

MAXIM-IZING PROFIT: NEW MEN'S MAGAZINES AND THE RISE  
OF CONSUMER MASCULINITY

by

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## ABSTRACT

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This is content analysis of Maxim magazine, published by Dennis Publications, and first appearing in American newsstands in 1997. Maxim is the most widely circulated men's magazine in the United States, with an estimated paid readership of around 2.5-3 million, and an estimated total readership of around 13 million. When combined with other magazines of the genre, which I distinguish as new men's magazines, the estimated total readership is around 26 million regular readers. Maxim's popularity and appeal are undeniable, and this project is an exploratory study dedicated to finding out exactly what the magazine offers which allows it to attract and maintain such a large audience. I have examined form and content, with the goal of being able to discuss with some certainty the degree to which Maxim's claim as an entertainment first

magazine, dedicated to, “address(ing) the real life needs of intelligent professional men in an entertaining as well as informative way,” stands up under close scrutiny.

In the end, I find that Maxim’s claim does not stand up at all. Though they do undoubtedly prove a source of entertainment for their readers, a close look reveals that they are more interested in attracting and retaining advertising revenue. Maxim is filled with stunted articles that utilize a series of clever and manipulative methods to indoctrinate their readership into the culture of consumption, all while hiding behind a banner of purposeful political incorrectness, that they claim liberates the most primal needs of the male psyche. To quote a former Maxim editor, “guys know they have their inner swine rooting around in there somewhere, and they are dying to let it out.” In truth Maxim, is less interested in their readers’ inner swine, and more interested in creating a better male consumer to the delight of their biggest advertising backers. I provide examples throughout the study which support my claim that Maxim is no different than any other culture industry artifact, albeit it more effective than most, in that it serves only the needs of those who stand to profit most from consumerism running out of control—the elite, who are motivated by the age-old capitalist agenda.

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## CHAPTER 1

### PROLOGUE-- WHY CRITICAL THEORY?

“They ask me where the hell I’m going? At a thousand feet per second, hey man slow down, slow down, idiot, slow down...”

Radiohead, The Tourist

We live in an accelerated age. Postmodernity is a hyperkinetic state-- moving much faster than the human mind has become accustomed to in its short evolutionary history. Our closest animal ancestors live in a slow moving world where days plot by with relatively simple aims of food, shelter, and kinship with others of their species, a state of being not unlike human prehistory. As our will and imagination have grown, our social interactions have become increasingly complex, and the pressures resulting from our shared obligations to civilization have created a unique effect. Humans, unlike their animal ancestors, must adapt to an existence that alters our perception of time and space dramatically. Advancements in quantum physics, suggest that we have only begun to understand the way that the speed at which we conduct our lives affects our perception of time and distance.

In the last one hundred years, the advent of modern technologies has facilitated the acceleration of our activities to levels previously unimaginable. Where a trip to the other

side of the country was a dangerous and protracted journey a century ago, today we look at the furthest reaches of space and ponder how we can make the flight as short as possible. It is all within our reach, you can feel it just at the edge of perception-- an era marked by movement at high speed.

What is the effect on the individual self? What does this acceleration mean for Joshua Olsberg, or anyone else for that matter? These are the questions that critical theorists must ask. Critical theorists gently apply the brakes and if only briefly, slow down just enough to notice the surroundings. We concern ourselves not only with how things are, but why things are the way they are, and whether this is acceptable in building a good society. Critical analysis cannot be done without an element of bias on the observer's part affecting the outcome of the research. Some might argue that this removes critical theory from the realm of science, and essentially renders critical theorists glorified editorialists. I would argue that a distancing from the science that critics hold aloft so proudly, that science modeled after Newtonian physics, is a positive one. Newtonian principles, and the scientific method, have to an extent, proven to have similar pitfalls to other systems of knowledge (see Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*). In physics, the oldest of the hard sciences which Sociology as a discipline has patterned itself after, the Newtonian model relied upon for centuries was blown out of the water in the early part of the last century by the minds of Einstein, Heisenberg, and their contemporaries in favor of the principles of relativity. Even Einstein, as a product of Western culture which so completely embraces the Newtonian model, could not accept

that there was not a master plan which could explain and predict all there was and is to know in the universe—an endgame that Newton founded modern science upon. In the time since Einstein, everything quantum physics has uncovered has verified that we simply cannot know all there is to know about particular entities, instead, we can know aspects of their nature at the expense of knowledge of other aspects of their nature. Uncertainty at work--

So perhaps Sociology as a form of discourse can follow physics, just not the physics of old. We can choose not to attempt to remove our bias from our work through rigorous mathematical methodologies, but admit them openly, and work moving forward with the ideal that we may not be capable of uncovering the grand social theory that our sociological forefathers envisioned. What will separate us from editorialists is our commitment to the discipline and our contribution to the sum of human knowledge. I do not advocate a complete abandonment of science, but a reevaluation of its aims. Critical theorists can be the quantum physicists of the social realm, conducting experiments that allow us to slow down phenomena just enough to examine their nature from our own unique perspective. We will not discount science, but we will not discount intuition or imagination either—a new ontology, for an age lived at light speed.

Intuition is what led me to conduct this research. Why Maxim, because it is interesting, widespread, and somewhat of an anomaly in respect to the rest of print media.



## CHAPTER 2

### THEN CAME MAXIM

“Four years ago, the country was drowning in political correctness. A joke in the wrong elevator could get you fired. You were supposed to ask a girl if it was ok to kiss her. Black-eyes peas were known as ‘eyed peas of color.’ Remember?”

--Dennis Publishing, 2001

Maxim magazine hit newsstands in the United States in April of 1997. Maxim blended sexual content, political incorrectness, and all out frat-boy antics unlike any men’s magazine had before. From 1997 to 2001, Maxim’s paid circulation grew to between 2.1 and 2.5 million, making it by far and away the most widely circulated men’s lifestyle magazine in the country. Maxim is now the most popular men’s lifestyle magazine in the world. It’s circulated American readership as of Fall 2005, according to Mediamark Research Inc. (MRI), is over 2.5 million, a mark that has held steady (or risen slightly) since 2001, while the magazine market as a whole has experienced a marked decline. Maxim enjoyed a meteoric rise to the top of the magazine world, and has never looked back.

Maxim is the brainchild of Felix Dennis, a shrewd British media tycoon who saw an opportunity for success in a time at which media attention toward political correctness in

the United States was at a crescendo. Much of the hype—perception of which was largely a media creation—surmised that those who would adopt “politically correct” values were liberals who meant to condemn mainstream white-male oriented culture as insensitive and archaic. The supposed consensus among Pro-PC parties cast the white male who would not embrace politically correct ideals as oppressors who, “seek only to retain the racism and sexism that characterize some of society.” (Lalande, 318) Whether PC-ers were actually anti-white male culture or not is a debate unto itself. Proponents of PC would likely assert that the movement was less about exposing white male culture as oppressive, and more about acknowledging the inherent value of other cultures who were present in America, but lacked the respect and representation that they felt they deserved in media and politics. The reaction on the part of white males, whose cultural values had long been the dominant paradigm, and who were faced for the first time, at least in their minds, with the possibility that they would become the marginalized group, was not unforeseeable. A palpable backlash towards all things PC began to emerge. Bumper stickers on cars read, “I’d rather be right than PC!” The choice of words is not coincidence as PC was seen as a direct assault on conservative values in many circles. Dennis’s timing was perfect and the magazine took up the fight on behalf of the white, 18-40 year old male demographic, many of who may have felt as if the world they grew up in was slipping away. Maxim flew the flag of Anti-PC/ hegemonic masculine values, and readers followed their beacon directly to newsstands.

