

Dude Reads Like a Lady



A Man's 8-step guide to reading women's magazines

BY DERRICK TAYLOR

As a magazine lover, I often find myself floating around the racks of magazines at Barnes & Noble during my spare time. There is one large rack that attracts me more than any other — the one that's filled with stacks of *Elle*, *O*, *Glamour* and their sister titles. As a man, I do feel a bit self-conscious fumbling around in the presumed for-women-only section, and I sometimes get odd looks and glares from women. But I quickly get over it when I pick up one of those glossy, feminine magazines and dive into its pages.

No matter how hard I try to push myself over to the men's-interest section, I never stay there long. Standing in front of the men's rack, I instantly get bored by the lack of variety in the magazines, most of which are focused on sports, cars and girls. So, I glide back to the comforts of the women's section and re-enter another world — a world that I think has plenty to offer to other male readers, if they're willing to defy society's norms and plunge in.

What is it that women's magazines have to offer to the male population? Plenty of things. I'll sort them into eight themes: 1. Visual and Design, 2. Intimacy, 3. Fashion, 4. Finance, 5. Stress Release, 6. Self-organization, 7. Sex and Relationships, and 8. Health.

Visual and Design Visual appeal is always hard to describe in words. You have to see it to appreciate it. But take a look at *Elle* and *Essence*, guys. They put the mostly lackluster layouts of men's magazines to shame. Their bright and warm color palettes, their mixtures of vivid hues with photographs and striking layouts challenge conventional thinking about design.

Essence is known for using passionate purples and blues to draw attention to its pages and make an impact on the reader. *Elle's* silhouetted fashions leap off the page. Even if I don't actually stop to read the text on these pages, I'm always amazed at the beauty of the magazines and the way the colors shift from page to page.

PHOTOGRAPH BY DERRICK TAYLOR

Intimacy In *Cosmopolitan*, no topic, no matter how embarrassing, is off limits. For example, there is always a “Cosmo Gyno Q&A” in the Health Check section of the magazine. “Cosmo Gyno” typically advises readers on how to care for their vaginas, from routine checkups to after-sex care. I, of course, don’t have a vagina, but I love the fact that *Cosmo* cares enough about health to break down the door and discuss taboo topics that desperately need to be talked about.

The March issue’s Q&A starts off with: “Can washing after sex lower my STD risk?” *Cosmo* responds: “In theory, it makes sense that you may be able to wash STD-causing bacteria or viruses out of your vagina before they have a chance to infect you ... But it won’t work, says Udele Tagoe, an ob-gyn in Philadelphia. It takes only a second or two for germs to glom onto the skin and/or body fluids inside and around your vagina, allowing them to enter your system and trigger an infection. The only way to reduce your STD risk substantially (but not completely) is always to use condoms.”

I find this candid conversation inspiring. I wish men’s magazines would cover how to care for your penis if you’re sexually active or, simply, give safe-sex tips, but I think they’re too uptight to even approach the topic.

Fashion *Elle* and *Harper’s Bazaar* provide some of the best fashion advice I have seen in any magazine, men’s or women’s. Although their pages are ostensibly for women, the new trends and styles they display can be applied to a man’s wardrobe.

For example, a collage in the March issue of *Elle* highlights fatigues as a spring trend. The spread shows heels and skirts in fatigue prints, but I see that as motivation to try on a new army fatigue jacket or buy accessories with gunmetal finishes or bullet accents to achieve the same effect. The April issue of *Harper’s Bazaar* features a sailor-themed spread. Those patterns and colors inspired me to look for similar items, like blue-and-white-striped shirts and boat shoes in the men’s section of H&M and Ralph Lauren, so that I, too, could feel like part of the yacht club.

Styling tips, if thoroughly understood, can transcend gender; I pick up a few new ones every month. Yes, *GQ* and *Details* provide styling tips for men, but they’re repetitious. There are only so many ways to wear a suit. And there are only so many times I’m going to read about it.

Finance Who doesn’t want to learn how to save a little money? Women’s magazines tend to be tactful — and often creative — when showing readers how to handle their finances. Because I read *O*, I’m well on my way to becoming a financial wizard! The March issue brings in financial expert Suze Orman to explain how to declutter those file boxes filled with old bank statements and bills. “I have a surefire way to build wealth that won’t cost you a penny,” writes Orman. “You’re going to clean up your finances by trashing old paperwork that serves no purpose other than as a dust magnet, and develop a system for keeping your important documents, bills and statements organized.”

