life, or at least working to improve the life one has now (Winship, 1987, p. 14). Senneset also criticizes women's magazines for this concept, particularly because of their tendency to lure readers with promises of a better life so long as they fix what the magazine tells you to fix (Veka, 2013). In their article entitled "Me at My Best: Therapeutic Ideals in Norwegian Women's Magazines," Ole Jacob Madsen and Brita Ytre-Arne also discuss this phenomenon of bombarding women with constant life- and self-improvement strategies that is present in women's magazines today. The authors highlight how while this inspiring type of message is not inherently bad, an overabundance of these "therapeutic" messages could result in a perpetual unhappiness due to the reader never being able to fully be good enough, as there is always more they can improve (Madsen & Ytre-Arne, 2012). In addition, the authors point out how women's magazines often portray societal problems as individuals' problems, thus

shifting the responsibility for improvement onto the individual, who in fact cannot realistically fix the societal/economical/etc. problem at hand.

Thus, it can be said that today's women's magazines are filled with a confusing mix of self-empowering portrayals together with insecurity- and dissatisfaction-inducing messages. The women's magazines of 2017 are a long way from the women's magazines of old, however Wolf argues that they still maintain oppressive ideas by means of the beauty myth. These highly contradictory realities can be frustrating, however they are not without reasonable cause.

3.5 The truth behind the contradictions

Wolf explains how women's magazines are often the subjects of much critique, receiving accusations of being unserious and superficial (Wolf, 2002, p. 70). However, as she argues, the editorial content that manages to escape the beauty myth is definitely not antifeminist, and in fact, these magazines actually represent something much bigger. Wolf writes:

A man reading *Popular Mechanics* or *Newsweek* is browsing through just one perspective among countless others of a general male-oriented culture, which is everywhere. A woman reading *Glamour* is holding women-oriented mass culture between her two hands. Women are deeply affected by what their magazines tell them...because they are all most women have as a window on their own mass sensibility. (Ibid, p. 70)

It is important to name that additional windows into a general women's culture have been created since Wolf's writing the book, largely because of the Internet. Today there exist additional sources for women, by women and concerned with women's culture, such as for example blogs and websites like Pinterest. So while women's magazines are not the only window that exists today as Wolf wrote, I do argue that they remain one of the most thoroughly compiled sources for the expression of women's culture. There is such strength in women's magazines since they are written by women, for women, and cover issues that relate to women. In describing the power of women's magazines, Ytre-Arne explains how these publications are in fact political:

Women's magazines are generally not associated with the forms of journalism which bring citizens information of crucial democratic importance. Nevertheless, research on women's magazines emphasize their political relevance as purveyors of ideology about class, family structures and women's role in society. (Ytre-Arne, 2011a, p. 247)

However, the previously discussed contradictions within the glossy pages can be read as a parallel to the contradictions present in women's everyday lives (Wolf, 2002, p. 71). As we have seen, even as women have achieved much progress in society, the beauty myth has been established as an attempt to continue an oppressive order within society.

Women have an extra condition in that there is so much pressure for them to look a certain way, whereas this is not the same for men. In order to be taken seriously and to succeed, women must fulfill an additional requirement than their male counterparts by participating in this beauty code.

Similarly, in order to be able to have serious content on their pages, women's magazines are in reality forced to have seemingly contradictory messages placed in their pages so as to satisfy the advertisers who fund them (Ibid, p. 71). Since the magazines must rely on these advertisers for their funding, they must take care to satisfy their demands. And since the advertisers want to sell their products, Wolf explains how they need the women reading their ads not to have exposure to so much progressive content that their products become obsolete. This concept is echoed by Jostein Gripsrud, who argues that the overarching and commercially-inflicted conservatism has severely limited the extent to which readers are exposed to challenging or provocative ideologies (Gripsrud, 1999, pp. 54-55). Thus, the presence of the beauty myth in women's magazines is largely due to the need for advertising money's support.

Gough-Yates crystalizes this point when she points out that in their struggle to compete economically, cultural producers have the need to create an identity construction both of themselves as well as their intended consumers (Gough-Yates, 2003, p. 20). Thus, from an economic standpoint, it is to the publication's and the advertiser's benefit to control and regulate the identities presented in the publications within which advertisers' products will be viewed by prospective consumers. This includes both the identities of

the advertiser's products, as well as the identity of the women whom the product is intended for. The more coherent these are, the more likely the advertiser will be profitable, thus continuing to advertise in the magazine, giving it the economic support it needs. As Gough-Yates says, "The magazine industry's depictions of femininity are attempts to unify the perceived complexities of young women's lives around coherent, commercially viable, configurations of 'woman' that will appeal to advertisers and readers alike," (Gough-Yates, 2003, p. 154). Women's magazines' dependency on advertiser funding thus makes the balancing of different and varying representations of women a sticky situation.

Wolf names an example of a situation where an editor for a leading women's magazine ran an article on the beauty of gray hair, which ended up costing her magazine six months of withdrawn Clairol advertisements (Wolf, 2002, p. 81). "Magazines, consciously or half-consciously, must project the attitude that looking one's age is bad because \$650 million of their ad revenue comes from people who would go out of business if visible age looked good," (Ibid, p. 84). This same sentiment is echoed by Gough-Yates, who also discusses the tension present between an editorial staff's desire to be bold and innovative, and the need to play it safer in order to satisfy advertisers and secure their ad revenue (Gough-Yates, 2003). Thus, editors are forced to take consideration to advertisers when it comes to content simply for survival purposes. Simply put, both women and women's magazines share the unfortunate reality of being caught in the middle between two ideologies. On one hand, they desperately strive to be feminist and progressive, yet on the other hand, they are forced to succumb to the pressure to participate in the beauty myth in order to succeed (Wolf, 2002, p. 71). Thus, what results in a seemingly confusing contradiction in content is really a material representation of the conflict women face in today's society.

I believe that another potential aspect contributing to these contradictions of female empowerment versus traditional thinking in women's magazines, is the remaining feminist-cultural clash of ideology amongst women today, pinned up against the magazines' desire to make a profit. While society has indeed made leaps and bounds of

progress over the past decades in terms of gender equality and women's rights, it would be mistaken to say that all women want these advancements and these messages equally. Thus, this puts women's magazines in a peculiar position. Being one of the main sources for womanly cultural representation in our society, women's magazines have to satisfy a whole range of people and their varying views and needs in order to be most profitable. This means that, idealistically, they have to appeal to a wide audience of both women with strong feminist ideas and also those without. Certainly some magazines lean very clearly one way or the other, such as a homemaker magazine or an outright feminist publication, however many magazines find themselves in the middle of the spectrum. Particularly those covering fashion and the youthful lifestyle are intended for "the every woman." However, this "every woman" is not so easily defined, as individuals are so varying and unique in their values and their beliefs. Thus, this can therefore lead to a contradicting set of messages and values presented in women's magazines' glossy pages, when they are trying to reach an audience that is as large as possible, so as to be most profitable.

When we look at women's magazines from this perspective, we can gain a whole new outlook on them. These resources, which women can rely on as one of the few sources compiled from a purely woman-centric view, are in fact facing the same oppressive, contradicting and divisive difficulties the women reading them face. I argue that this should garner them much more attention and respect, rather than being written off as superficial nonsense about lipstick and shoes. The larger phenomenon at work behind it all is, as we have seen, painfully relevant for modern society and modern women, and by understanding it for what it is, one can develop a new perspective on this aspect of our culture.

3.6 Why women's magazines matter

Something important women's magazines have historically been very good at is being an outlet for feministic ideology and literature (Wolf, 2002, pp. 71-72). "It was through these glossies that issues from the women's movement swept out from the barricades and down from academic ivory towers to blow into the lives of working-class women, rural women,

women without higher education,” (Ibid, pp. 71-72). With this, Wolf argues that women’s magazines have been one of the most effective means for social change, and when one takes this together with the conflicting messages they contain, it is understandable to think how these magazines can create such a love-hate relationship amongst readers. This identity as an important channel of communication, together with the fact that women’s magazines serve as physical representations of the contradictory nature of the beauty myth women face in daily life, serve to show us theoretical grounds for why women’s magazines matter. Long written off as trivial and unimportant, these magazines have a bigger story to tell.

As already established, women’s magazines can be seen as a vital source for representing many aspects of women’s culture all in one place. As Janice Winship said, “They [women’s magazines] offer help and, above all, hope. They present a catalogue, both sad and heartening, of women’s ability to survive in a world where the odds are stacked against them,” (Winship, 1987, p. 14). Especially in regards to promoting the changing attitudes of what it means to be female, magazines can be important resources for providing inspiration and role models of strong cover girls who break the traditional feminine mold. This alone increases their importance, yet there is another reason why these magazines are important sources for analysis. Wolf discusses how women’s magazines are very skilled at creating an environment of trust and solidarity amongst their readers through, for example, the community-building nature of reader write-ins, and the employment of titles such as “We know how you feel about __,” and “Our beauty expert shows you five easy tips to look your best this season,” (Wolf, 2002, p. 74).

These combine to make the magazine seem to be more than a magazine: They make it appear to be a mix of extended family, benefit agency, political party, and guild. They make it look like an interest group with the reader’s best interest at heart. (Ibid, p. 74)

This level of trust and familiarity is not a quality that all types of media successfully manage to create with their audience, and thus makes the genre of women’s magazines a unique case to look at. However, Wolf argues that this high level of trust can make it difficult to decipher the mixed messages of what is genuine and what is beauty myth. As

a women's magazine reader myself, I understand how all of these messages can swirl around together to create a confusing overall picture of how to live one's life, and this is something I want to examine within the pages of *Stella*.

3.7 The question about what can be done

My hope is that at this point, the problems of the beauty myth have been made clear, which leaves us with a lingering question. What can we do about it? Wolf argues that this focus on body and appearance perfection creates a competitive environment among women, where other women are viewed as potential threats for "looking better," etcetera, something that I absolutely posit to be true (Wolf, 2002, p. 75). This competition works to create distance rather than solidarity, yet it is solidarity that is needed to combat this situation. Wolf argues that the most crucial change will not come from men or the media, but rather from women themselves in the form of how women act towards and see each other (Ibid, pp. 282-283). Women using the beauty myth against each other, to create comparisons and competitions, only strengthens its power. Instead, coming together and generating awareness of these issues would not only work to improve the issues themselves, but also to improve relations amongst women and create the solidarity needed to combat these inequalities.

The beauty myth says that women must participate in an extra conditional layer in order to succeed. So therefore it would follow that overcoming the beauty myth would mean that this extra requirement gets taken away. "A woman wins when she feels that what each woman does with her own body – unforced, uncoerced, – is her own business," (Ibid, p. 290). This does not mean that women have to give up all interest in the subjects discussed in women's magazines. As mentioned earlier, the problem is not that a woman wants to wear lipstick, but rather that lipstick gets used as one of the beauty myth's tools to uphold an extra societal requirement for women. We are, thus, called to reclaim these tools for a use that is independent of these ideals. "The real issue has nothing to do with whether women wear makeup or don't, gain weight or lose it, have surgery or shun it... The real problem is our lack of choice," (Ibid, p. 272). In other words, Wolf clarifies

that it is not the products themselves that are the issue, but rather the fact that women are made to feel defect or less meaningful without them.

Wolf encourages us to call out the beauty myth's work for what it is when we see it in practice, to demand equal conditions between genders and to lift up portrayals of women that show the depths and versatility of female capability (Ibid, pp. 276-277). She describes the importance of attacking the problem at its source, rather than just changing the façade of how it unveils itself.

The 1980s' 'healthy' beauty brought about an epidemic of new diseases and 'strength as beauty' enslaved women to our muscles. This process will continue with every effort women make to reform the index until we change our relationship to the index altogether. (Ibid, p. 277)

This is extremely important to keep in mind, so that we do not keep thinking that we are eliminating the problem all together, when we are in fact simply shifting the problem over to something else, requiring us to now work to perfect ourselves in that area instead of another.

Something we often hear as a possible solution today is a push for showing more realistic representations of women in advertisements and magazine content. Wolf argues that this is a hope in vain, since the whole functionality in advertisements directed at women is to lower their self-esteem so that they continue to buy the advertisers' products in order to "improve" themselves – a concept which would be undermined by increased representation (Ibid, pp. 276-277). I am not fully in agreement with her on this, as I feel that there has recently been a shift towards more representative figures, and I feel that this can still be positive for advertisers' revenue, though I have my reservations about the breadth of this representation nonetheless. This is something I want to examine in my analysis of the issues of *Stella*.

Thankfully, as David Gauntlett highlights through the interview transcripts of many different women's magazine readers in his book *Media, Gender and Identity*, the messages and ideal images presented in women's magazines do not necessarily appear to

be automatically adopted and perceived as desirable by those who consume this medium (Gauntlett, 2008). Gauntlett concludes from the presented research that the interactions women have with these magazines seem to be often of what he calls the “pick and mix” variety. This essentially means that readers seem to be engaged with the magazines from an entertainment perspective, as well as gathering certain pieces of information or skill acquisition, yet that they do not articulate the belief that the images of womanhood presented in these magazines is idealistic or something to be strived towards imitating.

The reader interviews communicate the idea that these magazines present suggestions of an ideal of some sort, but that it is ultimately up to the reader to determine if that ideal is in fact ideal for them or not. The interviewees named an array of different motivations for reading these publications, none of which revolved around personally feeling negatively pressured to fit into the mold outlined on the glossy pages. In addition, the idea-inspiration and pure-entertainment functions of these magazines came through in the reader interviews, showing that readers were able to distance themselves from the content at hand in order to allow the possibility of being inspired and entertained by it while still keeping themselves grounded in who they are as individuals. This is not to say, however, that our situation is ultimately fixed, but rather, this insight about how the readers of women’s magazines may not be such passively-influenceable media consumers as sometimes believed, leaves me hopeful and optimistic for women’s continued progress in society. Overall, I believe that women’s magazines operate amidst the core of the issues of the beauty myth, thus making their analysis all the more pertinent for increasing awareness about these issues and challenging the reality we see today.