Dennis took the concept of the British 'lad' magazine and applied his content and formatting aptitude to create something that at the time was wholly unique. Maxim ignited an industry that was quickly burning out. Magazine readership was at the time (and to an extent, still is) languishing; however Maxim led the way for a group of men's magazines that would take the industry by storm. Maxim, its closest competitor FHM (published by EMAP Metro), and spin-offs Stuff and Blender (also of Dennis Publications, that focus slightly more on products and music, respectively) have forged a new genre that we can simply refer to as "New Men's Magazine's." The earmarks of the genre are most clearly defined in Maxim, so for the purposes of this study we will delve into just what the dominant ethos featured in the magazine tells us about its purpose in the marketplace, and its intended effect on its readers. Throughout the study for the sake of brevity, I will refer to the genre of New Men's Magazine as NMM's.

### 2.1 Just How Big are NMM's and Who Reads Them?

To understand the impact of this social artifact, it is important to make a distinction between paid circulation and the actual magazine audience. Paid circulation is the amount of subscriptions, however the number of people who read the magazine on a regular basis far exceeds the paid circulation statistics. Though over the years, there has been a debate as to how to calculate actual readership based on paid circulation, respected research entities have arrived at generally accepted methods which yield similar enough results to give the actual magazine audience (often referred to as the total audience)

statistic a high degree of validity. The total audience for Maxim is at over 13,000,000 regular readers (MRI, 2005). When you combine that with the total audiences for FHM, Stuff, and Blender as well, we see a combined total audience for the genre at around 25 million readers, about 8% of the current American population!

With an audience that large, it is easy to understand why this bears further investigation. Just who reads Maxim?

According to Maxim's own study published in early 2002, compiled using statistics from MRI, 80% of Maxim reader are males age 18-34. The median age of Maxim readers is 25 years old, and 64% are unmarried. The median household income was \$62, 668 a year, and about one quarter of Maxim readers listed a median household income of over \$100,000 a year. 73% indicated some level of college education. So we see a composite Maxim reader begin to emerge through this data. The Maxim reader is a single male around 25 years of age with a good paying job and fair level of education. Also, this reader is likely white as only 8% of Maxim readers are African American. This composite "Maxim man" is attractive to advertisers because he has money to spend, and will likely spend it on fashion or lifestyle oriented merchandise-- therefore, in the name of keeping advertisers interested, Maxim must continue to peak the interest of this reader.

Maxim's target market coincides with the potentially marginalized (or at least disillusioned) group that we addressed earlier. These men are the ones most likely to

regard the movement towards political correctness as a threat to their cultural values. That Maxim's and NMM's are popular with this crowd is not surprising, as in a way, Maxim offers them validation for feeling slighted by a society which they may perceive is denying them the most fundamental of rights-- the right to be what one is. In the minds of many men, PC is an attack of their masculinity, and reading Maxim allows them to reclaim some portion of that.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE HISTORY OF THE CULTURE INDUSTRY

Prior to engaging in a critical analysis of a social object, particularly one that is media oriented, it is vital to critically analyze the nature of culture—what it means on an individual and societal level, how it is generated, by whom, and for what purpose. It is worthwhile then, to reexamine the origin and function of the culture industry.

In the early 1900's, Henry Ford demonstrated to his fellow industrialists, a more profitable way to run their businesses. Shedding antiquated ideas of production, Ford instituted the modern assembly line, which allowed him to create an incredible yield of vehicles, at a microscopic cost per unit. In turn, Ford would pass the savings to the consumer, and suddenly, the automobile was available to the large and untapped middle-class consumer base. Taking a good idea and running with it, companies across the United States, begin to ramp up production to unheard of levels.

It became evident, however, to the industrial giants of the era that the increase in production was worthless unless they could “sell through” the product. The economics of mass production demand that product not be relegated to the dusty shelves of industrial warehouses, and hence the aforementioned crisis. No longer could industry cater only to

the elite, and remain afloat. How then, could they move the enormous quantity of product necessary to turn a profit?

The answer was advertising. Industrialists throughout the 20's and 30's began to discover that in order to recruit a consumer base large enough to support production, they would need to present their product in new and enterprising ways. In response to this, the advertising industry grew exponentially along with business. Ad-companies invested large sums of money, and recruited the well-known psychologists of the day in an attempt to understand how the most basic needs of individuals could be exploited for profit. Advertising agencies began to find extremely effective ways to align the products of the companies that they represented with the perceived needs for which they were responsible for creating in consumers. Advertisements in those early days, as they still do today, relied on the conviction that individuals base their self-worth on other's perception of them. Ads take advantage of this by pushing their product as a defense for the individual against the judgmental eyes of society at large.

As early as the 1940's, the Frankfurt school had so labeled the culture industry. The Frankfurts, who by then had been forced to flee Nazi repression and relocate to California by way of New York, understood big business's need to not only manufacture a product, but manufacture a consumer as well. It was evident to Horkheimer and Adorno that the homogenization of culture for the sake of capitalist gain was pervading every aspect of the contemporary American life. They distinguished mass culture from high culture and

claimed that mass culture “no longer pretend to be art,” in fact, by virtue of labeling themselves as industries, print media film, radio and eventually television as well justify their existence, even if they churn out a uniform product that wholly lacks substance. The lack of substance is further justified by those who point out that the mere size of the audiences the industries serve requires that they package their product in a standardized fashion, and that said product would not be as widely accepted were there not a demand for such beforehand. The culture industries follow the formula originated in the more traditional industries such as automobiles and defense by using their advertising dollars to generate the need, and conveniently supply the solution.

Such is the circular nature of the culture industry, even to this day. Generating the fetish, as it was in the time of Ford, involves creating an element in the consumers mind that they are missing something which can give them status otherwise unattainable.



## CHAPTER 4

### CULTURE AND THE GLASS OF MURKY WATER

The commodification of culture is, in the measure of the Frankfurt school, the actions that the masters of production take in order to promulgate aspects of culture in such a way as to create a palpable fetish that can focus consumer desires. Whether the product comes prior to, or after this action is irrelevant—a product can be designed around the fetish, or help to create it. The product thus becomes attached to, or helps to establish its own ethos. The tenants of the ethos are inexorably linked to those who underwrite the product, and, as Brian Grant points out, “each purchase reinforces the dominant worldview.” Inevitably, the capitalist shapes mass culture as he sees fit, and he sees fit to shape culture in such a way that aligns with the perspective that has amassed him unimaginable wealth.

The Frankfurts claim that a polarization of culture occurs as those aspects of culture available to the capitalist are exploited, and that which is not remains unspoiled and is designated high culture. Indeed, Grant (CIT) suggests that there are aspects of culture, “that will not be industrialized or is safeguarded against [the intrusive nature of the culture industry].” However, an ever more saturated market economy suggests that the frontier for those aspects of culture considered ‘too sacred’ to be fetishized will continue to shrink. One need not conduct an extensive investigation to see that the boundaries of

what some may consider being sacred aspects of culture are continually pushed to extremes (pope-on-a-rope anyone?). Thus, as time moves on, and the competition for territory in the consumer pocketbook becomes more intense, the distinction between high and low (or mass) culture become less defined.

Kellner (MC) suggests that a more applicable view would be that culture be studied as a spectrum from high to low. Elements of high culture can be incorporated into the ideology established by the culture industry, while low or mass culture can have some artistic or otherwise intellectual value, and so the “spectrum point of view” allows us to understand a cultural artifact in a more dynamic way, in that we can get a snapshot of the artifact’s place in relation to others at a given point of time. Kellner points out that we need to be mindful of the differences between the way that cultural artifacts are encoded and decoded. The interpreter is the ultimate authority in deciphering the meaning of any piece of culture.

It is with this in mind that I suggest that any distinction between high and low culture for the purposes of this research be suspended. I suggest a framework that takes culture to be in its nature an uninterrupted continuum that has no real value or form until it interacts with human intuitions and interpretations. Physicists suggest that particles on the subatomic level that are observed under the watchful instruments of scientists exist in no genuine sense until they interact with the measuring tool. They theorize rather, that these particles exist in the form of a purely mathematical probability function that lends infinite

possibilities as to the nature of their existence in our reality. Once the interaction with the measuring tool occurs, one of the infinite possibilities manifests, and thus we draw the conclusion that the particle is this or that way.

