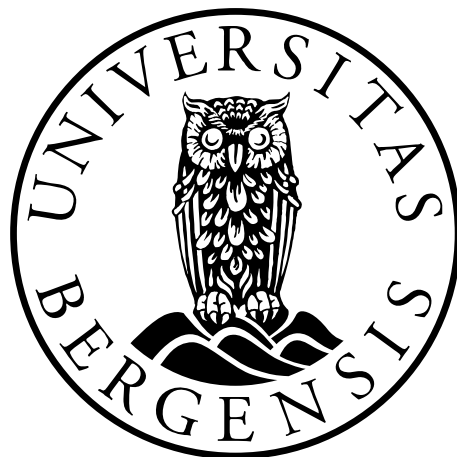


Women's magazines and their readers

Experiences, identity and everyday life

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Dissertation for the degree philosophiae doctor (PhD)
at the University of Bergen

Abstract

In this thesis I explore women's magazine reading as a media experience. I ask how regular readers of women's magazines experience these publications, and how these experiences can be related to readers' everyday lives and to their sense of identity. In order to answer these questions I have conducted a qualitative questionnaire and interview study of a group of regular women's magazine readers. The reader study constitutes the central empirical component of my research, but it has been supplemented with textual analysis and interviews with magazine editors. In the thesis, my analysis of this empirical material is presented in the form of four scholarly articles. Each article emphasizes different dimensions of women's magazine reading as a media experience, each draws on different theoretical perspectives, and each can be related to different debates in the field of media studies.

A central ambition of the thesis is to suggest and demonstrate analytical approaches that are new to research on women's magazines. In addition to drawing on established methods in qualitative audience research I will also propose a new methodological approach for exploration of the relationship between specific practices of reading and specific textual features. While I situate my research in relation important debates within women's magazines research, I also introduce and apply theoretical perspectives that are new to this field, inspired by phenomenology, sociological identity theory and public sphere theory.

Throughout the thesis, women's magazine reading is conceptualized as a multifaceted media experience that encompasses perceptual, aesthetic, technological, cognitive, emotional, social and cultural dimensions. Regular readers value women's magazine reading as a relaxing ritual that holds a specific place in the structure of everyday life, and they appreciate the properties of the print magazine medium as particularly suited to such reading rituals. However, readers also engage in critical evaluations of women's magazine texts. Sometimes women's magazines fail to live up to readers' expectations, but mainly regular readers experience women's magazines as *relevant* – to their everyday lives and to their conceptions about their own lives. Furthermore, these experiences are relevant to society in a broader sense, as women's magazine reading can be understood as one of several possible resources for relating one's personal life to a greater social and cultural community.

Sammendrag

I denne avhandlingen utforsker jeg lesning av kvinneblader som medieerfaring. Jeg spør hvilke erfaringer faste lesere av kvinneblader har med disse publikasjonene, og jeg spør om hvordan disse erfaringene kan relateres til lesernes hverdagsliv og identitet. For å besvare disse spørsmålene har jeg utført en kvalitativ spørreskjemaundersøkelse og intervjustudie blant en gruppe faste kvinnebladlesere. Leserstudien utgjør hoveddelen av min empiriske forskning, men den har blitt supplert med tekstanalyse og intervjuer med magasinredaktører. Analysen av dette materialet er utformet som fire vitenskapelige artikler. I hver artikkel vektlegges ulike dimensjoner ved kvinnebladlesing som medieerfaring. Artiklene trekker vekslers på ulike teoretiske perspektiver og kan knyttes opp mot ulike diskusjoner innenfor det medievitenskapelige forskningsfeltet.

En av avhandlingens sentrale ambisjoner er å foreslå og framvise analytiske tilnærminger som ikke tidligere har vært anvendt i forskning på kvinneblader. I tillegg til å bruke etablerte kvalitative metoder vil jeg foreslå en ny metodisk tilnærming for utforskning av forholdet mellom spesifikke lesepraksiser og tekststrukturer. Jeg plasserer forskningen min i forhold til viktige debatter innenfor eksisterende forskning på kvinneblader, men jeg vil også introdusere og anvende teoretiske perspektiver som er nye på dette feltet, inspirert av fenomenologi, sosiologisk identitetsteori og offentlighetsteori.

I avhandlingen forstås kvinnebladlesing som en mangefasettert medieerfaring som rommer perseptuelle, estetiske, teknologiske, kognitive, følelsesmessige, sosiale og kulturelle dimensjoner. Faste kvinnebladlesere verdsetter bladlesing som et avslappende ritual med en bestemt plass i hverdagslivets struktur, og de setter pris på magasinmediets egenskaper fordi disse er spesielt godt tilpasset slike leseritualer. Men leserne er også engasjerte og kritiske i sin omgang med kvinnebladens tekster. Noen ganger lykkes ikke bladene i å leve opp til lesernes varierende forventninger, men hovedsakelig opplever faste lesere bladene som *relevante* – både for deres hverdagsliv og for deres oppfatninger om seg selv og sine egne liv. Disse erfaringene kan dessuten være samfunnsmessig relevante i en bredere forstand, ettersom kvinnebladlesing kan forstås som en av flere mulige ressurser for å knytte bånd mellom enkeltmennesker og samfunnsmessige og kulturelle fellesskap.

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WOMEN'S MAGAZINES AND THEIR READERS: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TEXTUAL

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List of publications

The four articles that constitute part 2 of this thesis are all single-authored by Brita Ytre-Arne. Two articles have been published elsewhere, one has been accepted for publication and is scheduled to appear in the course of 2011, and one has been submitted and is currently under review. Except for some basic format changes I have not revised the articles for the purpose of inclusion in this thesis.

Article 1:

Ytre-Arne, Brita (2011): "Women's magazines and their readers: The relationship between textual features and practices of reading", *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 14(2): 213-228. Final version submitted October 2010 and published April 2011. All rights reserved. Copyright: Sage Publications Ltd, 2011.

Article 2:

Ytre-Arne, Brita (2011): "I want to hold it in my hands': Readers' experiences of the phenomenological differences between women's magazines online and in print", *Media, Culture & Society* 33(3): 467-477. Final version submitted May 2010 and published April 2011. All rights reserved. Copyright: Sage Publications Ltd, 2011.

Article 3:

Ytre-Arne, Brita (unpublished): "Women's magazines and women's lives: An analysis of reading and identity". Submitted to *Feminist Media Studies* in January 2011. All rights reserved. Copyright: Brita Ytre-Arne.

Article 4:

Ytre-Arne, Brita (forthcoming): "Women's magazines and the public sphere", *European Journal of Communication*. Accepted December 2010, final version submitted January 2011 and scheduled for publication September 2011. All rights reserved. Copyright: Sage Publications Ltd, 2011.

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Bergen, May 2011

Part 1: Final Contribution

1. Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to contribute to a more profound understanding of women's magazine reading as a media experience. Empirically, I have conducted a qualitative study of women's magazine reading in Norway, a country where women's magazines are widely read but scarcely researched. Methodologically, I will draw on established qualitative research methods but also develop a new analytical approach that can produce a better conceptualization of the relationship between women's magazines and their readers. Theoretically, I will enter into well-established discussions and frameworks in research on women's magazines, but also introduce theoretical perspectives that are new to this field. Fundamentally, my ambition is to explore dimensions of women's magazine reading that have so far received little attention in media research.

The main research question of the thesis can be simply put: *How and why do women read women's magazines?* Several delimitations and specifications are needed in order to attempt to answer this question through empirical research and theoretical analysis. I have prioritized the depths and nuances of the *how* and the *why* in the research question over the width and range of the women's magazines that exist and the women who read them.¹ This is, therefore, a qualitative study that aims to explore the experiences of some magazine readers in depth, and not a quantitative survey attempting to map the full range of women's magazine reading. Furthermore, the women who have participated in my study are all regular readers of women's magazines, and their experiences should not automatically be taken as representative for other forms of women's magazine reading. And importantly, my theoretical conceptualization of the activity that is my key object of study – women's magazine reading – is crucial for the formation, scope and development of my research. Rather than thinking of women's magazine reading through terms such as media use, media reception or media consumption, I will explore, analyse and discuss women's magazine reading as a *media experience*. This term is founded in phenomenological philosophy which attempts to grasp the complexities of lived experience (Beauvoir [1949]2000, Merleau-Ponty [1945]2002), and it emphasizes the nuanced and multi-dimensional nature of the phenomenon at hand (Gentikow 2005a, 2005b). Media experiences can be physical, cognitive, emotional, social, individual, communicative,

¹ The definitions of “women's magazines” and “women's magazine readers” that are applied in the thesis are discussed in chapter 3.2.

ephemeral or formative; they are rooted in everyday life as well as in society and culture, and can be closely intertwined with other aspects of human experiences and identities. My main research question can be reformulated more precisely as: *How do regular readers of women's magazines experience these publications, and how are their experiences with women's magazines related to their everyday lives and to their sense of identity?* This is in itself a wide question in several parts, and it will be further narrowed and specified through the structure of the thesis.

The thesis consists of four scholarly articles where I ask and answer research questions related to various aspects of the main research question, and a final contribution where I bring the articles together and highlight how they contribute to fulfilling the ambitions of my project. The thesis is called *Women's magazines and their readers: Experiences, identity and everyday life*, and this title is meant to encompass the components of the main research question as well as the central themes of the four articles. The first two articles deal with women's magazine reading as situated in *everyday life*, while the second two deal with women's magazine reading in relation to certain aspects of *identity*. All four articles share two main characteristics: In each I aim to explore dimensions of women's magazine reading as a media experience, and in each I analyse and discuss material from a qualitative study of regular magazine readers. However, the differences between the articles contribute as much as the similarities in order to bring them together as one project: Each article is written from a different theoretical point of departure, attempting to address various debates in the field of audience research on women's magazines and other popular media. The articles thereby represent different analytical approaches – not only to the main research question in my project, but also to important debates in the field of media research. To explain and substantiate how this is done is a central object of this first part of the thesis – the final contribution – and one I will return to throughout its chapters.

1.1 Why a collection of articles?

According to the statutes of the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Bergen, an article-based doctoral dissertation should consist of three or more articles and a summary that “must not only summarize but must also present the problems and conclusions in the articles as a whole to document the coherency of the thesis. The contribution of the thesis to the field

of research concerned must also be outlined” (Faculty of Social Sciences 13.06.2005). My dissertation consists of such an enhanced summary and of four single-authored scholarly articles.² I have chosen to call the summary by another term which is often used – *final contribution*. This term suggest that the final contribution is generally the last part of the dissertation to be written, but also that it is fundamentally important to the scholarly contribution of the thesis as a whole. Part 1 of my thesis is therefore a final contribution, divided into several chapters, and part 2 consists of the four articles. Except from some basic formatting for the sake of coherence, these appear as they were or will be published in (or in one case, submitted to) various journals. Details are found in the list of publications on page xi.

There are several pragmatic reasons for choosing the article-based dissertation format. For a young researcher it is important to learn how to write and publish scholarly articles, and it might be beneficial to divide the substantial amount of thesis work into smaller and more manageable units. However, my main justification for choosing the article-based format is that I found, from the planning stage of my doctoral research and onwards, that this format would best suit my project. I started with an interest in exploring a phenomenon – women's magazine reading as a media experience – from multiple theoretical and methodological points of departure. In light of the existing field of research on women's magazines, I believe that one of the most fruitful contributions one might make would be to suggest new approaches, thereby hopefully shedding some light on dimensions of women's magazine reading that have not been sufficiently illuminated so far.³ The article-based dissertation format appears to encourage such an approach in a realistically manageable fashion, as it allows for a combination of several specific and clearly limited investigations. I have therefore availed myself of this format when shaping a doctoral research project in which I aim to enter into several important dialogues in the field of media research.

There are, however, disadvantages to this format as well. While the faculty's statutes do not demand that an article-based thesis must consist of published work,⁴ it appears rather futile to

² As for the number of articles required, the guidelines specify that three is enough if all are single authored and that more than four might be required if several are co-authored.

³ This argument will be substantiated in the literature review in chapter 2.

⁴ According to the guidelines “The thesis – or parts of it – do not need to have been published before” (Faculty of Social Sciences 13.06.2005). Further guidelines on the faculty's website add that “The expert committee assesses whether the contribution is of a standard high enough to be published in periodicals with referees or by

write a collection of articles and put them in a drawer until the entire thesis is finished. Rather, publishing before the end of a doctoral project can result in valuable feedback from editors, reviewers and readers. A downside of the publication process might be, however, that one will have to adapt each article to the demands of journals and reviewers, even though this could imply that parts of the binding structure of the thesis are lost or downplayed. The individual journals one might submit to will, of course, have no consideration for how all the articles are supposed to come together in a thesis. In the beginning of my doctoral research I worried that this would be a problem, but after having had three of the four articles accepted for publication I no longer see it as such. I believe that the articles still work well together, and more importantly, that their qualities have been improved by going through thorough review and revision before being published. There is, however, one thing I would have done differently if these considerations were not relevant: I would have included some form of textual analysis in each article, as my view on the merits of combining textual analysis and audience research is a central argument in the first article in the thesis.

Another possible disadvantage of the article-based thesis format is that some repetition of key elements is unavoidable. In an otherwise very favourable review of an article-based dissertation on Hollywood historiography (Lavik 2008), the reviewer argues that this thesis format occasionally resembles “a bad American B-film, where the action starts over several times, where the same matters are explained several times at different places, telling both too much and too little” (Iversen 2009: 85, my translation). While acknowledging that the article-based format entails some repetition, I will propose a different metaphor: Rather than comparing this format to a B-film, one might compare it to a television series with a prequel. The articles might be read as regular episodes, each starting with a recap of previous events of particular relevance to that specific episode, and the final contribution might be read as a so-called prequel that stands outside the traditional serialised format, but which sets the stage and provides the relevant background for the series as a whole, often attempting to raise it to another level by emphasizing the grander themes.

In the case of this thesis, it is particularly some key methodological information that will have to be revisited in each article. The reason for this is that each article is built on analysis of material from the same empirical study, and in order to make the articles work independently

a recognized publishing house” (Faculty of Social Sciences 12.05.2011). Candidates are informally encouraged to attempt to publish at least some of the articles before handing in the thesis.

of each other methods must be explained in each case. However, I would actually agree with critics of the article-based format that this alone would be a confusing and fragmented way of presenting and discussing the fundamental methodological questions of a doctoral research project. Therefore I have devoted chapter 4 in the final contribution to methodology, and this chapter provides the fundamental explanations and justifications for my empirical work. Additionally, I hope that readers of the entire thesis might find it useful to have some particularly relevant points repeated in each article. I have, however, tried to limit methodological details in the articles as much as the various journals would allow (an exception from this is the first article, which makes a specific methodological argument). As with recaps of previous events in a television series, my methodological recaps will vary from article to article, as they will each emphasize the methods and materials which are most relevant in each case. Hopefully this will not appear confusing, but chapter 4 should nevertheless be read as the authoritative source for details of the entire empirical study.

1.2 Introduction to the articles

Here I will briefly introduce the four articles, so that the relations between the individual articles and the overarching research question can become clear from the outset.

The first article is called “Women's magazines and their readers: The relationship between textual features and practices of reading”, and I will refer to it as the *readers and texts* article. This article explores possible connections between women's magazine reading as a social practice situated in everyday life and women's magazines as texts with certain characteristics. Based on informants' accounts of the situations and circumstances in which they read women's magazines I identify two different reading practices (ritual and fragmented magazine reading). Then I analyse how specific textual structures of the magazine medium might facilitate and encourage these reading practices. Likewise, I analyse readers' experiences with magazine content, emphasizing that the regular readers in my study sought journalism that felt relevant and realistic to their everyday lives. These readers had rather different social backgrounds, but my textual analysis revealed that women's magazine texts appear to attempt to bridge such gaps by framing all sorts of material in relation to one overarching theme otherwise different readers might relate to: the busy everyday life of a Norwegian woman who combines work and family. This article lays the groundwork for the more specific

thematic analyses in the other articles, but it also aims to make a methodological contribution to the fields of audience and reception studies, feminist media research and cultural studies. Research in these fields and on women's magazines specifically has demonstrated substantial discrepancies between researchers' interpretations and audiences' interpretations of the same texts; and a tendency has developed to privilege either texts or readings in analysis. While it is important to avoid confusion about the claims one might make based on textual analysis or audience research respectively, it is also unfortunate that connections between texts and readings have been pushed to the background. In the article I argue that exploring connections between reading practices and textual features is crucial in order to understand media experiences, and I propose *reader-guided textual analysis* as a possible method for achieving this goal.

The second article is called "'I want to hold it in my hands': Readers' experiences of the phenomenological differences between women's magazines online and in print", but I will refer to it here as the *magazine medium* article. Like the *readers and texts* article this one also deals with women's magazine reading as a media experience situated in everyday life, but it focuses less on the content of women's magazine texts and more on the properties and capacities of the magazine medium. I draw on phenomenological theory (Beauvoir [1949]2000, Merleau-Ponty [1945]2002) and medium theory (Meyrowitz 1994, Nyre 2004) in order to explore dimensions of media experiences that are often neglected, namely perceptual, technological and aesthetic experiences (Gentikow 2005a, 2005b). This is done through a comparative approach: In order to grasp the specificities of readers' experiences with the traditional print magazine medium I also asked questions about online women's magazines, here defined as websites operated by magazine publishers and featuring traditional magazine content. Importantly, this article was written before the launch of a new generation of electronic magazines for platforms such as the iPad. The article does, however, offer results that are highly relevant for understanding the possible merits and limits of magazines for iPads and similar technologies. I present findings that clearly demonstrate why a group of regular women's magazine readers prefer print even though they actually enjoy websites offering similar journalism free of charge. However, these readers read magazines in specific *contexts* in which they feel that computers have no place, and they appreciate the *interface* of the print magazine medium. In addition to these specific findings and arguments, the article makes a general contribution to the field of audience and reception research by highlighting

the need for more analysis of perceptual media experiences, and by introducing relevant concepts, theories and methodological approaches for such endeavours.

The third article is called “Women's magazines and women’s lives: An analysis of reading and identity”, and I will refer to it as the *identity* article. This article started out as an investigation of readers’ interpretations of the meanings of women's magazine texts, with particular emphasis on how women's magazines represent women’s lives. In the course of doing in-depth interviews and analysing these it became clear to me that the regular readers I studied consistently related their interpretations of women's magazine texts to questions of identity and personal experience. Not only did most of them evaluate women's magazines according to whether the magazines were relevant to their day-to-day lives, they also related various questions about women's magazines to questions about who they were, what they had experienced in life and how they wanted to present themselves. In other words, they constructed narratives about identity when talking about women's magazines. In order to capture the nuances of these processes of interpretation, I draw on two interviews as examples throughout this article, and I provide a detailed in-depth analysis of the discourses these informants drew on when establishing different identity narratives and different interpretations of the same magazines. These findings are analysed in light of sociological and feminist theories about identity and experience, particularly drawing on Antony Giddens (1991) and Simone de Beauvoir ([1949]2000). The article demonstrates the need for further research on readers’ interpretations of women's magazines, and contributes to this task by suggesting a typology of women's magazine reading as a reflexive practice.

The fourth article is called “Women's magazines and the public sphere”, and I will refer to it as *the public sphere* article. Like the third article this one also attempts to grasp the connections between readers’ identities and the texts of women's magazines. It does, however, take a rather different starting point as it emphasizes the role of women's magazine readers as citizens and the broader functions of women's magazine reading in society and culture. I draw on classical public sphere theory (Habermas [1962]1989) and feminist public sphere theory (Benhabib 1992, Fraser 1992) as well as scholarly debates on the democratic functions of popular journalism (Dahlgren and Sparks 1992, Dahlgren 2010, Gripsrud 1992) and cultural citizenship (Hermes 2005, van Zoonen 2005) as I investigate how regular readers of women's magazines experience these publications as resources for citizenship. I argue that the role of women's magazines as purveyors of political information is strictly limited, but that readers

find women's magazines to be relevant to their roles as citizens in an indirect manner, as women's magazines provide frameworks and resources for relating one's private life to a greater community. Drawing on this dual understanding I substantiate my argument through a reader-guided textual analysis and analysis of interviews with magazine editors. The article makes an empirical contribution as it maps the role of women's magazines in the Norwegian public sphere, a topic that can be related to a long-lasting and ongoing media policy dispute in Norway.⁵ However, the article also contributes a theoretically grounded framework for two different conceptions of the role of popular media in society, and it demonstrates the need for clarity about such normative foundations in debates about media, journalism and democracy.

1.3 The structure of the final contribution

In the final contribution I will summarize, contextualize and discuss the four articles and the ways in which they contribute to answering the main research question.

In chapter 2 I will provide an overview of influential research on women's magazines and their readers. I will outline the main debates that have characterised this research field, argue that different theoretical and methodological approaches are needed, and explain how the articles in my thesis can provide such new perspectives. While chapter 2 ends with a discussion of how each article contributes to dialogues in the field of women's magazine research, chapter 3 will focus on the overarching research question that binds the articles together. In this chapter I will provide a critical discussion of the theoretical foundations of the key concepts in the thesis, as I substantiate my understanding of magazine reading as a form of *media experience* and *women's magazines* as a form of gendered media. In chapter 4 I will outline and reflect upon the methodology of the qualitative reader study – and the other methods and materials – that constitute the empirical foundation for the four articles. In chapter 5 I will discuss the historical and structural context of Norwegian women's magazines through an analysis of important changes in the magazine market in recent years. In the sixth and final chapter of the final contribution I will summarize and discuss the main analytical findings of the four articles in relation to each other and in relation to the main research

⁵ In Norway, books and newspapers are exempt from the 25 percent Value Added Tax which is levied on most purchases, while magazines are subject to full VAT rates. The dispute about this arrangement will be discussed in chapter 6 and in *the public sphere* article.

question of this thesis: *How do regular readers of women's magazines experience these publications, and how are their experiences with women's magazines related to their everyday lives and to their sense of identity?*

2. Mapping the research field

In this chapter I will place my research in relation to other studies of women's magazines. I will start with the local context of my study, Norway, where magazines have scarcely been researched until recently. More magazine research has been carried out in the other Nordic countries, but I will underline the need for further empirical work, particularly on magazine readers. I will then turn to international – primarily Anglo-American – research on women's magazines, but rather than a complete review of the field I will focus my discussion on a few highly influential studies. The field of research on women's magazines is characterized by the existence of such landmark studies with specific empirical, theoretical, historical and political foundations. While it would be interesting to draw attention to alternative strands of research, for instance from outside the English-speaking community, the existence and importance of these landmark studies mandate attention to how they have influenced the field. I will therefore discuss how key studies are positioned in relation to each other and to important debates in the field. Afterwards I will place my own work in this field of research, and emphasize how my research might bring new perspectives and insights.

2.1 Norwegian and Nordic magazine research

Magazines are a key example of an under-researched topic in Norwegian media studies. A large-scale research project has recently resulted in the publication of a history of the Norwegian press in four volumes (Dahl et al. 2010), but in this case, as in Norwegian media research in general, the *weekly* press is not considered part of “the press”. The four volumes are therefore a history of Norwegian newspapers, and constitute the largest but by no means the only work on this matter (see for example Ottosen et al. 2002, also Dahl et al. 1993, Eide 1995). There is no equivalent work that analyses the history of Norwegian magazines. The one study that comes closest to attempting such a task, and which remains the most important introduction to Norwegian magazines and magazine research, is Jostein Gripsrud’s report *Ukepressens kulturelle og samfunnsmessige betydning* [The cultural and societal significance

of the weekly press] (1999).⁶ The report is short in length, but rich and comprehensive in content. It traces the history of Norwegian magazines from 1814 – the year that Norway’s constitution was signed and a Norwegian parliament established, a landmark year in Norwegian political and cultural history – to the end of the millennium in 1999. Gripsrud concludes that:

In every way, the weekly press is closely connected to main developments in the social and cultural-historical development since 1814. By virtue of being widely read, and by the broad spectrum of information and experiences it has passed on, it is obvious that the weekly press has been very important for everyday culture and for the conceptions substantial groups of people have about themselves and the world around them (1999: 52, my translation).