3.8 A word on gender equality in Norway

As previously discussed, the idea of the housewife role is not fully gone from the world or even from Western society. This conservative ideology can still be found in many progressive countries, and will likely be present for many years to come. Nonetheless, Scandinavia, and Norway specifically, has become well known for its tremendous progress on the gender-equality front – something that serves as a very relevant point for my study of looking at the Norwegian women’s magazine, *Stella*. In Norway, one often

hears the word *likestilling*, (directly translated to “equality”) and it is most commonly used in the context of equality between men and women. Gender equality as a topic is a common piece for discussion, and every year on March 8th, International Women’s Day is zealously celebrated with parades and solidarity marches across the country. Though this is an international day of celebration, the fact that I had never heard of it before coming to Norway shows that while not all countries take it seriously, Norway indeed does. In fact, Norway has a long and rich history within gender equality – something that most certainly has helped in the development into what the country is today.

Introduced in 1913, Norway was one of the first countries in the world to give voting rights to women on equal terms as men (Lønnå, 2016). Since that time, Norway has historically been a world leader on the gender-equality front. The main piece of legislature that gives ground to the gender-equality ideas seen in Norway is what is referred to as *Likestillingsloven* [The Gender Equality Act]. Originally created in 1978, this law has held throughout the years, and has been updated at times as seen fit. Its official English translation states:

The purpose of this Act is to promote equality irrespective of gender. Equality shall mean: equal status, equal opportunities and rights, accessibility, and accommodation. This Act has the particular objective of improving the position of women. This Act shall apply in all sectors of society. ("The Act Relating to Gender Equality (The Gender Equality Act)," 2007)

There are various other laws in place as well to support this ideology, such as Norwegian law requiring 40% of all of the boards of publicly traded companies to be women, as well as the strong practices surrounding parental leave, which give women much increased freedom and ability to be able to work (Norwegian Embassy in the United States, 2015). In the year 2017, it may seem or feel on the surface like all the “big things” are equal between men and women. Women have finally achieved the right to vote, the housewife image is disappearing more and more over the generations and family duties are beginning to be more evenly distributed between both parents. However, there is more to it than just what lies visible on the surface. It is also much about intricacies, such as if

women's voices are equally represented in public spheres. Scandinavia as a whole is a leader in this area, as seen for example in the percentage of female politicians in parliament. Norway's parliament consists of 39.6% women, with 67 of the mandates being female (Stortinget.no, 2016). In addition, Sweden's parliament consists of 47% women and Finland's consists of 42% (Gauntlett, 2008, p. 5).

In fact, statistics from Norway's *Statistisk Sentralbyrå* (SSB) show that in 2014, 77.6% of women in Norway were a part of the workforce, compared to 83.1% of men (Statistisk sentralbyrå, 2016). In other words, there was only a 5.5% difference in the number of working men and women, creating an impressively small gap between genders. In terms of higher education, women are on average more educated than their male counterparts. Statistics from SSB show that in 2015, 27,3% of women took a higher education of up to 4 years compared to 18.7% of men, with 59.8% of students in higher education being women and 40.2% being men (Statistisk sentralbyrå, 2016). I feel that these are impressive statistics, and shows that Norway as a country has come far with gender equality.

Norway is not, however, without challenges when discussing gender equality. Statistics show that women are still paid less than their male counterparts, hold a much smaller percentage of leader positions in the workforce and are very unevenly divided according to profession type (Statistisk sentralbyrå, 2016). SSB shows that women earned, as of 2015, on average 86.1% of men's monthly income, that only 25% of top-leader positions in the country are held by women, and that only three in ten men work in the public sector (Statistisk sentralbyrå, 2016). But while these inequalities still exist, gender equality is very much a frequent topic of discussion which is openly debated on the political agenda in Norway, making it promising that the coming years will see these remaining aspects improve.

Keeping all of this in mind, I find it necessary to see how this plays out in relation to *Stella*, an example of a women's magazine in Norway. Norway may not be perfect when it comes to gender equality, however, their progress up to this point is still strides beyond many others, making them to remain a world-leader in this area. How does this

progressiveness of Norwegian society translate to the content, and especially editorial content, of *Stella*? What values and messages are emphasized in this magazine that operates within a society that has become known for its progress within gender equality? And not least of all, how does this strong culture of gender equality operate up against the idea of the beauty myth within the Norwegian women's magazine *Stella*?

4. Analysis

4.1 An introduction to today's magazine culture

The media format of magazines is far from new. Indeed, the magazine format has been around for decades. However, there is something to be said about the changing times and cultures in which these magazines operate. Today's magazines are functioning within a completely different media culture than the one which existed in the 1950s. In today's society, we are living amidst what can be called a blogger culture. Online media has become an integral part of everyday life for many media consumers, and blogs have skyrocketed in popularity. Today, individuals visit blogs to seek out information and advice on anything from fashion and makeup, to food, to insider travel information and general life tips. A while back, before the rise of blogging culture, if one was featured on the cover of a magazine, that was considered the ultimate pinnacle of achievement and success. However, today's media world is bigger, and being on a magazine cover doesn't mean as much as it used to. In fact, in today's media world, it can seem that one essentially does not "exist" in the media world if one is not also present on Instagram, Facebook, etcetera. This puts a new perspective on the magazine medium's role. Thus, even though the magazine format remains familiar, the media-cultural setting in which *Stella*, my analysis object, is operating has changed considerably since older days. *Stella* is a women's magazine operating within a blogger culture, and this has impacts on both the magazine's structure and contents.

However, while women's magazines and fashion and beauty blogs may often take up similar subjects, it is important to acknowledge a key difference between these two popular mediums. Magazines have more or less an established system in place. They have guidelines to follow, ethics to uphold and their content goes through an editing process before publication where contents can be modified or even dropped completely. With magazines, there is still a structure and an editorially selective process that is being followed. However, blogs serve as an unmediated tool where anyone can at any time publish content into the world, without being edited by a third party, and without following a system of guidelines before publication. Thus, magazines serve as a mediated

source of information, and they still come from the perspective of a critical eye – something that is not to be taken for granted in today’s blogger culture. It can be easy and quick to say that women’s magazines are just silly glossy publications without any merit, as previously discussed often happens, however when seen in this light of today’s evolved media culture, this is not the case.

For what does the presence of this critical evaluation process mean for the magazine’s content? When content goes unedited, there is no filter or outside opinion to give balance or perspective. There can be a tendency to create a sort of echo chamber, where all of the opinions being presented simply support themselves since there is no outside influence present to reflect upon it. Looking at magazines in this way, it becomes evident that they represent a dying breed amongst popular culture in today’s media world, in that at least they still have this critical process with an editorial staff, as well as guidelines to follow and regulations to uphold, all of which can help the publication, and the information presented in it, to maintain a higher level of credibility. One such example of a regulation present in Norway is the country’s *Vær Varsom Plakat* [Code of Ethics of the Norwegian Press], which serves as a guide for the role of the press in society and their responsibilities to conduct themselves in an ethically-responsible way throughout their work (Norsk Presseforbund, 2015).

Thus, while it may seem simple to write these magazines off as unserious contributions to the world of media today, they in fact remain an example of edited and processed media amidst an environment of an increasingly instantaneous, click-to-publish media world, and this gives the magazine medium value, especially today. However, the changed media landscape in which *Stella* is operating does not go unnoticed by the magazine’s editorial staff. Today’s blog culture is also present in *Stella*, as the magazine often features content such as profiles of or interviews with people who are active in the blogging world. Thus, *Stella* is aware of the blogger climate in which they are operating, and this influence can be seen in various aspects throughout its pages.

4.2 A closer look – Analysis of *Stella*

To conduct my analysis, I will seek to examine several different aspects of *Stella* throughout my analysis period of issue No. 06, 2015 to issue No. 06, 2016 (seven issues total). These aspects will include the front covers, back covers, magazine spine text, letters from the editor and inside content. I chose these specific aspects because they provide me with the opportunity to gain a comprehensive overview of what values and subjects *Stella* and its leader emphasize as important, what content *Stella* includes, how femininity, women and women's issues are portrayed in *Stella*, and how this modern magazine operates in modern-day business and social landscapes. All in all, by conducting an analysis of these five aspects, I believe that I will be able to develop a thorough understanding of who *Stella* is, how women are portrayed on its pages, and what the magazine is all about. This will give me sufficient grounds to then examine this publication up against the ideas of *The Beauty Myth*, to see if and/or how *Stella* attempts to set itself apart from other magazines, and to evaluate to what degree it succeeds in doing so.

4.2.1 Front covers

When looking at the collection of front covers of my analysis object *Stella*, there are several observations that can be made. The first thing one notices when looking at the cover page of *Stella* is, arguably, the picture of the person featured on the cover. There is a clear pattern in regards to these individuals, in that there is always a pretty female featured on the cover, they are very similar in age and ethnic appearance, and they are all known figures in Norway. Where they are known from, however, can vary. Examples from my empirical material include a well-known radio program host, a popular handball player, three singers and two actresses. All of these women are definitively Norwegian, rather than international mega-stars, and all seem to cater to approximately the same target audience.

Something noteworthy about all of the cover girls, however, is that they have a relatively every-day, normal-looking appearance. What I mean by that is that they appear

more natural and less retouched than, for example, the cover girls for *Vogue* or *Cosmopolitan* seem to always be. Stray hairs can be seen in the periphery of some of their faces, one of the oldest-seeming women has clearly visible wrinkles under her eyes that have not been edited away, and other elements such as the texture of their skin appears natural rather than airbrushed. This alone shows a large and progressive step away from Naomi Wolf's *The Beauty Myth*. Writing of the beauty myth, Wolf explains how, "Magazines, consciously or half-consciously, must project the attitude that looking one's age is bad because \$650 million of their ad revenue comes from people who would go out of business if visible age looked good," (Wolf, 2002, p. 84). However, the women on the covers of *Stella* do not fit into this mold of a perfected-visual utopia. These women that are placed on the front covers of *Stella* are portrayed as real. They have not been "perfected" by a visual editor, though some degree of editing has surely occurred, and this gives a much more realistic portrayal of women. By having these women on their front covers, *Stella* is communicating that these are successful women, from a variety of industries, who are relatable to the real-world reader.

This realistic portrayal of women on the front covers does not partake in the beauty myth's striving towards endless beauty work, and the shunning of physical imperfections. However, it should be noted that all of the cover ladies from my examples of *Stella* are slim and stylishly-dressed. This in and of itself is not a problem, as Naomi Wolf reminds us that it is all about having the choice to be something or partake in an area of interest or not. However, this lack of diversity does give off a certain notion of an ideal female. In addition, adding to the lack of diversity amongst the cover ladies is the fact that all of them are Caucasian. We do not see any diverse ethnic representation, and no other nationalities other than Norwegian are represented on these pages. Thus, we see that there is a strong tendency to portray women as not only slim and stylishly-dressed (once again, this is not inherently negative), but also as being Caucasian.

I would now like to focus on what content is highlighted on the front covers of the magazines. Every cover page of *Stella* included in my analysis features content that takes up important and serious issues. There are references to many articles that deviate from



("Cover, *Stella*, No. 06," 2015)
In consideration to photo quality, the above cover photo is retrieved from an Internet source rather than directly from Stella, but all aspects of the cover are exactly the same as they appear in Stella Issue No. 6/2015.

the stereotypical image of what a women's magazine is, and while other more "typical" topics such as fashion and beauty tips are mentioned on the covers as well, it is clear that these do not dominate the content. In order to demonstrate this, I will briefly review a select few of the highlighted topics (referencing to their corresponding specific articles in the footnotes below) from each issue's cover page³ in order to give a closer look at specific examples.

Topics that are taken up on the cover pages of *Stella* include articles related to gender issues⁴, mental health⁵, career⁶,

³ All article titles are of my translation.

⁴ No. 06/2015: "Christine blogs about life as a trans person." / No. 01/2016: P3s Silje Nordnes on nerves, morality and the way out of the closet."

⁵ No. 06/2015: "Big topic: Mental Health. When should you take action, really?"

⁶ No. 06/2015: "How to make a smart career plan." / No. 01/2016: "Is it time to change jobs?" / No. 03/2016: "Career 2.0. What will you work with in the future?" / No.

05/2016: "Boys club and domination technique: inside three male-dominated industries."

entrepreneurship⁷, activities⁸, family and relationships⁹, exercise¹⁰, beauty and dieting¹¹, money¹² and gender roles¹³. As stated before, these are examples of just a select few of the highlighted topics from each issue's cover page, but they allow me to give an adept representation of what the covers of *Stella* promote. These examples illustrate the fact that *Stella* takes up some very important issues. Topics such as transgenderism, money management and career planning break with the traditional idea of what women's magazine content looks like. Here we have a magazine that advertises for more than just lipsticks and baking on their front covers. The front cover of a magazine is arguably said magazine's sales pitch. It is the cover that a magazine uses to entice their audience to buy it from the shelves of the local kiosk, and as we see from these examples, *Stella* is selling their magazine with "real" issues.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Alexandra Starr has posited that the magazines of today use the same happiness equals securing a man formula that they have for generations, except that today the method of securing a man which is promoted by these magazines is good sex rather than good cooking (Starr, 1999). This is also in line with Naomi Wolf's discussion in *The Beauty Myth* about how endless housework has become replaced with endless beauty work. However, in looking at the topics taken up on the covers of *Stella*, this type of ideology is not prevalent. Looking at the covers of *Stella*, there is not one topic promoted on the cover pages about "getting a man," "keeping a man," or "how to impress him in bed." These are topics that, from my experience with

⁷ No. 01/2016: "Entrepreneurs that work organically." / No. 04/2016: "Success abroad: Amelia, Rico and Mona took the chance."