In a sense, I suggest that culture exists in this same vacuum. Culture is not, until we observe that it is. Though I have not the mathematical skill to express the probability function of culture, I will attempt to create a metaphor that explains the way that our interactions and interpretations affect others perceptions, and thus appear to create, change, and manipulate culture for various ends. I believe that this metaphor lends an explanation of culture that satisfies the axioms of the probability function.

Imagine that the whole of human social interaction is a drinking glass. It is filled with a human creation called culture. Water is the best substance we can choose to complete the metaphor because of its rather mundane and yet pervasive nature. Water, like culture, is everywhere that humans are, and we cannot exist in any sense we know without it. So we have a glass filled with a stable, uniform substance that, without human interaction lacks flavor, color, or any other particularly distinguishing feature.

Now let us imagine a hand positioned over the glass. This hand is representative of human will. In the hand are pellets of dye, representative of human imagination. When the hand puts the dye pellets to use, they can change the nature of the water. When the hand drops the pellets in the glass, they hit the surface and begin to dissolve. At first the

dye is local to one particular area of that glass, but slowly, over time, it separates and becomes unrecognizable, as does the water it landed in. The two are at least in appearance altered forever. As over centuries will and imagination add to the glass, the water inside is so dense with color it appears to be a murky cesspool.

Our perception suggests that culture has qualities that can be considered high or low, popular or artistically oriented, but it depends greatly on how, when, and where we observe the events inside the glass as they transpire. We can say that culture is high culture when the dye first hits the water, and we see a dense vibrant burst of color unique to a particular location. Given a long enough time line though, the dye gravitates towards a state of homogeneity and is assimilated into the whole of culture and loses its original quality or remark ability. Or so it appears.

However, if we take a different perspective of culture, one more microscopic, we would see that individual packets of the dye, indistinguishable at low magnification, still exist when viewed with a more powerful instrument. This is why cultural artifacts can appear to have elements of both high and low culture, because we have the ability to change the microscope, and hence change the nature of what we are observing. If we can, at least in our minds, step out and away from the glass all together, we understand that culture, in its entirety, is one and the same body of water. Distinctions between high and low, sacred and profane, are nominal, and useful only in a limited capacity.

What the those who drive culture industry do, is dye the water so that it alters our perception of culture in a way which can push us to decide that we need what it is they are selling. They spend time and money attempting to predict how we will react to their addition of dye to the mix, and hope that their predictions are accurate. What distinguishes the creativity shown by culture industry and that of the artist is not necessarily the result, but the intention. At least ideally, artists create for the sake of fulfilling some internal need and for general aesthetic reasons, while culture industry minds are preoccupied solely with profit.

Rather than judge a cultural artifact as high or low based on its similarities to other cultural artifacts, we need to avoid those labels altogether, and examine the artifact in an attempt to draw conclusions as to the motivations of its creators. What is the ethos that the creator is trying to attach to this artifact, how does this benefit or injure the consumer, the manufacturer, and so on?

## CHAPTER 5

### HOW TO, THE ART OF SELF-BUILDING

How to live a life in a culture that seems to provide an unlimited set of options (read opportunities, though they usually only are judged as such when they yield a positive personal outcome, which of course lies in the eyes of the decision-maker as well as society) when it comes to crafting one's self image is something that we as members of post-modern society are confronted with on a daily basis. As such, we look to a variety of external sources, either other individuals we know or social artifacts created by individuals we do not know to help us make choices. These artifacts do carry weight in the decision-making process, which we can also refer to as the process of "self-building".

This term is by no means my own; rather it exists out in the social ether-- just do a Google search and see what you can find. One such search I did revealed the term to be part of an Islamic guide to spiritual enrichment (the next search option down the list had something to do with do-it-yourself homebuilding, the next after that was about a robot who builds its own neural pathways, thereby self-building its own brain!)

Nevertheless, I find the term is attractive in several ways. First and foremost it is simple; it lacks the convolutedness that often results in lost meaning, a problem in academic writing to be sure. It seems that if, in the process of theory building, we can satisfy our

ideas in the most basic way that the text will allow, we might lose less of the intended meaning in our finished product. Simplicity in theory building is if for nothing more than aesthetic reasons something to be pursued.

Second, it suggests reflective action on the part of the individual which, (as far we can tell) is a uniquely human quality. After all, bees are social animals but do not have the capacity to examine how they feel, or act out in anti-social ways which can propel upon that society new perspectives. To say that the capacity for self-reflection is explicitly linked to anti-social behaviors is erroneous, because historically and in modern times we can observe that self-reflection more often leads to pulling together of the social order. People experience strong social pressures toward conformity (see Solomon Asch and the line-length experiments), and self building must surely be influenced by the gravity of these pressures.

Society builds, self builds, two otherwise similar processes occurring at a different size and speed. We pull together different elements of culture to create the “I”. Are we totally in control of this process? Not necessarily, certain elements of the self (whether you believe by nature or by nurture) are likely in place before the individual reaches a point in which they are fully aware of the I; however, like the society that arises from the roots of cultures gone by the wayside, we build upon the base in a way which we perceive pleases ourselves and others around us and at least at the time seems to be progressive.

We rely upon social artifacts as evidence as to what might bring us the social currency that we desire. We pick up books, magazines, watch television and movies not solely for entertainment, but also to learn the aspects of culture which can help us through the process of self-building. It as if we seek out the how-to manual for life in these items.

Fittingly, the artifact in question in this study, Maxim magazine, has a recurring series of textboxes, often embedded in larger articles entitled “How To.” Let us examine some of these in our attempt to build the ‘Maxim man’ and identify the ethos he lives by—

Issue 79/ July 04/ p.112: “How to: Be Immortal”

This text box is basically showing the male reader how to build and bury a time capsule to explain to future humans what it is like to live in our times. The writers solicit the option of an object conservator who states that, “[to build a time capsule] put in interesting things that tell about the times.” The objects the writers suggest their readership put in the time capsule are telling of the mindset that contributes to building an interesting “maxim man.”

First on the list is a pack of Camel cigarettes. The writers encourage the reader to include these to remind a future human of the days when smoking was still “legal and fun.” Coincidentally, Camel cigarettes are a major advertiser in Maxim, their two-page ads, often appears in the front pages of a given issue. Maxim naturally places themselves and



their readership in the position of defending smoking tobacco and tobacco companies as promoters of some sort of civil liberty, and those who decry smoking as an unhealthy and expensive pastime as whiners or control freaks or bleeding heart liberal do-gooders. The fact is, however, smoking is unhealthy and expensive, and anyone who believes otherwise is diluting themselves. Though it is anyone's option to make personal choices where their own health is concerned (and it rightly should be now, and into the future!), if all we can say about these times to future humanity is that we can smoke anywhere or anytime we damn-well please, then these are truly sad times.

The second time capsule item—a bottle of Jim Beam bourbon. The writers suggest that we make the recommendation to future Earth residents that, “before making any important decisions, mull things over with a couple of bourbons on ice.” Is this humor or actual advice? The answer lies in the mind of the reader and his interpretation. As such, though the editors would likely complain to any objectors to this advice that it is simply meant to be humorous, we can count on the fact that it will not likely be interpreted as such by a percentage of readers. Let's say 3 million men read this “How to” textbox and only 1 percent miss the joke and take the quote to heart. They say to themselves, “I can have a drink or two and be in control.” That means upwards of 30,000 men may decide to “have a few” before making an important life decision. What if the decision was how to discipline their child? What if that decision was whether or not to drive over to a friend's house that night? Could a bad joke cost lives?