Gripsrud discusses and draws on the other Norwegian magazine studies that existed when this report was written. Some analysis of magazines was carried out in the 1970s and 80s, as researchers and students of Nordic languages and literature took an interest in magazines as part of folk culture and popular literature (Breivik 1980, Bull 1989, Dahl 1973, Dahl 1979, Johannessen 1977, Nordland 1973, Tvinnereim 1979). There are also some quantitative content analyses of magazines, aiming to investigate how magazines portray values and social change (Torsvik 1973) or to map journalistic differences in form and topic between newspapers and magazines (Roppen 1998a, 1998b). A rare example of an early reader study is Berit Rosvoll’s (1970) analysis of the social demographics of Norwegian magazine readers, based on quantitative data from an election survey. Another is folklorist Gry Heggli’s (1991, 1993) analysis of qualitative interviews with women who were regular readers of traditional family weeklies. Heggli observes how the women she interviewed carefully balanced the private pleasures of reading with other obligations: They would read in the evening after completing the day’s chores, but they would only read on weekdays, as weekends were clearly defined as family time. Correspondingly, the magazines these women read emphasized family values in every way: “during weekdays women spend their spare time reading about how to care for their families during the weekend” (Heggli 1993: 14).

Heggli’s study was originally a student thesis, and this and several other interesting works by students constitute the main body of more recent Norwegian magazine research (e.g.

⁶ This report was written on assignment from Foreningen Norsk Ukepresse, later Magasin og ukepresseforeningen, in relation to the VAT dispute between the Norwegian state and the magazine industry (see chapter 6 and *the public sphere* article).

Gudjonsson 2008, Heidenreich 2006, Husnes 2003, Løvaas 2004, Meisingset 2005, Måseide 2005, Overvoll 2005, Sandvand 2003, Sørensen 2005). Most of these studies are textual analyses of how gender roles are represented in historical or contemporary women's magazines, young women's magazines, family weeklies or men's magazines. These studies join Gripsrud (1999) in emphasizing connections between magazines and various cultural-historical developments in Norwegian society, thereby making implicit or explicit arguments about the importance of magazines in society and culture. However, only a few studies offer empirical analysis of magazine readers, investigating topics such as girls' interpretations of young women's magazines (Sørensen 2003, Ueland 2003) or readers' experiences with gossip magazines (Rødland 2007).

In addition to these contributions from master students there is some Norwegian magazine research on a doctoral level, although this is not found within media studies or journalism research. A sociological doctoral thesis analyses gender roles in magazine advertisements (Flick 1994), and historian Sanna Sarromaa has recently completed a comprehensive doctoral research project on the young women's magazine *Det Nye* (Sarromaa 2011a). Sarromaa's study is primarily placed within the fields of social history and children and youth research, and provides a historical analysis of how changing discourses of girlhood have been represented in *Det Nye*. *Det Nye* is a suitable case for such a project, as the launch of this magazine in 1957 corresponded with an increasing focus on youth culture in Norwegian society (Sarromaa 2009). Sarromaa's study includes discourse analysis of selected *Det Nye* texts from different periods (2009, 2010a) as well as interviews with current and previous *Det Nye* readers about representations and experiences of girlhood (2010b, 2011b).

Sarromaa's analysis of focus group interviews with contemporary *Det Nye* readers (2010b) echoes other studies of girls reading magazines (Currie 1999, Frazer 1987, Sørensen 2003): It emphasizes that girls sometimes negotiate and sometimes accept the ideals that are represented in these magazines. A more innovative approach is found in Sarromaa's (2011b) analysis of oral history interviews with elderly women who read *Det Nye* as they came of age in the 1950s and 60s. This article is mainly about sexuality and housewifery and only occasionally touches upon interpretations of *Det Nye*. However, before conducting interviews Sarromaa sent the elderly women her textual analysis of *Det Nye*, and the women seemed to have read this eagerly. This study thereby provides some interesting insight into how historical *Det Nye* readers react to a researcher's interpretations of the magazine they used to

read. While there are several potential methodological pitfalls to such a method – for instance, one could argue that Sarromaa imposed her own interpretations on the informants before the interviews – the women do provide some very interesting reflections on whether *Det Nye* actually mirrored the dominant discourses of girlhood and femininity of the time. For instance, one informant cautioned Sarromaa against believing that the magazine represented “the way things were” back then: Speaking on *Det Nye*’s puritan agony aunt “Beate” and pre-marital sex, the informant declared that “Beate didn’t know what she was talking about!” (Sarromaa 2011b: 10).

Sarromaa’s study provides an impressive, thorough and highly valuable contribution to Norwegian magazine research, but not primarily to research on magazines as *media*. Although she occasionally draws on media research and cultural studies, Sarromaa is primarily concerned with representations and discourses of gender and girlhood in a historical perspective. As she clearly states, she explores *Det Nye* as a potential mirror of social change and not primarily as a medium (Sarromaa 2011a: 30). My doctoral research project is, as far as I know, the first magazine study of its scale in Norwegian media or journalism research. It is also, as far as I know, the first Norwegian study in any discipline that focuses both on *readers* and on *glossy women's magazines for a grown-up audience*.

In the other Scandinavian countries more magazine research has been carried out, and women's magazines – including both glossies and family weeklies – are the topic of several Danish and Swedish studies (e.g. Hirdman 2001, Holgersson 2005, Juncker 1976, Larsson 1989, Lövgren 2009, Povlsen 1986, Sköld 1998, Wärsall 1989). In Finland, a large-scale magazine research project is currently ongoing, and this project provides an interesting perspective as it explicitly highlights the journalism of women's magazines and the political relevance this might have in the public sphere (Saarenmaa 2010). Textual and historical magazine analysis appears to be more widespread than audience research in all the Nordic countries, and a large number of studies are characterized by a fundamental interest in how gender is constructed and represented in women's magazines. Analysis of readers’ experiences is included in some works, such as Karin Lövgren’s (2009) study of how conceptions of age and ageing are reflected in the Swedish version of the popular women's magazine *Tara*, which targets women over 40. Some interesting observations about magazine readers are also found in an old Swedish media use survey in the Uses & Gratifications tradition (Lundberg and Hultén 1968). These researchers found that women often read

women's magazines in order to create a personal space, shielded from their immediate surroundings. Magazine reading appeared as a legitimate way of signalling the need for a break. As Gripsrud (1995: 119) has observed, this resembles one of the key findings from Janice Radway's ([1984]1991) classic and groundbreaking study *Reading the Romance*, published many years later and studying a different type of reading matter through different methods and in a different context.

The Nordic field of research on women's magazines provides relevant insights and thoughtful analyses that join the Norwegian studies by Gripsrud (1999), Sarromaa (2011a) and various students in emphasizing the societal and cultural relevance of women's magazines. It is unfortunate that these studies have not inspired further empirical research on magazine audiences in relation to texts and contexts. As mentioned there are some studies of the readers of young women's magazines (Sarromaa 2010b, Sørensen 2003, Ueland 2003), but overall, readers' experiences with magazines appears to be an under-researched topic in the Nordic countries. Simultaneously, the field's emphasis on the role of magazines in society and culture provides a solid justification for why magazines in general and reading experiences in particular are worthy of further scholarly attention.

2.2 Influential international studies

Informative reviews of international (although primarily Anglo-American) research on women's magazines can be found in several studies (e.g. Currie 1999: 22-90, Gill 2007: 180-218, Gough-Yates 2003: 6-25, McRobbie 1999: 46-50).⁷ As mentioned, my intention here is not to produce a complete review of the field, but rather to discuss selected studies in more detail. I will emphasize the methods and theoretical perspectives that are used and the epistemological claims that are made in certain well-known and influential studies of women's magazines and/or their readers. The discussion of these landmark studies will contextualize the theoretical and methodological approaches I have chosen for the articles in my thesis. In

⁷ The American magazine scholar Sammye Johnson gives an alternative account of the field, emphasizing American scholarship, in the article "Why should they care?" (2007). Johnson's main argument is that magazine research is fragmented and of little relevance to magazine publishers. She also observes that textual and historical works dominate and that there is little research on overarching trends and tendencies in contemporary magazine publishing.

each article, I suggest new approaches and enter into dialogues with established frameworks in the field, and these frameworks are particularly evident in these landmark studies.

2.2.1 Early analysis: The ideological effects of women's magazines

An early analysis of American women's magazines is found in Betty Friedan's ([1963]1997) *The Feminine Mystique*, a book which is first and foremost known in relation to the American women's movement. Friedan draws on her experience as a journalist for various women's magazines, and describes how magazine editors in the 1950s demanded that any topic should be approached through its potential significance for marriage and motherhood:

it was simply taken for granted [...] that women were not interested in politics, life outside the United States, national issues, art, science, ideas, adventure, education, or even their own communities, except where they could be sold through their emotions as wives and mothers (Friedan [1963]1997: 100).

Friedan also provides a textual analysis of women's magazines from before and after the Second World War. She argues that an image of an increasingly independent and ambitious "New Woman" – who expected the right man to recognize her ambitions and her commitment to herself – was replaced with the image of the "Happy Housewife Heroine", whose only ambition was to find a husband, have children and live through her family ([1963]1997: 85-122). Friedan's analysis of women's magazines is combined with analysis of education systems, family structures, housework, child-rearing, sexuality, psychology, advertising and consumerism in American society, and every part contributes to Friedan's main argument: Women have been told, from every institution, that they will only be happy as housewives, but life as a housewife is making a lot of women miserable. Friedan's solution is that women need ambitions and life plans that are independent of their families, for instance by working outside the home and taking part in society as individual citizens, not just as mothers and wives.

Although Friedan substantiates her argument through a multitude of examples, her analysis is journalistic and political rather than scholarly. Her argument about an ideology – a feminine mystique – permeating American society seems credible because she finds evidence of this ideology everywhere, but she rarely finds her claims about causality through clear

application of theories or methods. This is particularly evident in her analysis of women's magazines, where she implicitly moves from making claims about production (based on her work experience as a magazine journalist) and texts (based on textual analysis) to making claims about effects on readers.⁸ Friedan starts her magazine analysis by arguing that these publications and other media form an image by which American women live. She asks: "What is missing from the image that mirrors and creates the identity of women in America today?" ([1963]1997: 81). Her analysis illustrates how the image of the happy housewife is created in women's magazines, but she is rather vague about *how* this image actually "mirrors and creates" women's identities. On the one hand, she argues that women come to accept the housewife ideal and that the ideal has the power to make them unhappy. On the other hand this unhappiness seems to indicate that the ideal is not fully internalized. Although the form and extent of alleged media influences remain unclear, the underlying model of communication appears to be that ideas that are represented in texts must have effects on readers. In other words, Friedan appears to take for granted a rather simple media effects model which, as we know today, has been the subject of heavy critique in media research (e.g. Barker and Petley 1997, Gauntlett 2005).

Consequently, the greatest significance of Friedan's analysis to the field of women's magazine research is probably that of being a starting point – for attention to the ideological effects of women's magazines and for more research on the matter. For instance, Anna Gough-Yates places Friedan's analysis as an example of an early work that tended to conceive women's magazines "simply in terms of their 'negative' or 'positive' images of women" (Gough-Yates 2003: 8), but she also shows how later studies (e.g. Glazer 1980, Leman 1980) drew on more sophisticated theoretical models in order to conceptualize what is Friedan's main concern: the ideological impact of women's magazines.

2.2.2 British cultural studies: Ideology, texts and contexts

Ideology is also a keyword in European and particularly in British research on women's magazines. In Britain, research on women's magazines is closely linked to the emergence and

⁸ As Currie (1999: 23) notes, Friedan interviewed women who lived according to the housewife ideal. However, it is not made clear in Friedan's book whether these women read women's magazines or how women's magazines could be connected to their experiences as unhappy housewives.

success of the research tradition known as cultural studies. The establishment of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham and the subsequent scholarly efforts there and elsewhere provided a framework for perspectives, concepts and debates that were crucial for research on women's magazines. The classic works of cultural studies emphasized everyday life and popular culture (Hoggart 1957, Williams [1958]1971), gender in relation to media use (Gray 1992, McRobbie 1991, Morley [1986]1990), and new models for understanding communication and reception in relation to ideology and society (Hall [1978]1980, Morley 1980, Morley 1992).

Janice Winship's *Inside Women's Magazines* (1987) is one example of a magazine study within this framework. Winship positions herself as a feminist, a "closet reader" of women's magazines and as a cultural studies researcher at the beginning of her study (1987: xiv), and throughout her analysis she combines a researcher's voice with a personal tone and a political feminist agenda. Methodologically, her study is first and foremost a vivid textual analysis of women's magazines from different periods and different genres. However, Winship does not only present theoretical interpretations of women's magazine texts. She also draws on her personal reading experiences in order to analyse women's magazines as social texts situated in everyday life, and she invokes a feminist critique of gender relations in order to understand the ideology of women's magazines. Winship makes several interesting observations about the role of magazine reading in everyday life and in society, and convincingly places these observations in a specific theoretical and political framework. For instance, she argues that:

Women's magazines provide for these rhythms and routines of women's lives in which private time and space are precious, work and leisure merge, activities overlap, and dreams and escape often feed on a modest vocabulary of everyday possibilities: modest partly because the horizons of women's lives are still limited and partly because women's desires are constantly forestalled (Winship 1987: 13).

These observations resemble key findings in Joke Hermes' (1995) ethnographic study of women's magazine reading (see 2.2.3), and Hermes credits Winship's study as being "a book that can make one understand the pleasures of women's magazines more than any of the other texts available" (1995: 4). Nevertheless, Winship's study remains a researcher's reading of women's magazine texts and not an empirical audience study.

The cultural studies tradition in Britain has also provided relevant research on magazines for younger women. The work of Angela McRobbie (1982, 1991, 1994, 1999, 2009) has been particularly important in this respect, not only because McRobbie has analysed different magazines over several decades, but also because of her self-critical and self-reflexive discussions of her own work. Recently, her relatively optimistic analysis of new young women's magazines in the 1990s (McRobbie 1994: 158-161, 1999) has been followed by more pessimistic discussions of a backlash against feminism and how this is represented in popular culture (McRobbie 2009). Likewise, McRobbie has criticized her early work on the young woman's magazine *Jackie* for "creating an image of *Jackie* as a massive ideological block in which readers were implicitly imprisoned" (1991: 141). McRobbie acknowledged that an empirical audience study of *Jackie* readers by Elizabeth Frazer (1987) demonstrated girls' abilities to negotiate rather than accept ideological messages in young women's magazines (McRobbie 1999: 50). Frazer's study can be seen as a turning point in magazine research for several reasons, as Frazer contradicted dominant assumptions about the ideological effects of magazines on readers, and provided a forceful critique of the use of the concept "ideology" in women's magazines research. Her argument was not that ideology was unimportant or irrelevant, but rather that ideological effects could not simply be "read off" texts:

All too often theorists commit the fallacy of reading "the" meaning of the text and inferring the ideological effect the text "must" have on the readers (other than the theorists themselves, of course!). We may oppose this strategy at two points. First, we may dispute that there is one valid and unitary meaning of a text. Second, we may care to check whether, even if we grant there is one meaning, it does have this, or an ideological effect on the reader (Frazer 1987: 411).

The contrasts between Frazer's findings and previous studies highlighted the problems of making claims about readers based on textual analysis alone. However, as David Gauntlett has commented in a research review (2008: 191), Frazer's study does not "prove" that readers are not influenced by texts – it just establishes that effects cannot be automatically predicted. Rosalind Gill also underlines the continued relevance of ideology in her review of magazine research:

Of course, it is not necessarily the case that all readers will accept the subject positions on offer in women's and men's magazines, and there may be divergent and even subversive readings made of them. What is clear, however, is that the representations on offer are profoundly ideological – designed

to naturalize gender difference and male power – even when this is presented in the postfeminist language of choice, freedom, sexual power and pleasing yourself, or in the ironic, self-deprecating tone of the men’s magazines (Gill 2007: 217).

These debates – about ideology and about textual analysis versus audience analysis – have come to characterize the field of research on women's magazines. Another study inspired by the cultural studies tradition can be read as an example of the complications and contradictions of these debates.

In *Women’s Worlds: Ideology, Femininity and the Woman’s Magazine* (1991), Ros Ballaster, Margaret Beetham, Elizabeth Frazer and Sandra Hebron analyse women's magazines from the eighteenth century to the end of the 1980s. This is primarily a historical work, but in one chapter textual analysis of contemporary magazines is combined with a focus group study. The historical analysis establishes how women's magazines came to be constructed as a genre in relation to changing femininities and ideologies, and the authors take care to emphasize that the implied reader must not be confused with the actual reader:

To put it simply, because women's magazines define their readers as “women” they embody definitions of what it means to be a woman in a culture at any given historical moment. However, we know that a contemporary woman reader often does not feel she matches the image projected by the magazine (1991: 45).

Through such reservations and the use multiple methods (where historically possible), Ballaster et al. aim to explore connections between women's magazine texts and women’s lives in different periods, but also to avoid what we might call the “epistemological confusion” of some earlier magazine analysis – namely the tendency to make claims about readers and effects without substantiation in empirical audience research.

Nevertheless, it is clear from the outset that Ballaster et al. (1991) work within a specific political and theoretical framework that defines the direction of their analysis. While it is recommendable that this is clarified, the analysis is also limited by some assumptions that are taken for granted when the authors define their project. Their starting point is a contrast – which the authors find in relevant literature and in their own experiences with women's magazines – between the women’s magazine as a “bearer of pleasure” and “a purveyor of oppressive ideologies of sex, class and race difference” (1991: 2). The authors highlight

contradictions between their own pleasures in reading women's magazines and their roles as feminist critics: “Why, when their contents fill us with outrage, do we nevertheless enjoy reading them?” (1991: 1). It is taken as self-evident that women's magazines represent oppressive values and should be condemned by feminists. One of many examples is the use of a well-known metaphor (see also Winship 1987: 53): “Reading women's magazines can have exactly the same kind of effect as eating two or more bars of chocolate – the original craving was real but seems in the end to have been for the wrong thing” (Ballaster et al. 1991: 1). This quote positions women's magazines in relation to several communication models at once in a clever but oversimplified manner: Women's magazines have unhealthy *effects* on readers, and they are the wrong answer to real *needs* women aim to fulfil through media use. Here the authors do not question their roles as feminist critics who judge “right” from “wrong”, even though they are otherwise self-reflexive about their work.

Ballaster et al. (1991) do not, then, aim to explore whether women's magazines present oppressive ideologies, nor whether a contrast between pleasure and ideology exists. Instead, the authors take this contrast as given and aim to situate it historically and theoretically. Their main argument is that the pleasures of popular genres are linked to the ideological frameworks in which they operate (1991: 162). Ballaster et al. make a convincing and thorough case for this argument, but the overall assessment of their contribution will depend on whether one accepts their starting point. Gill (2007) criticizes authors such as Winship (1987) for separating personal reading pleasures from scholarly criticism – exemplified by what Gill calls the “Guilty Prefaces Phenomenon” (2007: 195) – but Gill also argues that Ballaster et al.’s view on the matter is more productive, as they aim to actually understand the ideological dimensions of reading pleasures. Hermes, on the other hand, is highly critical of Ballaster et al.’s position, which she describes as an echo of a “feminism of concern” (1995: 3). Hermes finds that Ballaster et al.’s audience study is respectful of readers’ different points of view, but that this respect is undermined by the strong emphasis on the harmful qualities of women's magazines in the rest of their study: “Consequently the only relatively comfortable reader position as regards this book is to share the authors’ mixture of pleasure and guilt” (Hermes 1995: 3). Hermes’ opposition to these tendencies form the starting point for her study, which remains the most influential and comprehensive study of magazine readers to date.

2.2.3 *Ethnographic analysis: From texts to readers*

The opening lines of Joke Hermes' *Reading women's magazines* (1995) are:

I have always felt strongly that the feminist struggle in general should be aimed at claiming respect. It is probably for that reason that I have never felt very comfortable with the majority of (feminist) work on women's magazines (Hermes 1995: 1)

Hermes criticizes feminist magazine analysis for displaying an attitude of concern rather than respect for the readers of women's magazines. This position implies an unequal relationship between feminist critics and ordinary women, in which the feminist critic will attempt to enlighten the ordinary woman who is not able to see for herself how harmful women's magazines are. Hermes position, which she characterizes as postmodern feminism, is to be self-reflexive as a researcher and feminist, and to show readers "respect rather than concern: appreciation that readers are producers of meaning rather than the cultural dupes of media institutions" (Hermes 1995: 5). Her study can be placed in relation to developments in feminist theory, in which debates about who speaks for whom have been widespread (Mortensen et al. 2008, Thornham 2007, van Zoonen 1991, Ang and Hermes 1991) and in media research, in which debates about active audiences and possibilities for resistance have been central (Alasuutari 1999, Morley 1992, Moores 1993, van Zoonen 1994). For instance, Hermes' critique of magazine scholarship echoes Ien Ang's (1996) and Liesbet van Zoonen's (1991) critique of Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance* ([1984]1991). Ang questions the ways in which Radway combines the role of a self-reflexive ethnographer and (according to Ang) a not so reflexive feminist critic (Ang 1996: 103), while van Zoonen criticizes Radway for blemishing an otherwise respectful analysis by a "militant" feminist conclusion (1991: 44). Like Hermes, van Zoonen lists women's magazines as one of certain popular genres that have been singled out as particularly "problematic" by feminist critics:

Objectionable in particular are soap operas, romance novels, and women's magazines which create a "cult of femininity and heterosexual romance" that – since these media are predominantly consumed by women – set the agenda for the female world (cf. Ferguson, 1983). Such a strong conviction about the value (or rather lack of it) of these media for women's lives, is remarkably similar to the patriarchal attitudes of men knowing what is best for women (van Zoonen 1991: 43).

Hermes' stance in these debates has some particularly interesting consequences for the methodological choices she makes. Her analysis is based on 80 lengthy interviews with readers of women's magazines, informed by what she calls an ethnographic perspective (1995: 11). Her goal is to understand how women's magazines become meaningful for readers, and she argues that textual analysis has no place in this context, as: "it would always imply that readers 'miss' things in texts, such as their deeper meanings" (Hermes 1995: 6). Furthermore, she applies a broad and informant-guided definition of what a women's magazine is, and therefore includes gossip magazines and feminist magazines. Her selection of informants is also wide: Not only does she take care to include women of different ages, nationalities and occupations; she also includes male readers and people who hardly ever or never read women's magazines. This decision has a deliberate theoretical foundation: Hermes is critical of a tendency in audience and reception research to privilege "fan" readings over ordinary media use, "taking the knowledgeable reader for an average reader" (1995: 14). Rather, she consistently emphasizes the mundane and everyday nature of media use, arguing that readers are not necessarily very invested in media texts. Hermes makes some categorical statements such as "Media use is not always meaningful. From time to time it is a virtually meaningless or at least secondary activity" (1995: 15), against which it could, for one thing, be argued that "secondary" is hardly the same thing as "meaningless". However, her main argument is that so-called "meaningless" media use might become meaningful through its place in the structure of everyday life (1995: 19). Hermes theorizes media use in relation to a phenomenology of everyday life, drawing on the philosophy of Michel de Certeau (1988) and on media research that emphasizes media use as situated in everyday life (Bausinger 1984, Morley [1986]1990).

In this theoretical and methodological framework, Hermes constructs women's magazine reading as an activity that is made meaningful through its integration into everyday life. She defines two *descriptive repertoires* readers draw on when talking about women's magazines (the easily put down repertoire and the repertoire of relaxation) and two *interpretative repertoires* (the repertoire of connected knowing and the repertoire of practical knowledge). The interpretative repertoires explain how typical magazine genres (such as practical tips and problem pages) might be made meaningful as they feed fantasies of an ideal self who is prepared for any kind of practical situation or emotional crisis. However, Hermes emphasizes that the descriptive repertoires were dominant in her interviews with magazine readers, who emphasized that women's magazines were "easily picked up and put down" (1995: 31-36).

Thereby, they were suited to the short breaks a fragmented everyday life might afford. Hermes argues that women's magazines are “typically second-choice reading matter that adapts to a noisy background, to other obligations. They are read more for their adaptability than for their content” (1995: 34). She admits that content has to be somehow relevant if readers are to pick up the magazines at all, and provides a very interesting analysis of how content might become relevant through her discussion of interpretative repertoires. However, as she formulates a theory of everyday media use she emphasizes that “content is less important than whether or not a genre is accommodating” (1995: 64).

Hermes' study represents a radical break with previous research on women's magazines. It presents a great number of challenging and provocative arguments about women's magazine reading and about topics such as feminist criticism, methodology in media research and the nature of media use in everyday life. I will return to some of Hermes' findings and arguments in more detail where appropriate according to the way my analysis is presented in this thesis, most notably in the methodology chapter, the conclusion in chapter six and in *the readers and texts* article.