⁸ No. 06/2015: "Find peace in nature. Why go to the spa when you can go to the mountains?"

⁹ No. 02/2016: "What's the status? Date, hook-up or boyfriend?" / No. 05/2016: "Is everything allowed? Meet women who break with the family norm."

¹⁰ No. 02/2016: "Find new workout joy." / No. 06/2016: "9 exercises you become strong from."

¹¹ No. 02/2016: "Oh, hello you! The new [hair] tips and products you have to try now." / No. 03/2016: "The new diets. Healthy lifestyle or diet hysteria?" / No. 04/2016: "Face fixing. Have Botox and 'fillers' become just as common as going to the hairdresser?"

¹² No. 06/2016: "Hey, big spender! Teach yourself to use less money."

¹³ No. 02/2016: "It-girl Iben Akerlie – 'The dream role is a soldier in Afghanistan!'" / No. 06/2016: "Comic talent. They are girls, they are funny – and so what?"

American magazines, feel all too common. This is especially the case for certain publications like *Cosmopolitan*, which have become famously known for such rhetoric. For example, the cover of the April 2017 issue of US *Cosmopolitan* features an article entitled “101 Hot Sex Moves. This Master List Will Rock Your Body and Blow Your Mind!”, and the cover of the March 2017 issue advertises for an article entitled “The #1 Way To Tell If He’s Truly Into You,” (“Cover, *Cosmopolitan*, April,” 2017; “Cover,

Cosmopolitan, March,” 2017).

These headlines are by no means new for US *Cosmopolitan*. The February 2012 issue’s cover, for example, refers to an article titled “His Best Sex Ever. Guys Describe the Mind-Blowing Moves They Can’t Stop Thinking About” (“Cover, *Cosmopolitan*, February,” 2012). This type of rhetoric has become a quintessential feature of US *Cosmopolitan*, and stands in stark contrast to the articles advertised for on the covers of *Stella*.

Indeed, there are a few promoted articles on the covers of *Stella* that deal with beauty and



(“Cover, *Cosmopolitan*, April,” 2017)

fashion, however, as will be discussed in detail shortly, even these do not have the desperate-sounding tone referred to by Starr and Wolf. The articles presented on the covers of *Stella* promote a feeling of independence, and the idea that happiness equals a well-rounded life, which includes a career, hobbies, and doing things you love to do. Thus, the covers of *Stella* point to the idea that *Stella* is a positive example of a magazine

that breaks with this happiness equals securing a man formula, opting instead for a more feministic rhetoric.

Standing out just as starkly as the lack of these “get and keep a man”-type articles, are the types of the articles that *are* there. The cover pages of *Stella* present readers with some very strong and feministic portrayals of women. The image given off by the titles on *Stella*'s cover pages is a far cry from the image of women as housewives and homemakers. Instead, the titles on the cover pages of *Stella* present women as independent, career-minded, sporty and innovative individuals. The image of a *Stella* reader is so much more than just a pretty face. These cover pages say that the *Stella* reader has a career, a diversity of interests, and that she is not the stereotypical A4-type female who loves the color pink. The cover pages project a clear image that women (like men) are well-rounded and complex human beings, not two-dimensional, “über-girly” smiling faces whose purpose in life appears to be nothing more than to look sexy. *Stella* communicates that their readers are real people who have real-life challenges, for example as referenced by the headline to the article about mental health. Likewise, *Stella* communicates that their readers are strong and have an equal say in deciding over vital aspects of their lives, for example as referenced by the headline to the article about defining one's relationship status. Relating to Goffman's concepts of “frontstage” and “backstage,” it can be said that the articles presented on the covers of *Stella* place much more focus on the “backstage” than the “frontstage.” This is in comparison to many other women's magazines, such as, for example, *Vogue*, which tends to place a larger emphasis on appearance (“frontstage”). However, in that *Stella* takes up issues such as mental health and career, they are emphasizing the importance of the “backstage” of women's lives, while still acknowledging the presence of “frontstage” elements with a few select articles.

Moreover, the types of articles mentioned serve to break with the traditional, stereotypical idea of femininity, and challenge gender norms. Articles such as “P3s Silje Nordnes on nerves, morality and the way out of the closet,” serve to represent the enormous variety of feminine identities that exist, and articles such as “Comic talent.

They are girls, they are funny – and so what?” work to break the traditional male-dominated roles and the gender stereotypes our society can make (Danielsen, No. 01/2016c, No. 06/2016a). In addition, articles such as “Is everything allowed? Meet women who break with the family norm,” work to promote the ideology that traditional women’s roles are not the only option (Tine Aasen, No. 05/2016). Thus, *Stella* takes a clear feministic approach in the way they present women and women’s roles through the articles advertised on their cover pages. Naomi Wolf argues that upholding the societal order occurs through the messages women’s magazines present about who women “should” be (Wolf, 2002). However, as already established, the topics taken up on the covers of *Stella* promote a different picture of who women “should” be. The covers of *Stella* present messages about women as being independent, funny, strong and career-oriented. This is a far cry from the typical messages women’s magazines present about who women “should” be, as noted by Wolf. Of all the articles advertised on the covers used in my analysis, only one article uses the rhetoric of “here are the products you have to try now.” However even with the slight presence of articles of this type, the juxtaposition of being just one amidst all of the other topics creates a balanced and non-oppressive tone, as will be discussed shortly.

All of this being said, it is important to note that among the aforementioned topic examples from the covers of *Stella*, are some articles that relate to dieting and working out. At first glance, this may seem to point towards *Stella* being just like “every other” stereotypical women’s magazine. However, it is the angle these articles take that I find to be so interesting and important. Articles like “Find new workout joy” and “9 exercises you become strong from” are talking about the topic of exercise, as is quite common in women’s magazines (Kemp, No. 02/2016; Refsnes, No. 06/2016a). However, these articles focus on enjoying oneself at the gym rather than taking the “be good and go to the gym so you don’t feel guilty for eating that cupcake” approach, and stress the goal of going to the gym as being to get stronger, rather than to get a better-looking body. The article is not about how to get the best butt. Rather, it is about self-improvement for self-improvement’s sake (getting stronger), instead of appearance’s sake. This change in rhetoric makes all the difference, for it is not so much about *which* topics are talked

about, but rather *in what sense* they are talked about. It is not that a woman cannot be interested in learning new workout tricks, but rather it is a question of what the reasoning and motivation behind her desire to do so is. Similarly, it is a question of whether she feels that she has the free choice to partake, or that she “has to” in order to look good. In our example of working-out, is the motivation to “look better” (aka look more like society says one “should” look like), or is it to become stronger and increase your physical capabilities? Therein lies the fundamental distinction, and the way in which *Stella* presents these articles on the front cover communicates a rhetoric of free choice, and of doing it for the sake of health, rather than appearance.

Amidst the topics taken up on the cover pages of my empirical material are also some articles about beauty and fashion, such as “Healthy glow! Tips & tricks from women with dreamy skin” (No. 06/2015), and “The fall’s trend guide. The season’s hottest trends and how you style them” (No. 05/2016). These articles, however, come with a sense of balance, since they are placed sparingly among so many other types of topics, from finances to mental health. The magazines give off a clear feeling that it is not makeup and clothes that dominate the pages of *Stella*. Rather, these topics are present to a certain degree amongst a range of many other types of topics to give a broad spectrum of content in each issue. However, even when these types of topics are present, the angle in which they present themselves is still commendable. It isn’t about “you need to have glowing skin or else you’re failing beauty-wise,” or “this is what you must have in your closet to look fashionable this fall.” Both of these articles are examples of a presentation of activities that one can participate in if one wants to. Once again, the rhetoric used when presenting a given topic can have everything to say for the message it gives off, and the articles in *Stella* are presented with a rhetoric that gives the impression of choice – which, as Wolf discusses, is one of the key fundamental elements of feminism as a whole. In this way, this free-choice rhetoric supports Wolf’s ideology in that it works to abolish the oppressive order in society, since it presents these subjects more in terms of “here are tips if you *want* to participate in this,” rather than it being an unspoken requirement, or an extra condition to be met.

This is a perfect illustration of Naomi Wolf's distinction about being interested in something versus feeling forced to partake in it in order to be given respect and be taken seriously. It is completely fine to be interested in these topics; one does not have to shun them in order to be a feminist. There is nothing wrong or "anti-feministic" with, for example, genuinely wanting great skin. The feministic aspect lies in having the *choice* to partake or not. As previously discussed, Wolf poses the example question of whether or not someone who identifies as a feminist can wear lipstick. "Does all this mean we can't wear lipstick without feeling guilty? On the contrary. It means we have to separate from the myth what it has surrounded and held hostage" (Wolf, 2002, p. 271). In other words, if one chooses to wear lipstick because one enjoys it, then that is completely fine, however if one feels like they *have* to use lipstick in order to be taken seriously or be considered attractive, then it is not ok. In the same vein, if just because of their gender one "should" be interested in using lipstick, then it is not ok. When it all comes down to it, it is not lipstick or any type of product that is the real issue, it is the myth of being made to feel that we need to use it. The power, as Wolf explains, lies in one's *choice* to partake or not, and the problem comes when there is a lack of this choice.

4.2.2 Overview of front covers

As we have seen, the front covers of *Stella* raise many points for discussion in terms of how they relate to the concepts presented in *The Beauty Myth* as well as other previously-discussed sources. The individuals featured on the cover promote a more realistic and natural depiction of women, rather than the "perfected," airbrushed images we have grown accustomed to seeing on many large-scale, international women's magazines. The articles listed on the covers of *Stella* advertise for serious subjects, not just which shade of lipstick is best for you. The highlighted articles include subjects such as career, mental health and finances, and while articles about fashion and beauty trends are advertised for as well, the wide and more populous variety of other types of articles makes it clear that these do not dominate.

The subjects taken up also portray a more well-rounded image of women and femininity. For example, the article "Find peace in nature. Why go to the spa when you

can go to the mountains?” acknowledges that not every girl would enjoy going to the spa (Danielsen, No. 06/2015d). Not all girls love pink and strive to look pretty, and this wide variety of subjects taken up on the covers of *Stella* portrays more gender-equal depictions of females.

In addition, the angle through which certain “typical” women’s magazine topics are taken up on the cover of *Stella* makes all the difference in how they work to portray women. Articles about working out take the focus of building strength, not burning fat, and articles that talk about diets and plastic surgery take a critical stance in asking if it’s becoming too much, rather than joyfully promoting the idea. All of these things come from a feministic angle. The front covers portray women as multi-faceted creatures with a variety of interests, both serious and trivial, and they present the articles from a place of choice, rather than requirement. In doing so, *Stella*’s front covers take a direct stand in opposition to the ideas of the beauty myth.

Finally, the topics taken up and the portrayals of female roles presented on the front covers of *Stella* work to crush the oppressive ideology presented in *The Beauty Myth*. *Stella*’s front covers do not promote the ideology of happiness equals finding a man. Instead, they are promoting and portraying independence, being different and not adhering to the stereotypical mold of what femininity “should” look like. Stories such as “Is everything allowed? Meet women who break with the family norm,” promote the idea that there are multiple ways to raise a family and live life (Tine Aasen, No. 05/2016). Articles such as “Boys club and domination technique: inside three male-dominated industries” work to promote women having legitimate careers, just like men (Danielsen, No. 05/2016a). You do not, for example, see the front covers of *Stella* telling their readers how to become a great secretary, as you might have seen in the 1950s. Articles like these work in a very feministic way to break the glass ceiling, promote more female representation in male-dominated industries, and assist women in obtaining these jobs. This ideology is a complete turn-around from the older rhetoric presented in women’s magazines, and shows true progress on the feministic front. In this way, the articles

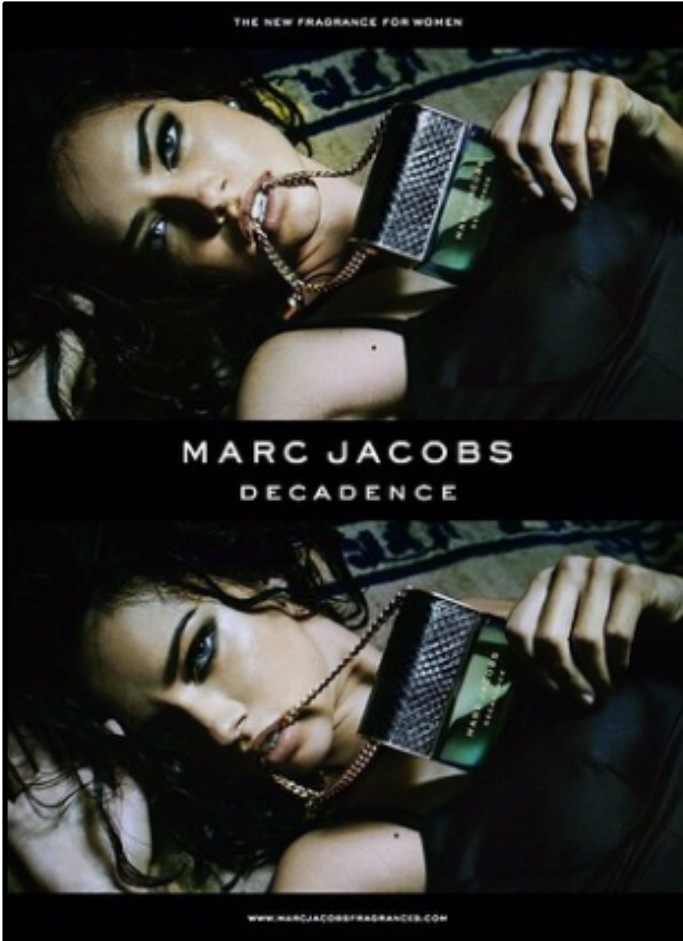
advertised for on the front covers of *Stella* are directly feministic, breaking gender norms and strongly promoting gender equality.