To say that Maxim magazine is completely responsible for whether a reader makes a poor decision concerning alcohol consumption is unfair. The readership is mostly of drinking age (though many are under 21), and adults are responsible for their own life decisions. However, to encourage rampant alcohol consumption is not by any means prudent (around 40 percent of fatal automobile accidents involve alcohol, according to a 2004 study by the National Highway Traffic safety Administration), and we have to assume that not everyone will get the joke.

Further suggestions to be put in the time capsule: a holy object (which in this case was a wind-up statue of Homer Simpson, the popular cartoon character who in many ways typifies the “Maxim man”), and well as DVD videos which could comprise a sort of moral code. The videos suggested were Goodfellas, The Three Stooges, and of course, Girls Gone Wild, the video series which pays young women to drink copious amount of alcohol and engage in generally homoerotic or auto erotic activities. What a wonderful world the past might seem to a future earthling living in Maxim’s sterile vision of the overly politically correct and apparently boring future.

Issue 83/ Nov. 2004/ p. 62: “How to: Pillow Fight. Two girls, one bed, you know what to do next.”

The article is supposed to teach a man how to induce women into pillow fighting with each other, in the hopes that that will lead to sexual exploits with himself and the women.

It lists a series of steps that man must take in order to accomplish this task. Among the tips are:

“Suggest an evening of pounding Zimas while debating the subtle nuances of The OC. Once the booze kicks in and the brainpower wears off, it’s time to get nakey.”

They also recommend turning the thermostat up so that the women will be inclined to remove excess layers of clothing. The final line of the mini-article says, “time it right and your entry into the fray could make you the meat in a tasty sorority sandwich.”

Recurring How to themes include fraternity pranks such as how to crush a beer can on your head or how to date a stripper, those which hint of violence such as how to sneak up on someone, and those which openly promote violence, such as how to kick a man when he’s down. The advice in this particular box suggests, “Aim for a soft area like the stomach, throat, or chode (perineum) to avoid injuring yourself. Wipe any blood splatters off your shoe and then depart.” The cartoon next to the caption shows a man in a wheelchair being kicked while he lays on the ground in a defensive posture.

Essentially, we see the Maxim guide to self-building as promoting a lifestyle boiled down to the pursuit of sex, violence, and alcohol or drugs. More worrisome is the fact that these are often presented in concert with one another, which is a recipe for trouble. In a society where sex crimes and violence are among the highest in the civilized world, will

exposing 25 million readers to content of this nature on a regular basis be a part of the problem or part of the solution—the answer seems obvious. Again, I will not go so far as to link directly the content presented in this medium or any medium to criminal acts, nor would I suggest that Maxim be censored in any way, but I ask in earnest if those who stand to profit from the dissemination of this material should bear at least part of the burden of responsibility. Put another way, would one of Maxim’s editors be comfortable allowing his teenage daughter to date a young man who would describe himself as an avid Maxim reader. Of course, I cannot answer for anyone else, but it is a good question to ask one’s self, particularly in light of how Maxim casts gender roles. Speaking of which, let’s take a closer look at gender.

## CHAPTER 6

### MAXIM-IZING PROFIT

“In modern industrial societies, gender identities are determined by capitalist social conditions and constructed in capitalist social relations.”

--Mary Talbot, *Language and Gender*

In the world of lifestyle and fashion magazines, in order to maximize profit, it is important to create in the reader, the clear impression of the “other” gender. Why is gender distinction so vital for advertisers-- because the retail market is simply not geared to sell to the androgynous consumer. Have you ever been to a department store that had a combined men’s and women’s clothing section? Thus, the push by advertisers in NMM’s towards the hegemonic conceptions of masculinity and femininity is requisite to perpetuate the production of gender-distinct products as they have always been, and to propel the market toward new products tailored to each distinct gender.

We see here a parallel in interests between advertisers and the creators of NMM’s. It is vital for the editors of these magazines to create a product that maintains the same antiquated gender views that advertisers so desperately attempt to thrust upon consumers, while at the same time touting a lifestyle filled with their sponsor’s products. The

common theme in NMM's is that they appeal to an urge in men that allows them to indulge and indeed revel in their "maleness". The magazines play to men's insecurities in a world that increasingly demands that they redefine their self-image. On the flip side of the coin, women's fashion magazines provide the same convenient escape from reality for women, and have done so effectively for quite some time. Elements of society and culture, whether it be other humans or cultural artifacts like magazines and movies, exert a great deal of pressure on individuals to gravitate towards one end of the gender spectrum or the other based on their biological sex. This is vital for the culture industry who has invested time and money into polarizing gender categories for financial gain.

Where are the fashion and lifestyle magazines that have no specific gender orientation? You will not find them because men's and women's fashion must exist, in the name of maximizing profit, in two completely different worlds.

Advertising executives often create campaigns designed to feminize or masculinize the consumer's self image. By the way, if one of the words in the previous sentence sounds a bit strange, you win the prize. Masculinize, is that a word? Microsoft Word, the software program I am using to types these words is giving me the crooked red line (symbolic of my lack of spelling prowess) on this. According to Merriam-Webster, it is a word, meaning to give masculine character to (an object or person). I did a quick Yahoo! Search, for feminize and found around 160,000 hits. I did the same search for masculinize and found only around 32,000 hits. Could it be that we have no need

commonly to masculinize things, because we assume that everything carries an inherently male quality, and that objects or people must be made feminine? Though that may be part our hegemonic gender views in this culture, an advertiser or magazine executive would be best served to ignore this and attempt to sell to both men and women equally on the idea that they need to be “genderized.” Did I make up a word just then? What I am trying to say is that culture industry cogs will only likely adopt aspects of a particular ethos that they believe will help them achieve their goal of profit maximization. Fashion and lifestyle oriented facets of the culture industry, such as Maxim are best served to maintain the hegemonic view that there are two very separate genders, but would also likely tout that individuals must adopt a lifestyle (one centered around consumption) that can draw them as close to the gender ideal of their particular sex as possible. In other words, for a Maxim reader, the possible question/advice would be, “You are all man, but are you a Maxim-ized man?” I think their founder Mr. Dennis, with his unique sense of tongue-in-cheek humor, might appreciate the double entendre.

First and foremost, how do we go about creating the “other gender”?

### 6.1 Says Her

“If you invite a guy over, he should assume it’s ok to run the bases until he’s told to stop...”

--*From the recurring Maxim comic strip entitled, Trust the **PPP** Girls*

Issue 83/ Nov. 2004/ p. 62: “Sexy Coeds Confess! Want to know how university hotties *really* get down? Laura Gilbert gets the dirt from these college cuties.”

This is an article dedicated to learning the personal and sexual secrets of college age women. It is part of a section of Maxim called “Says Her”, which is a recurring section featuring articles that gather “genuine” female opinions on lifestyle issues. The cover photo for the article is of five beautiful young women in underwear only. All are posed in a position that emphasizes either their breasts or public region. Of the six, five are white, one black. There is a line from each of the women to a text box at the bottom of the page which gives the reader personal information, in the form of a revealing quote, about each woman. The first reads as such:

“Trish, 21/ Jefferson State Community College, Forensic Science Major—‘ Guys need to take control. Throw me around.’”

Another reads:

“Whitney, 20/ Yale University, Psychology Major—‘ I’m kind of a flirting whore. I’m a touchy person, so I’ve led guys on accidentally.’”



The article continues to detail the girls' sexual exploits as each is categorized under one of the following headings: Summa Cum Laude, Extra Credit, Teacher's Pet, Performance Studies, Class in Session, and Study Buddy." Accompanying each are more pictures of the girls, paired off in groups of two in sexually suggestive homoerotic positions. Excerpts from each of the girls' sections are subdivided further into categories named; Her Type (Her type of Man), Underwear (What kind she wears if any), Hair down there (Whether or not she grooms her pubic hair), Sex Secret, Favorite (Sexual) Position and the like.

Some of the responses to these queries include:

Type of Man: "I like cocky guys and pretty boys."