Hermes' study is not, however, the only work that represents a methodological break with the strong textual focus of earlier magazine research. Dawn Currie's *Girl Talk* (1999) is also based on extensive interviews with readers, and provides a comprehensive analysis of how teenage girls use and interpret adolescent magazines. Like Hermes, Currie is critical of the tendency in early magazine research to make claims about audiences based on textual analysis. She observes that “when writers describe texts as demeaning to women, reading has been assumed to be oppressive; when texts are described as pleasurable fantasy, reading has been taken as resistance to patriarchy” (Currie 1999: 166). Nevertheless, Currie argues in favour of combining methods: She claims that various methods of textual analysis are necessary in order to understand magazine texts, but insists that interviews are required in order to understand magazine reading. Her goal is to connect these elements through the use of multiple methods: “Such an analytical move connects the cultural world of texts to the social world of embodied readers; it moves from the text as an object of analysis to the meaning-making that these texts mediate” (Currie 1999: 118). Nevertheless, it is difficult to understand the rationale for the specific methods of textual analysis Currie chooses to combine with her qualitative audience study. For instance, she applies quantitative content analysis in order to identify ideological messages in magazines, thereby representing

magazine texts in a way that has little in common with how these texts appear to readers. This seems like an odd choice for a study aiming to connect “the cultural world of the text and the social world of embodied readers” (1999: 118). Furthermore, while Currie is careful not to impose her own ideas on informants when analysing interview data, her textual analysis is – like much previous magazine research – built on the assumption that magazines for teenage girls are inherently patriarchal. Gauntlett has commented that this assumption is never really questioned and that Currie “seems to stamp her own broadly negative feeling about the magazines throughout the study” (Gauntlett 2008: 192). Currie’s study exemplifies a tendency in which actual magazine readers have gradually received more scholarly attention, but it also illustrates that the strained relationship between audience research and textual analysis in magazine research continues.

2.3 The need for new approaches

This history of some landmark studies of women's magazines and their readers has demonstrated how certain debates have characterized this field of research. The ideological impact of women's magazines has been taken for granted by some and thoroughly discussed by others, but the problem pointed out by Frazer (1987) about the how to grasp ideology in empirical research remains. It is also clear that several studies provide insightful textual and theoretical analyses of women's magazines in relation to society and culture (Winship 1987, Ballaster et al. 1991, McRobbie 1991). And where such analysis has led to unfounded claims about ideological effects on readers, the problems associated with these assumptions have been pointed out and discussed. Eventually, few but comprehensive studies have provided empirical audience analysis (Hermes 1995, Currie 1999).

In her insightful review of research on women's magazines, Anna Gough-Yates (2003) argues that contradictions in magazine texts and potential effects on readers are two topics that have received considerable attention in the existing field of research. Her study therefore tackles the question of alleged contradictions and ambivalences between femininity and feminism from a different point of view, as she explores how discourses of a “New Woman” were established within the spheres of women's magazine production and publication in Britain in the 1980s and 90s. In spite of the clear tendency to view women's magazines as possible purveyors of ideology, very few other studies actually analyse conditions of production (a

well-known exception is Ferguson 1983). However, while it is easy to agree that production studies are needed and highly interesting, this does not imply that the “old” debates about texts and readers are settled once and for all. Indeed, one of the pertinent conclusions in Gough-Yates’ literature review is that “Overall, it is the sheer unpredictability of the relationship between reader and text that emerges from the recent studies of women's magazines and their audience” (2003: 14).

Where does this leave magazine research? Based on the literature review I have just conducted, I will, first of all, underline the general need for more empirical research of any kind. A rather similar point is made by Tim Holmes (2007) in the introduction to a *Journalism Studies* special issue on magazines, where Holmes calls for a greater variety of analytical approaches to a greater variety of magazines. While recognizing the contributions of feminist media researchers with a particular interest in how gender is constructed in women's magazines (and eventually in men’s magazines), Holmes also argues in favour of broadening the analytical scope in magazine research: “But important though it is, gender is not the only lens through which to study magazines” (2007: 512). Furthermore, while women's magazines have received some scholarly attention, the body of research on women's magazines is still not substantial compared to the amount of research on other popular genres such as for instance soap opera (e.g. Ang [1982]1985, Gripsrud 1995, Hobson 1982, Press 1991) or tabloid newspaper journalism (e.g. Dahlgren and Sparks 1992, Sparks and Tulloch 2000, Schudson 1978). The landmark studies I have discussed are getting rather old, and although some are done in the Netherlands (Hermes 1995) or Canada (Currie 1999) the British dominance is strong (Ballaster et al. 1991, Frazer 1987, Gough-Yates 2003, McRobbie 1991). Research from a greater variety of countries is needed, preferably encompassing a greater variation of research questions. My study will provide one example of such a fresh empirical perspective, as I analyse reading of women's magazines in Norway.

However, while more women’s magazine research of any kind would be most welcome, the status of the existing research field also points to specific theoretical and analytical challenges. As feminist critique and cultural studies have been paramount to magazine research, the field would benefit from a greater variety of theoretical approaches. Women's magazines have been analysed and discussed in changing feminist frameworks – emphasizing ideology and pleasure, patriarchal gender norms and potential feminist resistance – but these are not the only possible approaches to a theory of how women's magazines relate to culture

and society. My thesis will particularly address four theoretical and analytical challenges, and suggest new approaches in order to meet them. These challenges are as follows:

1. Epistemological confusion in early textual analysis – and ensuing critique of this tendency – has resulted in insufficient analysis of the relationship between texts and readers.
2. The tendency to focus on the ideological meanings of women's magazine texts implies that the magazine as a medium has largely been neglected as a topic for research.
3. The existing field of research has given substantial insight into how researchers interpret magazine texts and some insight into how readers use magazines in their everyday lives, but we still know relatively little about how readers interpret magazine texts.
4. While the political significance of women's magazines is emphasized in practically every study, women's magazines should be more explicitly situated in relation to the realm of the political, for instance through the use of public sphere theory.

These challenges will be outlined in the remainder of this chapter, and I will also address how the four articles in the thesis aim to fill these gaps of knowledge by introducing new methodological and theoretical perspectives.

2.3.1 The relationship between textual features and practices of reading

My first argument is that *epistemological confusion in early textual analysis – and ensuing critique of this tendency – has resulted in insufficient analysis of the relationship between texts and readers*. As I have outlined above, research on women's magazines demonstrates several possible discrepancies between how researchers and readers interpret magazine texts. Such discrepancies are, in themselves, interesting rather than problematic. They signal a variety of possible meanings and provide interesting examples of how specific readings might relate to the theoretical frameworks employed by a researcher, or to the specific social contexts of an audience study. Research on women's magazines thereby enters into a key

debate in media research in general; a debate about the degree to which texts are open for interpretations or structured to be read in certain ways, and about how variations in interpretations might relate to conditions of society, culture and everyday life (e.g. Alasuutari 1999, Morley 1992, Moores 1993). However, problems arise if a researcher assumes that his or her reading will automatically and invariably be taken up by magazine readers. Such problems might occur when arguments *about* effects are made without a clear theoretical conceptualization of *how* effects occur (as in Friedan ([1963]1997), or when analysis of ideological messages in texts “implicitly imprisons” the reader (as in McRobbie’s 1991 critique of her 1982 analysis). Later empirical audience research has demonstrated a variety of negotiated readings (Currie 1999, Frazer 1987) or emphasized different aspects of the reading experiences altogether (Hermes 1995).

However, while the methodological focus has shifted from textual analysis to ethnography, something has been lost. Some studies aim to combine audience research and textual analysis (Ballaster et al. 1991, Currie 1999), but there is little research that combines reader analysis with textual analysis of magazines *as they appear to readers*. The unfortunate consequences of this tendency are addressed in the first article in my thesis, the *readers and texts* article. There I suggest a new approach that aims to deal with the text-reader problematic of previous magazine research, and to better grasp the specificities and complexities between certain practices of reading and certain textual features. This approach, which I have called *reader-guided textual analysis*, entails a combination of methods, and it will be explained in more detail in the methodology chapter as well as in the article itself.

2.3.2 The magazine medium

Secondly, *the tendency to focus on the ideological meanings of women's magazine texts implies that the magazine as a medium has largely been neglected as a topic for research*. Or to be more precise: Existing research offers a wide range of interesting observations and thoughts about the properties and capacities of the magazine medium, but these are often digressions rather than the result of systematic analysis. For instance, Winship notes that “There are formal qualities to a magazine to be enjoyed – the feel of its paper, its size, the quality of its colour, design and visuals.” (1987: 52). Then she immediately moves on to how different forms of content might appeal, and in the rest of the chapter she discusses the

potential visual pleasures and ideological messages of selected ads. The “formal qualities” which were mentioned are occasionally brought into this analysis, but the medium as such is no longer the main object of exploration. Hermes (1995) consistently emphasizes the magazine as a fragmented medium suited for fragmented reading, but it is this form of media use (rather than the medium that is used) that is her object of study.

The magazine medium is studied in detail in more practical texts such as Sammye Johnson and Patricia Prijatel’s textbook *The magazine from cover to cover* (2007), which provides an instructive discussion of the main formal characteristics of the magazine medium. Nevertheless, this is primarily a textbook for students who aim to work in magazine publishing. If one looks at research literature in media studies, there is a clear contrast between research on magazines and, for instance, television. Several classical works highlight the technological, historical, social and cultural capacities of television, and discuss relations between the television medium and specific programmes or television texts (Williams [1974]2008, Silverstone 1994, Scannell 1996). The same is rarely done for magazines, and the specific direction of the majority of magazine analysis might explain why this is so. A preoccupation with ideological messages and representations implies that detailed readings of specific texts are privileged over discussions of the medium in which these texts appear. When constructions of ideology and femininity in women’s magazine texts are explored, researchers tend to emphasize that these are found in magazines for women but not that they are found in magazines. Or to put it differently, magazine researchers often ask questions about *women’s* magazines and rarely about women’s *magazines*. Several studies offer insightful analysis of how the women’s magazines *genre* came to be constructed in relation to changing social, political and cultural conditions for women (Winship 1987, Ballaster et al. 1991, Beetham 1996). Medium analysis tends to be part of – but not the main objective of – these studies.

In order to begin a more systematic exploration of the magazine medium, I will apply phenomenology as a theoretical framework in a comparative analysis of readers’ experiences with women’s magazines online and in print. This is the object of the second article in the thesis, the *magazine medium* article. Phenomenological theory emphasizes the importance of senses and perceptions in how we experience the world, and might help us grasp the importance of what Winship, in the quote above, called “formal qualities” of the magazine medium: “the feel of its paper, its size, the quality of its colour, design and visuals” (1987:

52). A comparative approach is methodologically fruitful in order to capture these dimensions: By asking readers to compare their experiences with women's magazine journalism in two different media, the capacities and properties of these media – and their influence on reading experiences – become more visible. In the *magazine medium* article I outline how phenomenological theory might inspire a theoretical framework for grasping dimensions of media experiences that are otherwise often overlooked in research.

2.3.3 Readers' interpretations of magazine texts

Thirdly: *The existing field of research has given substantial insight into how researchers interpret magazine texts and some insight into how readers use magazines in their everyday lives, but we still know relatively little about how readers interpret magazine texts.* While the field offers valuable textual analyses of how gender is constructed in women's magazines, there is less research on how actual magazine readers experience constructions of gender, femininity and women's roles in these publications. This gap in knowledge is particularly evident when it comes to magazines for adult (as opposed to adolescent) women. While there are some studies of how girls interpret young women's magazines (Currie 1999, Frazer 1987), the one chapter on readers in Ballaster et al. (1991) is a rare example of an internationally well-known study of how grown-up readers interpret the texts of women's magazines. Hermes (1995) also deals with interpretations through her interesting discussion of interpretative repertoires, but the main focus of her study is nevertheless on women's magazine reading as a form of everyday media use. As a parallel one might look at the emerging field of research on men's magazines: While textual analysis is widespread there as well, comprehensive studies (such as Benwell 2003, Jackson et al. 2001) include readers' perspectives as an integral part when investigating how masculinity and men's identities are represented. As for women's magazines, the less influential field of Nordic magazine research might actually have more to offer in this respect, as the studies of Sarromaa (2011a), Heggli (1993, 1991) and Lövgren (2009) investigate readers' interpretations of texts.

However, more empirical audience research is needed, and again, the debates that have characterized women's magazine research provide important justifications for this need. Through textual analysis, researchers have argued for the cultural, social and political significance of women's magazines. Women's magazines are believed to represent certain

images of women's lives, to privilege some discourses over others, to situate these images and discourses historically and culturally, and to contribute to the construction of norms about what femininity is and what it means to be a woman. It is high time to ask readers how they feel about these representations. This was the starting point for the third article in my thesis, the *identity* article.

One possible approach might be to introduce audience research to the dominant theoretical frameworks and debates – about ambivalences between femininity and feminism or ideology and pleasure – in textual analysis of women's magazines. However, my interviews with magazine readers led me to believe that another theoretical framework might be equally relevant in order to understand how these readers interpreted magazine texts. As I interviewed readers, I found their *mode of interpretation* to be more fascinating than the resulting interpretations, although these were by no means uninteresting. I was surprised at the complex but direct connections the readers established between their own identities and the representations of women's lives in women's magazines. The informants might have something to say about women's roles in women's magazines on a general level, but they had even more to say about how they would situate and evaluate women's magazines according to their own experiences and their own lives. Friedan wrote that women's magazines “mirror and create women's identities” ([1963]1997: 81), but my interpretation is rather that readers create identity narratives using women's magazines as a mirror – while being aware that this mirror can be skewed in how it represents reality. Rather than drawing on the established mode of feminist critique I therefore introduce a different theoretical perspective inspired by sociological (Giddens 1991) and phenomenological and feminist (Beauvoir ([1949]2000, Moi 1999) theories about identity and experience.

2.3.4 Women's magazines and the public sphere

Fourthly, *while the political significance of women's magazines is emphasized in practically every study, women's magazines should be more explicitly situated in relation to the realm of the political, for instance through the use of public sphere theory.* If there is one concurring argument in the existing field of research on women's magazines, it is that these publications have *political* relevance. This is evident in Norwegian and Nordic magazine research, which emphasizes how magazines might represent important social and cultural developments over

time (Gripsrud 1999, Holgersson 2005, Sarromaa 2011a, Sköld 1998). It is even more explicit in magazine research inspired by cultural studies and feminist criticism, where women's magazines are constructed as purveyors of certain ideologies about the organization of society, and magazine critique is framed as a political project to reveal and counter such tendencies (Ballaster et al. 1991, McRobbie 1991, Winship 1987). It is also evident in audience research that investigates whether readers accept or negotiate the ideological discourses in magazines (Currie 1999, Frazer 1987, Sarromaa 2010b), or which analyses women's magazines in relation to the politics of everyday life (Hermes 1995, see also Currie 1999).

Nevertheless, “the political” remains a rather elusive concept in magazine research. Women's magazines are constructed as political first and foremost through the influence of cultural studies, which emphasizes the ideological dimensions of popular culture, or feminist critique, which emphasizes that “the personal is political”. This well-known slogan effectively highlights how a number of important issues particularly concerning women have been dismissed from the political realm. Ballaster et al. write in the preface to their study:

If we were to turn to the magazines in search of solutions we would find, as we document in what follows, that our troubles are represented as “ours”, individually, although they are also, by a bizarre and unexplained coincidence, also experienced by millions of other women throughout the western world and through the ages. By contrast, it is our profound conviction that “our problems” have political and structural roots, that their solutions lie in political struggle and transformation. That so many women have such similar experiences is a political matter. The struggle must be in the arena of sexual politics (for sexuality *is* political), the politics of social identity and difference, and the politics of economic relations (1991: ix).

This quote, the subsequent analysis, and the majority other women's magazine studies all draw on a model about the spheres of society in order to frame the political relevance of women's magazines. They assume that a distinction between the personal and the political is in place, and that certain problems are misplaced, so to speak: Some issues are relegated to the private sphere although their causes and solutions lie elsewhere, giving individual women the impossible task of solving structural, economic and political problems within an often narrow space for agency in their private lives. Women's magazines are an obvious case for analysis of these processes: They are written for women, their contents tend to emphasize women's home lives, and they are generally read at home – in other words, they are solidly

situated in the domestic sphere, while it is easy to argue that they also convey political messages and operate within specific ideological frameworks.

In light of this it is striking that public sphere theory is seldom applied in research on women's magazines. Jürgen Habermas' ([1962]1989) theory of the different spheres of society provides a historical, theoretical and normative conceptualization of the private-public distinction. The critique and development of Habermas' ideas, particularly by feminist public sphere scholars, provides a solid theoretical foundation for the argument made in magazine research about the political significance of women's magazines. The works of for instance Nancy Fraser (1989, 1992) or Seyla Benhabib (1992) question the very processes in which distinctions between private and public are made, and demonstrates how certain issues particularly concerning women can come to be marginalized in the political public sphere. The relevance of these theories to research on women's magazines can hardly be exaggerated. Public sphere theory provides a theoretical foundation for the forms of analysis and critique that have characterized the field, but is rarely explicitly used (exceptions are found in Gripsrud 1999 and Kivikuru 2009). In contrast, research on tabloid newspaper journalism has explicitly utilized public sphere theory in order to capture the political significance of this form of journalism (e.g. Dahlgren and Sparks 1992, Gripsrud and Weibull 2010, Sparks and Tulloch 2000).

The last article in this thesis, the *public sphere* article, aims to situate women's magazines in the Norwegian public sphere through the use of public sphere theory, drawing in particular on the works of Nancy Fraser and Seyla Benhabib as well as on research on cultural citizenship (Hermes 2005, Herkman 2010, van Zoonen 2005). I analyse readers' experiences, magazine texts and interviews with editors, and demonstrate how the role of women's magazines in the public sphere can be conceptualized in different ways both on a theoretical and an empirical level.

3. Theories, concepts, perspectives

In the previous chapter I placed my study in relation to influential research on women's magazines. Main arguments in my review were that the field offers a number of interesting and relevant insights related to some key debates, but that the need for different perspectives is evident. A central ambition of this thesis is to suggest and demonstrate analytical approaches that are new to this field, and consequently the theoretical perspectives I will draw on are only occasionally the same as those found in the field of research I outlined above. I have already mentioned some relevant theoretical perspectives – such as public sphere theory or sociological identity theory – and I will return to these in the various articles. The intention of this chapter, however, is to discuss the overarching concepts and perspectives that have informed the thesis as a whole. I will therefore focus on the main research question and analytical ambition, which is to explore women's magazine reading as a media experience. First I will discuss the theoretical foundations and analytical implications of thinking in terms of *media experiences*. Furthermore, I will situate the specific form of media experience in question here – *women reading women's magazines* – in relation to theories of gender and lived experience. For both purposes I will particularly draw on the phenomenological and feminist philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir ([1949]2000) and on Toril Moi's (1999) readings of Beauvoir.

3.1 Media experiences

In audience and reception research there has been considerable debate about key concepts. One example is the term “audience”: The singular has eventually been replaced with the plural “audiences” in a reflection of theoretical and empirical developments, but scholars nevertheless continue to question the relevance and meaning of the concept (e.g. Ang 1996, Bird 2003, Moores 1993). Likewise, influential models of communication such as Stuart Hall's ([1978]1980) Encoding/Decoding have inspired fundamental debates about relations of power in mediated communication: What are the possible interpretations of a text? Are there dominant interpretations? To which extent are these decided by producers? To which extent can and will audiences accept, negotiate or deny dominant meanings? While for instance John

Fiske (1989) has argued that audiences have great freedoms as well as political powers when using and interpreting popular culture, others insist on the power of producers to encode dominant meanings which are the most likely to be taken up by audiences. Even though texts can be interpreted in various ways, some interpretations are more likely than others, and this is not random or accidental, but rather a manifestation of the powers of production (e.g. Gripsrud 1995, Morley 1992). David Morley maintains that “the message is thus a structured polysemy” (1992: 86). As important as these debates have been to the field, they have contributed to steering the focus of research towards audiences’ interpretations of specific media texts. As a reaction, several studies have introduced ethnographic methods and perspectives in order to better conceptualize media use in relation to people’s everyday lives. David Morley has criticized his influential study *The Nationwide Audience* (1980) for studying interpretations of television texts in artificial contexts: As television is generally watched at home and not at work, his next study *Family Television* ([1986]1990) focused on families at home rather than on groups of workers, analysing television viewing in relation to power structures in families and in society. In research on women’s magazines, Hermes (1995) represents a rather similar move from reception of selected texts to everyday media use.

These developments are only some illustrations of how challenging it is to define the multifaceted and complex phenomena that are studied in audience and reception research. This area has emerged as a distinctive field of research through explicit focus on how people use media, but it nevertheless emphasizes how media use can be related to other dimensions: society, culture, politics, art, economy, gender, ethnicity, class, everyday life, identity and so on. Audience and reception researchers face the considerable challenge of conceptualizing media use in relation to such dimensions while retaining theoretical and methodological precision.

Barbara Gentikow’s (2005a, 2005b, 2010)⁹ writings about media experiences suggest one possible approach to such a task. Gentikow argues that media use can be conceived as a form of *experience*. More commonly used concepts such as “media use” or “media reception” are anaemic; they insufficiently grasp the embodied nature or the “flesh and blood” of the

⁹ Gentikow’s main works on media experiences are written in Norwegian, in the form of a book on qualitative research methods for exploring media experiences (2005a) and an analysis of a comprehensive research project on television experiences in a time of technological transitions (2010). A more concise elaboration of the concept media experiences is found in an English language conference paper (Gentikow 2005b).

phenomenon at hand (2005b: 11). I agree with Gentikow in this critique. *Media use* can indeed be a useful concept, as the prevalence of this term indicates, but it does sound instrumental and formalistic. *Media consumption* emphasizes the nature of media as commodities and might be highly relevant to some projects, but just like media are more than mere tools they are also more than consumer goods. *Media reception* is occasionally applied as a contrast to media use, as one term might emphasize specific moments of interpretation and the other the role of media in everyday life. However, such a division can be problematic in itself; in several research projects these dimensions cannot be separated a priori. Gentikow argues that there is a tendency in qualitative audience research to focus on either the reception of texts or on media use in everyday life (2005b: 2), and the description of such a division clearly resembles the history of women's magazine research I outlined in the previous chapter. If Gentikow is correct in her critique that such approaches are reductionist, then this critique is certainly relevant to research on women's magazines.

The rationale for applying media experiences as an analytical concept is to highlight different and possibly neglected dimensions. The concept aims to encompass established research interests in qualitative audience research, but also to turn our attention to dimensions that often fall outside the scope of inquiry. In order to highlight the *embodied* nature of media experiences Gentikow draws on phenomenological theory, and in order to emphasize the *multifaceted* nature of media experiences she develops a set of dimensions for analysis. In the following discussion I will attempt to develop Gentikow's argument by placing the concept experience in phenomenological philosophy, and by discussing the benefits and challenges of conceiving media experiences as a set of dimensions. While this discussion will highlight some of the theoretical problems associated with the concept media experiences, I will also emphasize the great advantages of this approach by underlining its relevance for research on women's magazines.

3.1.1 The philosophical roots of the concept experience

The word experience originally comes from the Latin *experientia*, which is again derived from the Latin verb meaning *to try*. The Oxford English Dictionary defines the meaning of the noun *experience* as “practical contact with and observation of facts or events”, “the knowledge or skill acquired by a period of practical experience of something” or “an event or

occurrence which leaves an impression on someone” (Oxford Dictionaries 2011). These definitions encompass spatial and temporal, bodily and cognitive dimensions: Experiences entail *practical contact* and *observation*, and they might *leave impressions* and lead to acquisition of *knowledge* and *skills*. The term thereby signifies a specific form of connection between the individual and the environment; it says something about how people relate to the world immediately and over time, emphasizing that both the body and the cognitive intellect will be part of this process. Experiences are formed as we interact with the world around us, through senses, perceptions, cognitive processing and emotional reactions.

Phenomenological philosophy provides theoretical approaches to explorations of these processes.¹⁰ Phenomenology can be described both as a theory of how humans relate to the world, and as a method of analysis (Gentikow 2005b: 3, Sturken and Cartwright 2001: 135). In philosophy, phenomenology is often associated with Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jean-Paul Sartre (see for instance Cerbone 2006, Lewis and Staehler 2010, Moran 2000). Theories inspired by these and other phenomenological philosophers have been applied in various strands of analysis of culture and media. One example is Paddy Scannell’s (1996) analysis of the role of broadcasting as foreground and background in modern life, where he draws on Heidegger’s philosophy. Phenomenology has also been important to major theoretical strands in literary criticism and film studies; for instance, Robert Holub outlines how reception theory and reader-response theory was influenced by Wolfgang Iser’s phenomenology of reading, again inspired by Husserl’s phenomenological philosophy (Holub 1984: 89-101). A recent work that continues to draw on these traditions is Tony Wilson’s *Understanding Media Users* (2009), where Wilson invokes Iser and Heidegger in a critique of dominant research traditions in audience and reception studies. Wilson credits cultural studies research (such as Morley 1980) for focusing on audience responses in relation to politics, ideology and social dimensions, but he also argues that this research does not sufficiently account for crucial psychological dimensions of meaning-making (2009: 47). As an alternative approach, Wilson suggests that media understanding can be conceptualized as a stage-by-stage process of “absorption/anticipation,

¹⁰ There are other possible routes to theorizing experience; for instance, Gray (2003) provides an alternative approach drawing on the work of Stuart Hall and Raymond Williams. Gray emphasizes that experience can be understood as “a discursive ‘site of articulation’ upon and through which subjectivities and identities are shaped and constructed. This involves both how we are positioned in the world and how we reflexively find our place in the world. Thus, experience is not an authentic and original source of our being, but part of the process through which we articulate a sense of identity” (Gray 2003: 25-26). As I understand it, a phenomenological approach to experience will take an even broader perspective, as it will aim to theorize how human beings experience the world as well as how these experiences are articulated and reflected upon.

articulation, and appropriation of or alienation from screen content” (2009: 173), and in his study he shows some examples of such processes through case studies of cell phone and internet use.