4.2.3 Back covers

Now that I have analyzed the front covers of *Stella*, which give the first impressions one sees when looking at the magazine, I would like to turn to the back covers. On the back covers of *Stella*, we see a clear pattern in that each issue's back cover features a full-page beauty advertisement. While one of these advertisements is promoting Dior makeup, in six out of seven issues, this advertisement is for a perfume. Three out of the six perfume advertisements are for Chanel perfumes, and the remaining three are for a Chloé perfume, an Emma S. perfume, and a Marc Jacobs perfume.

All of these advertisements (including the makeup ad) feature very typical beauty-ad layouts. In each advertisement, we see a beautiful female staring seductively or innocently towards the camera, giving off the allure that the product they are selling will make you instantly desirable, irresistible and über feminine. The beautiful female featured in advertisement is in most cases a known figure, usually an actress or a model. Some of the examples from my issues of *Stella* include Keira Knightley, Natalie Portman, Gisele Bündchen and Adriana Lima. The method of allure used in the advertisement varies slightly depending on the image of the product being advertised for – for example, the Chloé advertisement on the back cover of issue No. 03/2016, true to form, creates a romanticized image which fits with their brand, whereas the Marc Jacobs advertisement on the back cover of issue No. 06/2015 creates a grittier, city-streets type of sexy image which fits with their brand. One advertisement stands out against the rest, in that it features a female dressed in more androgynous clothing rather than a sexy, low-cut dress, though even she has a smug look in her eyes as she looks towards the camera, with her hand running over her hair. I will discuss this example more in a moment.

A common thread throughout these advertisements, is that they (to varying degrees) portray women as submissive, sexualized beings, as characterized by their intense, captivating stares and the positioning of their bodies. The Marc Jacobs example even goes so far as to have Adriana Lima bite the handle of the perfume bottle (which is



*("Marc Jacobs Decadence [Advertisement]," 2015)
In consideration to photo quality, the above advertisement picture is retrieved from an Internet source rather than directly from Stella, but all aspects of the advertisement are exactly the same as they appear in Stella Issue No. 6/2015.*

shaped like a handbag) between her teeth while laying down and tangling her fingers in her tousled hair ("Marc Jacobs Decadence [Advertisement]," *Stella* Issue No. 06/2015, back cover).

One thing to notice here, is that all of these ads are large-scale, international advertisements that are sure to be featured world-wide, not only in *Stella*. However, the advertisement that sexualizes the pictured individual the least is definitely the androgynously-dressed female in the Emma S. perfume ad. Emma S. is not as well-known of a name as the others, but with a little research, one finds out that it is in fact a Swedish brand. This may seem

irrelevant, however it is in fact interesting to my analysis, being that this is the only example of an advertisement on the back covers that originates from the Scandinavian region. As previously established, the Scandinavian region is known for its progressive and gender-equality societies. Thus, it is worth noting that even though the Scandinavian ad is still international in nature, it shows the least amount of female over-sexualization

out of all of the advertisements, which goes along with my findings so far about the Norwegian-based *Stella* being more progressively gender equal.

Nonetheless, the overall portrayal of women on the back covers of *Stella* stands in very stark contrast to the portrayal of women on the front covers. This is a curious phenomenon in my magazine analysis, in that the back covers of *Stella* stand in such strong opposition to the front covers as they relate to the beauty myth. Unlike the front covers, the back covers are advertising for beauty products and encouraging women to buy lots of things for beauty work. The ads do this through the means of both the specific product they are advertising for, but also the way in which the actual ads themselves look with the women being so glamorous and idealistic. In this way, the advertisements are selling more than just a product; they are selling an image of femininity. It is if to say “buy this product, and you will also be as desirable as she is.”

These advertisements are telling women who they “should” be, and defining what sexiness and beauty “is.” This type of ideology is exactly the type of thinking that Naomi Wolf refers to as being linked to maintaining social control. These advertisements represent the beauty work and extra hoops women are made to feel they must jump through in order to be good enough. As Rosalind Gill discusses, this message could, however, at first glance almost seem sexually liberating (as cited in Ytre-Arne, 2011b, pp. 20-21) . Tag lines that go along with some of the advertised products seem to point to a spirit of female independence, such as the text that accompanies the advertisement for No 5 L’eau by Chanel on issue No. 06/2016: “#YouKnowMeAndYouDont.” Deceivably, this could be read as supporting female autonomy, however the ad’s overtly-sexual tone works to maintain male authority, and to remind us that it is ultimately about making oneself attractive enough to compete and succeed in society.

The advertisements on the back covers strongly play on sex. They can be seen as straightforward exemplifications of Alexandra Starr’s theory that today’s happiness equals getting a man formula is carried out by means of sex appeal rather than cooking skills, in that these ads scream “wear this perfume and you’ll be irresistible” (Starr, 1999). Further, through all of this sex appeal, there is not much naturalness to be seen.

Most of the pictured individuals have the classic, sultry smokey-eye makeup look, and each one of them is pictured as having flawless skin, especially in the close-up portraits. This is very different from the portrayals that are seen on the front covers of the magazines. In fact, when one simply flips the magazines over to face the front again, it truly feels like one is transported to another type of world – more specifically, back to the real world. The images on the front covers are more realistic and relatable, whereas the images on the back covers are of the type that can make one develop unrealistic beauty standards for oneself. The images on the back covers represent the ideology discussed by Naomi Wolf, that says showing women with real-life signs of age is not allowed. This being that since, if women accepted themselves as desirable as they already are, then women wouldn't buy the products being advertised for in order to “make themselves desirable.”

This complete shift in portrayals and ideology by simply turning the magazines over from the front covers to the back covers is a near perfect representation of the contradiction element taken up in the theory chapter. As discussed by Ingeborg Senneset and Marta Breen, women's magazines can be swimming in contradictions, in that, for example, at one moment the magazines encourage readers to embrace themselves, flaws and all, yet in the next moment they give readers advice on how to improve their appearance (Veka, 2013). This contradiction seems perfectly represented by the contrast of messages on the front covers versus the back covers of *Stella*. The back covers work to support the beauty myth in that one must participate in the beauty code by buying these products and jumping through this extra hoop in order to succeed and be one's best (which includes looking one's best). However, the front covers work against the beauty myth by sending messages that one is their best as they already are, and by encouraging gender-equal and well-rounded life improvements such as changing to a better job, rather than appearance-based changes such as losing weight.

The presence of these contradictions points out the reality of magazines' visible dependence on advertising money's support. As previously discussed, advertisers serve as a double-edge sword, in that the magazines need the advertisers' money to survive,

and thus must include this content to at least a certain degree, even when it might actually go against the messages their publication aims to send to readers (Wolf, 2002, p. 69). The contrast of the front and back covers of *Stella* serve as an ultimate exemplification of this contradiction. On the front covers, we see the core content that *Stella* is promoting. We see the articles, the meaningful topics, the more natural images, and we understand that *this* is who *Stella* is. Yet on the back covers, we see the commercial, dreamy and romanticized, and expensive advertisements which seem nothing like the portrayals we get from the front cover, but which surely bring in a hefty revenue for *Stella*. In fact, according to *Stella*'s advertiser information, the cost of a back-cover advertisement is NOK 71 100,- – indeed an important source of income for *Stella* as a business (Bonnier Media, 2017). In this way, the portrayals on the front cover can be seen as the serious part of *Stella*, whereas the portrayals on the back cover can be seen as the business part. The stark contrast of these two elements represents the contradiction of a modern magazine, in that the front cover represents who *Stella* actually is, and the advertisements are just there because *Stella* is ultimately a product which the business side needs to sell in order to be profitable.

4.2.4 Overview of back covers

The back covers of *Stella* provide us with some interesting discussion pieces. The large-scale, international advertisements on the back covers advertise for beauty products, and encourage women to buy things for doing beauty work. These advertisements are selling an image of femininity that is narrow-minded, unrealistically-flawless and based on consumerism, and they work to support the beauty myth by indulging the message that one must buy these products in order to succeed and be one's best self.

At first glance, this stark contradiction in comparison with the front covers may seem absurd. However, when seen in light of the reality of a commercial magazine today, this contradiction serves to represent magazines' dependency on advertising money for survival. The portrayals of women on the front covers correspond to the serious part of *Stella* – who *Stella actually* is – whereas the portrayals of women on the back covers correspond to the business part of *Stella*, and the contradictory reality that a publication

like *Stella* must face in its quest to be profitable.

4.2.5 Magazine spine text

The final outward aspect of *Stella* that I will examine is the text located on the magazine's spine. This text follows a set pattern, and always includes the name of the magazine (*Stella*), the issue number and the year of publication, followed by three featured topics from that issue that have been selected to be highlighted on the spine. One of these three topics is always the individual profiled on the cover of/in that particular issue, and one of the other two topics is always something related to trends, style or beauty – referring back to the idea of *Stella* having a balanced variety of content.

While maybe not immediately evident, this spine text serves a purpose. As discussed previously, magazines are often items one holds on to even after one is finished reading them. Their aesthetic embodies the aura of a higher value, not something to just be tossed in the trash. Thus, it isn't uncommon that these magazines end up laying sprawled out on the shelf of a coffee table, or stacked up side by side on a bookshelf. In this way, these magazines become a sort of index – a resource that one can refer back to at a later time for inspiration and advice – and it is these spine texts that serve to organize the issues and remind the reader what topics are covered in each, even when the magazines are “stored” on a bookshelf. The spine texts allow for quick and efficient indexing and recall of information.

Much like the front covers, these featured topics can be seen as the selling points of the magazine. Thus, an interesting connection comes up regarding *Stella*'s serious side and *Stella*'s business side – once again relating to the idea of women's magazines containing contradictions. The three topics featured on the magazine's spine are always of content taken from the front cover, and therefore they always relate to the portrayals of women presented there, as discussed in my analysis of the front covers (for example: independent, breaking the mold, multi-faceted). In other words, these featured topics always relate to *Stella*'s serious side. This again goes to show that *this* is who *Stella* *actually* is. This is the content the magazine wants to promote, and these are the

portrayals of women the magazine truly stands for. One does not see this spine text promoting ads for beauty products, or any other advertising material whatsoever. This text promotes the editorial content of the magazine. It highlights the bigger, more important concepts that make up the real heart of the magazine.

This spine text serves as a reminder that one does not buy magazines for the sake of the advertisements. Rather, one buys magazines for the sake of the content, and what it has to offer its readers. This again supports the argument that *Stella* exemplifies Wolf's depiction of magazines as being caught in a double-edged relationship with advertisers. *Stella* needs them in order to financially survive, yet that type of content is not what *Stella*'s core is based on.

4.2.6 Overview of magazine spine text

Stella's magazine spine text contains a set collection of information, and serves to summarize some of the selling points of that particular magazine issue. This content is always taken from the front covers, meaning that it relates to *Stella*'s serious side, rather than business side. This supports the idea that the portrayals of women which *Stella* truly stands for are in line with the portrayals seen on the cover. Magazines are not purchased for the sake of the ads, but rather for the sake of the content, and the spine text for *Stella* promotes the editorial content from the front cover, not the ads. Thus, this further exemplifies the theme of contradiction by showing that the editorial content is the real heart of *Stella*, whereas the advertisements are there to supply the necessary financial support.

4.2.7 Letters from the editor

The fourth aspect I have decided to take with in my analysis is an examination of the letters from the editor, which are present towards the beginning of each issue. The structure of these pages is consistent. There is, as the name would imply, a letter written by the editor that takes up various subjects each time. In addition, there is always a list of three highlighted items selected by the editor which are presented with the heading "my favorites," or, "on the wish list" (my translations). While most certainly intended to help

create a sense of fellowship between the editor and the reader on a personal level, as discussed by Wolf, it is unclear whether these item lists truly serve as a recommendation from the editor as a private person, or from the editor as the leader of a commercial product. In other words, the authenticity of these seemingly-personal recommendations is difficult to discern.

One interesting thing to note regarding the time period which my empirical material encompasses, is that towards the beginning of my research period, *Stella* in fact changed editors. For the first two issues of my empirical material, the editor is Mari Grydeland, who had been with *Stella* since the very start in 2011. Then, from issue No. 02/2016 onward, the editor is Ida Halvorsen Kemp, whom I was in contact with in conjunction with my masters, as previously mentioned. This shift provides me with a unique opportunity to be able to see what differences (if any) there are in the way these two editors promote the magazine issues. One immediately noticeable difference is that under the editorship of Grydeland, the letters from the editor included a sidebar of awesome women readers will “meet” in the issue to follow, however this is something that was not carried forward with Kemp’s editorship. Overall, the two utilize different styles in the way they write their letters to readers. Grydeland’s letters give more of a preview of the content to come in that particular issue. Kemp’s letters, however, are utilized more in terms of a discussion platform similar to the likes of a blog entry, with only occasional direct references to the content to come. In addition, my analysis shows that Grydeland’s letters contained more outright feministic talk, whereas Kemp’s letters were subtler in their approach. Nonetheless, though the styles may be different, the overall messages given off by the two editors are in line with each other. This gives me the opportunity to see that there is a clear and consistent identity that goes along with *Stella*, which remains even throughout this editorial shift.

An analysis of these letters shows some interesting findings. Throughout the letters, there are some tendencies and themes that become evident. One of these themes is that of providing empowering messages about women to *Stella*’s readers. In issue No. 06/2015, for example, Grydeland focuses on the women in that issue being strong and

brave – two reoccurring portrayals these letters promote. It is as if to give off an aura of “girl power.” In this same issue’s letter, Grydeland also writes about how our society teaches people to strive for perfection, and how images of “the dream life” flood our social-media feeds. She writes about how this simply is not realistic – how real life is not a fantasy – and she points to an article in the issue where readers can meet three women who open up about how life *actually* is. Once again in issue No. 05/2016, Kemp tells stories of strong, bold and courageous women. She praises women who break with the norm of life, and who stick to their opinions even when they’re unpopular. These messages support the portrayal of women as being so much more than pretty faces, and women’s lives being about much deeper issues than striving to look like a supermodel. In fact, they seem to directly fight against the ideas of the beauty myth, in that they tell women that they do not have to be perfect – that such perfection is not realistic, and that lives are about much more than looking “beautiful.” Rather than encouraging women to look beautiful, these letters encourage women to be strong, independent and brave – all of which are very feminist messages that work to destroy the ideas of the beauty myth, which says that women need to fit within the standard idea of beauty in order to be successful.