Underwear: The most popular responses were either "boys shorts", or "none at all".

Hair down there: "All responded that they remove all or most of their pubic hair."

Sex Secret: The responses ranged from one extreme to the other: One replied that she was a virgin, another told of sexual escapes in the men's restroom of a bar, and in an SUV.

Favorite sexual position: "Lying on my stomach."

The theme of the article is decidedly immature and meant to appeal to the fraternity boy audience. I think that this was written with the idea of overstating the sexual nature of college age women and men. Though the article is intentionally over the top in writing style and presentation, there are subtly recurring themes that bear further examination.

The first is that women are biologically predisposed to a certain level of intelligence and certain modes of thinking. What comes to mind is a picture from the article on page 65, which shows two of the women in a somewhat sexual embrace. Both stare suggestively at the camera, one with a lollypop in her lips. On the floor are items such as a hairbrush and female fashion magazines, as well as a mathematics book. On the bed with the girls is a biology book. This suggests that all the women are interested in is their own physical nature, and that they lack the intellectual capacity for a more vigorous discipline such as mathematics.

The next theme is that women perceive themselves as sluts, teases, whores or any other ill terminology which men have used to label sexually deviant women in the past. One girl, a Yale student, labels herself as a “flirting whore,” which suggests, even though the girl reveals later in the article that she is a virgin, that women feel themselves to be inherently “slutty” whatever their sexual history, as if being a slut is part of what makes a woman, a woman. What accompanies this mindset is the dangerous notion that women

put themselves in a position that invites aggressive even violent sexual pursuit by men. The self-admitted “flirting whore” bridges that gap directly in her quote.

Following closely on the heels of that we see a theme of sexual violence that places men in the role of the dominant, and women in the role of the submissive. One woman states that “(Men should) throw me around.” Other more subtle items which support this theme are the admission on one girls part that her favorite sexual position is “lying on my stomach,” a position that is completely submissive. Almost all the girls admit to shaving or waxing their pubic hair, an act which reveals their genitals, and perhaps suggests an incest, age, or other role fantasy which makes the man an older authority figure and places the woman in the role of the helpless adolescent.

Another theme which is found throughout the article is the endorsement of homosexual behavior among women. I assume that Maxim would not be as likely to endorse homosexuality among men, and will continue to examine that throughout this study.

At the end of the article is another mini-article called “Pop Quiz!” This is a survey of college age woman asking them to detail aspects of their sexuality. The editors of Maxim ask questions, and then reveal the percentages of how the women surveyed answered. Here are some of the notable queries and responses:

What’s the oldest guy you’ve ever hooked up with? Top answer: Mid- to late 20’s.

Ever given or received road head (oral sex which occurs when one of the parties is driving)? 73% say yes.

How do you wear your hair down there? Top answer: bare.

Have you ever hooked up with a girl? 52% answer yes.

Have you ever gone bareback on a one-night stand (failed to use a condom upon sexual encounter with an individual who the woman has just met)? 42% say yes.

Where would not want a guy to finish (ejaculate) on you? Top answer: face.

How can a guy persuade you to try something nasty in bed? Top answer: "Ask me while we're in the sack."

The answers suggest that women are timid and sexually closed off, yet open to even the wildest suggestions if the man can manipulate them properly. If the Maxim man is dying to let out his inner swine, then in short, this article suggests that women are dying to let out there inner slut.

In creating an ethos by which women are labeled, Maxim also sets a standard by which men must judge themselves. If women are submissive, gullible and slutty, men must in opposition be dominant, conniving, and sexually virile enough to take advantage of the biological urges in women, which according to this article, are hidden just beneath a pious surface. This is a men's magazine, and make no mistake, this is an article about men and how they should perceive women. Though the article takes an indirect path, we arrive at a place where by analyzing the "honest" responses on the part of these women, we understand what actions men should take in dealings with women, at least according to Maxim. Here is another "Says Her" article.

Issue 82/ Oct. 2004/ p. 64: "Groupies' Guide to Sex: Do Rockers get as much tail as they did in the 70's? Judge for yourself, as their conquests share their best stories with Jodi Bryson"

This article details the sexual exploits of groupies, women who aggressively pursue musical acts in hopes of affirming their allegiance to the band by submitting to the sexual wishes of the band members. The article is laden with pictures of models half-dressed (or even less). A particularly telling picture is on page sixty-six, in which the model wears torn leather and fishnet outfit with several condoms tucked in the fishnet. She stands at a profile with her chin tucked behind her shoulder and her hands meekly clasping the front of her belt. Again the themes of submission and sexual longing come together in this image.

More interesting is the reading, which breaks the article into several section in which a groupie recounts a sexual experience. All are one nights stands in which the woman rates the sexual experience on a scale of one to ten, recounts what drugs were involved, judges the “rock’n’rollness of the experience,” and makes some sort of criticism of the liaison.

One woman, in a section of the article called “Atkins Man” recalls meeting a guitarist who dazzles her with pick-up lines like “Do you like protein?” Despite his callous and sexually forward comments she accompanies the man to his dressing room. She says, “He took me into his dressing room but suddenly asked for ID. I didn’t have any, so I said, ‘You have to be 18 to buy cigarettes, right? Apparently, that was proof enough.” She concludes, “Let’s just say I got two helpings of protein out of him (meaning he ejaculated into her mouth twice).”

Another part of the article entitled “Wet and Wild,” tells of a groupie who accompanied a singer back to his hotel room, and under the influence of alcohol, marijuana, and cocaine, allowed the man to have anal intercourse with her. Her recollection of the events: “I said ‘No,no,no.” But this guy! He talked me into it, and to this day, he’s the only guy who has!”

The article clearly sends men a message. The acquisition of social currency, in this case that granted by musical notoriety, is enough to give a man license to use women as they

see fit. That these men were able to use alcohol and drugs to further manipulate the women into sexual indiscretions is another particularly alarming feature of the article as instances of acquaintance rape (most of which are facilitated by the use of common drugs) are an ever-present danger for women.

What is most striking about the article is the fact that these women go to great lengths to put themselves into these potentially dangerous situations. This again suggests that women crave sexual congress, even to the point of endangering their health and well-being, to get to these men to take advantage of them. A Maxim reader could come away with the impression that the women in their own lives are not unlike these women, who feign sexual empowerment yet allow themselves to be exploited by strangers. If this is true, the call to action for Maxim men everywhere is clear—work aggressively to use these women for your own devices, since in the end, that is what they really desire in the first place. To hearken back to part of the lead quote from the section of this paper entitled “Then Came Maxim,” I wonder aloud-- since when has it ever been ok to not ask a girl’s permission to kiss her?

## CHAPTER 7

### THE BIG SELL

At the heart of all Maxim's many devices and opinions is an unrelenting push towards consumerism. Whatever belief the editors choose to promulgate in an article or pictorial, it is somehow linked to the idea that a man's life is incomplete without "stuff." Stuff (also the name of entire other magazine by the creators of Maxim) is those products or services that allow a man to achieve his life goals and help him through the aforementioned process of self-building. These goals are laid out by Maxim, and obtainable only through the acquisition of stuff or its alias, gear.

Whether a man wants to get women, get a good job, or simply be satisfied with his life, Maxim insists that stuff is essential to these goals. Page after page of Maxim (equal to actual content or perhaps greater), is either an advertisement or a section of the magazine devoted entirely to what is out there to be acquired, and more importantly why a man needs to acquire it.

The intertwining of ethos and consumerism is often a subtle process. Magazine ads that show only a photo can make quite a statement of belief just by the way that the principles are positioned-- it has been pointed out that female models are often shown in submissive positions to their male counterparts. The creators of Maxim have been very successful in



attracting advertisers due to their magazines success. But more than that, they have successfully reconciled hegemonic views of gender roles with the ideas that drive male consumerism.

