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**A Matter of Time:**  
An Exploration of Gender in *Time Magazine* Covers  
Since 1965

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### **Abstract**

Gender is a concept that influences almost all cultures as we know them. Current literature on this topic argues that gender is not an innate characteristic of society, but rather it is socially constructed and maintained by family, peers, and institutions. The main goal of this study is to illuminate the ways in which the news media maintains the dichotomous gender system by portraying men and women in gender-stereotypical roles. This study contributes to existing literature about gender in the media as it pertains to news media, rather than advertising or media targeted at one gender such as women's or men's magazines. A content and textual analysis was done on *U.S. TIME Magazine* covers from 1965-2014 that examined adult human figures in relation to body display, theme, gender, facial presence, and clothing type. Results indicated that gender had a significant relationship with all other variables, supporting hypotheses about gender-stereotypical roles.

Gender is a concept that virtually structures almost all societies and influences most cultures as we know them. In many cultures, for example, there are separate bathrooms for men and women, different toys for boys and girls, different socially acceptable ways of dressing as a man or a woman, and different standards for behaving (both emotionally and physically) for males and females. According to Irvine (2006), gender “consists of the cultural norms and expectations about how to be masculine and feminine” (p. 39). These norms and expectations guide how most people adhere to (or “do”) the gender system in a way that is purposeful and deliberate (West & Zimmerman, 1987). The notion of gender is so pervasive in contemporary culture that many believe it is an unchangeable and inherent fact of life (Carrera, DePalma, & Lameiras, 2012). Yet, current literature on this topic argues that gender is not an innate characteristic of society, but rather the gender system and its implications are socially constructed. Furthermore, the social construction of the gender system is maintained and perpetuated on a daily basis by family members, peers, and institutions (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003; Berrie, 1993; Butler 1990, & Martin, 1998, as cited in Hamilton, 2007; Charles, 2011; Craig, 1992; Helliwell, 2000; Hollander, 2001; Marsiglio, 2009; Pleck, Sonenstein, & Ku, 1994 as cited in Courtenay, 2000; West & Zimmerman, 1978).

One such institution that is the primary focus of this study is the American media system. It is no secret that the media has the power to influence, reinforce, and perhaps change cultural and social norms and beliefs in society. In fact, news-related media directly influences what messages, images, current events, and social problems the public is exposed to by selecting what to report as well as how to report it (Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, & Sasson, 1992). The media also tells us what to think about and how to do it (Pratkanis & Aronson, 2000). Previous research has gathered evidence to suggest that the media has a strong influence on the way people think,

behave, and make decisions (Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, & Sasson, 1992; Irvine, 2006; Signorielli, 1993, as cited in Reichert, 2005; Tal-Or, Cohen, Tsfati, & Gunther, 2010). The main goal of this study is to illuminate the ways in which the print news media maintains the dichotomous gender system by frequently portraying men and women in gender-stereotypical roles.

A significant amount of media, such as advertising and magazines, influence how gender roles and norms are seen by the public. A message that American culture continuously reinforces is the idea that gender is natural and inherent (Reis, 2009). Marketers and writers in the media can perpetuate this incorrect belief by portraying men and women differently in terms of gender norms and roles. Another goal of this project is to reduce this essentialist view of gender, which claims that gender consists of “fundamental attributes that are conceived as internal, [and] persistent” (Bohan, 1993, p. 7).

This project investigated how understandings about gender have been reflected and reproduced in the media over the last fifty years in the United States. More specifically, it looked at how *U.S. TIME Magazine* covers have portrayed men and women from 1965 to 2014. Most previous research has focused on how advertising and other marketing areas of the media have influenced the way people think about gender, but there is little research that deals with this influence from the news media (Craig, 1992). For example, Paff and Lakner (1997) studied the depictions of women in magazine advertisements directed toward female audiences from 1950-1994, and how “women’s dress has been used in magazine advertisements to socially construct the female gender role” (p. 35). They found that women were depicted in hedonic roles (physically attractive, dependent, decorative, emphasized physical appearance, etc.) significantly more often than in agonic roles (aggressive, strong, experts, achievement, independence, etc.) by