Another popular theme throughout these letters from the editor is that of challenging female stereotypes, and projecting directly feminist messages. These themes can be seen as being directly feminist in nature, and fit perfectly alongside my previous analyses of the front covers and spine text in that they promote complex, serious and feminist portrayals of women. One example of a letter from the editor that directly challenges a stereotype is issue No. 01/2016, in which Grydeland writes “Out with the word gabber-hag!” in reference to a derogatory Norwegian term (*skravlekjerring*) used to describe women who talk too much, and points to research that shows that men actually talk slightly more than women (Grydeland, No. 01/2016, my translation). Grydeland goes on to say how *Stella* very seldom writes about men, since they receive so much attention otherwise in the media. She writes how it feels necessary to write about women both to work towards more equal representation and also because women come up with so many wonderful ideas within industries such as business and technology. Statements such as

these are directly feministic in nature, and strongly portray a feministic image of women – a far cry from the ideals portrayed by the beauty myth. Such statements promote the representation of women in traditionally male-dominated fields (such as business and technology) and do not acknowledge the ideology that women need to jump through any extra hoops in order to achieve this.

Another example is from issue No. 03/2016, when Kemp writes about being oneself, because that is more than good enough. She writes, “For the point cannot be to stress ourselves sick, or into mental disorders or eating disorders, like youth do today. That we never can be good, thin, healthy or smart enough. We cannot be with in sending these types of signals to the coming generations,” (Kemp, No. 03/2016, my translation). In this way, Kemp is assuring women that they are good enough as they are, and that they don’t need to “fix this” or “fix that” in order to finally be acceptable. This letter is breaking with popular society’s narrow idea of what women “should be,” and it is saying that real life is messy, not perfect. Issue No. 05/2016’s letter takes a crack at the stereotype of the “dominating female” which has a tendency to arise when women talk a lot. This is a common stereotype that uses a negative tone to talk about women as being dominating when they are “too” vocal. In this letter, Kemp works to take away that stereotype’s power, and even says that society would benefit from allowing women to dominate our lives more (Kemp, No. 05/2016b). However, she says that in order for us to do that, we need to first allow women to be heard, which is presumably meant to reference what *Stella* aims to do.

A final trend I would like to discuss from these letters from the editor is the nature of their subjects. Similar to the ideas discussed in my analysis of the front covers, these letters take up rather “a-typical” women’s magazine subjects, and they work to portray women as having broader, more in-depth female roles, and as being more than just a pretty face. Issue No. 06/2016’s letter from the editor takes up the subject of money and personal finances, discussing saving versus spending (Kemp, No. 06/2016b). This can be seen as a very a-typical topic for a women’s magazine, in that seen in light of a more traditional viewpoint, money has the tendency to be considered a man’s topic more than

anything. However, this is not the case, and by taking up this topic of discussion, *Stella* is portraying women as smart, strong, independent and gender-equal. The presence of this content presents women as responsible and serious individuals, on equal footing with men, rather than weak individuals who cannot handle or are not interested in heavy subjects and just want to read about shoes. Similarly, in issue No. 04/2016, Kemp writes about issues of the environment and global warming. Again, we see *Stella* taking on serious topics that have a tendency to be atypical in women's magazines, and which portray women as intelligent beings who are interested in much more than just makeup. Indeed, these letters are encouraging substantial work, not just beauty work.

4.2.8 Overview of letters from the editor

An analysis of these letters from the editor provide us with a valuable look into what the editor of *Stella*, arguably the main spokesperson for the magazine, emphasizes to their readers. As we have seen, the messages in these letters consistently work to break the chains the beauty myth has placed on women. These letters provide women with empowering messages about being good enough and about being strong and brave (rather than just pretty faces). They promote realistic images of real life, including fighting the obsession with needing to be perfect, and they challenge female stereotypes, promoting substantial work rather than beauty work. In addition, they take up substantial topics, and in doing so, portray women as being intelligent, serious, complex beings with multi-faceted roles.

All in all, these letters provide very feministic and gender-equal portrayals of women. The messages that the letters from the editor promote are very positive in regards to my theory, in that they work against the ideas of the beauty myth. The letters from the editor portray women in ways that correspond to how Naomi Wolf advocates for women being portrayed, and they stand in opposition to the messages Wolf describes as stereotypically coming from women's magazines. In addition, there are no apparent contradictions within these letters' messages about or portrayals of women. This proves once again that these letters from the editor represent who *Stella truly* is (their serious side) – that *Stella's* real message is promoting gender-equal, feminist portrayals of

women, unlike the international advertisements that appear on some of their pages do. It is, rather, these advertisements that provide readers with a contradiction, in their meeting with the business side.

4.2.9 Inside content

Finally, I will now turn to an analysis of the inside content of *Stella*. As previously mentioned in the introduction to the magazine in my methods chapter, *Stella* is organized by several overarching sections that are present in each issue, and that work to structure the magazines. These include “Sense,”¹⁴ “Stella Meets/Portrait,” “Style,” “Life,” “Glow,” and “Pulse.” In addition, I will include a section on the advertisements present in *Stella*, as these make up a significant part of the magazine’s inside content as well. I would now like to examine these sections individually, so as to get a deeper look at what they are all about.

Before we begin, however, it is important to be reminded of *Stella*’s clientele. When describing *Stella*’s target audience, *Stella*’s advertiser information does not specifically say that *Stella* is a magazine targeting Norwegian women. However, being that it is a Norwegian-based publication written in the Norwegian language, and, as we have seen so far, seems to strongly exude Norwegian culture and values (i.e. gender equality), it can be presumed that the intended readers of *Stella* are mainly Norwegian – either native born or having immigrated – and that the magazine and its contents are thus directed towards them as an audience.

4.2.9a “Sense”

To begin with, I will look at *Stella*’s section, “Sense,” which describes itself as looking at culture, fashion and news, and which is composed of several different subsections. In a subsection of this section, called “Sense: Favorites,” we see a collection of items selected by the editorial staff of *Stella* as being some of their favorite things right

¹⁴ All section names, subsection names, article titles, content headings and content quotations throughout the rest of this chapter are of my translation.

now. In issue No. 01/2016, one of these items includes a sign which reads “*Vive le Feminisme*” and features the description “Good message,” in the staff’s written description of the item (*Stella* redaksjonen, No. 01/2016b, my translation). The fact that this item is included, plus the fact that the editorial staff unsolicitedly says that this is a good message, says a good deal about who *Stella* is and what they stand for.

The subsection entitled “Sense: Current” takes up a wide variety of things that are relevant right now, including anything from prominent people to cool new books. Particularly interesting for my analysis is the inclusion of certain individuals throughout the issues used in my study. For example, issue No. 01/2016’s “Sense” profiles Stavanger’s first rapper, Izabell, who has been awarded the title of Norway’s best female rapper (*Stella* redaksjonen, No. 01/2016a). This inclusion of a more “uncommon” portrayal of femininity is noteworthy and again goes to show which values *Stella* chooses to promote. In the same way, the inclusion of a profile on actress and women’s rights activist Chloë Moretz in issue No. 06/2016 promotes a feministic ideology that is in line with serving as a step away from the beauty myth. The profile highlights Chloë as being active in fighting for women’s rights and against patriarchal tendencies, all of which serve to illustrate the values that *Stella* as a publication holds as important (*Stella* redaksjonen, No. 06/2016b). While this section does well to highlight women doing notable things in various areas, I argue that these profiles should be expanded to include women in more diverse fields, for example doctors and lawyers, rather than mostly cultural sectors.

4.2.9b “*Stella Meets/Portrait*”

This section is devoted to profiling the individual who is featured on the cover of that particular issue. As discussed in my analysis of the front covers, these include a variety of women from a variety of careers, however most are from the cultural sectors, rather than business or other fields. These interviews are more or less straightforward, and include a discussion with the cover girl about a variety of subjects. One portrait, however, stands out as especially noteworthy. Silje Nordnes’ profile in issue No. 01/2016 takes up, among other subjects, her journey to “come out of the closet” and announce her identity as a

lesbian (Danielsen, No. 01/2016c). Highlighting this portrayal of femininity in the main portrait article of the cover girl is noteworthy because it encourages a broader definition of femininity (something that works against the ideals of the beauty myth), thus encouraging a feministic-positive rhetoric on the pages of *Stella* and in the spirit of who the publication is.

4.2.9c “Style”

The content in the “Style” section is more or less what would be expected in a style section of a women’s magazine. This section highlights popular trends and fashion of the moment, giving examples of where to get certain clothing and accessory pieces, and features photospreads of the current season’s look book as well as profiles of selected individuals’ style, and more.

Something noteworthy, however, is that in multiple issues of the magazine, this section includes a piece on office style and dressing for one’s career. This is positive in regards to a feministic portrayal of women in that it shows women as being active in the career world, however it can also be read as negative in regards to the beauty myth, in that while women are active in the career world, it is portraying that they need to dress in a certain way in order to be successful. Including this sort of “office style guide” could be seen as reinforcing the requirement that women need to look a certain way in order to be successful, and that women need to buy things for the body and undergo endless beauty work, even though they no longer need to undergo endless housework. This specific aspect could thus be seen as being representative of the beauty myth.

Moreover, the articles featured in this section are for the most part luxury items that would be considered high-end, pricey, and unattainable for the average consumer. These are often items that the average reader could only dream about owning. This is something that Naomi Wolf discusses in *The Beauty Myth*, when she describes how women’s magazines are skilled at creating the dream life (Wolf, 2002). As Wolf discusses, women’s magazines are often experts at conjuring the notion of being idealistic, and this phenomenon can have the effect of creating a desire to achieve and/or

purchase perfection in all areas of the reader's life. Indeed, this can create a desire within readers to buy something they never before would have thought of themselves as "needing." However, in reality, the majority of the items profiled in *Stella* are items of want, not need, in that people can live without the designer purse or newest perfume pictured on the page.

However, one positive observation to be made is the fact that, in issue No. 04/2016, style editor Marthe E. Jakobsen explains that even though she has a fashion obsession with expensive shoes, she would never actually be able to use a whole pile of rent money on something that doesn't last forever (Jakobsen, No. 04/2016). Thus, while *Stella* does present the idea of the dream life in some ways, it at least also presents some more down-to-earth, realistic sentiments as well.

4.2.9d "Life"

The content section "Life," makes up what is arguably the main part of each issue's content. Here we have a wide variety of subjects, from mental health to gender identity, and the section describes itself as discussing self-development, career and relations. At the start of each "Life" section, there is a written introduction to set the tone. This introduction was slightly modified together with the new magazine format when Ida Halvorsen Kemp took over as the new editor-in-chief, but the ideology remains similar. The older versions' statement reads: "Here you meet strong women, get good reading pieces and tips about all things big and small on life's winding path," and the new versions' statement reads: "Here you meet inspiring women, get good reading pieces and tips about how you can live life a little smarter" (*Stella* redaksjonen, No. 02/2016, No. 03/2016c). This change goes along with the ideology already put forward in my analysis of the letters from the editor, regarding former editor Mari Grydeland tending towards being more out-rightly feminist than current editor Ida Halvorsen Kemp. Thus, it makes sense that the magazine would follow suit under her leadership, hence the use of "strong women" being modified to "inspiring women."

To begin with, the fact that *Stella* has this section alone is noteworthy. There is a clear portrayal that the *Stella* reader is a woman who is out in the career world, who deals with real-life issues that extend way beyond picking the wrong nail polish color, and who is right down in the midst of everything messy about life. These are not women who sit on a pristine pink pedestal to avoid getting their hands dirty; these are modern, diverse, real women. The inclusion of this section also works against the ideology put forth by Alexandra Starr about how women's magazines often use a rhetoric of happiness equals securing a man (Starr, 1999). Instead, *Stella* implies that happiness is achieved through a balance of many different things.

I would first like to examine the career aspect of the "Life" section. All but one issue of my empirical material has a specific part of the "Life" section devoted to career-related topics, whether it be profiling cool women in the workforce, or giving tips and advice about various career aspects. Some examples of the articles included in this section throughout my analysis material include "Make A Plan," which investigates the question of how much planning a career really requires, "Your Next Step," which discusses when the right time is to move on to one's next job, and "The Work Journey," which profiles three women who moved abroad and established careers there (Danielsen, No. 01/2016a, No. 06/2015c; Kemp, No. 04/2016). Each of these examples encourages women as career professionals and portrays women as being fully-active members of society, on equal level with their male counterparts in terms of career.

Another note regarding *Stella*'s portrayal of women in the workforce comes when we look at some of the various career paths and avenues of interest the profiled women have pursued. For instance, in "Chasing the Girl Code" we meet Isabelle Ringnes, who has a passion for technology and has made computers and IT into her career, and who holds talks at Oslo Innovation Week, and more (Danielsen, No. 01/2016b). "The Futurists" features profiles of several women in new lines of work that have been established in recent years, one of which is Karen Dolva, general manager at No Isolation, who works with avatar robots made from 3D-printers (Danielsen, No. 03/2016). A final example is the article "Savings Plan," in which we meet three

financially-savvy women who give an insight into their monthly finances, what they spend money on, how they manage their money, and their long-term financial plans (Tina Aasen, No. 06/2016). Further, the article is followed up with five savings tips from a female consumer economist.

