



NATIONAL CENTER ON SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

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January 24, 2017

Mr. Steve Swartz, President & Chief Executive Officer
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Ms. Michele Promaulayko
Editor-in-Chief
Cosmopolitan
300 W 57th Street
New York, NY 10019

RE: *Cosmopolitan's* Distribution of Sexually Exploitive Materials

Dear Mr. Swartz and Ms. Promaulayko:

We are writing to express our grave concern regarding *Cosmopolitan* magazine's distribution of sexually exploitive and pornographic materials via its magazine and social media platforms.

Shortly, the National Center on Sexual Exploitation (NCOSE) will publicly announce its annual "Dirty Dozen List," which catalogs top mainstream promoters of sexual exploitation and pornography in America. We write to inform you that *Cosmopolitan* will appear on this list for a fifth consecutive year. With placement on the Dirty Dozen List, *Cosmo* shares a shameful spotlight with the ilk of Backpage.com, one of the biggest facilitators of sexual exploitation in the nation.

With monthly mundanity, *Cosmopolitan* magazine accosts American shoppers with covers that pronounce the latest in recycled sex tricks, and flaunts yet another hypersexualized and objectified cover model. As for its content, *Cosmopolitan* relentlessly normalizes risky sexual practices such as public, anal, group, and sadomasochistic sex to its young female readership.

While the material in question is not hardcore pornography, it is nonetheless sexually provocative, explicit, degrading, and fuels pornified culture. Research has shown that individuals frequently exposed to softcore images become desensitized to them, and are

less likely to hold positive views of women.¹ Additionally, “evidence suggests that sexualization contributes to impaired cognitive performance in college-aged women, and related research suggests that viewing material that is sexually objectifying can contribute to body dissatisfaction, eating disorders, low self-esteem, depressive affect, and even physical health problems in high-school-aged girls and in young women.”²

Additionally, three large-scale, longitudinal studies have found that exposure to non-explicit sexual content on television and in other media used by adolescents (i.e. music, movies, and magazines) predicts earlier initiation of sexual behaviors, including intercourse.³

Furthermore, a content analysis of *Cosmopolitan* and *Glamour* magazines revealed that:

*Sex is portrayed as largely recreational and mechanical and as occurring between genitals, or involving mouths, hands, or anuses. The articles do not talk about sexuality in a context of people having relationships, deciding about safe sex (or not) and doing things with others, going to concerts or out to eat, or engaging in other activities. Thus the portrayal of sex is fundamentally reductionist. In a way sexuality is individualized but the individual is seen as a body made up of organs-seeking-pleasure rather than as a whole-person.*⁴

Other research has shown that *Cosmopolitan* and *Playboy* magazines showed similar concepts about sexuality and women’s sexual attractiveness to the audience. The following highlights of articles published in *Cosmopolitan* within recent months demonstrates both *Cosmo*’s reductionist portrayal of sex and its pornified perspective:

- February 2017 – “Sex Q & A” – in a question concerning sex addiction, *Cosmo* responded by saying that the term “sex addiction” is used to shame people who like a lot of sex or that they may have a higher sex drive. This response ignores twenty-four neurobiological studies (from the likes of Cambridge University) that support compulsive sexual behavior and pornography addiction;⁵
- January 2017 – “The Cosmo Guy” – in an interview with Joe Jonas, *Cosmo* inquired about his “sex bucket list.” Jonas proceeds to discuss having sex in elevators,

¹ University of Nottingham, “Soft-core pornography viewers ‘unlikely to hold positive attitudes towards women,” June 15, 2016, <http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/news/pressreleases/2016/june/soft-core-pornography-viewers-unlikely-to-hold-positive-attitudes-towards-women.aspx> (accessed June 22, 2016).

² American Psychological Association, “Report of the APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls,” 2010, <http://www.apa.org/pi/women/programs/girls/report.aspx> (accessed June 22, 2016).

³ Jane Brown, “X-Rated: Sexual Attitudes and Behaviors Associated with U.S. Early Adolescents’ Exposure to Sexually Explicit Media,” *Communication Research* 36, no. 1 (2009): 129–151.

⁴ Juaane N. Clarke, “The Paradoxical Portrayal of the Risk of Sexually Transmitted Infections and Sexuality in US Magazines *Glamour* and *Cosmopolitan* 2000–2007,” *Health, Risk & Society* 12, no 6 (2010): 560–574.

⁵ Your Brain on Porn, “Brain Studies o Porn Users,” <http://yourbrainonporn.com/brain-scan-studies-porn-users> (accessed January 17, 2017); See also <http://yourbrainonporn.com/emperor-has-no-clothes-fractured-fairytales-review> for a discussion on David Ley’s appalling ignorance of addiction science.