My conceptualization of media experiences will take a different starting point, drawing on another relevant philosopher who is less frequently mentioned in introductions to and discussions of phenomenology: Simone de Beauvoir.¹¹ Her main work *The Second Sex* ([1949]2000) provides an existentialist and phenomenologist philosophy of lived experience that is closely connected to Merleau-Ponty’s ([1945]2002) philosophy of bodily perceptions and experiences. In the following I will discuss some of Beauvoir’s ideas in order to conceptualize media experiences as one form of lived experience, but this is of course not the only possible approach to a phenomenology of media experiences. Likewise, the analysis I present in the articles should not be read as an attempt at a complete phenomenology of magazine reading, but rather as a series of specific explorations of selected dimensions. I thereby hope to demonstrate the relevance of this approach and to contribute to – although not complete – a more profound understanding of women's magazine reading as a media experience.

Simone de Beauvoir was an existentialist as well as a phenomenological philosopher, and as an existentialist, she constantly emphasizes the importance of *context*. The individual is always in a situation and must be understood accordingly (Beauvoir [1949]2000: 34). In *The Second Sex* she aims to understand the embodied and specifically situated experience of being a woman, and her philosophical exploration of what it means to be a woman is historically, geographically and culturally situated. She argues that neither biology nor psychology alone can define or decide a woman’s situation, and underlines the importance of civilisation as a whole in order to explain how women come to be defined (and to define themselves) as the *other sex* ([1949]2000: 78-80, 329). In order to understand lived experience, one must therefore take into account that as individuals we always find ourselves in situations that are experienced subjectively. Various social and cultural structures could be highly relevant in order to define the situations we are in and our understanding of these situations. However, these are not the only relevant factors – we are also situated through our embodied existence.

¹¹ Beauvoir is included in certain readers and companions to phenomenological philosophy (Moran and Mooney 2002, Dreyfus and Wrathall 2006) although she is not given considerable attention here either. She is hardly mentioned in other introductions (such as Cerborne 2006, Lewis and Staehler 2010).

Beauvoir's discussion of biology is clearly influenced by a phenomenological approach to lived experience, and like Merleau-Ponty ([1945]2002), Beauvoir emphasizes the importance of the body in how humans experience the world. She describes the body *as* a situation: "The body is not a thing, it is a situation: it is our grasp on the world and a sketch of our projects" (Beauvoir [1949]2000: 77-78, translation by Moi 1999: 59).¹² In other words, the body could be described as a medium through which we experience the world.

As the body is our grasp on the world it is always potentially relevant to all our experiences. Writing on Beauvoir's concept of the body as a situation, Toril Moi observes that "My body is a situation, but it is a fundamental kind of situation, in that it founds my experience of myself and the world. This is a situation that always enters my lived experience" (Moi 1999:63). This implies that bodily aspects matter when it comes to how someone experiences the world, but not that everyone who shares certain physical characteristics will experience everything the same way. For instance, Beauvoir does not deny that there are biological differences between the male and female body, and she asserts that biology is extremely important to a woman's situation, for instance when it comes to childbearing (Beauvoir [1949]2000: 76). However, biology is not destiny: "Because the body is the instrument for our grasp on the world, the world appears completely different if perceived in one way or the other. But we deny the idea that [biological facts] constitute a locked destiny" (Beauvoir [1949]2000: 76, my translation). Moi writes that according to Beauvoir "There are innumerable different ways of living with one's specific bodily potential as a woman" (1999: 66). Like Merleau-Ponty, Beauvoir thereby advocates a notion of bodily and sensory perceptions as relevant but by no means deterministic when it comes to how individuals relate to the world around them. If our goal is to understand human existence and experience, biological facts and bodily dimensions find their *variable* importance through the social situations individuals live in (Beauvoir [1949]2000: 78). The structure of society prescribes a realm of agency for individuals and individuals understand themselves in relation to society.

Is this idea of lived experience relevant for media studies and audience and reception research? At first glance it might seem like media experiences have little to do with the body. Reading magazines or watching television is generally not thought of as physical activities,

¹² According to Moi (1999), translations of Beauvoir's works are often very inaccurate, and this might cause philosophical misunderstandings. I have read the Norwegian translation from 2000, which Moi recommends. When quoting passages from Beauvoir that Moi also quote, I have used her English translations and referred to the texts in which she makes them.

and interpreting media texts is thought of as something we do with our brains and minds, not our bodies. However, this argument is obviously flawed, as it is evident that bodies *can* affect media experiences in a number of ways. One example is that a blind or deaf person probably will experience television radically different from people who can both see and hear. Even temporary bodily conditions such as having a headache might affect the experience of watching TV. Another factor is that media experiences might contribute to reactions that affect body as well as mind: One might argue that pornography or horror films are designed explicitly to do this. A third example is the way in which physical environments – experienced through the body – might affect media experiences: Think for instance of the differences between watching a movie at a cinema and at home. In a study of television experiences in a time of digital transition, Gentikow (2010: 59-60) observes that a main selling point in advertising for new television technology is that improved picture and sound quality will induce perceptual and even sensual reactions. The list of examples of ways in which bodies could matter to media experiences could go on and on.

According to a phenomenological position, media will – like everything else – first be experienced through the senses, through the body that is always *in* a situation and that *is* a fundamental situation that influences experience. Of course, these perceptions of media will be processed cognitively, sometimes leaving lasting impressions. Following Beauvoir's theory of lived experience, the overall cultural and social context in which this takes place is of the utmost importance. It is possible and perhaps even likely that cognitive interpretations of and emotional reactions to media, understood in social and cultural contexts, are in fact the most relevant and interesting aspects of media experiences. It is also possible that these dimensions are the ones we might hope to successfully grasp in empirical research. Nevertheless, it is unfortunate to jump directly to this point without attempting a broader conceptualization of what it means to experience media. Attention to various dimensions of media experiences is one possible approach to such a conceptualization.

3.1.2 The epistemology and ontology of media experiences

Gentikow begins her exploration of media experiences by conceptualizing such experiences as a set of related dimensions. There are certain similarities between Gentikow's approach and that of Wilson (2009); for instance, both emphasize the potential importance of consumer

experiences related to media use. However, I find Gentikow's conceptualization of media experiences to be a broader and more open theory, suited for a greater variety of research questions. While Wilson is primarily concerned with psychological stage-by-stage *processes* of reception, Gentikow conceptualizes media experiences as a set of potentially overlapping dimensions, thereby highlighting how these might be relevant in different ways in different contexts. The taxonomy of dimensions include consumer experiences, experiences with media as technology, perceptual experiences, aesthetic experiences of both media technologies and media texts, cognitive and emotional experiences, and communicative experiences (2005b). Elsewhere (2005a) she adds social experiences, while experiences with media as technology are not singled out as a separate dimension.

As Gentikow elaborates on these dimensions, she emphasizes two dual aspects: She explains how each dimension might be relevant in order to understand the nature of media experiences, and she evaluates how and to which extent each dimension has been (and could be) analysed in media research (Gentikow 2005a, 2005b). The first aspect can be understood as an ontological argument and the second as an epistemological argument. The epistemological argument is very clear: Thinking in terms of dimensions of media experiences clarifies how audience and reception research has focused more on some dimensions than on others. In the *magazine medium* article, I draw on the idea of perceptual media experiences as a neglected dimension in audience research. My findings in this article indicate that perceptual experiences are very important in order to understand the continued appeal of women's magazines, and that perceptual experiences are by no means impossible to grasp in empirical research. However, at the end of the article I also ask whether a set of dimensions of media experiences is a fruitful reflection of how individuals subjectively experience media. This question might be impossible to answer, but phenomenological theory advocates the importance of at least addressing such questions in studies of lived experience. This relates to the ontological aspect of media experiences, which appears equally important but less clarified in Gentikow's writings: To which extent can the dimensions reflect the nature of media experiences? The benefit of analysing perceptual media experiences as a separate dimension – as I have done in the *magazine medium* article – is that these experiences are not obscured in analysis. Of course, other dimensions of media experiences can be brought into such analysis, as the dimensions might work as flexible analytical tools. Nevertheless, one should be aware that focus on certain dimensions might create greater distance from the ways in which media are experienced subjectively.

A related question is whether and how one should distinguish between experiences with *texts* (such as television programmes or magazine articles) and experiences with *media* (such as television or women's magazines). Distinctions between media and texts might be helpful analytically, particularly if one aims to understand the specific properties and capacities of different media. However, people do not read magazines or watch television without being exposed to texts in some form. If one attempts to strip the significance of the texts from the significance of the medium one will probably not be left with accurate reflections of how media (or texts, for that matter) are experienced subjectively. Consequently, the theoretical and methodological application of categories such as “medium” or “text” should be addressed. We need to clarify whether we are analysing certain dimensions of media experiences or attempting to theorize how media are experienced subjectively. In order to understand media experiences both approaches might be fruitful. For instance, in the structure of the *readers and texts* article I distinguish between experiences with the magazine medium and experiences with the meanings of magazine texts. This is an analytical distinction where different elements are singled out so that the connections between them can be highlighted. I aim to show that reading practices correspond with the structure of the women's magazine medium and the meanings of women's magazine texts, and that the pleasure associated with the act of magazine reading can depend on how readers relate to the meanings of women's magazine texts.

3.1.3 Dimensions of media experiences - revised

If, then, we take as a starting point that media experiences can be conceptualized as a flexible set of dimensions for the purpose of analysis: What should these dimensions be? To a great extent that will depend on the research questions we investigate. Our specific purpose of analysis will determine whether it makes sense to single out certain dimensions. Taking Gentikow's lists (2005a: 11-22, 2005b) as a starting point and drawing on my analysis of women's magazine reading as a media experience, I will suggest the following dimensions:

- *Consumer experiences*: Experiences with purchasing media technology and/or media texts
- *Technological experiences*: Experiences with media as technologies

- *Perceptual experiences*: Experiences with sensory and bodily interactions with media
- *Aesthetic experiences*: Experiences with form and style as characteristics of media and in mediated texts
- *Cognitive and emotional experiences*: Experiences with interpretations of and reactions to mediated texts
- *Communicative experiences*: Experiences with media as means of communication and with mediated communication with others
- *Social experiences*: Experiences with media and media texts as integrated in the social structure of everyday life
- *Cultural experiences*: Experiences with media and media texts as integrated in the cultural context of societies and communities

There are, of course, several problems associated with such a conceptualization. Some of the dimensions refer to media technologies, some to media texts and some only to media – and this is, as mentioned, another analytical distinction that might have implications we need to be aware of. All the dimensions can be said to overlap: They should be seen as *shifts in emphasis* rather than as mutually exclusive categories. However, this conceptualization clarifies which dimensions women's magazine research has traditionally focused on (cognitive, emotional, social and cultural experiences) and which experiences I additionally choose to emphasize in my research (technological, perceptual and aesthetic experiences). These dimensions will be taken up in the various articles in the thesis: the *magazine medium* article will explicitly highlight perceptual, technological and aesthetic experiences, while the other three articles will analyse cognitive, emotional, social and cultural experiences. Cultural dimensions of magazine reading is given particular attention in the final article in the thesis – *the public sphere* article – which thereby contextualizes the broader societal relevance of the media experiences that are explored throughout the thesis.

My list primarily differs from Gentikow (2005b) in that I have not only singled out social experiences as a category, but also added cultural experiences. Gentikow mentions that media experiences “encompass both our experiences with (new) media and experiences of the world through media” (2005b: 2), but this latter aspect is less emphasized in her conceptualization of dimensions of media experiences. Overall, I find that Gentikow provides a highly relevant outline of important dimensions that are often overlooked in audience and reception research,

but I also believe that dimensions that have in fact been studied should be assigned greater analytical importance through the conceptualization of media experiences. I furthermore find it useful to distinguish analytically between social experiences as referring to the individual's immediate surroundings, for instance the home and the family structure, and cultural experiences as referring to the greater cultural contexts in society. My intention in adding this dimension is to highlight connections between media experiences as situated in the lives of individuals and the cultural context in which these experiences take place, as social and cultural experiences are closely intertwined. Influential studies such as Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance* ([1984]1991) and David Morley's *Family Television* ([1986]1990) articulate *how* such dimensions might be connected, as they analyse the role of popular media in relation to gender relations in the lives of individuals *and* in society. In the following I will enter into a similar discussion, as I address how women's experiences with women's magazines are conceptualized in this thesis.

3.2 Women's experiences with women's magazines

In the thesis I explore *women's experiences* with reading *women's magazines*, and I have just argued that media experiences should be understood as a theorized concept with specific implications. Likewise, "women's magazines" is not necessarily a simple or straightforward term. What are women's magazines? And what does it mean to analyse *women's* experiences with these publications?

3.2.1 Defining women's magazines

The term "women's magazines" is used in research, publishing, journalism, everyday talk, advertising and media statistics, but the meaning of the term can vary and sometimes remain undefined. In most cases it is possible to make sense of research on women's magazines even if precise definitions are not provided, but sometimes that is not the case. For instance, Norwegian readers will probably need the introductory explanation provided by Hermes (1995: 95-96) in order to understand the chapter where she analyses reading of a *feminist* women's magazine, as this genre label is not used in Norway at all. Likewise, it is entirely possible that readers of this thesis have already been confused by references to "family

weeklies” in my review of Norwegian magazine research. Norwegian magazine publishing and media statistics have traditionally distinguished between “women's magazines” and “family weeklies” (which might elsewhere be called “domestic women's magazines”), even though the latter category now joins women's magazines in explicitly targeting women as opposed to men.¹³

The Norwegian language provides further nuance (or confusion, depending on the point of view) by having two words for magazine: “blad” and “magasin”. These terms might refer to publication frequency: The Norwegian terms for weekly and monthly magazines are, respectively, “ukeblad” and “månedsmagasin”, and the prefixes can be dropped but are usually not interchanged. Alternatively, choice of word might be meant as indicator of quality or style, “blad” being more everyday-ish than “magasin”. As for women's magazines, a Norwegian might call this category “kvinneblader”, “kvinnemagasiner” or “dameblader”. “Kvinne” translates as “woman” and “dame” as “lady”, but “dameblader” can be considered a derogatory term. When speaking about my research with informants, students, Norwegian researchers or journalists, I have most often used the term “kvinneblader” about my object of study. I have occasionally used “kvinnemagasiner”, but generally I prefer “kvinneblader” because *KK*, the most important magazine in my study, is a weekly which some Norwegians might not think of as a “magasin”. In English I use the term “women's magazines”.

According to Johnson and Prijatel (2007: 3), the word magazine comes from the Arabic *makhazin*, which means warehouse or storehouse. The word is used about publications as it might be used about museum storage facilities or department stores; a magazine contains a variety of elements (Gripsrud 1999: 12, Johnson and Prijatel 2007: 3, Holmes 2007: 516). Johnson and Prijatel define “magazine” as:

Printed and bound publications offering in-depth coverage of stories often of a timeless nature. Their content may provide opinion and interpretation as well as advocacy. They are geared to a well-defined, specialized audience, and they are published regularly, with a consistent format (Johnson and Prijatel 2007: 14).

¹³ The publisher Egmont Hjemmet Mortensen now categorizes the family weeklies *Hjemmet*, *Norsk Ukeblad* and *Familien* as “women's magazines” and defines the target group for these magazines as women over the age of 50 (Egmont Hjemmet Mortensen 2011).

There are some ideas in this otherwise precise definition that might not suit all magazines: As the authors point out elsewhere, lack of depth is a common critique against several magazine genres, and even though most magazines today are geared towards a specialized audience, some have very broad target groups. An example of both tendencies is the much debated Norwegian gossip magazine *Se og Hør*, which has been Norway's top-selling magazine for years, and which defines its target group as "the entire Norwegian population" (Aller Media undated a, my translation). Nevertheless, if we accept the definition above, then the notion of *women's magazines* will appear rather strange, practically as a contradiction in terms. Women constitute half of the world's population, so how can women be a *specialized* audience? Of course, most women's magazines define their target groups as women of a certain age and lifestyle, and they are also restricted in terms of the linguistic and geographical areas they address – but the genre label is nevertheless *women's magazines*.

Historical analysis of women's magazines explores how this genre came to be constructed. The notion of magazines for *women* appears to echo an idea of universal womanhood, but analyses often highlight how women's magazines have been developed in relation to discourses of femininity that are economically, socially and culturally situated (Ballaster et al. 1991, Beetham 1996, Kitch 2001). In addressing "women" and yet privileging certain representations of what it means to be a woman, women's magazines can easily become sites of discursive tensions. Margaret Beetham opens her study of British women's magazines between 1800 and 1914 by underlining contradictions in how these magazines addressed "women":

Throughout history, the woman's magazine has defined its readers "as women". It has taken their gender as axiomatic. Yet, that femininity is always represented in the magazines as fractured, not least because it is simultaneously assumed as given and as still to be achieved. Becoming the woman that you are is a difficult project for which the magazine has characteristically provided recipes, patterns, narratives and models of the self (Beetham 1996: 1)

The idea of women's magazines thereby represents contradictions between the universal and the specific and between the natural and the cultural. The existence and prevalence of this genre relates to (but does not necessarily reflect) ambivalences and contradictions in women's roles in society. In *Inside women's magazines* (1987) Janice Winship describes a typical British newsstand where magazines about what is presumed to be *women's* interests are placed on a shelf marked "Woman's World", while *men's* presumed hobbies and interests are

simply categorized as “Hobbies” or “Leisure”. Winship writes: “Men do not have or need magazines for ‘A Man’s World’; it *is* their world, out there, beyond the shelves” (1987: 6). These observations might seem outdated today, particularly considering the boom of men’s magazines in Britain in the 1990s (see Benwell 2003, Jackson et al. 2001). However, there are still some resemblances between Winship’s description from Britain in the 1980s and the way some Norwegian magazine outlets are organized today.

If we look at the categorization of publications at the website of the kiosk and newsstand chain Narvesen, one of Norway’s main magazine sellers, we will find the following categories: Cars; Planes; Needlework; Celebrity and glamour; Food and drink; News and economy; Comics; Boats; Crossword and Sudoku; House, interior and garden; Woman; Motorcycles; Society, culture and films; Sport and active lifestyles; Audio, video and photo; Computers; Erotica; Hobbies and leisure; Music; TV-guides; Science and history (Narvesen undated, my translations). *Woman* is a main category, a fact that of course reflects the great number of Norwegian and imported women's magazines sold in Norway. The woman category features the following sub-categories: Weddings; Parents and children; Health and wellbeing; Hair; General women's magazines; Fashion; Younger women. The first two subcategories are particularly interesting: Although it is possible for two women to get married and have children in Norway today, there is a man involved when the vast majority of marriages are formed and children born. Still, these are marked as women’s issues. There is, as we might note, no main category for men’s magazines, but “Men” is a subcategory under “Lifestyle”, along with for instance “Woman” (found here as well) and “Gay lifestyle”. Being a man, being a woman, and/or being gay is here presented as various lifestyles, but being a woman is something else as well; an area of specialized interests, a separate sector, a grander theme. Winship’s observations still appear relevant: “Our lives as women and men continue to be culturally defined in markedly different ways, and both what we read and how it is presented to us reflects, and is part of, that difference” (1987: 6).

So what is a women's magazine? The term could refer to magazines written and edited by women, to magazines about women, to magazines written for women, or to magazines read by women. As I understand it, the core meaning of the term is that *women's magazines are intended for women as women*. Not only is the implied reader a woman; she is first and foremost addressed as a woman. She might also be addressed as being of a certain age or lifestyle that constitutes the magazine’s target group, but in women's magazines (as opposed

to other genres) men of similar ages or lifestyles will be pre-excluded, often rather explicitly. In women's magazines, *the idea of the implied reader being a woman is the starting point, background and framework for everything else*. This idea might often remain in the background, as an implicit starting point or a not so obvious framework, but it is always there in some way or other.

With this in mind, some of the strange classifications mentioned above might make more sense: If a parenting magazine is really directed at mothers rather than fathers, and if wedding magazines target the bride to be, then they might be women's magazines after all. Likewise, the Norwegian family weeklies can be defined as women's magazines. However, the idea of womanhood as the starting point, background and framework for everything else is most clearly represented in the category often known as general interest women's magazines. In Norway, these magazines differ from the family weeklies in some main ways: they address women as women even more *explicitly*, and they are different *aesthetically*, with higher paper quality and more modern layouts. Most general interest women's magazines also target younger audiences compared to the family weeklies.

In this thesis I operate with one broad and one focused definition of women's magazines. I broadly define women's magazines as *magazines that target women*, and thereby include for instance wedding magazines and family weeklies. Nevertheless, I focus on *glossy general interest women's magazines* which are defined more specifically as *magazines that explicitly and primarily address women as women, rather than taking a special interest area as a starting point*. Within this category I focus on magazines for adult (as opposed to adolescent) women.

3.2.2 Analysing women's media experiences

In research on women's magazines, attention to differences between implied readers and actual readers has eventually emerged as a source of fruitful research questions. As I showed in chapter 2, conceptualizations of potential differences between implied and actual readers have gradually become clearer as the field of research has grown to include more empirical audience research and more sophisticated theoretical models. However, without going into detail about representations versus readerships one can easily observe some simple facts: All

women do not read women's magazines, and all readers of women's magazines are not women. In order to analyse actual as opposed to implied readers it is imperative to reflect upon what it means to be a reader of women's magazines.

In an overview of feminist perspectives in media research, Liesbet van Zoonen argues that the popularity of genres such as women's magazines has led to “an unprecedented concern with the female audience, expressed in a boom of ethnographic studies” (van Zoonen 1991: 44). She underlines the unfortunate consequence of this tendency for the scope of analysis in research on media and gender:

The knowledge we have accumulated by now, concerns a very particular group of media consumed by a very particular group of women. [...] Do we really think *gender* is only constructed in “women’s media”? [...] Moreover, the focus on the reception of soaps, romances and women's magazines seriously narrows our potential for articulating a comprehensive cultural critique for we tend to ignore whole areas of social and cultural practice (van Zoonen 1991: 48-49).

Ien Ang and Joke Hermes (1991) also argue that the tendency to focus on women audiences implies a risk of reproducing essentialist ideas about gender differences:

[M]ost research that sets out to examine gender and media consumption has concentrated exclusively on *women* audiences. What is implicitly taken for granted here is that gender is a given category, that people are always-already fully in possession of an obvious gender identity: women are women and men are men. Even the tentative but laudable attempts to do justice to differences between women (as in terms of class) do not go as far [as] problematizing the category of “women” itself. [...] Not only does exclusive concentration on women as audiences unwittingly reproduce the patriarchal treatment of Woman as the defined (and thus deviant) sex and Man as the invisible (and thus normal) sex [...], more fundamentally, the a priori assumption that there is a continuous field of experience shared by all women and only by women tends to naturalize sexual difference and to universalize culturally constructed and historically specific definitions of femininity and masculinity (Ang and Hermes 1991: 314).

Possible consequences of focusing only on women audiences are, according to Ang and Hermes, that patriarchal sex roles are reproduced, that sexual difference is portrayed as natural and that certain definitions of femininity and masculinity are presented as universal while others are marginalized. The authors do not suggest that researchers should refrain from studying genres like women's magazines, but they underline that one should not approach

“women’s experience, women’s culture, women’s media consumption as if these were self-contained entities” (Ang and Hermes 1991: 315). Using women’s magazines as an example, Ang and Hermes argue that audience research should include

female and male self-identified readers (and arguably non-readers as well), but also pay attention to the multiple feminine and masculine identifications involved. We would argue that the theoretical question that should guide our research practice is how gender – along with other major social axes such as class and ethnicity – is *articulated* in concrete practices of media consumption (Ang and Hermes 1991:315).