Here we do not see a “typical” women’s magazine that is only concerned with talking about beauty products and how to have the best home interior. Here we see a magazine that brings up serious subjects such as technology and finances. The fact that *Stella* puts a focus on portraying women in this way, and portraying women as being involved in fields that have traditionally been dominated by men is refreshing and very noteworthy. It is not everyday that one sees these topics, and especially these types of careers, being brought up in a women’s magazine, and it sends a strong portrayal of gender equality and female strength. Readers see that there is so much more to life than doing beauty work.

Two articles stuck out with me specifically when conducting my analysis of the “Life” section, and I will now take a moment to review them both. First, the article “The Comic Gender” takes up the subject of female comedians – a subject that has generated much debate throughout the years, due to the fact that comedy has traditionally been seen as a male-dominated field, and due to the long-running stereotype about how “women can’t be funny,” (Danielsen, No. 06/2016a). This article profiles various female comedians on their thoughts about being a female in this career field, how the industry has changed in this regard throughout recent years, and more. In regards to women breaking more into this field, one of the women profiled, Sofie Frøysaa, even says “These are truly girl-power times now,” (Danielsen, No. 06/2016a, my translation). The inclusion of such an article in *Stella* is important. It gives space for a portrayal of women in a male-dominated industry and shows that they, too, can succeed here. The inclusion of this article works to create a more inclusive understanding of who and what women can be, and works to widen the narrow picture of traditional female-ness thus advocating for gender equality.

Second, the article “Over the glass ceiling” is an excellent example of how *Stella* provides gender-equal portrayals of women and works against the ideology that a woman’s calling lies in working to look beautiful. In this article, we meet three women working in traditionally male-dominated industries – namely, Khamshajiny “Kamzy” Gunaratnam, deputy mayor in Oslo, Ingrid Margrethe Gjerde, chief at the war school and soon to be chief of staff for the army in Bardufoss, and Live Wilhelmsen Lindholm, lawyer and partner in Pacta (Danielsen, No. 05/2016a). The entirety of this article focuses on these women’s experiences of working in such male-dominated industries – what it has been like, if there have been any challenges, and what their advice would be for other women who are considering a career in these fields. This article presents an overwhelming portrayal of women as equals to men, of women as intelligent, competent workers capable of so much more than just beauty work, and of women as being complex and diverse in nature rather than “all women liking pink and sparkles.” The focus is on these women’s careers, not on some idea that they dressed in the right way and were traditionally feminine in order to succeed. Thus, it dismisses the ideology that women must jump through extra hoops of beauty ideals to succeed, and in this way takes an important step away from the beauty myth. It sends readers the message that they can create the path that they want for their lives, and that in no way do beauty ideals need to stand in their way.

The next aspect of the “Life” section that I would like to take up is the content relating to psychology and mental health. Throughout my empirical material, there are multiple articles relating to these topics. One such example is “The Evil at the Root,” which encourages readers to embrace any painful experiences of their pasts and let them become a part of their roots, rather than attempting to shut them out (Moberg, No. 03/2016). Another example is “An Open Mind,” which profiles several women who are working to banish the taboo and stigma surrounding psychological illnesses in modern society (Danielsen, No. 06/2015b). Further, this is part of the content which is referred to on the front cover as being a “big topic,” which is considerable because it shows that *Stella* is putting focus on these issues.

The presence of such a large number of articles relating to psychology and mental health throughout *Stella*'s pages is a testament to the monumental amount of progress which has been achieved over the past decades of women's magazine publishing. These are subjects which would not have been mentioned in a 1950s women's magazine, yet today these topics find their way into these magazines, and even onto the front covers. In this way, *Stella* is portraying women as real – as real, multi-faceted individuals who have real, multi-faceted issues. This acknowledgement portrays women as being beyond the beauty myth, which would posit that their issues are related to beauty. These articles are encouraging women to do difficult psychological work to improve their lives from the inside, rather than encouraging them to do beauty work to improve their appearance on the outside. In this way, (as well as throughout many other content sections, such as career-related articles too) we see an application of Janice Winship's ideas that women's magazines provide readers with survival skills to deal with womanly issues, and the ideology that improving upon the things the magazine tells you to, will help you to create and achieve your best possible life (Winship, 1987). However, there is one important thing to note here, and that is the type of help and survival skills that are being offered. Throughout various parts of the "Life" section (and other sections as well), we see *Stella* working to improve readers' lives by means of improving their career, their physical and mental wellbeing, and their understanding of identity and self in relation to the world. Thus, the "survival skills" given are actually valuable. *Stella* is not trying to help improve readers' lives with the help of the newest mascara so that their eyelashes can look more voluminous. Rather, *Stella* is giving real, non-superficial aid to readers about real, non-superficial topics that their modern readers struggle with in their daily lives. Thus, while Winship was critical in her evaluation of this property that women's magazines hold, in the case of *Stella*, I would posit that this quality is actually a positive one.

A third aspect of the "Life" section that I would like to bring forth for analysis is that regarding the diverse portrayal of female identities, and the broad presentation of who women "should" be. Throughout *Stella*'s content, we meet a diverse group of females. Just a few examples of these are Margaret Alva, who tells how she likes wearing red lipstick and big earrings and who is pictured wearing a bright, bubble-gum pink coat,

Christine Marie Jentoft who transitioned from a male to a female in order to be true to herself and who she really is, and Emma Clare Gabrielsen, a program host for NRK broadcasting who tells *Stella* that she is at her happiest when she is in the mud on an ATV (Danielsen, No. 02/2016, No. 06/2015e; Kemp, No. 05/2016a). Just from these three examples, we see how *Stella* includes a very broad range of portrayals when it comes to women and femininity. Women are not always all about pink and sparkles, and women don't have to put in hours of beauty work in order to succeed. However, this tougher image would not be seen in a women's magazine from the 1950s. This tougher image might not even be seen in a 2017 issue of *Cosmopolitan*. This acceptance of and even open portrayal of such a diversity of what it means to be female in 2017 is remarkable, and places *Stella* on a different playing field than that of the beauty myth. As Naomi Wolf says, the beauty myth is in place to keep women busy with beauty work before they can succeed, and to keep the power relations in tact as they are with their male-dominated hierarchy. But *Stella* portraying these diverse definitions of who women "should" be is sending a powerful message that is working to get rid of this oppressive ideology.

Additionally to this is *Stella*'s portrayal of women's roles when it comes to family life. We have already seen *Stella* strongly portray women in the workforce, but how is it with the aspect of family? Throughout the issues of *Stella*, we see several mentions of family life, including the profiling of all different types of women living in all different types of life situations. However, one article in particular concretized *Stella*'s outlook on the matter. In "Roll Play," we meet four women who are breaking with the expectations of how a family life is "supposed" to look. We meet Line, who chose to have two children as a 45-year old single mom, Birgit Hatelhol, who is 54 years old and has never had children, Marit Øimoen, who chose to move away from her teenage son from a previous marriage, and Rebecca Shirin Jafari, who lives with her multicultural family in a renovated 100-year old house in the woods outside of Oslo (Tine Aasen, No. 05/2016). Here, we see *Stella* portraying women and family lives that are far from the traditional. These portrayals deviate from the norms about family life, and most certainly would not have been highlighted in a women's publication from some decades back. Though not

directly connected to beauty, these strong, progressive portrayals of women and their lives work to abolish the hierarchical systems that society has in place. They work to communicate that traditional ways of thinking are no longer the only ways of thinking, and that women are equal actors as men when it comes to deciding over their lives and the paths they take. This in turn works alongside the abolishment of the beauty myth and its ideals, and communicates that the *Stella* woman is strong, savvy, and has no tolerance for outdated, patriarchal ideals.

Finally, while politics are not often mentioned throughout *Stella*'s content, each issue that comes after the introduction of the new magazine format has a section called "Cheat Sheet," which talks about how to begin and/or navigate a discussion on a difficult, often political topic. One such example of this is the "Cheat Sheet" regarding discussions about the practice of wearing hijabs and burkinis (Kemp, No. 06/2016a). In this way, *Stella* is taking up some more hard-hitting subjects within their pages, further adding to the portrayal that women are intelligent, capable members of society on equal footing as men. Though I wish for more of this type of content, the fact that something is there is worth noting.

4.2.9e "Glow"

I would now like to examine the section "Glow," which focuses on makeup, skin, hair, and fragrance. Throughout this section, the pages feature content such as product reviews and suggestions, advice from experts and personal profiles, to name a few. One common characteristic that I have observed, however, is the overall strong focus on healthy skin, more so than makeup. This focus on skincare over makeup is striking. While there are countless commercial products featured on these pages which women can buy, for the most part they work to take care of one's natural-born skin, rather than altering the appearance of the face. For example, one article focuses on educating readers about the importance of facial cleansing, explaining the process and the benefits and suggesting products (Jakobsen, No. 05/2016). Similarly, another issue features an article that interviews three women about their skincare routine, asking what steps they follow, and profiling some various products (Grydeland, No. 06/2015).

This can be seen as a positive point for *Stella*, in that it is focusing on the skin one has, rather than adding lots of makeup to “improve” one’s appearance, which communicates that one is not good enough as they are. That being said, as mentioned before, there is a question to be raised regarding the connection between the featured commercial products and the notion of keeping women busy through buying lots of products for the body – a key characteristic of the beauty myth. This holds true regardless of whether these products are makeup products, or skincare products.

In the “Glow” section of each issue, *Stella* includes a column entitled “Glow: In front of the mirror,” which profiles various women and their beauty regimens. However, rather than this manifesting itself as being a long list of foundations, mascaras, lipsticks and concealers, it again holds with the notion of more natural beauty. One such example of this is the morning-routine profile of Thea Sofie Loch Næss, in which she tells how she uses two minutes in the bathroom and only one product while getting ready each morning (Danielsen, No. 06/2015a). Other examples include women who use anywhere from five to 20 minutes in the bathroom each morning, and a consistent trend amongst the featured women is their strongly natural look, rather than a strongly “made-up” look that was created with the use of a lot of makeup. Featuring this type of beauty regimen feels refreshing in 2017. In this way, *Stella* presents readers with content that is less focused on beauty ideals, which in turn works to promote the idea that how one looks is not standing in the way of their advancement. *Stella* promotes the idea that this is not a requirement, thus placing itself in a position that distances itself from the beauty myth.

Further, the fact that *Stella* features more natural-looking women on its pages goes along to further support the idea presented under the analysis of the front covers, in that *Stella* offers portrayals of women that can be considered more natural, and less edited. There is an element of realness amongst the women one sees in *Stella*, and this helps to establish more realistic beauty ideals amongst readers.

All of this is not to say, however, that makeup products are not to be found in *Stella*’s pages also. Certain pages are dedicated to reviewing products, giving beauty tips, etcetera. However, it is worthwhile to note that the balance of these types of features

amongst all of the other content as discussed thus far, gives a clear sense that these messages about makeup do not dominate.

Another overarching point for analysis is the angle at which topics of beauty are approached throughout the pages of *Stella*. Whether it be skincare products, makeup products or even beauty products designed to remove lines and wrinkles, a plethora of items is presented and/or reviewed throughout the pages of “Glow.” However, one key distinction to be made is that the rhetoric surrounding the presentation of these items elicits an aura of choice. This is in part due to the large balance of topics, rather than an overwhelming focus on changing one’s appearance, as discussed previously, and also in part due to the portrayal of many different types of womanhood. Identities from glam to transgender to using only five minutes to get ready in the morning are all presented in *Stella*, and this strong diversity works to communicate that using these makeup products is most certainly not mandatory.

Further, the actual language surrounding this content is very often optional in nature with the primary use of descriptive, un-charged titles and headlines, such as “Cool Color,” “Spring, Now!” and “Ready, Set, Glow” (*Stella* redaksjonen, No. 03/2016a, No. 03/2016b, No. 03/2016d). It does not say that one *must* get these new products. Instead, it comes across as more aiming to present an option, and then give an overview of the best products for in case one does choose to participate. Rhetoric such as “10 anti-aging products you have to try now” seems to be common amongst many typical women’s magazines, but this type of rhetoric gives the impression that one is not good enough if they opt not to try those products. It makes it seem as if the use of anti-aging products is mandatory, which is strongly remnant of the beauty myth. However, this type of rhetoric is very rarely used in *Stella*, and therefore when these topics are presented in a way that elicits readers having the choice to participate or not – the choice to use the products or not – it presents itself as something that one can participate in if one chooses to. This exemplifies Naomi Wolf’s point about free choice separating enjoyment from the beauty myth. As Wolf says, it is not the case that women cannot participate in beauty culture, but

rather that we must work to crystallize the distinction of this being optional, not mandatory like the beauty myth would have us believe (Wolf, 2002, p. 271).

Again, however, this is not to say that beauty myth-eliciting language does not exist at all within *Stella*'s pages. One example of a time when *Stella* does not convey this optional-type rhetoric is in their use of the title "Free from Flaws," for an article that discusses quick-fix products to help with situations such as tired eyes and broken nails (*Stella* redaksjonen, No. 06/2016a). In this example, the use of the word "flaws" is bothersome because it communicates that you are not acceptable as you are – that you are flawed and need to be fixed. This is the type of language that is reminiscent of the beauty myth, encouraging readers towards more beauty work and an extra condition which women must meet. While it may not be nearly as common in *Stella* as it is in other magazines, it is still present in some cases, and I argue that it should be removed altogether.

Finally, it is worth noting a select few other articles present throughout my analysis material which communicate a strong message about *Stella*'s stance in regards to the ideas of the beauty myth. In an article entitled "Our Best Beauty Tips," the author interviews a variety of women about their beauty habits and preferences, and one question that is asked to each individual is, "What are you most satisfied with about yourself?" (Jakobsen, No. 3/2016). This is noteworthy because it focuses on what each of these women *are* satisfied with about themselves, rather than one thing they would like to change if they could. In addition, in the article "Everyday Fill," *Stella* investigates today's culture of Botox injections and fillers, and on the very first page highlights the question, "What does it say about the time we live in that Botox is compared to going to the hairdresser?" (Furuset, No. 04/2016). This presents a very powerful statement about *Stella* and their stance on such physical modifications, in that it is questioning our culture of plastic surgery and cosmetic enhancements. This sceptical questioning is definitely a step away from the rhetoric of the beauty myth, in that it is placing a question mark next to this idea of women needing to undertake beauty work in order to be good enough.