such advertisements (p. 39). An and Kim (2006), examined the difference between web advertisements' portrayals of gender roles between Korean and American cultures. They carried out a content analysis of more than 400 web advertisements. They hypothesized that Korean web ads (being from a more "feminine society [that] values relationships" (p. 190)) would more often feature people in relational roles and that U.S. web ads (being from a more "masculine culture that strives for material success, achievement and productivity" (p. 190)) would more often depict people in "production situations" (p. 190), as well as that Korean ads would be more likely to have women as the main character (p. 191). An and Kim (2006) found that their data supported all of these hypotheses.

In addition to the media, there has even been previous research about how images in educational textbooks portray gender. For example, Love and Park (2013) examined depictions of gender in criminal justice and criminology textbooks. They found that men were the "most visually dominant in textbook pictures," being depicted three times more often than women (p. 328). Also, the same researchers found that women were more often portrayed as victims than were men. Another study by Táboas-Pais and Rey-Cao (2012) examined gender portrayals in Spanish physical education textbooks. These researchers, too, found that males dominated images found in such textbooks. They also found that males were depicted more often in competitive athletic environments whereas females were depicted in non-competitive athletic environments. Both of these studies demonstrate the prevalence of stereotypical gender portrayals in educational textbooks. These studies reveal another mechanism for the perpetuation of a dichotomous gender system. Although previous research has focused on marketing and education institutions in relation to gender portrayal, the focus of this study was the news media.

*U.S. TIME Magazine* covers were chosen for this study because as a news magazine, its intended audience is the American population, in contrast to magazines like *Cosmopolitan* which is intended for a female audience or *Sports Illustrated* which targets a male audience. Magazines targeted specifically at men or at women tend to portray gendered bodies more often and in more specific ways (e.g. *Cosmopolitan* often presents extremely feminine depictions of women, whereas *Sports Illustrated* emphasizes very masculine aspects of the male gender). Since the intended audience for a news magazine like *U.S. TIME* is simply the American population, the target audience is presumed to include all genders. In order to carry out this analysis, five aspects of adult humans on *TIME Magazine* covers were examined: body display, the main theme of the cover, the gender of a figure or figures depicted on the cover, the presence of a face, and the type of clothing on each figure.

One objective of this study was to examine the relationship between body display and gender in order to provide insight into how the media portrays beliefs about gender as well as social expectations of gender. The typical “feminine beauty ideal” emphasizes physical attractiveness as the most important quality that a woman should have (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003). I hypothesized that men would be more likely to have a face or portrait body display, as opposed to women who would be more likely to have their entire body shown on the cover.

Another goal of this study was to provide a better understanding of how cultural beliefs about differences between men and women are socially constructed rather than naturally inherent by looking at the different themes associated with a gender category. Masculinity is more frequently associated with politics (Jaworska & Larrivé, 2011) and men are more often in positions of political power than are women (Craig, 1992), and masculinity is more often

associated with physical strength and dangerousness (Hollander, 2001). Moreover, males are usually perceived to have better skills when it comes to STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) areas of study (Charles, 2011). I hypothesized that men, or masculinity, would more often be associated with themes such as politics, sports, science, violence, and war.

An additional goal of this study was to see how many times men were depicted on the covers as compared to women. Because American society and culture tends to favor a patriarchal system and men appear significantly more often in news media than women (Craig, 1992), I hypothesized that there would be a greater number of men and more masculine depictions on the magazine covers than the number of women or feminine depictions. Furthermore, it was predicted that men would more likely have their faces visible on the covers whereas women would less often have their faces visible while more often have their bodies emphasized on the covers. Also, it was predicted that men would more often be displayed wearing formal clothing.