Likewise, what van Zoonen (1991) primarily argues against is the *dominance* of reception studies of women’s genres, not the existence of these studies per se. Nevertheless, this critique raises a number of important questions for a research project on women’s magazines and their readers. How is research influenced by the classification of genres and audiences according to gender? Is it possible to study women’s experiences with magazine reading without reproducing notions of women as a homogenous group or as the defined sex?

First of all, I would like to clarify why I have not followed Ang and Hermes’ advice that male readers should be included in analysis. As I will explain in more detail in the methodology chapter, my informants were recruited among subscribers to the weekly women’s magazine *KK*. *KK*’s publisher provided me with a list of contact information for approximately 400 subscribers, and I started the recruitment process by sending them all a questionnaire by post. There were some men on this list, and their addresses indicated that they were mainly doctors and dentists who had *KK* sent to their offices, probably to put in the waiting room. None of these men replied to the questionnaire, and I did not take other measures to recruit male readers. The reason for this is that I find it difficult to agree with Ang and Hermes’ *general* advice about how to recruit informants. As these authors otherwise emphasize strongly, media use must be understood in context. Likewise, research projects operate within a context, and recruitment of informants should be decided on basis of research questions and the methodological and theoretical considerations that follow. For some purposes it might be highly relevant to study men who read women’s magazines (or women who read men’s magazines, for that matter), but for other purposes it might make sense to study women reading women’s magazines. As I will clarify in the methodology chapter, I found it fruitful to focus on regular magazine readers, and I also wanted to investigate relations between representations of women’s lives in women’s magazines and the lives and experiences of

actual readers (as I do in the *identity* article and *the readers and texts* article). These ambitions do not exclude male readers per se, but neither do they indicate that it would be particularly problematic to focus on women. According to Norwegian media use statistics the vast majority of women's magazine readers are in fact women. Of course, self-reporting cannot be entirely trusted, especially not men's self-reported use of a so-called woman's genre, but in the official Statistics Norway media use survey of 2009, the number of men who reported to have read a women's magazine an ordinary day was zero (Vaage 2010: 20). In order to understand women's magazine reading as a media experience it might be more relevant to focus on the women who self-identify as readers of these publications.

A more fundamental question raised by Ang and Hermes is whether explicit focus on *women's* reading of a *women's* genre creates an image of women as a unified category; as a special group of media users with shared experiences and interests. When Ang and Hermes articulate the problems of concentrating on *women* audiences, they caution researchers against taking for granted that "gender is a given category, that people are always-already fully in possession of an obvious gender identity" (1991: 314). Ang and Hermes draw on poststructuralist theory, particularly Teresa De Lauretis (1987), in order to substantiate the claim that gender identities are not pre-articulated. However, one might question whether poststructuralist theory and the implicit move from questions of *women* to questions of *gender identity* is the most helpful approach – particularly if we aim to analyse media use as a form of lived experience.

In feminist theory formulated in the English language, a distinction is often applied between biological "sex" and socially/culturally constructed "gender". This distinction has been criticized for several reasons. In "A Manifesto for a Genderless Feminist Critique" (2008) Linda Steiner argues that "the contemporary emphasis on gender obscures the problems of sex and sexualization, especially given a morphed version of the concept that now treats gender itself as a fixed binary" (2008: 9). In the essay "What is a woman?" (1999) Toril Moi recounts the history and origin of the sex/gender-distinction, framing it as a reaction to the ways in which biological determinism have been used to discriminate women. Moi describes how the sex/gender-distinction was coined by Gayle Rubin ([1975]1996) and others in the 1960s and 70s in order to form a critique of such practices (Moi 1999: 23-24). Both Moi and Steiner acknowledge the value of the distinction for certain analytical, rhetorical and political purposes, but they caution against taking for granted that it is always relevant. According to

Moi, Rubin's version of the sex/gender-distinction works rather well on a general social level, but *not* when applied to individual human beings:

Soon theorists following in Rubin's footsteps will think of sex as an ungraspable entity outside history and culture, and of gender as the only relevant term for sexual difference. This appears to leave a gap where the historical and socialized body should be (Moi 1999:30).

Moi then evaluates how poststructuralist theory has tried to fill this gap by redefining the concepts of sex and gender. She particularly discusses Judith Butler's radical idea that sex can be understood to be as "culturally constructed as gender" (Butler [1990]2006: 9). The goal of the poststructuralist critique is, as Moi understands it, to "(1) to avoid biological determinism and (2) to develop a fully historical and non-essentialist understanding of sex or the body" (Moi 1999: 31). Moi shares these objectives but claims that poststructural theory fails in achieving them: "The result is work that reaches fantastic levels of abstraction without delivering the concrete, situated, and materialist understanding of the body it leads us to expect" (Moi 1999: 31). One of the reasons Moi gives for this alleged failure is that poststructuralists try to *rethink* the sex/gender-distinction instead of asking whether it is useful at all. Moi does not reject the distinction altogether, but she urges scholars to at least question whether it provides a useful framework for the various projects they engage in. Specifically, she argues that the distinction is *not* useful if the project is to develop a theory of lived experience or subjectivity (Moi 1999: 6). Moi does not only disagree with Butler's elaboration ([1990]2006, 1993) on how bodily aspects can be material and yet constructed,¹⁴ she also claims that this theoretical problem can be avoided altogether by choosing a different approach than the poststructuralist one (1999: 59). Instead, Moi turns to the philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir to produce a theory of lived experience and the socially and culturally situated human being.

As argued earlier in this chapter I find Beauvoir's theory to be a relevant and fruitful approach to understanding media experiences as a form of lived experience. In keeping with Beauvoir's crucial idea that bodies might matter but not determine, I do not find it inherently problematic to think of the majority of women's magazine readers as "women" or to study a group of

¹⁴ I will not go into detail on either Butler's or Moi's arguments. The main point here is not how to solve the alleged problem of materiality, but rather that Moi proposes to avoid the problem by choosing a different starting point. See Butler (1993) and Moi (1999) for the complete accounts.

readers who are all women.¹⁵ There is a substantial difference between defining someone as a woman and making assumptions about that person's character, abilities or interests *because* she is a woman. But we also have to be open for the possibility that the fundamental bodily situation of being a woman might be relevant to women's experiences, as different as these might be. For one thing, as women's magazines constitute a well-known and established genre, potential readers are probably aware that women's magazines are intended for women, and whether one understands oneself as a woman can therefore be highly relevant for how one approaches these magazines and for whether one reads them at all. For instance, Hermes observes that "women's magazines are not a topic men are supposed to have knowledge of or talk about" (1995: 194) when she describes the trouble she had recruiting male readers for her study. As I will argue in the *readers and texts* article and in the *identity* article, my findings indicate that the women I interviewed expected women's magazines to portray women's lives in ways they could recognize and relate to. They did not always identify with representations of women in women's magazines. However, this did not imply that they questioned their own identities *as* women or the magazines' representations of what a woman *is*. What they questioned were representations of what a woman's *life* is really like; what the reality of her lived experience is. The relations between women's magazines and women's lives are complex, as I hope to demonstrate in the *identity* article, but these complexities do not necessarily lie in understanding oneself as a woman or in questioning one's gender identity.

This leads to what I believe to be the greatest problem associated with researching women's genres and women audiences. I absolutely agree with Ang and Hermes (1991: 314) that it is unfortunate if exclusive concentration on women contributes to ideas about women as a form of specialized audience that deviates from a (male) norm. Therefore, it is also unfortunate if research on women's genres or women audiences only apply theories that foreground women as women. The argument I just advocated – that the situation of being a woman might always be relevant in analysis of women's experiences – does not imply that it is always *the* most relevant factor. In this respect I fully agree with Ang and Hermes who emphasize that researchers should not "presume *a priori* that in any particular instance of media consumption gender will be a basic determining factor" (1991: 321). Nevertheless, in several influential studies of women's magazines (Ballaster et al. 1991, Hermes 1995, Winship 1987) the researchers start by positioning themselves, their projects and other research on women's

¹⁵ Moi (1999: 40) also argues that "man" and "woman" are perfectly usable everyday terms that are not inherently discriminatory.

magazines in relation to a feminist theoretical or political framework. While this is relevant it is not the only possible approach to understanding women's magazines. For instance, Hermes theory of everyday media use can be read in relation to her positioning as a postmodern feminist, but it can also be read in light of ethnographic media research or De Certeau's philosophy of everyday life.

I would like to emphasize that I find various forms of feminist theory to be extraordinarily interesting, relevant and rewarding for a great variety of purposes, including analysis of women's magazines. However, we cannot assume that just because we study women's magazines feminist theory will *always* provide the most relevant approaches. To analyse men's media experiences through a greater variety of perspectives than women's media experiences can certainly be seen as treating women as *the other*. The use of feminist theory in research on women's magazines has produced highly relevant insight and debate, but I still find it important to explore what other theoretical approaches might offer, preferably in dialogue with the existing field of research. Consequently, each of the articles in this thesis draw on strands of feminist scholarship, but this is done in relation to other theoretical frameworks, some of which are rarely used in women's magazines research. The *readers and texts* article addresses important methodological and theoretical debates in the fields of feminist media research and in cultural studies. In the *magazine medium* article, I draw on Beauvoir's as well as Merleau-Ponty's theories of lived experience and bodily perceptions, in this case reading Beauvoir as a phenomenologist and not primarily as a feminist. In the *identity* article I also draw on Beauvoir's understanding of lived experience, juxtaposed with the sociological identity theory of Anthony Giddens. In the *public sphere* article I introduce public sphere theory to research on women's magazines, while particularly emphasizing the relevance of feminist public sphere theorists such as Nancy Fraser and Seyla Benhabib. The overarching idea behind the various analytical approaches in the articles is to suggest how the theoretical scope of women's magazines research might be broadened, while also maintaining a productive dialogue with the existing research field.

4. Methodology

In this chapter I will discuss the methodology of the research project this thesis is based on. I will particularly draw on Ann Gray's (2003) work on research practice in cultural studies and on Barbara Gentikow's (2005a) guide to qualitative methods in research on media experiences. Both authors emphasize the importance of making methodological decisions on the basis of the research question one seeks to explore, and both advocate approaches where methodology, epistemology and theory are related and reflected upon in the practical process of research and analysis. Gray (2003) distinguishes between *method* as techniques of research and *methodology* as "the overall epistemological approach adopted by the study" (2003: 4), but argues that these are and should be closely and explicitly connected. In keeping with this line of thinking I will emphasize how the practical choices I have made in the research process have contributed to exploring the main research question in relation to the theoretical framework of this study.

First I will explain my reasons for choosing a qualitative approach. Then I will discuss the reader study that constitutes the main empirical element of my research, including how I recruited informants, which methods I used to explore their experiences and how I analysed the resulting material. Afterwards I will explain why and how the reader study was supplemented with textual analysis and with a small-scale contextual production study. Each section will include reflections about methodological choices and challenges, but some overarching reflections will be further discussed in the final section of the chapter.

4.1 A qualitative approach to media experiences

There has been widespread debate about the merits and challenges of quantitative and qualitative methods within media research and in the social sciences more generally (see Bergman 2008, Bruhn Jensen and Jankowski 1991, Lindlof and Taylor 2002). Selecting a quantitative or qualitative approach can be seen as a fundamental decision between different world views, as taking a stance in epistemological debates between, for instance, positivist and postmodern frameworks of knowledge. However, selecting a quantitative or qualitative

approach can also be seen as choosing to emphasize particular aspects of a complex phenomenon. A social science researcher studying poverty could try to map the demographics of people living in poverty, or attempt to gain some insight into how people who live in poverty experience this situation. Most people would probably agree that both of these questions are of political importance and scholarly interest, but they might entail very different methodological approaches.

As for the topic of my thesis, I initially formulated my main research question rather simply and broadly as: *How and why do women read women's magazines?* Both quantitative and qualitative methods can provide relevant approaches to this topic, but in either case the general research question would need theoretical framing and methodological specification. In chapter 3 I outlined my theoretical understanding of women's magazine reading as a media experience, and this theoretical framework has some methodological implications as well. Thinking in terms of media experiences entails attention to women's magazine reading as a potentially multi-dimensional phenomenon, and to how readers experience women's magazines in relation to other aspects of their lives and the society they live in. This is reflected in my reformulation of the main research question: *How do regular readers of women's magazines experience these publications, and how are their experiences with women's magazines related to their everyday lives and to their sense of identity?* Qualitative methodology provides the most relevant and fruitful approach to this reformulated question. Comparing qualitative methods to surveys, Gray (2003: 16) argues that qualitative methods are particularly important when one aims to understand texts or practices in relation to everyday life and identity – the exact same dimensions emphasized in my reformulated research question. Qualitative methods aim to reflexively explore and interpret the depths, nuances and ambivalences of people's experiences, as explained in their own words and as situated in social and cultural contexts (Gentikow 2005a: 37-55).

The question of how to deal with the social and cultural *context* of the phenomenon one is studying is fundamental – for several reasons. It relates to the question of how and when results can be generalized, and thereby to a main point of critique against qualitative methods (Gentikow 2005a, Höijer 2008). Results produced through qualitative research – no matter how scholarly sound – cannot be generalized in the same manner as results produced through sound quantitative research. The experiences of the informants who have participated in my study *could* be representative of regular readers of Norwegian women's magazines, but the

qualitative methods I have used do not offer precise tools for asserting the degree of representativeness. However, the fundamental question here is whether knowledge about culturally and socially situated multi-dimensional experiences can be generalized at all, and if so, what form of generalization we are referring to. In order to generalize as in quantitative research we might need to separate a phenomenon from its context in order to avoid factors that might disturb our analysis. However, if we understand a phenomenon as founded in a particular context, as made meaningful through this context and through subjective experiences of phenomenon and context as intertwined, then such separations are neither desirable nor possible. Gentikow argues that researchers who use qualitative methods should not necessarily accept the values associated with quantitative research – such as generalization – as ultimate goals. Instead, Gentikow draws on the anthropological idea of *thick description* (Geertz 1973) and argues that qualitative research should aim to take into account a *phenomenon's contextual complexity* (2005a: 24, 63).

Furthermore; even if we cannot generalize as in quantitative research, qualitative methods can still produce knowledge that is relevant outside its immediate context. Qualitative audience and reception research has produced a number of theories, concepts, typologies, hypotheses and analytical tools that are relevant to other empirical projects and to the main debates of the field.¹⁶ Importantly, such theoretical insights might be gained through studies in which theory, methodology and analysis are closely intertwined, and where phenomena are analysed as situated in specific cultural, social, historical and geographical contexts. Writing on *grounded theory*, Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss ([1967]2008) underline the importance of qualitative research for the generation and furthering of theory, but they also emphasize that methods, material and analysis will be closely connected through specific processes of research, and that generation of “new” grounded theory is not isolated from existing theory ([1967]2008: 6). Likewise, in a critical discussion of ontological assumptions in qualitative audience research, Birgitta Höijer (2008) argues that studies aiming for theoretical generalizations are strengthened if “the study in question can demonstrate that the ontological position and methodology are clearly related” (2008: 289). In my study, theoretical and methodological approaches are related through the key concept media experiences, which informs ontological understandings as well as methodological choices. The findings presented in the various articles can be read both as empirical results and as theoretical concepts

¹⁶ Gray (2003: 73) also emphasizes that qualitative research often offer detailed reflections upon the research processes, and that methodological approaches and strategies can be transferable to other projects.

generated through a qualitative analysis that operates within a specific theoretical and methodological framework. For instance, I conclude the *identity* article by presenting a typology for how magazine reading might be understood as a reflexive practice, and this typology is an attempt at a theoretical contribution that is grounded in the specific research I have carried out.

4.2 Exploring readers' experiences

A qualitative study of women's experiences with women's magazine reading constitutes the main empirical component of this thesis. Having decided that a qualitative approach would best suit my project, I faced the challenge of defining my theoretically founded research question so that it could be explored in empirical research. Höijer (2008) argues that audience researchers do not study something that is materialized "out there"; rather "we start by constructing a body of material that we suppose reflects the phenomenon we want to study" (2008: 277). In order to analyse the phenomenon I wanted to study – women's experiences with women's magazines reading – I had to construct such a body of material. This entailed practical decisions about how to recruit informants¹⁷ and about which methods to apply in empirical research and in analysis. It also implied continuous awareness about how these practical decisions served to construct a body of material that could represent women's magazine reading as a media experience. In this section I will discuss the practical decisions and the surrounding reflections that formed my reader study.

4.2.1 Selecting informants

As mentioned in chapter 3 I have broadly defined women's magazines as magazines that target women, but I also decided to focus on glossy general interest women's magazines that

¹⁷ I agree with Gentikow (2005a: 47) that the term "informant" is preferable to "respondent", as it better indicates that informants do not merely respond to a researcher's questions, they also contribute information in a more independent manner. I therefore use the term informant in this thesis, except in the *readers and texts* article, where the term "participant" is used instead. This change was made in proofreading by the journal that published the article, and I accepted the journal's preferences. However, I still find that the concept "informant" provides a clearer description of the roles and power relations within most qualitative research projects: Informants contribute crucial information, but the scope and form of their contributions are shaped by the researchers' decisions – and the term "participants" might cloud such power relations. Kvale (2001: 21) also emphasizes that informants and researchers are *not* equal participants.

were defined more specifically as *magazines that explicitly and primarily address women as women, rather than taking a special interest area as a starting point*. These can be said to constitute the core as opposed to the borderlines of women's magazines as a genre. There are many such magazines on the Norwegian market, and I was initially hesitant about limiting my attention to one or a few selected titles. My main ambition was to understand women's magazine *reading* as a media experience, and not study the reception of selected texts. I therefore started to think about which readers rather than which magazines I was most interested in.

First, I decided to focus on *regular* readers of women's magazines. Having read Hermes (1995) analysis in which occasional and non-readers are included, I was convinced by her arguments about the dangers of confusing “fans” and average media users (1995: 16). However, I also wondered if further research on *regular* women's magazine readers might highlight different sides of women's magazine reading as a media experience, compared to the impression left by Hermes (1995) that this is a rather mundane and perhaps even meaningless practice. As my interests lay in exploring questions of identity and experience in relation to women's magazine reading, I found it most relevant to focus on readers who actively and over time choose to engage with women's magazines. Regular readers should not be confused with occasional or “accidental” readers, but their experiences are nevertheless interesting.

Secondly I decided to focus on adult rather than adolescent readers. In the limited field of Norwegian magazine research, studies of adult readers of glossy general interest women's magazines appeared to be completely absent (see 2.1). However, the notion of adult as opposed to adolescent readers is complicated because the Norwegian magazine market offers blurred lines between magazines for teenage girls and magazines for (young) women. A telling example is that the publisher Egmont Hjemmet Mortensen markets *Det Nye* as “Norway’s biggest women's magazine”, defining the target group as *women* between 18 and 35. The publisher also emphasizes that *Det Nye* is a magazine for *everyone* because it is read by *people* of various ages, and that the magazine aims to “touch all *girls* in the primary target group” (Egmont Hjemmet Mortensen 2011, my italics and translations).¹⁸ Nevertheless, Sarromaa and others have taken a special interest in *Det Nye* as a magazine for girls growing

¹⁸ The Norwegian word for girl – “jente” – is frequently used about grown women as well as about children and adolescents, and it is generally considered more playful and fun than the Norwegian word for woman – “kvinne”.

into women, and produced reader studies where girls aged 13-17 (Sarromaa 2010b) or 13-24 (Sørensen 2003) talk about their interpretations of *Det Nye*. This does not, of course, refute the publisher's claim that people of different ages (including grown women) read *Det Nye*. It does, however, illustrate that the landscape of women's magazines and their readers can be seen as a patchwork of partially overlapping target groups, primary target groups, actual readerships and cultural notions (in research and elsewhere) about who different magazines are intended for. In spite of my initial scepticism about defining my field of interest based on particular publications, I saw the need to focus my analytical attention. I eventually decided that the most fruitful approach would be to recruit a group of informants who had some reading experiences in common, but who also read a variety of different women's magazines.

I therefore decided to focus on regular readers of the glossy weekly *KK*, which is Norway's oldest and (perhaps) most well-known women's magazine.¹⁹ *KK* has a relatively broad target group. Although the magazine now primarily targets women in their 30s, the target group description first and foremost emphasizes that *KK*-readers are active, independent and socially engaged working women (Aller Media undated c). *KK* was also a magazine I knew well – due to my mother's subscription I had already read this magazine regularly for more than ten years at the time when I started my research. Another pragmatic reason for choosing *KK* was that the publisher, Aller Media, was willing to provide me with readership demographics and subscription data (see 4.4 and note 29). Having already decided to focus on regular and presumably engaged readers, *subscribers* were interesting potential informants. One might safely assume that most subscribers are regular readers, some of them for periods of several years. Aller Media provided me with a list of contact information to *KK* subscribers in the city of Bergen (Norway's second largest city) and the surrounding suburbs and rural areas. The list included names, postal addresses, dates of birth and occasionally phone numbers, but no e-mail addresses. I could have approached some of these subscribers by phone, but rather decided to approach them all by mail. My primary aim was to recruit regular readers who would participate in qualitative research interviews (see 4.2.4), but I did not want to ask a random selection of the subscribers on the publishers' list for an interview. Rather, as I was eager to know more about each potential informant before selecting whom to interview, I decided that each person on the list would receive a letter with information about my research and a *qualitative questionnaire*.

¹⁹ See my discussion of *KK* in chapter 5 for an introduction to *KK*'s cultural history, and for information about *KK*'s circulation.

4.2.2 Stage 1: A qualitative questionnaire

Questionnaires are often associated with quantitative methods, but it is possible to apply such methods in qualitative research as well. Questionnaires can be a practical way of gaining an overview of informants' biographical information and perhaps also of the research topic at hand.²⁰ While qualitative audience research is strongly associated with oral interviews, several well-known projects analyse informants' written accounts, for instance in the form of letters (e.g. Ang [1982]1985, Gripsrud 1995) or by applying a questionnaire as a first entry into the field (e.g. Radway [1984]1991: 48, see also Gentikow 2005a: 110).

My intention in producing a questionnaire was twofold: I wanted to approach and learn more about potential informants for in-depth interviews, and I wanted to start my exploration of readers' experiences. I hoped that the questionnaire would produce material that was interesting in its own right, but also that it would prepare the ground for the interviews I planned to carry out. In order to achieve these goals I had to balance several considerations. I wanted informants to describe their experiences in their own words, but answering the questionnaire should not be too time-consuming, as that would probably affect the reply rate. Some multiple-choice questions with space for comments were therefore combined with questions where informants would have to reply in their own words. The questionnaire included questions about biographical information and about which magazines each informant read, had read previously, liked and disliked and so on, and these were primarily interesting in order to get a preliminary impression of each informant as a magazine reader. Other questions were drawn directly from my research interests. For instance, as I wanted to explore the role of magazine reading in everyday life, informants were asked to describe the situations and circumstances in which they read magazines. I asked some questions pertaining to *KK* specifically and some about "magazines", "women's magazines" or "women's magazines you have read". Importantly, the questionnaire was designed with qualitative – not quantitative – analysis in mind. I have not used the results to produce statistics or to compare one group of readers with another. This was designed, implemented and analysed as a *qualitative* questionnaire, not a media use survey.

²⁰ I had previously experienced that combining questionnaires and interviews could be a fruitful approach. I worked as a research assistant on a project about how journalists use search engines (Nyre 2010), where I was one of two researchers interviewing journalists in various newsrooms. At the start of each interview the journalist was asked to fill out a short questionnaire. This was a practical way of collecting information about use of search engines in daily journalistic work, but also a way of introducing the research topic to the journalist, clearing up eventual confusions and getting the interview started.

The original list I received from *KK*'s publisher included 350 names, and I received 110 replies. As dates of birth were included on the publishers' list I was able to discover that the youngest subscribers on the list were least likely to reply. It is obvious that I was not in the process of recruiting a representative sample, but I nevertheless found it valuable to recruit informants of different ages. I therefore asked for and received a supplementary list of subscribers under the age of 35. Some of these had already received the questionnaire as they had been included on the first list as well, but the others were sent the same questionnaire so that 410 people received it in total.²¹ The reply rate was lower the second time and only resulted in an additional 15 replies, bringing me to 125 replies in total.

Each questionnaire was marked with a number which made it possible for me to identify the informants who replied, so that I might approach them at a later date to ask for an interview. The informants were informed about this and other aspects of the research process in the information letter that accompanied the questionnaire. This letter, the questionnaire and the entire procedure of data collection was cleared with Personvernombudet for forskning [The Privacy Ombudsman for Research], according to guidelines for ethical research practice in Norway.²² The informants are not identified in any way in any publications, and no one but me has had access to the registry linking the numbers on the questionnaire replies to the names of informants.