The hegemonic view of masculinity is such that men are inherently masculine, whilst women must strive to achieve femininity through the application of consumer products, whether it be fashion, makeup or otherwise. This however, to an advertiser or editor of a men's magazine wishing to attract readers who would be consumers, is an undesirable belief.

Maxim openly encourages its male readers to utilize a variety of consumer products and services. I wonder if ten to fifteen years ago a man who dyed his hair regularly and used a variety of facial products to enhance his youthful and vigorous looks would not have been regarded with some degree of suspicion by other men as having feminine or possibly homosexual tendencies. The traditional view has been that men are said to age gracefully (where women must fight the effects of age tooth and nail), and so there would be no reason for men to use products that recapture their youthfulness. In this era of consumer masculinity and for the sake of greater profitability of culture industry, those views have fallen to the wayside.

On one hand, Maxim has found ways to instill in its male readership the idea that they (or rather their image) are in need of improving, and on the other, it gives men the

opportunity to enhance their image through the use of consumer products conveniently found in its own pages. It is, like most culture industry byproducts, the disease and cure rolled into one. What has made Maxim so successful, its genius if you will, is that it has managed to push the agenda of consumer masculinity on its male readership while attracting them with more antiquated gender views. A given issue of Maxim might have a section devoted to a particular type of product, even one that may not be considered masculine by traditional views (hair dyes, face creams, etc.), and on the same page make a comment that reinforces those traditional views. Literally, they exist on the same page.

Issue 84/ Dec. 04/ p.80:

This issue was of course the Christmas issue, and therefore devoted even more to consumerism than typical, however, it is interesting because of the ways it found to sell the products to the reader. Rather than an in-depth discussion of a particular product benefits, the editors used their signature politically incorrect humor to get achieve with the reader a cohort status, almost as if the editor and reader were just two guys talking about buying presents for family and friends. The section is entitled “Never Shop Again” and is issuing advice to the reader as to quick gift ideas for different individuals in their life.

In bold print on the front page we see the lead, “A Very Maxim Christmas: ‘Twas mere weeks before Christmas, and all through the house, you’d bought nothing for no one, you drunk, flaky louse. But what in these shiny pages should appear, but all the gifts you

should buy... other than beer.” This is accompanied by a full page colored picture of a model dressed as one of Santa’s elves popping out of a gift box barely dressed. The article then shows a page of gifts for each potential family/friend the reader may have.

Suggested gifts for dad (or the old man as Maxim says): Kobe Beef and well aged Dewar’s brand scotch. It is not coincidental that Maxim continually finds ways to plug different brands of alcohol and tobacco in their various articles, particularly in light of the fact that those two industries advertise en masse in the magazine. Incidentally, underneath the heading that says “The Old Man” is a sub caption that states: “get Dad the holiday swag that’ll help him forget you’re his son.” I suppose a fifth of scotch would do the trick.

Spouse/girlfriend gifts: This section is called “Ball and Chain,” and suggests a litany of high priced gifts for the male readers female counterpart. One item entitled “Dial B for Bling (the hip-hop term for an item that sparkles because it has either diamond or precious metal/gemstone accents)” is a cell phone cover encrusted with Swarovski crystals that retails from \$55-\$400 dollars. The caption underneath reads as follows: “Stone size and amount of coverage affect the cost—and don’t think she’s not aware of that. Sure, it’s pricey, but guaranteed sex isn’t cheap. Especially for a hunchback.” This suggests that women are more materially driven than the reader may have originally thought, thereby placing the man in a position in which he feels pressure to exhaust his bank account or else risk angering his partner to the point she may refuse sex. It reduces

the man's partner to the status of an expensive hooker, and makes a man who cannot afford these extravagant items feel incomplete. Another item, entitled "Glitter Puss" is a \$325 Tiffany charm bracelet. The caption reads, "Face it: You're a little 'charm challenged.' Instead of improving yourself, buy her this sterling silver charm bracelet from Tiffany's. Girls like shiny." Again, the process of creating the other gender-- by impressing upon the men that women are materially obsessed, men in turn must be obsessed with acquiring material possessions for the sake of capturing and keeping women. A man who lacks the charm to get women must at least have the financial wherewithal to entrap them using their material longings against them.

Another interesting section is dedicated to helping the reader find gifts for his children (affectionately referred to as snot nosed little twerps). What makes the section interesting is a small textbox inlayed into the lower left-hand corner of the page, which is entitled "Season's Beatings." The subcaption reads, "Give till it hurts: Don't forget these important people in your life—they deserve a little something too." Among those suggested gift recipients are the reader's illegitimate son, who Maxim suggests the reader buy a DNA paternity test. Also, the ex-girlfriend, to which Maxim comments, "You didn't know her mouth was like a public toilet plunger, and nothing bridges the chasm separating former lovers like oral herpes." This is an excellent example of Maxim utilizing their politically incorrect humor to make the male reader more comfortable with the idea that buying "till it hurts" is okay, but what should the male consumer buy himself?

That question is answered by Maxim in a recurring section usually positioned at the back of a given issue, called, “Gear: Because the Best Things in Life Cost Money.”

Issue 79/ July 2004/ p.145:

This issue is suggesting what gear is essential for the Maxim man, and first on the list for summer '04 is a set of Bushnell Binoculars with a built in digital camera, that retails at around \$280 dollars. Maxim explains why these are necessary in the caption entitled “Sneak Peak”. It follows:

“Nobody at the office your golden-haired, hard-bodied Swedish lesbian neighbors feed each other cheesecake while lounging naked in their outdoor hot tub? Sound like a job for Bushnell’s ImageView digital binoculars. Simply pop up the 1.5 inch LCD screen, zoom in up to 8x30 mm, and snap a digital picture with the built-in 2.1 megapixel camera. With 16 megabytes of internal memory and a USB port, you can easily e-mail the evidence to your favorite Web site—creepybastard.com.”

The picture below the caption shows the binocular with an image of a naked woman’s silhouette in the viewing oculars.

There is also a foam football that counts the rotations of the ball as it flies through the air. Below it is this caption: “It has a counter that’ll, er, count the numbers of rotations the

ball makes when you ‘accidentally’ whip it at that group of buff marines-- d’oh!—gaggle of hot chicks. Whatever.” Clearly there is a latent attack of homosexual tendencies in this caption, though it makes almost no sense that it be there, however, again the consumer impulse is validated in the mind of the male reader in the attack. In other words, it is okay to desire whatever products are out there as long as in your heart and soul you stay 100% male, even to the point of being openly anti-gay.

Not surprisingly, across from the football on the opposite page is a bag of Margarita mix that only requires the user to add tequila. It admonishes the reader to, “Just remember, it she leaves you, it’s your own damn fault.” This is clearly an acknowledgment to the Jimmy Buffet song, Margaritaville, which tells the tales of a man who has drank his woman out of his life. A situation a Maxim man should probably be very sympathetic too—if you would believe the editors.

Though it seems that Maxim’s attack on the male self-image is directed more towards his buying power than actual looks, which would make it different than consumer oriented women’s magazines that eat at a woman’s self esteem by pointing out all the little flaws in her figure, there is evidence of the male form being placed under scrutiny as well. Issue 79 in June 2004, in a corner text box, advises a man how to properly shoot digital video footage on a page conveniently covered by newly available digital cameras. Its last piece of advice is “never shoot a nude scene with yourself, unless you have a vagina.” In a different section of the same issue, it shows a baseball style t-shirt and says, “girls will

love you in this baseball shirt,” suggesting perhaps that girls will not love you unless you can demonstrate a fashion sense which de-emphasizes your less attractive physical characteristics. A few pages prior shows a combination of wardrobes pieces, probably totaling out at over \$2,000. The caption reads: “Date Bait- One suit with three cool looks means she’ll be putty in your hands after work and after hours.”

The message is this: Work Hard. Spend harder. Use consumer products to fulfill your desires whether it is in the form of women or other gratifications. Be a real man, and use any means necessary to master your domain. The classic model of hegemonic masculinity with a new consumer oriented twist personified in the form of the Maxim man.