Finally, another goal of this study was to investigate whether the media's portrayal of gender has changed over the last fifty years. There exist both similarities and differences regarding the way the media has portrayed gender today compared to fifty years ago. In order to see where and when changes occurred, and how the news media, specifically *U.S. TIME Magazine*, influences the social construction of gender, it is necessary to explore the content of these magazine covers from the last fifty years. This study will contribute to the existing body of literature about gender in the media as it pertains to news media, rather than media targeted at one gender such as women's or men's magazines. An advantage of employing a news magazine for this project rather than a men's or women's magazine is that it targets all genders, perhaps eliminating the biased or extreme depictions of gender often found in magazines targeting specifically women or men. A content and textual analysis was chosen for this study because it



has been deemed quite useful for gender research that aims to examine “messages containing information about sex and gender roles” in the media (Neuendorf, 2011, p. 276).

## **Methods**

### **Procedure**

The first cover of every month that depicted an adult human was used, resulting in about twelve covers per year for the fifty year period. Only those covers depicting adult humans were used. Covers including only children were excluded from this study, while covers depicting both child(ren) and adult human(s) were used, but the adult(s) were the only subject(s) analyzed. Coding of the images was done using Microsoft Excel 2010. Statistical tests were employed using SPSS to analyze the data to determine if there were any significant relationships between the variables that were coded. *TIME Magazine* covers from January of 1965 to December of 2014 were obtained from *TIME's* magazine archives from their online website. A total of 607 cover images were downloaded onto a Google Drive folder as well as a USB drive that served as a back-up. The images were sorted by year. The data for coding the images was kept in a Microsoft Excel file and saved to the same Google Drive folder and USB drive. A total of 934 figures were analyzed.

### **Coding**

Each *TIME* cover image was coded for the following five variables. The images were named according to the date they were published by *TIME*. Because some covers displayed more than one adult human figure on the same cover, each figure was treated as its own entry in the data set. Coding for multiple figures was only done if they were equally prominent on the cover. For example, the cover published on May 20<sup>th</sup>, 1991 displayed eight, equally prominent adult

human figures. Multiple figures were coded from left to right and top to bottom according to where they were located on the cover. The first human figure was titled “05/20/1991a,” the next, “05/20/1991b,” etc.

**Body Display.** Body display was analyzed according to how much of a figure’s body was displayed on the cover, whether clothed or not. “F” signified that only the face of a figure was visible on the cover. This included the silhouette of a face as well as the neck. “P” signified that a portrait display of a figure was visible on the cover, meaning the head, face, neck, shoulders and any part of the torso above the waist. “W” signified that a figure’s body from the waist-up was visible on the cover. “B” signified that the figure’s whole body was displayed on the cover. This included the head/face, torso, legs, and arms. “L” signified that only a limb or limbs of the figure were displayed on the cover. This included any hands, arms, feet, and legs.

**Theme.** The main theme of the cover or theme of the message on the cover was coded using eight categories. Occasionally, a *TIME Magazine* cover would have additional images or messages located in the top right-hand corner of the cover. These small images and messages were not central to the cover’s main theme or message and therefore were not included in this study. “POL” signified that the cover’s main theme or message was related to politics. Examples include anything related to a president, world leader, or political movements. “E” signified that the cover’s main message or theme was related to entertainment. Examples include any form of performance, music, art, literature, film, and television or radio program. “W” signified anything related to war. “SC” signified that the main message or theme was related to any area of science or technology. “SP” signified that a cover’s main message was related to sports or an athlete of any kind. “R” signified that a cover’s main message or theme was related to religion. “V” signified that the main message or theme of the cover was related to violence (not associated

with violence due to war). “MI” signified that the main message or theme of the cover was not readily identifiable as belonging to any of the other existing thematic categories and thus was regarded as “miscellaneous.”

**Male/Female.** The gender of the depicted figure was coded based on whether the figure was readily and obviously identifiable as being portrayed as a man or a woman. If the gender wasn’t readily identifiable as a man or woman, it was unspecified. “M” signified a male figure, “F” signified a female figure, and “U” signified that a figure wasn’t readily identifiable as a male or female.

**Face.** For each cover, the visibility or presence of a face on a figure was coded as either “Y” for yes (the face is present/visible), or “N” for no (the face is not present or visible).