As mentioned in chapter 3, the few men who received the questionnaire did not reply. The women who did reply appeared to be a diverse group. They were between 24 and 88²³ in age, but most were in their 30s, 40s and 50s. A common tendency was that they were working women, although some were on maternity leave or retired. The education levels and professions they listed were diverse. The majority was married or living with someone, and the majority had children. A few had very recently cancelled their subscriptions to *KK*, but the vast majority subscribed to *KK*, and most read other women's magazines and magazines as well.

²¹ The first round of questionnaires was sent out in the fall of 2008 and the second in March 2009.

²² Some information about the Ombudsman is available in English (Norwegian Social Science Data Services 2011). More comprehensive information about procedures and guidelines is available in Norwegian from the same source.

²³ By mistake the age of the oldest informant was listed as 86 in the published version of the *readers and texts* article. This has been corrected in the article version included in the thesis.

4.2.3 Initial analysis

The questionnaire was designed with two forms of analysis in mind. In order to find potential informants for qualitative in-depth interviews, I carefully studied each questionnaire reply in detail in order to form an impression of the individual informant's biography as a magazine reader. One might call this person-focused analysis or *portrait analysis* in order to underline that the focus is placed on each informant as the key analytical entity (Gray 2003: 154, Gentikow 2005a: 135, Thagaard 2003). Some informants had left several questions blank or given very short answers, but others had provided rather rich accounts of their experiences by answering each question in detail. Given my previously stated interest in regular and engaged readers, I found it most fruitful and relevant to focus on such informants when moving on to qualitative interviews (see 4.2.4).

I also analysed the questionnaires *thematically*. For instance, I extracted and compared all the descriptions the informants had given of the situations and circumstances in which they read magazines, and analysis of these led me to identify the two recurring reading practices which are described in the *readers and texts* article. Informants were also asked to report on whether they had used the website *www.kk.no*, and to describe (in their own words) their impression of this site, and these replies were a valuable starting point for the analysis which is presented in the *magazine medium* article. Other questions produced material that was relevant to the particular research questions in the articles in less predictable ways. For instance, I asked a question about what (if anything) informants disliked about *KK* or other women's magazines they had read. Some informants gave detailed accounts of what they disliked and why, but other replies to this question were rather short and did not explain much. At first these appeared rather difficult to understand as anything but individual fragments. However, after doing interviews I found that these replies actually seemed to substantiate opinions and interpretations that were explained in far more detail in the interviews. This illustrates one benefit of mixing methods; one might follow analytical "threads" from one form of material to another and gain a more profound overall analysis (Cronin et al. 2008, Moran-Ellis et al. 2006). The questionnaire replies were especially relevant for the analysis that is presented in the *readers and texts* article and in the *identity* article, even though they are not directly used in the latter.

4.2.4 Stage 2: *Qualitative interviews*

The second and most important stage of my reader study consisted of qualitative in-depth interviews. Qualitative research interviews can be described as *conversations with a structure and a purpose* (Kvale 2001: 21), but also as *discursive spaces* where research material is constructed (Gray 2003: 9). Interview methods are important and well-known in audience and reception research and in qualitative social science research more generally (Gentikow 2005a, Kvale 2001). The rationale for doing qualitative interviews in a research project such as mine is relatively simple and straightforward: In order to attempt to understand people's experiences it makes sense to ask them to talk about them (Gentikow 2005b: 11, Gray 2003: 95, Kvale 2001: 17, Morley 1992: 181). If and to what degree one might succeed in understanding people's experiences through interview methods is a far more complex question, which I will return to in the last section in this chapter. Here I will focus on my practical approach to interviewing and how this related to the research questions in my project. This perspective is important because qualitative methodology implies that strategies for interviewing should be developed in relation to the specific ambitions and frameworks of a research project, not according to instrumental models for what interviews are and how they should be done (Gray 2003: 94, Kvale 2001: 44).

I recruited informants for interviews by sending another letter to some of the women who had replied to my questionnaire. I aimed for approximately 15 interviews, and 15 informants initially accepted my request.²⁴ One of these turned out to be impossible to reach to arrange the interview, and the result was 14 interviews, mainly conducted in November and December 2008. Each interview lasted for approximately an hour, and each was taped using a digital recorder. I brought some magazines (the October 2008 editions of several Norwegian women's magazines) with me each time, and these were laid out on the table. I asked some questions about the front pages of these magazines, but several informants also used them actively during the interviews, to point out examples or to "demonstrate" how they usually read women's magazines. The interviews took place in informants' homes or in quiet cafés, according to each informant's preference, and both these interview situations appeared to work well. One informant insisted on doing the interview at her workplace, and this was not a productive situation. Even though she had set aside more time than I had asked for, shut of the

²⁴ As with the questionnaire, younger informants were least likely to accept my request for an interview.

phone and informed colleagues not to disturb her, the workplace atmosphere seemed to make it difficult to move beyond short and businesslike answers. A research interview is obviously a constructed and rather unusual social situation, but with this one exception the informants appeared to be rather relaxed and eager to talk. My impression was that they found it interesting and slightly curious to be interviewed by a media researcher, while the interview situation also had a comfortable resemblance with other social situations they could easily relate to.

Before starting the interviews I worked on an interview guide which I also tested in a pilot interview.²⁵ A translation of the interview guide is included in the appendix. I would characterize the interviews as semi-structured (Østbye et al. 2002: 102, see also Gentikow 2005a: 83). The interview guide was designed for a rather open exploration of several dimensions of media experiences, but it was also, more practically, developed with the idea that the resulting research material would probably be analysed in four articles. The guide was therefore divided into four main themes: Magazine reading and other forms of media use in everyday life; experiences with women's magazines online and in print and with magazine aesthetics; experiences with different forms of magazine journalism; and finally women's roles, representations and identity. The idea was to start with something I imagined would be easy to talk about – the informant's daily routines – and eventually move to topics which were possibly more complex and sensitive. Of course this was only a sketch for how an interview would play out: I made sure that we touched upon every main theme in every interview, but the time devoted to each varied greatly according to what each informant had to say. The interview guide included a number of questions related to the main themes, but these questions were not necessarily asked in every interview, and certainly not asked in the same order or in the same phrasing. My approach to interviewing was informed by Gentikow (2005a: 92-95), who emphasizes that various types of questions and meta-communications might contribute differently to a successful interview: Open questions are valuable, but when used carefully less open (but more precise) questions can also be fruitful. Following up on informants' answers, encouraging elaboration on interesting statements and clearing up confusion is also of crucial importance. Steinar Kvale (2001: 113) also emphasizes the value

²⁵ For the pilot I interviewed an informant recruited through the "snowballing" method. The pilot interview was transcribed and analysed in order to improve the interview guide, but has not been included in further analysis. The pilot suggested that the interview guide worked rather well. I did not make major changes, but the pilot interview was very useful in order to practice interview techniques and phrasing of questions, and in order to clear up some conceptual misunderstandings.

of doing initial analysis in the actual interview situation, for instance by interpreting, rephrasing and following up on informants' answers.

The informants who were interviewed were, as mentioned, recruited on the basis of having given rich but otherwise varied replies to the questionnaire. In demographic terms they also appeared to be fairly representative of the group of informants who had replied to the questionnaire, although this was not my first concern when selecting which informants to interview. The informants who were interviewed varied between 24 and 72 in age, came from different backgrounds, lived in different family situations and had different educations and careers. They all knew *KK* rather well and some had read it for years. Most of them read other magazines as well, but which magazines varied considerably. I was therefore able to ask some specific questions pertaining to *KK*, but also to discuss women's magazine reading with a group of informants who had partly overlapping and partly different reading experiences. An overview of the informants who were interviewed is found in the appendix, and the pseudonyms used in this list are also used systematically throughout the articles.

Overall, I would say that my recruitment and interview strategies worked well according to the analytical ambitions of my project. Gray (2003: 101) and Gentikow (2005a: 76-80) both emphasize that informants for qualitative research should be recruited according to the research questions a project seeks to answer, not on the basis of general notions of how a sample should be constituted. The richness of the research material that is constructed is more important than the actual number of informants or interviews (Gray 2003:101, Gentikow 2005a: 78). My initial idea was to do approximately 15 interviews, more if necessary. I stopped at 14, mainly because I found that the material reached what is sometimes described as a point of saturation (Thagaard 2003: 56, see also Gentikow 2005a: 62). Having read Hermes (1995) account of how little her informants had to say about women's magazines, I quickly realized that the regular readers I interviewed were different. I was also aware that I would present my analysis in the form of articles that had to be clearly focused. Writing the first drafts for what would eventually become *the readers and texts* article, I was frustrated that a great number of interesting quotes and relevant analytical discussions would have to be left out. The body of material I had at my disposal after approximately 10 interviews appeared to provide relevant and meaningful answers to the research questions I was asking, and the further four interviews strengthened this impression as they continued to provide nuance and complexity but not radically new revelations.

4.2.5 In-depth analysis: Themes and portraits

I transcribed the interviews myself, verbatim, attempting to complete each transcription shortly after each interview. This approach is recommended by Gray (2003: 149) as a useful starting point for engaging profoundly with interview material. The interviews were interpreted in several stages. In addition to the initial interpretations which took place while interviewing and transcribing, I coded and analysed the interview transcripts systematically and thematically over and over again, as I immersed myself in the material with a different perspective for each article.

I initially coded the transcripts according to the themes of the different articles I planned to write, starting with the *readers and texts* article and *the magazine medium* article. Of course, the same passage in a transcript could be highly relevant to both. The initial coding was followed by careful reading and re-reading of the passages I had marked as particularly relevant, but also of the full interview transcripts. I aimed to formulate analytical categories that could capture patterns and tendencies – as well as ambivalences and nuances – in the material in a theoretically founded analysis. For instance, the phenomenological philosophy and medium theory that led me to explore perceptual experiences also informed my reading of the ways in which informants spoke about reading women's magazines online and in print. I considered several explanations as to why these experiences were different, evaluated their resonance in the material, and eventually decided that the analytical categories *context* and *interface* could capture the varied and nuanced reasons informants gave for preferring print magazines.

For the *public sphere* article, initial coding was a frustrating experience. As I attempted to code the material according to whether it was relevant to an analysis of the role of women's magazines in the public sphere, I became acutely aware of the complications and pitfalls of making such judgements. This turned my attention to public sphere theorists who deal with problems of categorization, as I first tried to refine my analytical categories and eventually decided to emphasize the actual problem of categorization in the article. In *the public sphere* article I argue that different normative ideals prescribe different roles for popular media in the public sphere, and I demonstrate how the role of women's magazines – as expressed by readers, in texts and by editors – can be interpreted in several different ways according to how these normative ideals are understood and applied. This is, I would say, an example of a

fruitful approach to a theoretically informed analysis of an empirical phenomenon, but also an example of how analysis of empirical material might contribute to theoretical debates and developments.

When working on what eventually became *the identity* article, I initially analysed the interviews thematically, attempting to extract and interpret passages where the informants spoke about women's roles and portrayals of women's lives in women's magazines. However, while the informants' opinions about this topic were interesting, I found that their ways of expressing and contextualizing these opinions were actually more intriguing. As emphasized in *the identity* article, the informants consistently interpreted women's magazine texts in relation to their own identities and experiences. This happened throughout the interviews, not only in reply to selected questions. In order to better capture these dimensions in analysis, I therefore abandoned the thematic approach and performed a portrait analysis, analysing complete interview transcripts as individual entities. This allowed for more profound exploration of how individual informants constructed narratives about identities and experiences as frameworks for evaluating representations of women's lives in women's magazines. My approach concurs with an observation made by Gray (2003: 153), who notes that thematic analysis will entail a fragmentation of individual "voices" that might not be productive when one is analysing questions of identity or subjectivity. When writing the article I first intended to draw on four or five of these portraits as examples, but in order to achieve some of the analytical depth this topic demanded I eventually decided to only include two examples, chosen because they articulated discourses and ambivalences found in the rest of the material as well. In the identity article these two interviews are analysed in depth, drawing on feminist and sociological theories of identity and experience (Beauvoir [1949]2000, Giddens 1991, Moi 1999), and the relations between these theoretical perspectives, the example interviews and the rest of the material are clarified as I construct a typology of women's magazine reading as a reflexive practice.

After analysing the interview material for four different articles, I still found the material to be rich, nuanced and intriguing. Interesting dimensions had to be left unexplored, for instance, I could have written other articles on how the informants talked about what different magazines had meant to them at different periods in their lives, or about magazine reading as part of each' informants overall media use. The limits entailed by the article format – and by the article-based dissertation format – could be seen as a problem when it comes to how one

represents research material. For instance, when adhering to word limits for journal articles one cannot quote informants at length as often as one might wish. Furthermore, as I wished to publish in international journals I had to translate from Norwegian to English when quoting informants. This is not ideal, because it is difficult to preserve the many nuances of oral language in accurate translations of transcripts, but it is necessary if research from a small country such as Norway is to be read outside Scandinavia.²⁶ On the other hand, I found that the article format worked very well in the sense that it provided “forced” but necessary analytical focus that facilitated in-depth interpretations, as I had to limit my analysis to selected research questions and theoretical approaches.

4.3 Exploring texts: Reader-guided textual analysis

The reader study I have just discussed constitutes the main element of my empirical research, but it was complemented with analysis of magazine texts. The most common approach would probably be analyse texts before “entering the field” to study readers, but my approach was the other way around. My textual analysis did not only come after the reader study; it was also guided by the informants’ accounts of their experiences and preferences. From the large selection of contemporary Norwegian women's magazine texts, I chose to focus on forms of magazine journalism that were *defined by informants as particularly relevant to their experiences*. My selection of magazines to analyse was of course affected by the fact that all informants subscribed to one particular magazine, *KK*. Nevertheless, the reader study guided my analysis of this magazine as well as my attention to certain other magazines.

I have called this approach *reader-guided* textual analysis, and it is used in two of the four articles in the thesis. In *the public sphere* article, my analysis of readers’ political engagement with women's magazines led me to identify an explicit and an implicit political dimension of women's magazine reading, both of which I followed up on in analysis of a body of texts which was selected on the basis of the informants’ accounts.²⁷ The prime example of my use of this approach is, however, the *readers and texts* article, in which I aim to explore relations

²⁶ I have also written an article (which is not included in the thesis) in Norwegian (Ytre-Arne 2011 forthcoming), where the main findings of my reader study are discussed with special emphasis on women's magazine reading as situated in a national Norwegian context.

²⁷ As detailed in the article, the material consisted of articles, interviews, regular columns and editorials from every issue of *KK* and *Henne* published between September 2007 and December 2009, and from 10 random issues of *Tara* and *Kamille* published in the same period.

between women's magazine reading as a social practice situated in everyday life, and women's magazines as texts with certain characteristics. My analysis of reading experiences is used as a starting point for a qualitative content analysis of how recurring textual structures and themes in the 2008 annual volume of *KK* correspond with recurring reading practices.²⁸

In *the readers and texts* article I also discuss the potential merits of this approach. This discussion can be related to fundamental methodological debates within audience and reception research, cultural studies and feminist media research. These debates have already been introduced in the two previous chapters: As I argued in chapter 2, research on women's magazines provides several examples of the discrepancies between researchers' readings and audiences' readings of the same texts. And as mentioned in chapter 3, a fundamental question in media research is whether and to which degree dominant meanings are encoded in texts, and how and to which degree audiences accept, negotiate or resist such meanings in various social and cultural conditions. These debates highlight the importance of empirical audience research in order to understand media experiences, but it is also pertinent to ask what textual analysis might contribute to audience research. My main argument in the *readers and texts* article is that the rationale for combining textual analysis and audience studies can be found in the ontology of the phenomenon in question: Media experiences are formed through connections between texts (as cultural artefacts) and uses and interpretations (as social practices). In other words, media experiences are social practices which revolve around mediated texts, and in order to understand media experiences one needs to pay methodological attention to all these elements. I particularly found reader-guided textual analysis to be a fruitful approach because it gave me an enhanced understanding of magazine texts *as they appeared to readers*. In other words, I used this method as a supplement to *my* analysis of informants' interpretations, not as a supplement *to* their interpretations.

My position is contrary to the arguments presented by Hermes (1995) in her study of magazine reading, but rather similar to her arguments in a later study called *Re-Reading Popular Culture* (2005). Here Hermes draws on Gray's (2003) work on methodology in cultural studies, and proposes that

²⁸ As described in the article, the material I analysed was the full 2008 volume of *KK*, and my qualitative content analysis emphasizes *recurring textual structures and overarching themes* because these appeared most relevant to the ways informants read, interpreted and experienced women's magazines.

The validity of popular culture research might well benefit from a methodological strategy in which the audience study remains central but feeds and directs textual analysis (rather than the other, more usual, way round, which tends to obscure lived reality by privileging an author's perspective) (Hermes 2005: 80).

Hermes cautions that textual analysis should not be applied as a researcher's corrective or superior reading, and the history of women's magazine research illustrates that this is a valid concern. Reader-guided textual analysis is a rather careful approach compared to the tendency in early magazine research to make assumptions about audiences through textual analysis alone. Furthermore, this method of analysis might encourage a sound balance between informants' interpretations and researchers' interpretations, as it gives informants a say about how researchers analyse texts. However, while I understand Hermes' concern and hope that my approach might avoid some of the problems of earlier research, I will not assume that a researcher's voice will necessarily be less authoritative just because audience research is privileged within a project. The researcher is still in a position of power that manifests at different stages in the research process: Defining research questions, choosing methods, selecting informants, asking questions, categorising and analysing, and so on. As crucially valuable as the informants' contributions are to the research material of a thesis such as this, it should be emphasized that the research material was generated within a framework constructed by my methodological decisions and reflections.

4.4 Exploring context: The magazine industry and a small-scale production study

I also conducted a small-scale production study in the form of qualitative interviews with five key editors in Norwegian women's magazine publishing. This was primarily done in order to gain background information about the business, and the interviews contributed to the analysis of Norwegian women's magazine publishing which will be presented in the next chapter. Furthermore, I wanted to include editor's perspectives as well as readers' experiences and textual analysis in *the public sphere* article in order to provide a multidimensional analysis. While production perspectives are only highlighted in this one article and in one chapter of the final contribution, these dimensions are nevertheless important in order to understand the context of the reader study and the reader-guided textual analysis. The potential importance of production analysis in studies of popular media is underlined by

several scholars; for instance, Gough-Yates (2003) argues that the cultural discourses in the spheres of production and publication are central in order to understand historical changes in women's magazines, and in a multi-dimensional analysis of the *Dynasty* phenomenon in Norway, Gripsrud (1995) emphasizes the importance of production analysis in order to understand how specific conditions of production might influence reception in different cultural contexts.

Researchers with an interest in the production and publication of magazines have described difficulties in establishing dialogues and gaining access to the industry (Gough-Yates 2003: 21-25, Johnson 2007). I experienced no such difficulties, and I believe this was due to a previously established relationship between members of the Norwegian magazine industry and the Department of Information Science and Media Studies at the University of Bergen (UiB). In 2007 I was employed as a “stipendiat” (PhD candidate/ junior research fellow) at the department, and the position I applied for was earmarked for doctoral research on magazines. The position was funded partly by the department and partly by an arrangement between the University of Bergen and the media organization Magasin- og ukepresseforeningen (MUF), an organization of magazine publishers which has later been dissolved. The agreement between MUF and UiB entailed that the university would receive some funding for research on magazines, contributing to the creation of a PhD position, but MUF had no influence on recruitment for this position or on the direction, form or scope of the research. Except for this thematic focus every aspect of the formation of a research project was left up to potential applicants. When I applied I designed a project based entirely on my own research interests. In the course of carrying out this project I have been in touch with some magazine industry officials who have expressed interest in my research,²⁹ but I have never experienced any attempts to influence my work. I have of course been employed by the university on the same terms as any other PhD candidate with any other form of external or internal funding, and I have no personal ties to the magazine industry. Overall, it is my experience that MUF’s contribution to the position I came to occupy has had one clear effect on my research, and this was that it was relatively easy to gain access when I needed to

²⁹ Before MUF was dissolved in June 2009 I met director Karen Eldbjørg Toven a couple of times. I was also introduced to the board of MUF and later invited by board member Jan Mathisen to visit Aller Media, where I talked informally with several editors and officials. These included Arne Fangberget and Arne Aksdal, who provided me with information on *KK*’s readership and with the subscription data I used to recruit informants for the reader study. After MUF was dissolved I have been in touch with Liv Brynhildsvoll who was a key figure in MUF and in the establishment of a magazine group within the Norwegian Media Businesses’ Organization, where most magazine publishers are now members.

contact editors or other officials. Even though MUF was dissolved in June 2009, it was an advantage that the editors I approached for an interview had heard about the existence of my research through MUF.

I chose to interview the editors of the magazines that were most talked about by the informants in my reader study. *KK*'s editor in chief Gjøri Helén Werp was an obvious choice. I also wanted to interview the editors of *Tara* (editor in chief Torunn Pettersen) and *Kamille* (editor Kjersti Mo) because these magazines were very popular with many of my informants. *Kamille*'s publisher Egmont Hjemmet Mortensen has chosen a different editorial model from other Norwegian publishing houses: Each magazine has an "editor" who is in charge of running the magazine and who writes editorials, while the editorial responsibilities associated with the title "editor in chief" lie elsewhere. I therefore also interviewed Gunnar Bleness, who at the time had editorial responsibility for *Kamille* and a number of other women's magazines published by Egmont Hjemmet Mortensen. Furthermore, I interviewed Ellen Arnstad of Aller Media's *Henne*, a magazine frequently mentioned by informants in reference to political women's magazine journalism. Arnstad founded *Henne* and was editor in chief for 17 years, and was also an interesting informant because of her position as a key leader in Aller Media and her various roles and engagements within Norwegian media organizations.

The interviews took place in Oslo, at the offices of the various publishing houses, in March and April 2010. Each interview lasted for approximately an hour, was recorded digitally and afterwards transcribed verbatim. The editors were of course informed beforehand about my research and my reasons for interviewing them, and they agreed to be quoted by name and title in publications resulting from this research. I used a semi-structured interview guide that contained some common topics and questions and some which were individually adapted.

4.5 Concluding reflections: Challenges when exploring media experiences

Are the methods I have used suitable in order to understand women's magazine reading as a media experience in relation to everyday life and identity? This is as much of a theoretical as a methodological question. As argued previously, media experiences is a theorized concept. In order to evaluate methodological choices one must take into account how the specific research methods and their epistemological foundations correspond with the theoretical research

questions one seeks to explore. The most important methodological choice I have made was to build my research on qualitative interviews as the most central method. Although the interviews were substantiated by the preceding questionnaire and the subsequent textual analysis and production study, the interviews are fundamental to my analysis and to the way it is presented in the four articles.

The merits of qualitative research interviews have been questioned in recent methodological debates in the field of media studies. For instance, David Gauntlett (2007) asks whether interviews are fruitful in research on complex phenomena related to media, audiences and identity. As identity is an important concept in my main research question as well, I will discuss the particular example of researching media and identity before moving on to how various dimensions of media experiences might be explored through interviews. Gauntlett starts his discussion by identifying two potential problems, which are that:

researchers expect people to explain immediately, in words, things which are difficult to explain immediately in words; and that researchers often start with their own sense of a topic or a problem (media, prejudice, economics or whatever) and then are frustrated when their pesky subjects do not seem to think that this subject-matter is as important as the researchers do (2007: 3).

These are important concerns, but I would argue that the first problem is more substantial than the second. While it is obviously problematic to impose upon informants the notion that something like women's magazines *must* be important to their sense of identity, it is also possible to do research on, for instance, women's magazines and identities without making these assumptions. I did assume that women's magazine reading had some value to my informants, as they had decided to subscribe to at least one women's magazine. I did not, however, make any assumptions about the relative importance of women's magazines in comparison with anything else. In the interviews I found that informants had no trouble at all in placing women's magazine reading as part of their overall media use. For instance, they could clearly state that novels or newspapers were *more* important (for various reasons), while also explaining why and how women's magazines mattered to them. As for women's magazine reading and identity, the arguments I make in *the identity* article are that identity narratives are relevant in order to understand readers' interpretations of women's magazines; and that women's magazines or other forms of popular media might function as resources for reflections about identity. Neither of these arguments assigns any special importance to

women's magazines in terms of identity construction; rather, they emphasize the importance of a relative, contextual and reflexive approach to these matters. My position is, therefore, that even when it comes to something as complex as identity, qualitative interviews *can* be a fruitful method. The deciding factor is whether interviews are suited for exploring questions of identity as they are understood within the theoretical framework of specific research projects. In the *identity* article I draw on a theory of identity in which reflection and narrative are crucial concepts (Giddens 1991).³⁰ Given *this* understanding of identity, the reflections and narratives constructed through qualitative research interviews are highly relevant.