4.2.9f “Pulse”

Stella's section “Pulse” provides space for subjects such as exercise, diet¹⁵ and food. An overarching observation that can be made, is that throughout this section, there is a general focus on having a healthy lifestyle. At first, this might not seem revolutionary, but seen in light of the beauty myth, this is significantly important.

The articles in this section consistently focus on being active, eating healthy, ensuring an intake of proper nutrition, clean eating, etcetera. In this way, the content of this section is encouraging readers towards a healthy lifestyle, not a skinny lifestyle. This is an important distinction. In all of the issues of *Stella* used for my analysis, there is not a single article about dieting or losing weight. For a women's magazine in 2017, this is extremely noteworthy. There exist articles about staying in shape, but everything you read is approached from a health perspective, not a looks perspective. In other words, one can still mention burning calories, as long as the angle at which one approaches it is focused on keeping the body healthy and strong, rather than fitting into a size 34. The fact that there is this focus on being strong and healthy shows major progress.

In each issue of *Stella*, the “Pulse” section includes a column from personal trainer Annema Refsnes, where she takes up various topics regarding exercise and physical activity. These columns serve as cornerstone examples of *Stella*'s outlook on and approach to this aspect, which I will demonstrate with some examples below. In a column about post-baby exercise, Refsnes emphasizes that the most important thing to focus on is your new baby, not fitting into your skinny jeans again (Refsnes, No. 01/2016). In a column about getting back into your exercise routine after a vacation, she applauds readers who may not have exercised at all while they were on holiday, saying, “good for you!” (Refsnes, No. 05/2016, p. 120). In an inspiring New Year's column, Refnes posits that if readers have followed her tips throughout the previous year, they probably have a bit rounder and bouncier behind, but she makes sure to follow it up with

¹⁵ It is important to note that here, the use of the word “diet” refers to the composition of one's nutritional intake, rather than a voluntary restriction of calories or certain types of foods in order to, for example, lose weight.

“but either way [you] are satisfied with your own body and appearance,” (Refsnes, No. 02/2016, p. 114, my translation). Similarly, in her column promoting the benefits of participating in strength training, she writes, “In magazines you will read about the strength training that burns fat, or about the strength training that gives you the roundest buttocks – and that is true and good – but the real reason that you should do strength training is so much more than all of that superficial stuff,” (Refsnes, No. 06/2016b, p. 120, my translation). With this, she is redirecting readers’ attention away from the all-too-common messages heard elsewhere about how women should exercise in order to obtain a “bikini body” (the ideology which says it is unacceptable to show any stomach rolls at the beach), and refocuses it back on the self and one’s wellbeing.

The “Pulse” section also includes various other health and wellness-related articles that are worth noting. For example, the body-positive article “Practice Makes Perfect” encourages readers to find the exercise activity they enjoy doing, so that training can be pleasurable rather than something one must force themselves to do because they “have” to (Kemp, No. 02/2016). Here, the motivation is health and enjoyment, rather than appearance. Giving focus to women in the workplace, the article “Office Rat?” is aimed specifically at readers who spend their work time sitting at a desk (Refsnes, No. 06/2016a). It shows numerous easy-to-do exercises that can help to counteract the large amount of time spent sitting still, and help to make the workday easier.

In addition to this, this section includes a number of articles that focus on the importance of increasing mindfulness and finding peace and happiness in life. In this way, *Stella* projects the message that looking beautiful is not what is important in our lives, but rather to find peace and contentment, so as to get the most out of life that we can. This is a very positive message that stands leaps away from the beauty myth, and which places focus on the “backstage” rather than the “frontstage.” *Stella* reminds us that women’s purpose on earth is about so much more than looking pretty. One example of this focus on wellbeing rather than a “bikini body” is seen in *Stella*’s three-part series on meditation, which ran from issue No. 04/2016 until issue No. 06/2016, and gave an

introduction to meditation, its many benefits and how one can go about giving it a try (Danielsen, No. 04/2016, No. 05/2016b, No. 06/2016b).

Finally, each issue of *Stella* includes a collection of meal recipes that are both nutritional and yummy, but these sometimes also include dessert recipes, which shows that such things are fine to partake in. One article even talks about today's diet trends (such as vegan, paleo and raw) and questions whether or not our society today overdoes the whole "healthy-eating thing," asking "Can we be too healthy for our own good?" (Imeland, No. 03/2016). All of this acts as a counterforce to the traditional women's magazine rhetoric, and works against the belief that women are not good enough without putting strenuous effort into beauty work.

4.2.9g Advertisements

The final aspect of the inside content that I wish to examine is the advertisements present amongst *Stella*'s pages. These are the external advertisements not created by *Stella*, which appear in the magazine amidst the *Stella*-produced editorial content.

To begin with, I would like to start by giving a general idea of how prevalent these advertisements are in comparison to the *Stella*-produced editorial content. Throughout my seven issues of empirical material, the percentage of advertisements in relation to content as a whole ranged from between 25% on the low end and 37% on the high end¹⁶. That is to say that in the issue with the least amount of advertisements, 25% of the issue's pages were advertisements, while 75% of the issue's pages were *Stella*-produced editorial content. Similarly, in the issue with the most amount of advertisements, 37% of the issue's pages were advertisements, while 63% of the issue's pages were *Stella*-produced editorial content. This ad to content ratio is much more

¹⁶ The full listing of the percentage of advertisements in relation to content as a whole is as follows: Issue No. 06/2015 – 30%, Issue No. 01/2016 – 33%, Issue No. 02/2016 – 25%, Issue No. 03/2016 – 37%, Issue No. 04/2016 – 36%, Issue No. 05/2016 – 28%, Issue 06/2016 – 31%

positive than I originally expected, as I expected there to be a much higher percentage of advertisements, and was pleasantly surprised to find out that the ad percentage was as low as it was. When one takes the average of all of these percentages, we see that, on average, an issue of *Stella* contains 31% advertising, and 69% editorial content.

Now let us turn our attention to what these advertisements are advertising for, and how they go about doing so. The large majority of the advertisements in *Stella* are advertising for makeup (and/or other body products), jewelry and clothing. Thus, the majority of advertisements are aimed at selling things for the body. This sentiment may sound familiar, as it is very reminiscent of the beauty myth. Here, we see advertisements encouraging women to do beauty work, which thus requires them to go out and purchase the products required for them to do said beauty work. The advertisements play upon creating a concept of guilt and dissatisfaction with one's appearance, so that the reader will go out and purchase the product in order to "fix" what "isn't good enough," in order for their appearance to be acceptable (Wolf, 2002). One such example of this is an ad for a foundation from the popular international makeup brand Maybelline New York, which leads its ad with the text, "Experience silky-smooth perfection. Hides your pores in a sophisticated way," ("Maybelline New York, Dream Satin Liquid Foundation [Advertisement]," *Stella* Issue No. 06/2015, pp. 34-35, my translation). This insinuates that, in order to achieve this perfection, one must purchase this Maybelline foundation. This type of rhetoric holds true whether the advertisement is for a makeup product, new clothes, a diamond necklace, or a new perfume, and whether the message is communicated explicitly through text, or implicitly through beautiful, desirable images. Further, even though it can be seen as a positive quality that *Stella's* editorial content mostly focuses on healthy skin rather than makeup, this concept is then capitalized upon by advertisers who take the opportunity to advertise for an abundance of skin creams and facial cleansers in the pages following this editorial content. This promotes the practice of beauty work by encouraging readers to busy themselves with buying more things for the body. In addition, throughout the advertisements, we see a tendency to advertise for luxury products and items of frivolousness, such as diamond jewelry or the newest designer perfume. These are not products of necessity, but rather products of desire, and

the advertisement is there to create a desire for that product which previously did not even exist amongst the ad's audience.

When looking at the portrayals of women throughout the advertisements in *Stella*, we see a very different picture than that which we see throughout the editorial content. The portrayals of women in these advertisements rely much more on narrow, traditional notions of femininity and what it means to be a woman, which stands in contradiction to *Stella's* editorial content. The advertisements feature beautiful women with perfectly windswept hair and completely flawless skin, who very often glance towards the camera (and, thus, the viewer of the ad) with seductive glances. Most of the women featured in the advertisements are Caucasian, tall, and very thin, and the majority exude a very traditional femininity, rather than the rough-and-tumble, tougher image of femininity that is portrayed by *Stella's* editorial content. Several advertisements for jewelry and skin-care products feature women who are completely naked (or wearing only the jewelry they are selling), while they stare longingly towards the camera/reader. This is reminiscent of the idea put forth by Laura Mulvey about the concept of the male gaze, in which a female serves as an item of spectacle for their male viewers (Mulvey, 1975). This traditional portrayal of women as sexualized objects to be gazed upon works to uphold the idea of male societal dominance, the idea that women must fit into a narrowly-defined definition of what beauty is, and idea that they must purchase said advertised product in order to do so, hence participating in what Naomi Wolf calls beauty work.

Thus, these advertisements work together with the ideology that Wolf presents in *The Beauty Myth*, in that the ads work with the idea of keeping an oppressive extra condition on women, keeping to a narrow image of what women "should" be, and sending the message that they need to do beauty work (ie. buy more things for the body) in order to be good enough and to succeed. This stands to support the idea once again that commercial business thrives off of making women feel trapped in a state of self-dissatisfaction in order to sell their products.

All of this being said, the presence of these advertisements create contradictory messages for readers. The way in which women are portrayed throughout *Stella's*

editorial content is leaps away from the way in which the advertisements portray women. However, the unfortunate reality of it is that these contradictory portrayals end up being placed side by side in the magazine, which can send confusing messages to readers trying to navigate through *Stella*'s rhetoric. Sometimes these contradictions can become very blatant, causing all the more confusion, such as can be seen with the examples of two different plastic surgery advertisements on the pages of *Stella*. One of these examples comes in an issue that also highlights women in tech and gives tips about when you know it's time to change jobs, and another is placed in an issue that features editorial content such as a feature on jobs within digital and technological career fields, and an article questioning whether the new diet trends have gone too far. Thus, this creates confusing and contradictory juxtapositions of the portrayal of womanhood.



("Volvat Cosmedical [Advertisement]," 2016)
In consideration to photo quality, the above advertisement picture is retrieved from an Internet source rather than directly from Stella, but all aspects of the advertisement are exactly the same as they appear in Stella Issue No. 3/2016.

In the first example, we see an advertisement for an esthetic surgery clinic in Oslo, where they advertise for Botox, fillers, scar removal and more ("Aesthetic Clinic [Advertisement]," *Stella* No. 01/2016, pp. 106-107). In this advertisement, readers learn about the different procedures they can receive at this clinic, meet the doctor who runs the clinic, and get tips and ideas for beauty-related Christmas gifts from the clinic. The advertisement includes pictures of the clinic location and staff, as well as pictures of patients undergoing treatments such as facials and Botox injections. In this way, the ad appeals to readers' logic. The second

example is an advertisement for Volvat Cosmedical, a division of the *Volvat Medisinske Senter* (Volvat Medical Center; my translation) which has several locations throughout Norway. In this advertisement, we see a picture of a slender woman who is completely naked except for being wrapped in a digitally-produced purple ribbon, alongside text that explains that Volvat Cosmedical is the division that focuses on cosmetic skin and laser treatments and plastic surgery ("Volvat Cosmedical [Advertisement]," *Stella* Issue No. 03/2016, p. 99). Here, we see an advertisement that appeals to the sensual and the emotional, and which is very aesthetically appealing in that the image is highly edited and "perfected."

These mixed messages are examples of the frustrations Marta Breen expresses about how on one page, women's magazines encourage readers that they are beautiful as they are, yet on the next page give them tips and advice for fixing their "flaws" (Veka, 2013). Advertisements such as the above-mentioned plastic surgery ads become even more confusing when we see that just three issues, and then one issue later (respectively), *Stella* features the editorial-content article which questions whether Botox and other cosmetic modifications have become too common in our modern society (Furuseth, No. 04/2016). This editorial article communicates a vastly different portrayal of femininity and womanhood than the advertisements for plastic surgery treatments do. Thus, in *Stella*, it is not so much that the editorial content contradicts itself, but rather that we see contradictory messages between the editorial content and the advertisements.

Here, we see a real-life example of Naomi Wolf's notion of women's magazines being caught in the middle (Wolf, 2002). Even though these advertisements promote portrayals of women that are contradictory to the rest of the editorial content, *Stella* is dependent upon the income from these advertisements in order to stay in business themselves. These advertisements generate revenue for *Stella*, and thus they need these advertisers in order to survive as a commercial product. Of course, a natural question to be asked is why *Stella* does not think alternatively in regards to their advertisements? Why does *Stella* not opt for selecting other advertisements that go more along with the message of their editorial content?

This, too, comes down to a financial aspect. As we have already seen with the ads on the back covers, these advertising spaces do not come cheap. As stated earlier, a back-cover advertisement costs NOK 71 100,- (Bonnier Media, 2017). Similarly, purchasing an advertisement within the magazine comes at a high price. According to *Stella's* advertiser information, inside advertisements range anywhere from a 1/3 page ad for NOK 25 300,- (the cheapest), to a full-spread advertisement on pages 2-3 for NOK 117 200,- (the most expensive) (Bonnier Media, 2017). These are very high prices to pay for smaller companies that operate on a more alternative level. Thus, the companies that end up having this type of budget are likely to be high-dollar, large-scale, very often international companies that can afford to hand over these large sums of money for advertising, which *Stella* is dependent upon receiving. Yet in turn, these advertisements tend to rely on more traditional portrayals of women and femininity in their means of conveyance. This is a very strong example of Wolf's thoughts on how women's magazines of today are stocked with some very positive messages, yet because of their dependence on advertisers' funding, the magazines must contain a degree of the opposite, hence leading to the confusing contradictions Marta Breen writes of.