- suggests bribing flight attendants to have sex on an airplane, and discusses his song normalizing BDSM;
- November 2016 - “Manthropology” - *Cosmo* has men discuss “Where’s the Weirdest Place You’ve Gotten an Unexpected Boner?” and provides a “Get Your Sexscope” with a sex position for each sign of the zodiac;
 - July 2016 - “Acing Your Orals” - presents readers with techniques for “getting ahead at giving head;”
 - June 2016 - “I took my boyfriend to a swingers’ resort” - discusses Young Swingers Week, a Florida-based company that arranges orgies, and the so-called “swingers” lifestyle;
 - February 2016 - “The swing set,” - purports that, “Monogamy is seen as the gold standard, but other relationship models—throuples, quads!—are emerging from the sidelines and shedding their stigma;”
 - October 2015 - “The Evolution of the Threesome,” - presents group sex as a “fun diversion for committed couples . . . just another option on life’s sexual smorgasbord;”
 - September 2015 - “I Hired a Hooker with My Husband,” - about a couple who engages in threesomes and travels to Amsterdam to buy sex from a prostituted person complete with descriptions of strap-ons, butt plugs, anal beads, etc.;
 - August 2015 - “Long Live the Hand Job” - presents readers with methods to “master the HJ,” as well as a “Love & Sex & Weed,” a dispassionate article discussing the growing use of marijuana during sex.

These and other *Cosmopolitan* issues are also replete with lurid sexual discussions, including:

- explicit instructions for sexual positions;
- display and promotion of numerous sex toys;
- encouragement to incorporate pornography into sexual relationships;
- discussions on topics such swallowing semen or choking as a sexual practice;
- ads which hypersexualize and objectifying women and men;
- ads for other *Cosmo* products such as “69 Shades of Cosmo” (a card set featuring sex games with a “BONUS: Bondage Cord Included!”), and
- promotion of *Cosmo’s* social media platforms (*Cosmo’s* social media platforms such as its website and Snapchat pages, routinely push pornography and normalize prostitution).

An occasional article on topics like the drunk sex epidemic notwithstanding, *Cosmo* cannot have it both ways. Each issue is riddled with graphic sexual discussions that trivialize sex and which promote risky sexual practices. *Cosmo* is grossly irresponsible—especially when one when considers *Cosmopolitan’s* attempts to appeal to a young female readership (below their purported 18-49 demographic) through the use of Disney stars and male celebrities popular with teenagers. It even goes so far as to encourage readers to buy

sex—a practice which contributes to the normalization of commercial sexual exploitation and the demand for sex trafficking of women and children.

While there's no shortage of sexually explicit content in *Cosmopolitan* magazine, its social media is even worse. *Cosmo's* website pushes sex toys and pornographic articles with such regularity that it has the ambiance of a porn industry forum. Here are just a few examples:

11 Orgasmic Sex Toys the World Was Blessed With in 2016

A list of the year's greatest sex toys, promoting them as "must haves".

"Here's What 7 People Actually Bring to Sex Parties"

Normalizes sex parties, group sex, and multiple-partner relationships.

"You Have Got to Check Out the Fifty Shades Darker Sex Toys"

Promotes the Fifty Shades of Grey sequel and line of sex toys including vibrators, nipple clamps, anal plugs, and even a 'replica' of the bow tie Christian uses to tie up Ana.

"Sex Workers Open Up About Their Most Expensive Service"

Normalizes "The Girlfriend Experience" and prostitution as "sex work."

"12 BDSM-Style Sex Toys You've Got To Try"

Promotes bondage-style sex and toys.

What It's Really Like to Have a Threesome

Article normalizing group sex.

"Is Porn the Answer to Zika in Rio?"

Promotes a pornography website.

The same can be said of *Cosmo's* Snapchat "Stories." *Cosmo's* Snapchat stories have included the likes of "24 Times Celeb Nipples Wanted All the Attention," and "10 Things He Thinks about Your Vagina."

In light of the above, we call upon Hearst Communications to 1) take immediate action to seal and blind all *Cosmopolitan* magazines sold at stores, and 2) conduct a shift and thorough reorganization of *Cosmopolitan* to stop its normalization, distribution, and profiting from sexually exploitive and pornographic material.

Major corporations such as Marriott International, Hilton Worldwide, InterContinental Hotels Group, and others have eliminated or are eliminating pornography from their business model. Now is the time for Heart Communications to do likewise and, in so doing, take a leadership position in the publications industry.

Mr. Swartz and Ms. Promaulayko

Page 5

January 24, 2017

All human beings have a natural dignity, and thus a right to live lives free from sexual exploitation. Pornography and other forms of sexual exploitation are degrading, dehumanizing, exploitive, and a violation of this right. Pornography and sexual exploitation are a serial attack on human dignity, identity, and worth.

Our nation is now suffering the consequences from widespread distribution of pornography and sexually exploitative materials, and Hearst Communications has an historic opportunity to play an important role in stopping it. Accordingly, we request the opportunity to meet with you and your representatives to discuss how Heart Communications can become of leader in the fight for a world free from sexual exploitation.

Sincerely,



Patrick Trueman
President & CEO



Dawn Hawkins
Senior Vice President & Executive Director

cc: William Hearst III
Frank Bennack Jr.
Mitchell Scherzer
James Asher
Eve Burton
Richard Malloch
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David Carey
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