The first problem identified by Gauntlett, however, clearly describes the difficulties of asking people to quite simply explain their experiences, preferences and interpretations – phenomena that we, as researchers, might actually be interested in because we believe them to be complex. This problem is particularly relevant for a research project on media experiences. The theoretical understanding of media experiences I outlined in the previous chapter is not necessarily easy to apply in empirical research. Other scholars have also observed the importance of recognizing that media use can encompass dimensions that are extremely difficult to put into words, and that might even be described as subconscious or irrational (Gripsrud 2007: 61).

One idea for a possible solution might to replace or supplement interviews with other methods. Gauntlett's (2007) proposed alternative to traditional qualitative interviews is to develop creative methods allowing informants more time and resources for reflection and expression. However, critics such as David Buckingham (2009) argue that it is naïve to assume that these methods provide more direct access to people's beliefs, and that verbalized reflections – made through some form of interview – are still crucial to Gauntlett's methodologies (Buckingham 2009: 645). Likewise, methods of observation could be put forward as an alternative to interviews, but still one might want or need to do some form of interview in order to make sense of observations (Morley 1992: 181). Thereby, the complications associated with asking people to “put things into words” remain an important concern even for studies combining interviews with other methods. However, rather than taking this as a disincentive to do research on phenomena such as media experiences, it is important to reflect upon which dimensions of media experiences we might hope to analyse,

³⁰ Gauntlett also draws on and discusses Giddens' theory of identity (Gauntlett 2007, 2008).

and on how the limitations of our research might influence our overall theoretical understanding.

My practical experience in the course of this project was that some dimensions of media experiences were far more difficult to research through interviews than others. Informants talked easily about cognitive, emotional, social and cultural dimensions of magazine reading. These are dimensions that interview-based qualitative audience and reception research often has focused on and explored, but what about the “new” dimensions I also hoped to include, such as perceptual, technological and aesthetic dimensions of magazine reading? In the course of conducting interviews I found myself struggling to get informants to talk about the aesthetic dimensions of magazine texts, but I also found it surprisingly easy to develop rich and interesting research material on perceptual and technological experiences with the magazine medium. However, I believe that this is a reflection of my own approaches to these particular questions and not of the general suitability of interview methods in research on media experiences. I had anticipated that perceptual dimensions might be difficult to grasp, and I had given a great deal of thought as to how this might be accomplished. Eventually I decided on a comparative approach in which informants were asked questions about their experiences with online magazines as well as magazines in print, and this worked very well. As for aesthetic experiences with magazine texts, I hoped that having different magazines available during the interview might encourage informants to talk about this topic. They could, for instance, show examples when they found that something was difficult to put into words. I was, however, surprised by the informants’ strong insistence that pictures, layouts, colours etcetera did not matter – they wanted to talk about the written texts, and in keeping with the flexibility that is emphasized in qualitative interviewing I did not object to moving the conversation in that direction. This produced highly interesting material related to *other* dimensions of media experiences, but questions about magazine aesthetics were partly left unexplored. Overall, this implies that when certain dimensions of media experiences are highlighted in my research, this is both because I chose to emphasize them for various analytical and theoretical purposes, and because I felt that I succeeded reasonably well in finding practical and methodological entries to the theoretical questions I was interested in.

On a more general level, I found that there were two substantial advantages to exploring media experiences through interview methods, and these might be relevant for other research projects as well. First of all, we can gain some highly interesting insights by asking people to

talk and reflect, but secondly, interview methods also highlight that we are studying verbalized reflections rather than readings or interpretations in some “pure” form. Buckingham makes a similar argument when he observes that choosing focus group methods “often reflects a fundamental *epistemological* commitment to the idea that meanings are socially produced” (2009: 644). Likewise, Morley asserts that interviews might provide valuable information both through *what* informants choose to tell us and *how* they tell us what they tell us:

The interview method, then, is to be defended, in my view, not simply for the access it gives the research to the respondents’ conscious opinions and statement but also for the access that it gives to the linguistic terms and categories (the “logical scaffolding” in Wittgenstein’s terms) through which respondents construct their words and their own understandings of their activities (Morley 1992: 181).

This brings back the questions of ontology and epistemology in qualitative audience research addressed by for instance Birgitta Höijer (2008), who argues that “In research on interpretations, readings, attitudes, intentions, motives, emotions, or reactions, we are looking for something which is not materialized ‘out there’” (2008: 277). Audiences’ verbalized reflections should neither be seen as direct expressions of media experiences nor as obstacles on the route towards an understanding of “pure” experiences, but rather as an integral part of media experiences that are socially and culturally situated.

5. The Norwegian women's magazine market

In this chapter I will contextualize and discuss the magazines that are most central to my research through an analysis of recent changes in the Norwegian women's magazine market. In addition to *KK* I will focus on *Kamille*, *Henne* and *Tara*, which were read by several informants and therefore frequently mentioned in interviews and questionnaire replies. I will provide a short historical outline of how women's magazines gradually came to be a central genre in Norwegian magazine publishing, and I will situate the selected magazines within this structural framework while particularly emphasizing changes in recent years.

The analysis in this chapter is built on three forms of material: Interviews with magazine editors (see 4.4); reading of previous research, media statistics, publishing information and media news sources; and qualitative thematic content analysis of women's magazine texts. The material for this textual analysis consists of all issues of *KK* and *Henne* published between September 2007 and December 2010, and random issues of *Tara* and *Kamille* from the same period.³¹ While this material is substantial my analytical focus will be limited to one particular tendency of change in this period. I will argue that there has been a re-definition of the key thematic focus in women's magazines, and that this is most evidently expressed through changes in the amount and form of journalism on social and political issues. These changes can best be understood in light of overall structural changes in the Norwegian media market in general and in women's magazine publishing in particular.

5.1 A short history of Norwegian (women's) magazines

As mentioned in chapter 2, the most important work on the history of Norwegian magazines is Jostein Gripsrud's (1999) report on the cultural and societal significance of the weekly press. If one compares Gripsrud's analysis to histories of British women's magazines (Ballaster et al. 1991, Beetham 1996), it appears that the notion of *women's* magazines as such came rather late to Norway. Norwegian periodicals and magazines established in the early

³¹ The analysis presented here is a continuation of the textual analysis in *the public sphere* article, which traced similar changes until December 2009. I have also analysed the 2006-2007 "wave" of political journalism in *KK* and *Henne* in a Norwegian publication (Ytre-Arne 2009).

1800s were rather broad and varied in scope; they were intended to be educational and entertaining for the general public (Gripsrud 1999: 12-14). Gripsrud argues that political tensions and rapid social change contributed to create cravings for knowledge and information in the Norwegian population, and that the popularity of educational and general periodicals can be understood in this light (1999: 14). Early attempts at establishing magazines for women specifically – such as *Illustrert Dametidende* in 1862 – were not successful. In contrast, Ballaster et al. (1991) date the publication of the first British women's magazine as early as 1693, and they emphasize that “the emergence of the early modern ‘magazine’ as a form went hand-in-hand with the development of a specific address to female readers as a definable ‘special interest’ group” (1991: 48).

Gripsrud observes that commercial logics became more dominant in Norwegian magazine publishing from 1890 onwards. Of particular significance was the introduction of the genre known as *family weekly magazines*, which have been a dominant factor in the Norwegian magazine market ever since. The family magazines continued to address general audiences in terms of class and geography, and they continued the ambition of informing and entertaining the public. However, they also represented a shift in emphasis from the public to the private sphere, as practical and emotional dimensions of home and family life became the most important subject matter. The amount of popular fiction also increased. Family weeklies can be understood as a form of women's magazines; but even though women were the primary target group these magazines were also intended to be read by men and children. *Norsk ukeblad* (established 1933) and *Hjemmet* (first published in Norway in 1909) are still among Norway's top-selling magazines.

Other magazines established between 1890 and 1940 also tended to address a general audience, but there were some significant exceptions that mark the gradual establishment of the women's magazine genre. *Urd* was published between 1879 and 1958, targeting women but also favourably received by men of the cultural elites (Gripsrud 1999: 18). This magazine emphasized literature, culture and a moderate but distinct form of feminism.³² While not advocating radical social change, the magazine consistently accentuated women writers and artists and regularly included articles on women's lives in different countries, on women

³² I have inherited my great-grandmother's collection of several volumes of *Urd* from the 1940s and 1950s, as well as some earlier issues. These observations are based on my reading of these magazines, but they also concur with analysis of *Urd* by Breivik (1980), Gripsrud (1999: 18) and Amézquita (2001).

pioneers in various professions and on women's contributions to society through cultural and public life. *Urd* also included typical women's magazine genres such as fashion reports and practical advice on housekeeping and child-rearing. While *Urd* can be understood as primarily targeting middle or upper class women, a magazine called *Alle Kvinners Blad* was introduced in 1937 as a potential counterweight, portraying a more traditional housewife ideal and emphasizing popular fiction rather than critically acclaimed literature. The title *Alle Kvinners Blad* translates as *Every Woman's Magazine*, and this is the first example of a Norwegian magazine using the word "woman" in the title (Gripsrud 1999: 18). Several others followed in the years to come, as women's magazines were finally fully established as a genre. Thereby, gendered distinctions were not really a prominent feature of the Norwegian magazine market until after the Second World War (Gripsrud 1999: 18). Gendered target groups are, however, one of several examples of gradual differentiation and fragmentation of the magazine market from 1945 onwards.

5.2 The women's magazine market today

Norwegian magazine history indicates that women have long been defined as attractive readers to reach, but also that women have often been addressed as part of general audiences or accentuated as primary target groups for magazines also aiming to reach some men. The rather late establishment of the women's magazine as a distinct genre is striking, especially considering the importance of women's magazines in the Norwegian magazine market today. The central role of women's magazines in contemporary Norwegian magazine publishing is evident in several ways.

First of all, media use statistics collected over several years by Statistics Norway (the official Norwegian statistics bureau) demonstrate that more women than men read magazines. While there are practically no gender differences when it comes to newspaper reading, women are strongly overrepresented among magazine readers (Vaage 2007, 2010).³³ Elderly women are most likely to read magazines an ordinary day. Comparing the latest media use statistics to

³³ These differences can be observed in annual reports on media use, but are particularly evident in larger analyses such as the report *Kultur- og mediebruk i forandring* [Changing uses of culture and media] (Vaage 2007), published by the official Norwegian Statistics Bureau Statistics Norway. The report provides analysis of a variety of media use from 1991 to 2006, and a helpful figure detailing gender differences in the use of print media can be found on page 120.

Gripsrud's historical analysis, a relatively stable pattern emerges: Magazines are (and have been) widely read by people of different ages, sexes and education levels – but women, the elderly and the least educated are particularly eager magazine readers (Vaage 2010, Gripsrud 1999: 28).

Secondly, family weeklies primarily targeting women continue to be a dominant category in the Norwegian magazine market. It is, of course, not surprising that bestselling magazines target the most eager magazine readers – who are adult and elderly women. Overviews of top-selling magazines over the past 20 years reveal that these publications are either celebrity magazines or family weeklies (Media Norway 2010a). Family weeklies can easily be misinterpreted as an old-fashioned genre in severe decline if one compares the circulation figures of today with those of the 1970s, a golden age for *Hjemmet* and others.³⁴ However, comparing the *current* circulation figures of family magazines with those of other magazine genres leaves a radically different impression. In 2010 *Hjemmet* was one of the two top-selling magazines in Norway (different ways of calculating circulation will decide if *Hjemmet* holds the number 1 or the number 2 spot).³⁵ The three other family magazines on the market (*Norsk Ukeblad*, *Familien* and *Allers*) are also among Norway's most popular magazines, regardless of genre. All of these emerge from the tradition of accentuating female audiences while also potentially targeting some men, but today they all define their target groups specifically as *women* (Aller Media undated, Egmont Hjemmet Mortensen 2011).

Thirdly, while general interest women's magazines can be said to have come rather late to Norway, this genre has grown in importance as the market has gradually become more fragmented. According to Media Norway, the overall circulation for all Norwegian magazines increased from 2 328 000 in 1991 to 2 654 000 in 2010, while the number of titles published increased from 27 to 76.³⁶ The most striking tendency in the Norwegian magazine market in the past 20 years is therefore that *an increasing number of magazines compete for a relatively*

³⁴ According to Gripsrud (1999: 25), *Hjemmet*'s circulation peaked with 378 000 in 1980.

³⁵ The gossip magazine *Se og Hør* is published twice a week, and the weekend edition has considerably lower circulation than the Tuesday edition. In official circulation figures from the magazine industry the two *Se og Hør* variants are classified as two separate magazines, making *Se og Hør Tuesday* Norway's biggest magazine. The media statistics service Media Norway classifies *Se og Hør* as one magazine using the average of the circulation figures for the two variants. Thereby, *Hjemmet* has been bigger than *Se og Hør* since 2005 according to Media Norway (Media Norway 2010a).

³⁶ The official circulation figures published by the Norwegian Media Businesses' Association would put the number of total titles at 80. This is due to different ways of counting, for instance, a few comics are included by the Media Businesses' Association but removed by Media Norway (Media Norway 2010b).

stable number of readers. One expression of market fragmentation is the growing number of specialized lifestyle magazines catering to various hobbies and interests, but a substantial amount of the increasing magazine output comes in the form of general interest women's magazines. In the official circulation figures for 2010 the four family magazines were categorized as women's magazines for the first time, putting the number of women's magazines at 16. In comparison there were only three general interest men's magazines.³⁷

Women's magazines represent a key site of competition between different publishers. Norway's largest magazine publisher is Egmont Hjemmet Mortensen (until recently Hjemmet Mortensen), owned by the Danish media group Egmont. The second largest publishing house, Aller Media AS, is owned by the Danish Aller group. Since 2004 the Swedish Bonnier Group has fully entered the Norwegian market, as Bonnier Media has launched Norwegian versions of a series of their successful magazine concepts.³⁸ Magazines published by these three houses dominate the market (Methlie 2005, Eiken 2006), and all have launched new women's magazines in recent years.

5.3 KK and the other main magazines in this study

In the remainder of this chapter I will place the main magazines in this study within the historical and structural context I have just outlined.

5.3.1 KK

KK can claim to be Norway's oldest women's magazine still in publication. It has historical roots that can be said to go back further than the actual notion of women's magazines in Norway. What is today *KK* started out as a magazine for needlework patterns, *Nordisk Mønster-Tidende*, first published in 1874. In 1940 this publication was transformed into a general interest women's magazine under the name *Kvinner og Klær* [Women and clothes]

³⁷ A fourth men's magazine, Aller Media's *Alfa*, was launched in the end of 2010. After high sales for the first few issues the magazine is already reported to be struggling heavily to hold on to readers (Kampanje 06.04.2011).

³⁸ Bonnier was a minor actor in the Norwegian market before 2004 as well, as the Danish branch Bonnier Publications AS published a series of Norwegian versions of some magazines in the lifestyle and hobby categories (Methlie 2005: 11).

(Aller Media undated b). The official name was changed to the abbreviation *KK* in 1970, but *Kvinner og Klær* remains a household name in Norway. *Kvinner og Klær* was part of the first generation of “modern” women's magazines launched in the 1940s and 1950s, but *KK* is the only one of these publications that remains in publication today.³⁹

KK is published by Aller Media, and it is the only Norwegian glossy women's magazine that is published weekly. The publication frequency makes *KK* an “ukeblad” (weekly magazine), but *KK*'s layout, paper quality and contents have more in common with monthly or bi-weekly glossy women's magazines than with other Norwegian weeklies such as *Hjemmet*, *Allers* or *Se og Hør*. *KK*'s position in the magazine market should be understood in light of this hybrid position. In 2010 *KK*'s circulation was 48 604, which is low compared to other weeklies (*Hjemmet*'s circulation was 182 555). Some glossy women's magazines also have higher circulation figures than *KK*, but *KK*'s publication frequency makes it Norway's best-selling glossy women's magazine in terms of total sales.

In the past ten years *KK* has undergone several changes in terms of market position and editorial content. The fragmentation of the women's magazine market has been particularly challenging to *KK*, as the magazine has been forced to compete with an increasing number of rivals. *KK*'s circulation dropped 13 percent from 2005 to 2006, 12 percent from 2006 to 2007 and no less than 20 percent from 2007 to 2008. The dramatic downward spiral ceased in 2009, and in 2010 circulation was again rising. The turn in *KK*'s circulation corresponded with a change of editors and changes in the editorial profile. These changes are discussed briefly in *the public sphere* article, but I will provide a more detailed analysis here, as *KK*'s reorientation can be said to represent a more fundamental redefinition of the women's magazine genre in Norway.

KK has traditionally combined lifestyle journalism (on fashion, beauty, health, food, home decorating, relationships etcetera) with feature journalism on current affairs and social and political issues. Both elements are emphasized in the presentation of *KK* at the publisher Aller Media's website, but the presentation particularly aims to place *KK* in the Norwegian public sphere. This is evident through the use of phrases such as “*KK* sets the agenda on behalf of women”, “*KK* represents liberal values, and is a magazine on the side of women in debates in

³⁹ I am here defining *Det Nye* (established in 1957 and still published) primarily a magazine for girls and young women.

society” and “*KK*-readers are engaged in society” (Aller Media undated c, my translations). It is important to note that *KK* has a long history of printing articles on social and political issues, international as well as national (see for instance Gripsrud 1999: 32). However, *KK*’s previous editor Bente Engesland further strengthened this established tradition. She regularly commented on political matters in her editorials and instituted a letter page with room for political debate. In 2007 and 2008 *KK* regularly included long articles on social and political problems in Norway (e.g. discrimination of immigrants, problems in the child welfare system, wage gaps between men and women) and in the rest of the world (e.g. eradication of rain forests in Africa, school shootings in the USA, the consequences of abortion bans in South America). There were not many of these articles within a single issue, but these topics were nevertheless a distinct presence in the magazine.

In June 2008 Engesland abruptly resigned, allegedly due to disagreements with the publisher about the direction *KK* should take (Kampanje 10.06.2008). Ellen Arnstad (*Henne*-editor and Aller Media publishing editor) took over as acting editor, but soon Gjyri Helén Werp was hired to be *KK*’s new editor in chief. She started work in October 2008. Werp came from the position of editor of *Kamille* (see 5.3.3), a fairly new magazine that had grown to be one of *KK*’s main competitors. When I interviewed Werp in March 2010, she described her strategy when taking over *KK* in terms of a return to what she understood to be the key elements of the magazine:

What I have done in *KK* is to turn up the feelgood factor [...] But *KK* should be feelgood with meaning. We must have substance. Our readers expect that. That is the role *KK* has had historically. It’s a serious publication, we have always portrayed interesting people, there are price-winning journalists working here... *KK* is not a lightweight. [...] I am concerned with developing and maintaining that, but I will not look too much at what competitors are doing. There is more than enough inspiration in *KK*’s history! As for “sickness and death”, I have put that on timeout, even though *KK* will go deeper than mere feelgood and superficialities. We will find new angles to topics close to us. Our profile is turned from “current” to “relevant for the reader, here and now”. Foreign affairs are therefore removed, and our journalism will emphasize the everyday lives of Norwegian women we can identify with. We will have a nice mixture of light and heavy, but everything should be inspiring or fascinating, even the more serious stories (Gjyri Helén Werp, *KK*-editor).

The changes Werp described are evident in *KK*’s content. My analysis in *the public sphere* article shows a clear decline in explicitly political journalism from 2007 to 2009, and this change has continued in 2010. One striking tendency is that international perspectives and

foreign affairs are no longer prominent within the magazine. Another tendency is the removal of topics and journalistic presentational devices that break with the idea of pleasurable reading; there are no more stories about violence and war. The layout also appears lighter and brighter than before – the paper is glossier, colours are brighter and pictures more glamorous.

Nevertheless, there are also fundamental similarities between “old” *KK* and “new” *KK*. In the *readers and texts* article I analyse the 2008 volume of *KK*; 2008 being the turbulent year in which the change of editors took place. Nevertheless, my analysis shows that one overarching theme consistently dominated *KK*’s journalism throughout the year, and this theme was the everyday life of an ordinary Norwegian woman who combines work and family. This was a common denominator for various forms of reportage journalism as well as a direct or indirect presumption for most of the magazine’s lifestyle journalism. As the quote from Werp above signals, the aim to connect with readers’ lives would continue under her leadership with an even stronger emphasis on the “here and now” of – or the immediate relevance to – readers’ everyday lives.

The items that are highlighted on the front cover of *KK* 37/2010 (see appendix 5) might serve as examples of how this main theme continues to dominate the magazine. Some of the main headlines can be translated as: “Good balance, better life! – The time, - The food, - The workout”; “Big fashion guide: Classy all week! 88 super buys. Clothes, boots, bags, jewellery, jackets, shoes”; “This is how you thrive in the workplace” and “The interior décor professional: - Airy rooms reduce stress!”. These headlines exemplify a continued assumption that the reader is a busy woman seeking to find a healthy balance between various concerns in her everyday life. The editorial in the same issue is written in response to a letter from a reader who complains about how everyday challenges in a busy family life (exemplified by the sight of a messy house when she comes home from work) can put her in a bad mood. The editor sympathizes with the reader, recognizes the same challenges in her own everyday life, and provides strategies for how to stay happy and content. A major fashion spread provides fashion tips for various situations readers might encounter throughout the week, such as being at work, going for a walk or for a night out. An article aims to reveal the private everyday lives of lifestyle experts on for instance fitness, food, or fashion, while another discusses food as a potential identity marker – the journalist starts by asking if she is the only one who cannot find the time to bake the family’s bread herself. Advice on how to balance your life is the topic of an article in which three women share their strategies for a better life, and the

food column provides “Thai on a Tuesday – Quick dishes that are perfect everyday food”. In other words, the main theme from 2008 continues, although the inspirational approach emphasized by Werp is also evident. Whereas “old” *KK* might connect women’s presumed quest for everyday balance to societal structures in Norwegian working life or family politics, chances are that “new” *KK* will rather provide inspirational stories on how individual women have dealt with these challenges.

5.3.2 *Henne*

Henne was launched with great fanfare by Aller Media in March 1994, on the International Women’s Day. According to editor Ellen Arnstad, whom I interviewed in March 2010, she was given great liberties when developing *Henne* as a new women’s magazine concept. The slogan was “Du legger merke til HENNE”, meaning “You will notice HER”. *Henne* was designed to be a hybrid between high-quality feature and fashion journalism, and it appeared more upmarket than other Norwegian magazines at the time. Another ambition was to consistently highlight inspirational women, contemporary or historically. In my interview with her, Arnstad joked that she came close to being fired when she decided to devote ten pages in the second issue of *Henne* to a feature article about the Mexican artist Frida Kahlo. Nevertheless, *Henne* succeeded in establishing a position in the magazine market and Arnstad remained editor of the magazine until she chose to resign early in 2011, after having hired Laila Madsö as her replacement. Arnstad continues to hold a leading position within Aller Media, and has been involved in several Norwegian press organizations. She is also a well-known figure in Norwegian public debate, often called upon to comment on issues somehow related to feminism or women’s roles in Norwegian society.

The fundamental journalistic ambition behind *Henne* has remained relatively unchanged since the start in 1994. Fashion (which Arnstad described as a cultural form that reflects contemporary society) is a major part of the magazine. Feature journalism is the other main element. A regular item is a long portrait interview, often accompanied by photos taken by a critically acclaimed photographer, and often making headlines in the general news media. For instance, *Henne* has received much attention for exclusive portrait interviews and cover shots with the Norwegian queen and other women of the royal family. The topics that are covered in the magazine’s feature articles bear some resemblance to *KK*’s previous profile, but

Henne's journalism represents more of a cultivation of the lengthy feature genre. Another trademark of the magazine is a series of annual campaigns inside and outside the magazine pages. *Henne* has instituted a Norwegian fashion award (Nåløyet) and an award for women entrepreneurs (Startknappen), but the magazine has also devoted special issues to topics such as violence against women or global climate change (Ytre-Arne 2009).

Henne's circulation was 36 401 in 2010. Figures have been higher in the past, but *Henne* is and has been a relatively small magazine, both in comparison with the giants in the magazine market (family weeklies and gossip magazines) and in comparison with the top-selling glossy women's magazines. On the other hand the magazine has attracted considerable ad revenues from the start, according to Arnstad. However, she also emphasized that *Henne*'s market position changed drastically a few years after the launch, when a series of Norwegian newspapers introduced weekend supplements emphasizing lifestyle and feature journalism in a magazine format:⁴⁰

Henne was alone in the market, really, for years, with no competition. Then came *Dagbladet Magasinet* in 1999, five years later. And the effect was instant. It affected our circulation, in both *KK* and *Henne*, from one day to the next, and it affected us in terms of ads. [...] [So on the one hand] you have the development of newspaper weekend supplements that are hybrids like *Henne*, and on the other you have even more specialized fashion and lifestyle magazines (Ellen Arnstad, former *Henne*-editor).