Thus, the relationship between the editorial content and the advertisements can be described in a similar manner as the relationship between the front and the back covers has already been described. The portrayals of women in the editorial content correspond to the serious part of *Stella* – who *Stella actually* is – whereas the portrayals of women in the advertisements correspond to the business part of *Stella*, and the contradictory reality that a publication like *Stella* must face in its quest to sell their product and be profitable.

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, advertisements make up, on average, about 31% of each issue of *Stella*, while editorial content makes up 69%. Something that is important to note here, is that the content which is promoted on the front covers and which *Stella* is thus using to sell their magazines is related to the 69%, and to who *Stella* actually is. Thus, this shows us that the portrayals of women which *Stella* truly wants to promote are those which lie in the editorial content, not the advertisements. However, these contradictions come about as a result of *Stella* being

caught in the middle of having an ideology they want to promote, yet at the same time having to rely on advertisers in order to be profitable.

4.2.10 Overview of inside content

We have now taken a closer look at each main section within *Stella* in order to examine trends and tendencies as they relate to the ideas of the beauty myth. We have seen that the “Sense” section portrays a decently wide spectrum of femininity in its profiles, and that the same is true for the “Stella Meets/Portrait” section, though these could stand to be more diverse in regards to the types of career fields that are profiled. The “Style” section features items that do, however, work to create the idea of a dream life in that most items are luxurious, want-based items (as opposed to need-based items) that the average reader likely will not be able to afford. In addition, this creation of the dream life ends up creating a “need” for things that there previously never was a need for. Further, while content such as office style guides portray women as being active in the workforce and thus on equal level as their male counterparts, this type of content could be seen as reminiscent of the beauty myth in that it is enforcing the idea that yes, women can be in the work force, but that they should look a certain way while doing so.

The “Life” section brings many positive portrayals of women in that it profiles them in their careers and acknowledges that they have real, non-superficial issues that they deal with in everyday life that are far beyond the “issue” of a broken nail. The career paths themselves are often noteworthy in regards to how *Stella* portrays women, due to the fact that they include women who work in traditionally male-dominated fields. This section brings up serious subjects such as politics, financial planning and mental health, which thus works to portray women as being smart, serious actors in society, and which are arguably very different than the types of articles that one would be able to find in a women’s magazine in the 1950s. Throughout this section, we see the reality of Janice Winship’s ideas about women’s magazines tending to give tips that encourage readers to create their best possible life, and implicitly promising that if one follows the advice on the magazine’s pages, then they will be able to do so (Winship, 1987). However one important aspect to note is that *Stella* does this through the means of improving one’s

career, wellbeing, financial life, and more. Thus these tips are more serious and truly meaningful, rather than the type of advice that promises that the newest shade of lipstick will be life-changing. Similarly, these meaningful tips do not utilize the rhetoric which Alexandra Star discusses in regards to the typical women's magazine rhetoric of happiness equals securing a man (Starr, 1999). Instead, *Stella* gives the impression that happiness is found through a balance of hobbies, a good work life, and doing what works for you, even if that breaks with the norm.

The content in this section portrays women as being serious, and as not having to jump through extra hoops than men. The section includes content that works to break gender stereotypes and portray women in gender equal ways. It shows a diverse portrayal of feminine identities and a diverse definition of who women "should" be, which works to abolish the type of patriarchal, oppressive ideology that comes with the beauty myth. Additionally, *Stella's* active roll throughout this section in educating women that they can break with the norms of a traditional family life also works to portray women as strong, independent and equal actors that do not have to bend to the ideology of conducting beauty work and fitting into a traditional picture of "who women should be" in order to be successful.

Throughout the "Glow" section, we see many different products featured, though the biggest trend is clearly that of healthy skin, rather than makeup. This section features natural-looking women and profiles makeup routines that do not take an eternity of beauty work each morning. This is extremely positive in terms of the beauty myth in that it is not supporting the message that women are not good enough as they are, or that they have to apply makeup in order to be taken seriously. However, this is still working to promote the idea of buying lots of products for the body, which is a characteristic of the beauty myth. The overall language of this section is commendable in that it uses a rhetoric of choice to participate in these beauty practices or not. *Stella's* content communicates that participation is not mandatory, and certain content pieces even critically question ideas such as how our society has become so obsessed with, for example, plastic surgery.

The “Pulse” section has a strong and clear focus on a healthy lifestyle, through promoting being active, eating healthy, and so forth. This is an important distinction in that a healthy lifestyle is very different than a skinny lifestyle. We do not find a single article about dieting or losing weight throughout my analysis material, and all the content is approached from a health perspective, rather than a looks perspective. All of this promotes body-positive portrayals of women that are not at all interested in the “rules” of the beauty myth. These ideas relate back to Erving Goffman’s concepts, in that they promote more of a balance between the “frontstage” and the “backstage,” since *Stella*’s content does not just focus on looking good, but also on feeling good from the inside too (Goffman, 1990).

Additionally, it is worth noting that throughout all of the inside content sections, we see Naomi Wolf’s concept of the women’s magazine acting as a sort of surrogate family, giving advice and helping out the other members of their family (which are the readers) (Wolf, 2002). *Stella* uses language that creates camaraderie and familiarity between the editorial staff and the readers, and gives the impression that the editorial team is a family member that readers can trust and come to for advice.

Finally, the biggest distinction comes forward through an examination of the advertisements present amongst *Stella*’s content. An analysis showed that the average issue of *Stella* (based on my empirical material) consists of 31% advertisements and 69% editorial content. This number is surprisingly low to me, as I had originally expected the advertisement percentage to be much higher. The majority of *Stella*’s advertisements are for makeup, skin products, jewelry and clothing, which means that, in other words, they are aiming to sell things for the body. This is very reminiscent of the beauty myth and encourages women to go out and buy the products needed to do the beauty work in order to “fix” what “isn’t good enough.”

In addition, the advertisements contain very different portrayals of women than the editorial content does. The ads depict women in far more traditional and narrow senses of what it means to be a woman, and most exude a very traditional femininity which harkens back to the beauty myth. All of this stands in stark contrast with *Stella*’s

editorial content, and makes it so that the ads actually seem out of place. This discrepancy between the messages in the editorial content and the messages in the ads leads to the contradictory messages talked about by both Naomi Wolf and Marta Breen, and serves as a concrete example of how magazines today are caught in the middle. In one sense, they are filled with positive messages, yet in another sense, they are dependent on advertisers' funding and, thus, end up containing a degree of the opposite. However, being that the contradictions occur between the editorial content and the advertisements, and not so much within the editorial content itself, we see that the 69% of editorial content is clearly who *Stella actually* is, and the 31% of advertisements is what *Stella* must include in order to be profitable.

5. Discussion & Conclusion

Throughout my examination, I have aimed to conduct a case-study analysis of the Norwegian women's magazine *Stella* from a feministic perspective, examining the question of how women and femininity are portrayed in the magazine, analyzed against the backdrop of Naomi Wolf's cornerstone book, *The Beauty Myth*. Despite my background in and knowledge of this field, I have been steered by academic analysis, and have examined *Stella* from an academic perspective rather than a personal one. After having conducted this analysis, I have found that *Stella* serves as a refreshingly positive example of a women's magazine in this regard.

Stella's covers and content feature a broad variety of subjects, and take up important, serious issues such as mental health, career life, and sexuality, sometimes from a directly feministic standpoint. This portrays women as being intelligent, serious and complex beings and promotes the idea of substantial work, rather than beauty work. Topics related to beauty and appearance are mentioned as well, but their juxtaposition amongst a hefty percentage of other, serious and non-beauty-related content makes it so that these beauty topics in no way dominate in importance. More so than not, these topics are approached from a position of choice, rather than requirement, and *Stella* even includes articles that pose critical questions to some of today's health and beauty practices. There is no content that focuses on the "happiness equals securing a man" rhetoric discussed by Alexandra Starr, and the overall message of *Stella* promotes the ideology that happiness actually equals a balanced and well-rounded life, comprised of hobbies, a good work life, and doing what works for you, even if that breaks with the norm.

Another key distinguishing feature of *Stella's* content is the angle at which content is approached. Articles related to physicality and nutrition focus on strength and a healthy lifestyle, rather than a skinny lifestyle, and there is in fact not a single article regarding weight loss or dieting to be found within my analysis material. Similarly, the majority of beauty articles take a more natural approach that focuses on caring for one's skin, rather than altering one's appearance with makeup. In this way, we see much more

of a focus on one's inner wellbeing ("backstage") than one's outer appearance ("frontstage").

In this way, I find *Stella* to be a women's magazine that does not promote the beauty myth ideals in its editorial content's portrayals of women and femininity. The rhetoric and overall message of *Stella* does not work to uphold the oppressive societal order which Wolf says is kept in place through telling women what they "should" look like and who they "should" be, thus creating an extra condition in order for them to succeed. In fact, my findings show that *Stella* actually works to fight against such ideals by promoting diverse, gender-equal and empowering portrayals of women, by creating a strong focus on the "backstage" elements of their readers' lives rather than just the "frontstage" elements, and by employing a rhetoric of choice regarding whether to participate in beauty practices or not. As Wolf says, it is the promotion of this rhetoric of choice that serves as a key element to fighting against the beauty myth, in that it puts the power back into women's hands to decide for themselves, rather than having to conform to the oppressive order of extra conditions that is being set for them by others.

Based on my analysis material, the average issue of *Stella* consists of 31% advertisements and 69% editorial content, and it is between these two elements that we see the main source of contradictory messages regarding the beauty myth. The majority of advertisements are for makeup and/or body products, jewelry and clothing, and are thus aimed at getting readers to purchase things for the body. This is reminiscent of the beauty myth, in that it works to create a sense of dissatisfaction with one's appearance as it is, and thus encourages women to participate in beauty work so as to "fix" what "is not good enough." The rhetoric these advertisements elicit, together with the more traditional and often times submissive portrayal of women in the ads, works to uphold the oppressive order that places an extra condition (the beauty myth) upon women. It communicates that they must participate in this beauty code in order for them to be good enough to succeed.

These portrayals of women and femininity are vastly different than the portrayals which we see in *Stella*'s editorial content, and they seem out of place when set side by

side with the other 69% of *Stella*'s content. However, as we have seen, the contradictions that are present in *Stella* occur between the editorial content and the advertisements, not within the editorial content itself. This illustrates Naomi Wolf's ideology regarding women's magazines being caught in the middle of the identity they want to promote, and the high-paying advertisers whom they rely upon for financial support.

Through all of this, it is important to note that the front covers, magazine spine texts, letters from the editor and editorial content all correspond to the serious side (the 69%) of *Stella*, and that the advertisements correspond to the business side (the 31%). This business side shows the reality of being a commercial magazine and being dependent upon advertising money in order to be profitable, but it is in *Stella*'s serious side that we see who *Stella* actually is, as well as the portrayals of women and femininity which *Stella* truly promotes. Perhaps some of the motivation behind starting this magazine so recently, in 2011, was that people saw that there was something missing in the realm of women's magazines. Perhaps society saw a need for a different type of women's magazine – one that was more progressive, and that was not like all of the others that fill the kiosk stands. Perhaps *Stella* came about to fill this role.

During the arrangement of this year's "F-Uka," a week arranged through NTNU that is dedicated to feminist discussions and events, I happened to learn that Marta Breen was going to be giving a talk. Being that I had already used her work as a part of my thesis's theory, I decided that this was an interesting opportunity and decided to attend. During her talk, she spoke of many topics that were relevant for my study, and after her talk was finished, I had the fortunate opportunity to meet her and speak with her personally about my thesis work. When I mentioned that I was analyzing *Stella*, she immediately replied by saying that *Stella* "is actually not the worst," (my translation). She went on to say how *Stella* as a publication has had some really good people writing the content, and how they have even had feminists that have influenced the content. She added that it is, of course, still a commercial product, but that it really is not the worst when it comes to issues of feminism and oppressive beauty ideals.

Hearing this was a wonderful experience for me, as these are the findings that I had been seeing throughout my work as well. While *Stella* is still not perfect, it has proven to be a positive example in the midst of an industry that so often plays into the ideas of the beauty myth. Having a magazine like *Stella* fits well with the culture of Norway's progressive gender-equality milieu. Having a magazine that promotes strong, independent, career-minded portrayals of women feels very appropriate. My experience with Norway as a whole is that one can clearly see the effects of gender-equality efforts, in that female roles are not so gender conforming, and in that there is a broader acceptance for gender expression as being a spectrum, rather than being binary.

That being said, I would encourage *Stella* to continue on the path of their efforts. *Stella* presents a more varied and overall tougher image of femininity, though I would say that the publication could stand to include an even wider range of, for example, careers, body types and styles. In addition, I would encourage *Stella* to feature more everyday-level products, rather than the luxury items which the average reader cannot afford.

I believe that there is much that can be learned about our current society through the examination of women's magazines, and I feel that this subject area would benefit from further research into these topics. For example, I feel that it would be worthwhile to go deeper into the editorial process of *Stella*, looking at the system of how content gets suggested, why the staff choose to write the things they write, and how much influence their advertisers actually have. Additionally, I believe much knowledge could be gained by expanding this examination into an international study that includes a cross-cultural analysis of multiple different women's magazines, looking at the same questions I have looked at for *Stella*, in order to examine any trends and/or differences regarding the portrayal of women throughout women's magazines of various cultures.

Overall, I feel that *Stella*'s contributions to the field of women's magazines are very positive, and I wholeheartedly believe that having more publications like *Stella* would be a step in the right direction for our society, and for future generations to come.

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