## CHAPTER 8

### CIRCUS MAXIMUS—IT'S OK TO BE AN IDIOT

There is an aspect of the Maxim mentality that cannot be ignored upon close inspection-- Maxim encourages its readers to embrace general idiocy. At first, one may not consider this anything other than collegiate (or perhaps even lower level) humor, but there is in Maxim a distinct difference. After all, it is one thing to laugh heartily at “dick and fart jokes,” but something wholly different to accept a worldview that takes nothing seriously.

To elaborate, I hold as evidence the recurring section of Maxim entitled “Circus Maximus—a Maxim View of the World.” This section is a bouillabaisse of short articles dropped into the Maxim blender that purport to relay the stories that others are “too responsible to report.” In making this claim, Maxim attempts to grant legitimacy to these articles and though the section is overtly dedicated to humor, one gets the impression of an insistence upon Maxim’s part that their version of the news will somehow be more relevant to their readers lives than what the mainstream media or less edgy men’s magazines might have to offer. After all, if Maxim reports that which everyone else is too responsible to report, than does that not put others in the position of being afraid to say the things men somehow want or need to hear?



We now must boil down the Maxim man to the essential elements of his being. We know already a Maxim man has priorities in his life, and those priorities are well documented throughout the magazine. His first priority is the pursuit of women—in this pursuit he must allow time for the acquisition of wealth through his career activities. When he is not working or on the hunt for ladies he needs to spend a great deal of time in consumer related activities that increase his chances of being a success in his professional and personal life. Between work, play, and consumption there is not much time for ancillary activities, and so the Maxim man cannot devote himself to the pursuit of knowledge which can enrich him in ways not vital to the big three areas of his life. Maxim grants men a pass -- in fact it laughs with the reader at his own idiocy and tells him that it is ok, being idiotic is part of what makes a man, a man. That Homer Simpson, a character legendary for drunken buffoonery is an idol worthy of highest praise for the Maxim reader is no surprise. Hence, Circus Maximus is an opportunity for men to learn that which while factual (giving him something to share with his friends around the water cooler) does not take valuable time away from his more important activities. Lets take a closer look at the circus.

Issue 84/ Dec. 2004/ pp 40-64:

In a textbox entitled, “Medical Innovation” we find that Maxim is informing the reader of a new product on the market that tests a man’s sperm count. After giving a variety of technical data, it concludes that if the arrow on the tester points up (indicating the man

has an adequate sperm count) then, “you can make magic happen,” however, if the arrow points down, “that’s why those hookers never hit you with a paternity suit.”

A variety of textboxes entitled “Fun Facts!” can be found in every Circus Maximus-- lets exam some of these.

Fun Facts:

1. A man burns 87 calories taking off a woman’s bra.
2. 250,000 guys are beaten up by their wives yearly.
3. Bob Hawke downed 2.5 pints of beer in 12 seconds in 1954 to set a world record.

He then went on to become Australia’s Prime Minister.

Every Circus Maximus has a section dedicated to attractive working women who are not professional models but pose in next to nothing for the Maxim reader. These women reveal aspects of their profession that ultimately relate in someway to sex. In this issue an ICU nurse relates dressing up in her uniform to satisfy her boyfriend. The subsection states, “No wonder guys are dying to spend time with this beauty.”

The Circus also has a Q and A section where readers can send in questions that have been on their minds. In this issue the three questions asked are as follows: 1. Where did flipping the bird come from? 2. Is stalking legal? 3. How big can breasts get?

I do not feel the need to overanalyze the content from this section of the magazine, for dedicating nearly twenty pages per issue to Circus Maximus is telling in and of itself. One who would critically analyze Maxim can draw the conclusion that the only knowledge of value to the Maxim man is that which can entertain him (such as that found in Circus Maximus), that which can help him make more money (or, in a related issue, makes him a better consumer), and that which can help him sleep with as many women as possible.

Though the editors of Maxim are adept at providing the entertainment they advertise, I cannot help but feel that there is an inherent danger in men accepting that they are somehow naturally inclined to idiocy of this nature. The world is a large and complex place, and more than ever having knowledge beyond that which rules our careers, or that which can only be described as trivial, is of utmost importance. Maxim grants a man permission to retain the more harmful elements of his adolescent self, under the guise that it is natural.

Thus, the final piece of the puzzle that gives us a complete picture of the Maxim man is in place. He is clever yet idiotic, he is every bit a civilized animal but barely so, he is smarter than his female counterpart in areas which matter the most, he is well-informed about only that which can help serve his own longings (for women, and prestige), he is one-dimensional, not unlike the pages of the magazine.

He carries with him a carefully crafted self-image which rests lightly upon his shoulder, and mutates as needed to deliver to him all of his primal desires. He longs for more of everything. If people are drinking alcohol, he needs to drink more than they, as competition is an accepted and central point of his existence. If there are women present he, being justified by evolutionary instinct, is right in attempting to conquer them, if necessary by force or deception. He is intelligent insofar as he needs to be but, being a man, is only smart enough to serve himself, and in doing so, conveniently serve the capitalist marketplace, which provides him with all that he lacks if he is willing to work ceaselessly to get it. The culture industry generates his desires through a vehicle such as Maxim, and provides him satiation for those desires. He can only be made whole by consumption of commodities, which to him are people as well as objects. He is wholly unenlightened and satisfied in ignorant bliss.

## CHAPTER 9

### THE RISE OF CONSUMER MASCULINITY

The birth of the Maxim man is a harbinger of a new era of consumer masculinity. In different forms of media we see men becoming objects under the magnifying glare of social criticism, and the culture industry coming to their rescue (for the right price of course). The genius of Maxim is its marriage of two ideals that seem to stand in opposition to one another.

The first is Metrosexuality. Metrosexuality is a phrase first used in the mid-1990's by British journalist Mark Simpson which described urban homosexual males that spend a great time on their personal appearance. The definition was later extended to men of any sexual orientation, though at this time I would contend that the definition is unclear to mainstream America. Take a look at [urbandictionary.com](http://urbandictionary.com), a website that takes user submissions to keep viewers abreast of the definition of the most recent slang. Here are some recent user submissions for the term *metrosexual*:

1. "A man who, regardless of sexual orientation, deems fashion and appearance to be all important."
2. "Someone who adheres to homosexual tendencies but declares their orientation to be heterosexual (supposedly)."

3. “A man who is in touch with his feminine side- although not gay and is straight.  
Has a passion for what would usually be considered women’s products.”
4. Any past contestants on Queer Eye for the Straight Guy.”
5. A gay man so deep in the closet, he finds Christmas presents.”

The site allows contributors and viewers alike to give a thumbs up if they agree with the contributed definition, or a thumbs down if they disagree. Next to all definitions are the results. All of the definitions given for metrosexual were split almost perfectly down the middle in the rankings, confirming a high degree of ambivalence about the term. Most interesting are the comments from users who cannot separate the idea of consumer-oriented activities of men from homosexuality, for those are the readers that Maxim has managed to sell.

The second ideal, or set of ideals, are those associated with hegemonic gender/family values. Traditional gender/family roles are best expressed in the work of Talcott Parsons, which confirmed the model 1950’s era nuclear family. These values do not allow for homosexual behavior, and as such those who would advocate the traditional family values, or gender roles, would also likely openly express anti-gay sentiments.

In its inception (and still today for that matter), the creators of Maxim, for the sake of attracting and retaining advertisers, had to create a cultural artifact that could push the

metrosexual commitment to consumerism upon its readership while maintaining allegiance to traditional gender and family values. In order to do this, the creators hid behind a banner of purposeful political incorrectness and made it seem that their agenda was the reestablishment of those traditional values that let men be men, and their secondary purpose was to inform men of products that could enhance their lifestyle. In reality, the priorities are reversed, Maxim's most pressing desire is to create a better male consumer, and the vehicle they use to do so, is the guise of an "entertainment magazine." They should call themselves a consumer magazine that entertains as a means of retaining a record setting readership, and the vast contributions of advertising dollars that must surely follow.