**Clothing.** The type of clothing that was displayed on each figure was coded using the following five categories. “F” signified formal clothing, such as a suit and tie, a formal dress, or any other business-like or professional clothing. “SF” signified semi-formal clothing on a figure, including button-up shirts or blouses. This category falls between clothing that is seen as formal and clothing seen as casual. “C” signified that the figure wore casual clothing that is not meant to be formal or professional in any way. “Unknown” signified that, although it was obvious that the figure was wearing clothing, the type of clothing was not readily identifiable as formal, semi-formal, or casual. This category was often used for figures that were also coded in the body display category as “F” (just a face/neck showing). “None visible” signified that the figure wore no clothes in the image or what was showing of the figure’s body had no clothing on it.

## Results

Of all the 934 figures that were analyzed, 74.7% (N=698) were men and 21.2% (N=198) were women.

**Gender and Body Display.** A chi-square test for independence was performed to examine the relationship between gender and body display. Table 1 shows the test results for body display by gender. It was hypothesized that men would be more likely to have a face or portrait body display, as opposed to women who would be more likely to have their entire body shown on the cover. Results supported the hypothesis that men would be more likely to have a face or portrait body display, but it was not supported that women would be more likely to have their whole body (B) displayed. It was shown that there was a significant relationship between gender and the body display of a figure on the cover,  $X^2(8, N = 934) = 203.78, p < .001$ . Men were four times as likely as women to be shown with a face (F) body display or a portrait (P) body display.

**Gender and Theme.** . A chi-square test for independence was performed to examine the relationship between gender and theme of the cover. Table 2 shows the test results for theme by gender. It was hypothesized that men, or masculinity (as opposed to women and femininity), would more often be associated with themes such as politics, sports, science, violence, and war. Results supported this hypothesis. Results indicated that there was a significant relationship between gender and theme of the cover,  $X^2(14, N = 934) = 125.70, p < .001$ . In fact, for all themes, men were more often depicted than were women. Politics and war were the most notable themes. Of all the men depicted on the covers, 33.6% of them were associated with politics while only 5.2% of women were. Also, of all the men on the covers, 8.6 of them were associated with war while only 0.6% of women were.

**Gender and Face.** A chi-square test for independence was performed to examine the relationship between gender and the presence of a face on the cover. Table 3 shows the test results for face by gender. It was predicted that men would more likely have their faces visible on the covers whereas women would less often have their faces visible while more often have their bodies emphasized on the covers. Results supported this hypothesis. It was shown that there

was a significant relationship between gender and the presence of a face,  $X^2(2, N = 934) = 210.01$ ,  $p < .00$ . Men accounted for 70.6% of all figures that showed a face (Y), while women accounted for only 20.6%.

**Gender and Clothing.** A Chi-square test for independence was performed to examine the relationship between gender and the type of clothing worn by each figure. Table 4 shows the test results for clothing by gender. It was predicted that men would more often be displayed wearing formal clothing than would women. Results supported this hypothesis. Results indicated that there was a significant relationship between gender and clothing,  $X^2(10, N = 934) = 91.78$ ,  $p < .001$ . Of all the figures depicted wearing formal clothing, 44.1% of them were men, while only 8.1% of them were women.

Table 1

Results of Chi-square Test for Body Display by Gender

Body display	Gender	
	Male	Female
F- Face	253 (27.1%)	64 (6.9%)
P- Portrait	280 (30.0%)	69 (7.4%)
W- Waist	56 (50.8%)	11 (1.2%)
B- Body	107 (11.5%)	54 (5.8%)
L- Limb	2 (0.2%)	0 (0%)

Note.  $X^2 = 203.78^*$ ,  $df = 8$ .

\* $p < .001$

Table 2

*Results of Chi-square Test for Theme by Gender*

Theme	Gender	
	Male	Female
E- Entertainment	85 (9.1%)	47 (5.0%)
MI- Miscellaneous	92 (9.9%)	53 (5.7%)
POL- Politics	314 (33.6%)	49 (5.2%)
R- Religion	22 (2.4%)	5 (.5%)
SC- Science	67 (7.2%)	21 (2.2%)
SP- Sports	16 (1.7%)	10 (1.1%)
V- Violence	22 (2.4%)	7 (0.7%)
W- War	80 (8.6%)	6 (0.6%)

Note.  $X^2 = 125.70^*$ ,  $df = 14$ .