The financial crisis of 2009 was also difficult for *Henne*, according to Arnstad. The total ad volume dropped, and hesitant advertisers were reluctant to commit to *Henne*'s print deadlines, preferring the shorter production cycle of the newspaper weekend supplements. Arnstad admitted that changing market conditions, as well as changing expectations from magazine readers, entailed a shift in what sort of topics *Henne*'s reportage journalism should cover: "Some of the things we did ten years ago would not work today". These changes in *Henne* (and in *KK*) imply that certain differences between newspapers and magazines have been accentuated. Newspapers and magazines might become more similar in other respects, as newspapers also increasingly emphasize various forms of lifestyle journalism, but when it comes to political feature journalism, the tendency is clear: There is considerably less of this

⁴⁰A similar narrative was confirmed in my interview with Gunnar Bleness, who is now director and editor in chief for a series of Egmont Hjemmet Mortensen's magazines, but who used to work for the tabloid newspaper *Dagbladet* and was a key figure in the development of *Dagbladet*'s successful Saturday supplement *Magasinet*. Bleness said that *Magasinet* was developed in order to capture ad revenues from the weekly press, and he agreed that the introduction of newspaper weekend supplements had contributed to a redefined "division of labour" between magazines and newspaper weekend supplements in terms of who will deliver what sort of journalism.

in Norwegian women's magazines now than before. The presentation of *Henne* at the Aller Media website now describes a “makeover” within the magazine, maintaining a commitment to quality journalism but particularly emphasizing lifestyle topics (Aller Media undated d).

5.3.3 *Kamille*

In 2005 several new women's magazines were introduced in the Norwegian market. One of these was the bi-weekly magazine *Kamille*, published by Hjemmet Mortensen. Media market analysts described *Kamille* as a clever manoeuvre from Norway's largest magazine publisher: The magazine would fill a hole in Hjemmet Mortensen's portfolio (between the young women's magazine *Det Nye* and the family weekly *Norsk Ukeblad*) and compete with women's magazines published by Aller Media, primarily *KK* (Kampanje 19.09.2005). When I interviewed Gunnar Bleness (who was then director/editor in chief of *Kamille* and other women's magazines published by Egmont Hjemmet Mortensen) he also explained that *Kamille* was designed to be an alternative to the Norwegian version of the international fashion magazine *Elle*: *Kamille* would be more “Norwegian”, lively and warm compared to the cool and cosmopolitan *Elle*.

Kamille succeeded in securing a position in the market at a time when *KK*'s circulation decreased year by year, and in 2008 *Kamille* surpassed *KK* as Norway's top-selling glossy women's magazine (Kampanje 17.02.2009). *KK* closed part of the gap in 2009, and in 2010 both magazines saw a relatively similar rise in circulation, placing *KK* at 48 604 and *Kamille* at 53 379. *Kamille* has secured a strong market position in a time of fierce competition, but what were the reasons for this success?

Current *KK*-editor Gjyri Helén Werp edited *Kamille* between 2006 and 2008. In my interview with her in March 2010, she gave the following explanation for *Kamille*'s progress in the market:

Kamille was established to “get” *KK*, because *KK* was the biggest player in the women's magazine market. In the beginning *Kamille* was rather similar to *KK*. The same ingredients were there, even though *Kamille* aimed for a feelgood profile while *KK* became more and more serious. *Kamille* could take advantage of the situation when *KK*'s circulation dropped dramatically. [...] As a competitor, *Kamille* could handpick position after position as *KK* left them behind. The first thing I did when I

arrived at *Kamille* a year after the launch of the magazine was to remove anything that seemed like a copy of *KK*. [...] I wanted *Kamille* to have its own identity and its own voice, and I wanted to cultivate what was unique about *Kamille*: the feelgood profile (Gjyri Helén Werp, former *Kamille*-editor).

Kamille's identity is here defined as the idea of *pure* feelgood journalism. Current *Kamille*-editor Kjersti Mo also emphasized this aspect in my interview with her. One implication of this idea was that everything in the magazine should be *pleasurable*. Everything should be suited for enjoyment and relaxation; nothing should feel like an obligation. Another implication of the pure feelgood profile was, according to Mo, that *Kamille* had a different approach to lifestyle journalism:

The basic attitude is that you are good enough as you are. With that we exclude quite a bit of material, actually. For instance we are not into self-development, because the premise for that is that you need improving. We don't want to put the reader in a mode where she feels that she is not good enough, we choose the opposite. [...] And that might be a little bit different from other women's magazines (Kjersti Mo, *Kamille*-editor).

It is, however, pertinent to ask exactly how different *Kamille* is from other women's magazines. In recent editorials (*Kamille* 5/2011, *KK* 13/2011) the editors of both magazines assure readers that "you are good enough as you are", but *KK*'s editor also argues that one should not feel guilty for wanting to be "an even better version" of oneself. This might reflect slightly different approaches or attitudes, but it does not change the fact that lifestyle journalism and reportages on various aspects women's everyday lives are absolutely fundamental elements in both these magazines.

In my opinion, *Kamille*'s success could also be attributed to the magazine's resemblance to the most successful Norwegian magazine concepts, historically and today – the family weeklies. *Kamille* tends to emphasize home and family life and to display fashion and interior design that is more affordable, available and practical compared to most other glossy women's magazines. The layout also shares several similarities with the family weeklies, as *Kamille* appears partly like a homemade scrapbook: a variety of fonts and colours are used, and texts are always divided into many short fragments. Editor Kjersti Mo confirmed that *Kamille* was partly intended to function as a form of family weekly for a younger generation:

Family weeklies are huge, right? But they are primarily for the generation above us. This is partly about providing something similar for women in their 30s, who don't want to feel like their mothers! (Kjersti Mo, *Kamille*-editor).

However, *Kamille* is not the only successful women's magazine to be inspired by the family weeklies and designed in order to be a family weekly for a new generation of women.

5.3.4 *Tara*

Tara was also part of the wave of new women's magazines launched in Norway in 2005. The magazine is published by Bonnier Media and based on a successful Swedish magazine for women over 40. The recent fragmentation of the magazine market implies that new niches have been defined new magazines launched by various publishers, aiming to compete for leading positions within these niches. *Tara* was one of three 40+-magazines introduced in 2005, and is the only one of these remaining today. In 2009, when the competing *Eva* was cancelled, *Tara*'s circulation increased with 31,9 percent, making it fastest growing magazine in Norway by an overwhelming margin. In 2010 *Tara*'s circulation was 55 061, best of the glossy women's magazines on the market (Norwegian Media Businesses' Association undated).⁴¹

Tara's formidable success can also partly be explained by inspiration from the family weeklies. Editor Torunn Pettersen (who worked in Hjemmet Mortensen's *Norsk Ukeblad* for years before establishing *Tara* for Bonnier) said this when I interviewed her in March 2010:

We are not a very glossy magazine. The cover is glossy, but the inside material can sometimes resemble what you will find in family weeklies. But our angles are much more positive. We try to be where we feel that a lot of women over 40 are. We feel that something has changed for a substantial group of women; they do not necessarily relate to the family weeklies any more [...]. A lot of women start over, in a way. Maybe your children are leaving home, maybe you are divorced or entering a new phase in life with your husband, suddenly your parents are old... Things are happening in your life. You face some fundamental choices. There is sorrow and happiness and personal experience that makes you look

⁴¹ In the circulation figures published by the Norwegian Media Businesses' Association, family weeklies and the senior citizen magazine *Vi over 60* are now classified as women's magazines. I have not included these magazines when proclaiming *Tara* as the biggest glossy women's magazine.

differently at yourself. Maybe you think that this is my chance. And that is the wave we want to surf, saying that yes, this is your chance! (Torunn Pettersen, *Tara*-editor).

One similarity between *Tara* and family weeklies is that women's health is a dominant topic. According to Gripsrud (1999: 42), health and relationships are the primary areas where magazines continue to have important educational functions. This is achieved when information drawn from research and medical experts is mitigated through the "intimate" connections that are often established between magazines and their target readers. *Tara* has, for instance, published annual series of long feature and research articles on women's health in 2009, mental health in 2010 and alternative medicine in 2011. Nutrition and exercise advice for healthier living is a dominant theme in *Tara*'s lifestyle journalism, and there is often an explicit health perspective in articles on food, emotional wellbeing, relationships etcetera. A fundamental difference between *Tara* and family weeklies is, however, found in terms of layout: *Tara* appears as a high quality magazine with a neutral look, targeting women who might not identify with the more traditional, lively and "messy" aesthetics of the family weeklies. Another possible implication of market fragmentation is that *Tara* might have captured readers from *KK*, *Henne* and other glossy women's magazines that primarily target younger audiences while also being read by women of different ages. From April 2011 *Tara* is again challenged within the glossy 40+ niche, as Egmont Hjemmet Mortensen introduces a Norwegian version of the Danish concept *Alt for damene*. The tendencies of fragmentation, niche competition and adaptation of Scandinavian magazine concepts thereby continue to characterize Norwegian magazine publication.

5.4 A redefinition of the Norwegian women's magazine?

The recent changes in the Norwegian women's magazine market can be understood as a redefinition – on several levels – of what a women's magazine is. As the short historical outline in the beginning of this chapter showed, the women's magazine genre came rather late to Norway while family weeklies have been and continue to be a dominant category in the magazine market. While the four family weeklies (*Hjemmet*, *Norsk Ukeblad*, *Allers* and *Familien*) have long histories and have remained a stable presence in the market, the category of glossy general interest women's magazines has become increasingly fragmented in recent years. The number of titles has increased significantly, and competition has moved into

several specific niches, for instance based on differentiation in term of age. Interestingly, market winners such as *Kamille* and *Tara* have drawn inspiration from the family weeklies in some respects while distancing their profiles from these magazines in other respects. These developments have been particularly challenging for *KK*, “the grand old lady” of the glossy women's magazine market, as *KK* has been forced to adapt to a completely new competition situation. *KK* has in turn been going through a process of redefinition, and recent circulation figures suggest that the downfall has stopped even though the magazine is not the market leader it once was.

Nevertheless, an equally important process of differentiation is that women's magazines have been redefined as a genre *in relation* to other media, primarily newspapers and newspaper weekend supplements. These supplements have largely conquered the market for feature journalism on current affairs and social and political issues, and *KK* and *Henne* have left this niche in favour of more traditional magazine journalism. Paradoxically, differentiation on this level – between newspapers and magazines – implies that the increasingly fragmented women's magazine genre is in fact rather homogenous. It would be a gross oversimplification to say that Norwegian women's magazines are all the same, but differences in profile are sometimes rather subtle, as Norwegian women's magazines share a fundamental emphasis on lifestyle and reportage journalism directed at readers' immediate everyday lives. There are no longer any women's magazines that radically break with the established expectations associated with this genre, for instance by emphasizing foreign affairs or explicitly political journalism. This is not to say that the magazines are apolitical – there are of course highly political dimensions to the everyday lives of Norwegian women, and this is reflected in the magazines.

6. Main findings and conclusions

In this chapter I will summarize my main findings in relation to the overarching research question. The findings will be presented, substantiated and discussed in more detail in the various articles, but given that the articles are written as individual entities their relation to each other and to the main research question is not always made explicit in these texts. Here I will therefore emphasize how the findings of the four articles contribute to answering the main research question.

6.1 Women's magazine reading, everyday life and identity

The main research question of this thesis is: *How do regular readers of women's magazines experience these publications, and how are their experiences with women's magazines related to their everyday lives and to their sense of identity?* I have conceptualized women's magazine reading as a multi-dimensional media experience, and the various articles will emphasize different dimensions and draw on different theoretical perspectives. Thereby they introduce methodological and theoretical approaches that could be applied in further and more comprehensive research on women's magazines.

The *readers and texts* article is first and foremost an exploration of women's magazine reading as a social media experience situated in readers' everyday lives. Based on analysis of questionnaire replies and interview transcripts I identify two reading practices: *ritual* and *fragmented* reading. The regular women's magazine readers who participated in my study preferred to read women's magazines as a form of relaxation, reward and ritual, and would, for instance, sit down with a glass of wine on Friday night and read magazines in peace and quiet. However, they also emphasized the possibility of reading women's magazines in bits and pieces, in any situation that called for a short break. In order to explore why women's magazines (as opposed to other forms of media) were read in these situations I have drawn on insights from the reader study while engaging in a systematic exploration of women's magazines texts. My textual analysis was therefore based on the clues provided by informants about how and why they read women's magazines. Through reader-guided textual analysis I

identify certain *textual structures* in the women's magazine medium that make them suited for both ritual and fragmented reading practices: Women's magazines are repetitive and thereby predictable; there are always multiple textual entries and exits so that texts can be read continually or in fragments; and a great number of meta-texts continually encourage the reader to anticipate the pleasures that are to come, making women's magazines suited for a weekly relaxation ritual one might look forward to. In contrast, the informants found that reading novels could be far more rewarding than reading magazines, but novels were less predictable (you do not know if you will enjoy a new book) and demanded more time and concentration (you have to read continually and “work” to get into the story). An important part of the attraction of the women's magazine genre lies in the ability to immediately but temporarily engage readers.

Connections between the role of women's magazine reading in everyday life and the structural properties of magazines are further explored in the *magazine medium* article, where I move beyond social media experiences and also emphasize perceptual, technological and aesthetic dimensions. The regular magazine readers in my study had rather favourable impressions of websites featuring women's magazine journalism, but they still felt that these websites could not possibly replace women's magazines in print. Paradoxically they found online women's magazines to be enjoyable but still useless for the specific purpose of enjoyment. There were two reasons for this, and the first was the placement of women's magazine reading in the structure of everyday life: Informants strongly associated computers with work and women's magazines with leisure and relaxation. The other reason was that informants preferred the interface of the magazine medium: They wanted a magazine they could hold in their hands, and the perceptual experience of reading printed women's magazines provided added value to the reading experience. The relevance of conceptualizing women's magazine reading as a media experience is most directly evident in this article, as it highlights dimensions that are often neglected in audience research. Since the article was written the relevance of these perceptual and technological dimensions has been further accentuated by the introduction of a new generation of electronic magazines for iPads and other tablet technologies. The iPad appears to be suited to the contexts in which regular women's magazine readers enjoy their magazines, and the interfaces of magazine applications for iPads appear to reflect some of the print magazine properties readers appreciate. However, the iPad is still a fundamentally different media technology compared to the printed magazine, and systematic and empirical

research is needed in order to explore if and how the perceptual capacities of magazines for iPads might compete and compare with magazines in print.

Important findings in the first two articles are, in other words, that readers value the act of women's magazine reading and that they value the properties and capacities of the magazine medium. However, this does not imply that the contents or meanings of women's magazines are irrelevant or of lesser importance. While my study is not directly comparable to that of Hermes (1995) in terms of methods or context, and while there are several similarities in our findings, the analytical importance assigned to magazine content remains a fundamental difference between her study and mine. Hermes downplays the importance of content at several points throughout her study (1995: 7, 11-16, 19, 34, 65, 144), and although she does not dismiss it completely she writes that:

The two main tenets, then, of a theory of everyday media use are, first, that content is less important than whether or not a genre is accommodating, whether or not it can be fitted into everyday obligations; secondly, content has, in some sense, to be relevant to the fantasies, anxieties and preoccupation's of readers (Hermes 1995: 64).

My findings would rather suggest that it is problematic to “rank” the importance of these factors. I agree that the integration of women's magazines into everyday life provides a crucial part of the explanation for their appeal, but I have not found that readers' opinions about magazine content is secondary or even separate to the “accommodating” capacities of the genre. Rather, evaluations of magazine content will decide if women's magazines fulfil the desired role in readers' everyday lives – informants would feel cheated of the relaxing reading experience if magazine content failed to appeal and engage. The magazine medium is not sufficiently attractive in itself; rather, it is an attractive way of imparting information and perspectives readers appreciate. This illustrates the importance of understanding media experiences as multi-dimensional: Social and perceptual dimensions of media experiences should be understood in relation to cognitive and emotional dimensions.

Furthermore, my findings suggest that readers do not only engage with women's magazine content through fantasies (of an ideal self etcetera), but also by a more direct, practical and critical evaluation of how various forms of magazine journalism can be relevant to their lives, either in the form of practical information or by creating opportunities for reflection. In the

readers and texts article I show how the main themes of *KK* can be understood as corresponding with these demands, while the *identity* article provides a more in-depth approach to analysis of the relations between women's magazine journalism and readers' lives. Informants differed in their opinions about magazine journalism, but shared a mode of *reflexive interpretation* as they situated women's magazines in relation to conceptions of their own identities and their ideas about the realities of women's lives in Norway today. Most constructed narratives in which the real and the ordinary were self-evident positive values that they, positioning themselves as ordinary women, could judge women's magazines against. In contrast to this *realism discourse* some informants established what we might call a *makeover discourse*, as they emphasized that women's magazines should take everyday life as a starting point and make it more glamorous and attractive. Thereby, these readers could criticize certain women's magazines for being "too ordinary" without criticising "the ordinary" per se – this discourse did not entail such a clear-cut positioning of the self.

Importantly, some readers wanted women's magazines to mirror reality while others wanted women's magazines to enhance it, but in neither case did readers take "reality" as presented by women's magazines at face value. This is particularly interesting in light of important perspectives in previous research on women's magazines. Norwegian and Nordic magazine research tends to highlight the role of magazines as possible reflections of cultural and social change in society (e.g. Gripsrud 1999, Lövgren 2009, Sarromaa 2009). The readers who participated in my study often expressed similar ideas, but their criticism of women's magazines focused on instances where they felt that women's magazines failed in this respect. Readers might expect women's magazines to reflect society, and they might use women's magazines as "mirrors" for construction of identity narratives – but readers are also aware that these mirrors might be heavily skewed when it comes to how they represent and reflect reality. As for the ideological influences of women's magazines, highlighted in international research (e.g. Ballaster et al. 1991, Winship 1987), my findings would underline the need to understand women's magazine reading in relation to a vast array of other potential influences. I found very little to suggest that the ideological messages in women's magazines directly influence readers; rather, I found plenty of evidence of readers' abilities for critical reading. However, the identity narratives and positions readers drew on in their criticism of women's magazines can certainly be understood as *ideological*. The notion of being an ordinary Norwegian woman seeking realistic and relevant information in women's magazine reading can be understood as part of a broader ideological framework, as Norway is generally

conceived as a society where egalitarian values are strongly embedded (Skarpenes and Saksliind 2010). The complex relations between women's magazines and the cultures and societies in which they are read are further investigated in the final article in my thesis, which takes a different approach to questions about women's magazines as potential reflections of contemporary society.

6.2 The relevance of women's magazine reading in society

In *the public sphere* article I explore readers' experiences with women's magazines as potential resources for citizenship. This article emphasizes what I in chapter three called cultural dimensions of media experiences, understood as experiences with media and media texts as integrated in the cultural context of societies and communities. While the first three articles are related to the main research question through their direct emphasis on media experiences, everyday life and identity, the final article contextualizes and explores the broader *social and cultural relevance* of the topic of my thesis, as it aims to theoretically and empirically situate women's experiences with women's magazines in a broader societal context.

In *the public sphere* article I analyse the role of women's magazines in the Norwegian public sphere, exploring how this is understood by readers and editors and how it is expressed in women's magazines texts. I argue that women's magazines can be positioned as either marginal or important, depending on theoretical frameworks and normative ideals prescribing the role of popular media in democracy. A rather traditional ideal grounded in a strict reading of critical normative public sphere theory will lead to one outcome, while an alternative conceptualization of the political, grounded in feminist public sphere theory and/or postmodern cultural theory will lead to another. More practically, women's magazines have limited functions as providers of traditional political information, but they might contribute significantly to people's feelings of community. This in turn might have political dimensions and implications, as exemplified by research on the democratic functions of popular journalism (e.g. Dahlgren and Sparks 1992, Gripsrud 1992, Dahlgren 2010) or in the notion of cultural citizenship (e.g. Hermes 2005, van Zoonen 2005).

The article also underlines the potential political and financial implications of these questions, as my analysis is framed in relation to Norwegian media policy. While newspapers and books are exempted from the 25 percent Value Added Tax (VAT) which is levied on most purchases in Norway, magazines are subject to full VAT rates (Lovdata 2011).⁴² The magazine industry has made various quests for VAT exemptions, including legal action put forward by the former association of magazine publishers, Magasin og ukepresseforeningen (MUF). MUF brought this case before the EFTA Surveillance Authority (ESA), arguing that the differentiated print media VAT rates were in violation of EU competition regulations because newspapers and magazines compete for readers and advertisers in the same markets.⁴³ In 2007 ESA supported MUF in a preliminary statement, but Norwegian authorities responded by challenging this claim and by referring to the special importance of newspapers in order to secure a vital democratic debate (Royal Ministry of Finance 18.09.2007). Since 2007 the case has been in a standstill. MUF is now dissolved and most of its former members have joined the newspaper-dominated Norwegian Media Businesses' Association. After internal negotiations this association now advocates reduced VAT rates for magazines and continued VAT exemptions for newspapers (Norwegian Media Businesses' Association 8.8.2010).⁴⁴

The developments within the genre of women's magazines – discussed in chapter five as well as in *the public sphere* article – are particularly interesting in light of the VAT dispute. Newspaper weekend supplements (with full VAT exemptions) have conquered the position certain women's magazines used to hold as providers of feature journalism on culture and current affairs. This tendency implies that differentiated state aid might have contributed when women's magazines have left (or been driven away from, depending on the point of view) forms of journalism that are traditionally rewarded with state aid. Women's magazines and newspaper weekend supplements have become increasingly different in this respect, while they resemble each other in heavy emphasis on lifestyle journalism. There are also several examples of similarities between newspapers and magazines more generally: Practically identical pieces of journalism – be that a health and fitness article, a piece of celebrity gossip or an interview with a leading politician – can appear in newspapers (free of

⁴² There are VAT exemptions for periodicals according to certain criteria, but commercial magazines do not meet these (Lovdata 2011).

⁴³ Norway is not a member of the European Union, but is nevertheless part of the EU's internal market through the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) agreement.

⁴⁴ In an article at the media news site *Kampanje* this was described as the weekly press giving up on a 50 year long struggle (Kampanje 27.08.2010).

VAT) or in magazines (subject to VAT).⁴⁵ On the other hand: The journalistic areas in which newspapers and magazines resemble each others the most are generally not the areas that newspapers are rewarded state aid to cover. Norwegian authorities draw on rather strict definitions of what constitutes politically relevant journalism when they justify the differentiated VAT rates. While magazines occasionally provide news and political information, they do not attempt to continually follow news, events and debates in a national or local community from day to day the way most newspapers do. Thereby, magazines can hardly claim to be *equally* politically relevant as newspapers. A radical redefinition of “the political” is needed if magazines are to acquire VAT exemptions on grounds of being politically relevant.

The matter becomes even more complex when the actual readers of newspapers and magazines – who are also citizens and members of the public – are brought into the equation. The most important finding I present in *the public sphere* article is that women’s magazine reading can have a form of political relevance that cannot necessarily be “read” off magazine texts as such. This political relevance lies in a media experience that concerns the implicit and indirect role of magazine journalism as one of several resources that contribute to readers’ sense of community and citizenship. It is a rather elusive, vague and intangible form of political relevance, but it is nevertheless significant. Reading women's magazines can be understood as one of several possible forms of connection between individuals and the communities in which they live.

This final point represents both a challenge and an opportunity for contemporary Norwegian women's magazines. The recent “political wave” was a commercial failure for *KK*, and magazine publishers are probably right when they emphasize that readers want to enjoy themselves while reading women's magazines – they want lifestyle journalism and human interest rather than hard news. However, my analysis also asserts that readers want to read important stories about people’s lives, stories that provide opportunities for reflection about identities and personal experiences as situated in cultural and societal contexts. This desire in readers can be interpreted narrowly or broadly – and it can probably be interpreted differently than what is the case in Norwegian women's magazine publishing today. Readers know their

⁴⁵ While the history of the VAT dispute invites comparisons between newspapers and magazines, it is also relevant that lifestyle journalism is prevalent in other media as well – including, for instance, Norway’s public service broadcasters NRK and TV 2.

magazines and magazines know their readers – but women's magazines tend to give readers only what they ask for or respond to immediately; they rarely give readers something they did not even know they wanted. Women's magazines could take more chances in this respect. They could further attempt to find new and unexplored approaches to journalism on women's lives. There are no necessary contradictions between offering journalism that is relevant to women's everyday lives and offering journalism that is relevant to society in a broader sense. However, most women's magazines choose the safer and more traditional approaches – and thereby a less relevant social and cultural position than what they potentially could have.

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