She then gives step-by-step instructions on how to organize it all, starting by sorting everything into six piles: 1. Monthly Bills, Bank Statements and Pay Stubs, 2. Investment Statements, 3. Tax Returns and Supporting Documents, 4. Policy Documents and Deeds, 5. Warranties and User Manuals, and 6. Forever Documents. Orman then tells you what to do with each pile and how to discard unneeded documents. Sure, *Smart Money* can provide similar advice, but I prefer *O* because I’m partial to Orman’s direct language; she’s just the drill sergeant I need.

Stress Release *O* again, in the same March issue, features a column by Martha Beck, who uses a kayaking metaphor to help readers navigate the waves of life, enumerating four paddling skills everyone should have. “Paddling Skill

#1: Don’t swallow the river,” she writes, meaning that you shouldn’t try to handle every demand or request that reaches you. “That’s like trying to drink the Nile. You just can’t do everything. You shouldn’t.”

Beck advises you to ask yourself two questions before you commit to anything. “1. Is this task absolutely necessary to keep my life afloat? 2. Does this task buoy me up emotionally?” The paddling skills in the rest of the article focus on helping you live your best life. I look forward to her monthly advice because she often gets to the root of my stress, and her suggestions are easy to follow, even with a busy schedule like mine.

Self-organization *Essence* dispenses advice for black women on everything from health and beauty to race and politics, but the advice is gender-neutral, and I suspect that white people could use it as well. The Work and Health section in the April issue has “The 2010 Black Woman’s Tech Guide.” It spells out nine simple ways to save money and time online, with references to specific websites. Want to organize your life? You can use a site called Agendus to integrate “your calendar, contacts, tasks and memos in one place.” Need to keep track of bills you have or haven’t paid? Record Your Bills is a program that keeps track. I found that it was exactly what I needed when dealing with expenditures involving unpredictable roommates.

Organizational tips in women’s magazines tend to be simpler and more practical than what you find in men’s magazines.

Sex and Relationships Believe it or not, I always learn something from the sex advice columns in *Cosmopolitan*. And they talk about real situations and feelings. For example, *Cosmo*’s March issue dishes out “8 ways to Feel Closer After Sex,” an idea that would never occur to men’s magazines. Clinical sexologist Rachel Ross says, “When you orgasm, hormones are released that make you feel more connected.” She advises, “Upgrade your usual postsex shower by giving each other neck rubs,” and goes on to explain why.

Her most useful tip: “Before you get busy, turn off anything with an on button, like your cell phones, laptops, and T.V.” Nothing kills the mood faster than mom calling to talk about grandma’s swollen feet.

Health For health advice, go to *Self*. The April issue, for example, features 50 foods that can improve your health. “The food on your plate has the power to brighten your mood, heal your muscles, help prevent cancer, ward off weight gain and more — as long as you choose the right bites,” the article asserts. It covers 13 health issues you may encounter and provides food choices for each of them.

I sometimes suffer from headaches, and I learned that pumpkin seeds could wipe my headaches away. “Roughly 50 percent of headache sufferers are magnesium-deficient,” says Dr. Alexander Mouskop of the New York Headache Center. “The nutrient (also in spinach and potatoes) relaxes blood vessels in the brain, preventing and alleviating headaches. Crunch 2 ounces of toasted pumpkin seeds to achieve your daily magnesium need. Toss them on a salad or blend them into molé sauce.” To battle sore muscles after an intense workout, often a problem for me, *Self* recommends eating almonds, which I now munch on regularly.

When it comes to the health of its readers, women’s magazines think about every bone and muscle that may ache or give you trouble.

It seems to me that those are eight good reasons for men to read women’s magazines. If you’re a man reading this and you haven’t picked up the magazines your girlfriend is reading, do yourself a favor and take a look. You have nothing to lose and a lot to gain by entering a world beyond the one you share with your sweaty gym buddies. Put your ego aside. Put your misconceptions to rest. Open your mind and open the pages of what may be the most valuable, life-enhancing information booklets to be found on magazine racks. 