### 9.1 What is Mantropy?

Perhaps nowhere is Maxim's commitment to this puppet show more apparent than in the example of the website [mantropycontrolcenter.com](http://mantropycontrolcenter.com). Just what is mantropy? Mantropy is a fictional disease—the website is set up as a public service, courtesy of Maxim, that is dedicated to helping men become more aware of the symptoms. The symptoms bear the distinct markings of homosexual (and also metrosexual) behavior. Upon entering the site, we see a warning which indicates that the user must check a box indicating whether or not they wish to proceed depending on if they are over 18 or under. For the under 18 response it says things like, "I understand that if I see an image of, say, a man purse, I may not understand that a man purse is wrong... I agree to wait until I am 18 and my testicles descend. Until then, I will steer clear of tofu, unisex clothing, and Lilith Fair

concerts (concerts run by and featuring mostly or all females musical acts).” The over 18 response asks the reader to acknowledge that a man purse is not okay.

Upon entering the site, there are several clickable sections that tell the symptoms and effect of the fictional disease. The site warns that mantropy generally affects men between the ages of 18-34, which coincidentally, is the exact age of Maxim’s target market. One section, entitled “Oh God, am I sick,” provides several symptoms and the degree of severity of each in relation to the advancement of disease. Some symptoms ranging from modest to severe sickness are, excessive smoothie consumption, lightly tinted sunglasses (a trend in fashion which was at one time restricted to mainly women’s sunglasses but which has taken off in men’s high fashion sunglasses as of late, mainly due to their being featured on shows such as Queer Eye), Fauxhawks (a hairstyle which involves using hair product to sculpt the full head of hair into a Mohawk-like configuration, also distinctly metrosexual), the Man Purse, brightly colored tennis shoes (like those a formula one racer might wear), small pets (a fashion trend made popular among women by the Hollywood crowd, see Paris Hilton, Britney Spears, etc.), and spa facials.

A section of the site entitled, “How do I get all better,” redirects men to another site called endangeredman.com. This site offers remedies for the disease in the form of several products. These include, a punching bag (for transferring male aggression), a checkered flag, a Swiss army knife-like tool they call a “panty remover”, a speargun, a



brick, and a car engine. These are all products that have been used by men in traditionally masculine, heterosexual activities. The site also warns against the use of hair products (both gels and dyes), skin products and the like as they change men in ways that, in Maxim's own words reduce the man, "to a sleek, seductive shadow of his former self." An encapsulation of the metrosexual mission if ever there was one.

In truth, Maxim practices anything but what they preach when it comes to their magazine content. Though the magazine has articles that are dedicated to controlling the effects of mantrropy, they also dedicate as much room to selling the very products that bring about their supposed epidemic. Maxim, after all teamed up with Just for Men, a popular men's hair dye line, to create its own line of hair dye. In the magazine are pages of skin and hair care products, brightly colored tennis shoes, and lightly tinted sunglasses. Based on that, one wonders if the editors of Maxim have actually become infected with the fictional disease, after all, their own magazine does more to spread the symptoms than almost about any other cultural artifact to be found.

## CHAPTER 10

### ORWELL, KEROUAC, AND THE IMPLICATIONS OF CULTURAL IMPERIALISM

This project illuminates the notion that the capitalist agenda is an incredible influence on the cultural norms predominately displayed in social artifacts such as Maxim. This agenda, with the muscle of the Military Industrial Complex, and the voice of the Culture Industry has a heavy-handed influence in what we see, hear, and how we relate to one another. Aside from its impact on the global economy, the environment and world hunger, a fundamental area of concern moving forward is to what extent does the capitalist agenda adversely impact cultural autonomy. Culture should be a phenomenon independent of market influence as much as possible. In other words, culture cannot be allowed to be privatized or centralized, for therein lies the heart of fascism. The danger to democracy and culture are one in the same, those who would profit at the expense of free expression—and so we move forward understanding that we must have a better notion of who stands to gain from the restriction of cultural freedom.

In question here is just how the motives of the capitalist marketplace, the engine that drives the culture industry, can affect the artifacts we are exposed to on a daily basis. A deeper understanding of these motives, and more importantly the consequences these motives have on our worldview, is necessary. Ultimately, in order to paint a coherent picture of what is happening, we must be able to make the connection between the motive

and the artifact (such as Maxim), and then delve into the interaction of artifact and subject (those exposed to culture industry artifacts). Further studies in this particular subject matter could elucidate this relationship via in-depth interviews in an attempt to discover the worldviews and opinions of those who are regularly exposed to NMM's and those who are not, noting differences along the way.

Results from studies of this nature could then be cross-referenced with the theoretical implications proposed herein, so that a greater theoretical framework that describes the process in its entirety can be constructed.

Essentially, this project can be seen as springboard to a series of studies that involve content analysis of culture industry artifacts and interactive studies with those who are exposed to the artifacts regularly—the goal is to connect the dots. Though one cannot speak directly of another individual's motives, I feel that these artifacts bridge the gap between the subject and culture industry, and can allow us to comment intelligently on the potential motives of culture industry braintrusts. To borrow from Einstein, though we cannot fully reveal the inner-workings of the pocket-watch, we can make intelligent conjectures as to its nature based on those events that we can observe.

We detect in the pages of Maxim, and I suspect any culture industry artifact, the specter of cultural imperialism, though not in a way that we are accustomed to understanding it. Rather than applying cultural imperialism in the context of one entity in the role of

foreign invader actively repressing the cultural idiosyncrasies of another weaker social entity, we can view this version of cultural imperialism as being internal to this particular culture or that. To be sure the perpetrator is the same in either scenario, but in the version we see in the pages of Maxim, the repression is passive and slow moving. It is akin to a multinational car conglomerate buying the rights to Beatles songs and rewriting them to fit their latest luxury model SUV, and what was unique and symbolic of one worldview is deafened to the masses by its new masters.

In Maxim, we see progressive views on gender and self-image glossed over or made fun of, not for the sake of satirical freedom, as the editors would purport, but for the insidious lust for profit and profit and loss sheets that grow fatter by the day.

The culture of consumption propagated by the culture industry is formless and undefined, yet pervasive and hungry. It seeks to dominate the individual and in order to do so, must override, assimilate, or permeate aspects of culture separate from itself that may create in the individual an element of doubt that might threaten the capitalist agenda.

The culture industry is the long arm of capitalism grabbing hold of the metaphorical murky glass of water and attempting to gain legitimate and singular access to it. As its grip tightens, the imagination and uniqueness of generations of people are drowned out, bought out, and sold out to those who care not for anything but bottom lines and stock quotes and the like. The markings of a silent war on culture, pitting the capitalist agenda

(with the might and muscle of its army, the culture industry) against everyone else is apparent. A cold war fought not on battlefields with geographical names, but rather the battlefield of each of our minds, which carry only our own names and identities.

Conceptually, the best comparison is the Orwellian idea of duckspeak, which attempts through language to create a system of knowledge which can limit the avenues of communication so much as to rule out ideas which run contrary to the dominant ethos of the ruling caste. In 1984, the main character is well versed in duckspeak, even as treasonous ideas run through his head.

The cultural industry tells us to be unique, even as they redefine the concept of uniqueness. Their version attempts to convince us, through a relentless deluge of advertising that being unique means to buy the most popular cars, clothes, etc. They wish to establish and regulate cultural boundaries much the same as Orwell's fictional regime sought to establish linguistic ones.

Thus we see a future that may make culture a hostage, tucked away and applied as any commodity, and accessible only to the privileged, even confiscated at the first sign of independent operation within the populous. A frightening thought, to be sure.

To quote Kerouac, "the woods are full of wardens."

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