\* $p < .001$ .

Table 3

*Results of Chi-square Test for Face by Gender*

Face (Y/N)	Gender	
	Male	Female
Y- Yes	659 (70.6%)	192 (20.6%)
N- No	39 (4.2%)	6 (0.6%)

Note.  $X^2 = 210.04^*$ ,  $df = 2$ .

\* $p < .001$ .

Table 4

*Results of Chi-square Test for Clothing by Gender*

Clothing Type	Gender	
	Male	Female
C- Casual	147 (15.7%)	70 (7.5%)
SF- Semi-Formal	33 (3.5%)	7 (0.7%)
F- Formal	413 (44.2%)	76 (8.1%)
None Visible	69 (7.4%)	22 (2.4%)
Unknown	36 (3.9%)	23 (2.5%)

*Note.*  $X^2 = 91.78^*$ ,  $df = 8$ .

\* $p < .001$ .

### Discussion

The results of this study are highly consistent with the results of previous research about this topic. Just as Love and Park (2013) and Táboas-Pais and Rey-Cao (2012) found in their studies, this study too found that men and masculine depictions dominated the images found in the media that was examined. Craig's (1992) claim that men appear significantly more often in news media than women is also supported by this study. This research further demonstrates that the news media, in addition to advertising and other forms of marketing institutions, also perpetuates the dichotomous gender system by portraying men and women in accordance with socially-acceptable norms and expectations of gender. The fact that men were more often associated with politics and war reflects the idea that politics is perceived as a more masculine area of work (Jaworska & Larrivéé, 2011), as well as that the gender system maintains the idea

that aggression, physical strength, and dangerousness should be displayed by men and not women (Hollander, 2001).

Although this researcher is confident that this study was thorough and provides important information regarding gender portrayals of gender in the news media, there exist some limitations to this study. For example, only one person coded all of the cover images. This fact brings up the possibility that another coder would not agree with the original coder's decisions about the categories to which some covers belong. The absence of inter-rater reliability in this study calls for future research to repeat this study using more than just one coder. Another limitation of this study is that only one kind of statistical test was used to analyze the collected data (Chi-square test for independence), and therefore it was not discovered if there were any trends in the data from 1965-2014. The only aspect of the data that was able to be tested was whether or not there were any significant relationships between them. In order to see if there are any differences regarding the way the news media portrays gender today as compared to fifty years ago, statistical tests that examine data trends in categorical data should be employed in future studies similar to this one. A third limitation of this study is that not all of the conditions were met for one variable in order to perform a valid chi-square test. In order to be able to perform a chi-square test, certain conditions must be met. One such condition is that no more than 20% of the expected counts for each categorical variable should be less than five. For "Theme" 20.8% had expected counts less than five. However, this is extremely close to the threshold required for a valid chi-square test, and so it was decided that the chi-square test for this variable should still be performed and reported.

This project strengthens the argument that gender is a socially constructed system. The "ideal feminine beauty" that emphasizes physical attractiveness above all else (Baker-Sperry &



Grauerholz, 2003), as well as the preference for a patriarchal society in American culture (Craig, 1992) are reflected in this study. The focus on men's faces more often than women's faces shows how the female face is not as important as her body, as well as that a man's identity or face is more central to a message than is his body. These findings suggest that the news media perpetuate the construction of gender as a system by depicting men as objects of power and women as objects of beauty. This research also supports the notion that the media both reflects and maintains our current understandings of gender in America. The idea that gender is not inherent or natural (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003; Berrie, 1993; Butler 1990, & Martin, 1998, as cited in Hamilton, 2007; Charles, 2011; Craig, 1992; Helliwell, 2000; Hollander, 2001; Marsiglio, 2009; Pleck, Sonenstein, & Ku, 1994 as cited in Courtenay, 2000; West & Zimmerman, 1978) is illuminated by current and previous research. In order for this idea to reach the public and to change this incorrect notion, it is necessary that we recognize the multitude of influences and institutions that maintain the gender system, especially the American media.

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