ТМ	Г. XXXVIII	Бр. 2	Стр. 805-824	Ниш	април - јун	2014.

UDK 305-055.2:070.48(497.11:73)
Оригиналан научни рад
Примљено: 12. 12. 2013.
Ревидирана верзија: 14. 2. 2014.
Одобрено за штампу: 27. 5. 2014.

Aleksandra Izgarjan
Diana Prodanović-Stankić
University of Novi Sad
Faculty of Philosophy
Department of English
Slobodanka Markov
University of Novi Sad
Faculty of Sciences
Department of Geography, Tourism and Hotel Management

GENDER ASPECT IN HUMOROUS DISCOURSE IN POPULAR WOMEN'S MAGAZINES IN SERBIA AND THE U.S.

Abstract

The paper explores gender aspect of humorous discourse in four popular women's magazines published in Serbia and the U.S. Firstly, we wanted to describe the functions humour has in this discourse and determine to what extent gender roles are affected by humour. The results of this study indicate that in most cases self-directed humour is used, particularly in the narratives where the authors want to depreciate themselves, elicit sympathy or build rapport with the readership. Gender influences humour both overtly and covertly and stereotypes related to gender are still widely present in both cultures. On the other hand, humour upholds gender roles and helps in maintaining them.

Key words: women's magazines, gender aspect, humorous discourse, Serbian culture, American culture

РОДНИ АСПЕКТ У ХУМОРИСТИЧНОМ ДИСКУРСУ У СРПСКИМ И АМЕРИЧКИМ ЖЕНСКИМ ЧАСОПИСИМА

Апстракт

Чланак анализира хумористички дискурс у четири популарна женска часописа који се објављују у Србији и Сједињеним Америчким Државама. Циљ

izgarjana@yahoo.co.uk

анализе је био утврдити функције различитих облика хумора и међусобни утицај тих облика и родних улога. Резултати ове студије указују на то да у већини случајева жене аутори и наратори користе хумор да омаловаже себе како би изазвале емпатију код читалаца и створиле осећај блискости. Род утиче експлицитно и имплицитно на хумор, а родни стереотипи су још увек широко заступљени у обе културе. Кроз интеракцију хумора и рода, хумор подупире постојеће родне улоге и помаже у њиховом продужавању.

Кључне речи: род, хумор, српска култура, америчка култура, стереотипи, женски часописи

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between gender and humour as reflected in the written discourse of popular magazines published in two different countries and the dominant gender ideology of each magazine as well as the influence of certain cultural models on humour. Since there are no studies that contrast the discourse in Serbian and American women's magazines, in particular regarding humour, we wanted to see to what extent each discourse is similar or culture-specific. It was interesting for us to explore the blend of global and culture-specific elements from the perspective of humorous discourse, and to frame this analysis in the real-world context, as Lumby (2011, p. 96) suggests. Namelly, in popular magazines, humour generally plays an important role since it makes the reading material lighter and more appealing, not to mention advertisements where humour is often used to reach the prospective customers.

Despite the fact that popular magazines sometimes tackle serious issues and try to educate their readership, their main purpose is to sell entertainment and amuse their readers. Hence, it is expected that discourse in popular magazines is abundant with humour, yet, at the same time, humour can be used as a powerful tool in creating and maintaining gender identity. Many authors (Holmes & Marra, 2002; Crawford, 2003; Kotthoff, 2006) have proved the assumption that humour can be used to construct power and gender identity as well as maintain the existing cultural assumptions about gender. Press (2011, p. 107) claims that "an assessment of feminist media studies must necessarily address our anxieties about women and feminism, as well as those about media representations of and impact upon women, gender, and sexuality" and that the post-feminist environment requires a more holistic analysis (Press, 2011, p. 108).

HUMOROUS DISCOURSE

Humour research has become quite popular recently since it offers a deeper insight into the way people construct and use language. Most linguistic studies with this field of interest are based on Raskin's Semantic-Script Theory of Humour (SSTH) and Attardo's General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH) (Raskin, 1985; Attardo, 1994; 2003), which attempt to provide an encompassing general theory of humour that is based on the idea that all humour involves a "semantic-pragmatic process activated by a (fragment of a) text and a violation of Grice's maxims of the principle of cooperation" (Attardo, 2003, p. 1287). Traditionally, it was assumed that humour was restricted to men, and that women were not expected to make jokes, but to smile politely in appreciation of humour produced by men. According to Kotthoff (2006, p. 5), female humorists were almost completely absent from literary humour anthologies and female caricaturists and cartoonists excluded from the exhibitions. This fact is blatantly obvious when it comes to media or in cases where humour serves some other functions. Rarely are women caught off their guard in public: in many situations it is neither acceptable nor desirable if women make fools of themselves by telling jokes, making a grimace or trying to be funny. Still, women have not been excluded completely from the realm of joking: more often than not, they have been the butt of sexist jokes.

Investigating different functions of humour in conversations of men and women, some researchers (Hay, 2000; Crawford, 2003; Kotthoff, 2006) highlighted the fact that there are significant sex differences in attitudes towards expressing humorous utterances. First of all, women frequently assume the role of a passive recipient in verbal humorous exchanges. They use humour to show support in a familiar circle of friends and they rarely direct their jokes at other people. On the other hand, a study that explored humour in relation to the discourse of men's and women's magazines showed that humour is much more present in the discourse of men's magazines than in women's (Izgarjan & Prodanović-Stankić, 2011). Also, as the results of the study indicate, men generally feel more at ease using humour to preserve and promote their identity, especially using sexist and vulgar humour aimed at women (Izgarjan & Prodanović-Stankić, 2011, pp. 18-19).

These findings certainly depend on the particular cultural model shared by the speakers of a language. According to Martin et al. (2003), each culture has a set of preferred humour styles, however, there are individual differences in uses of humour. These differences are pinpointed in the scale they (Martin et al., 2003) have developed. Namely, people use humour

1. to enhance the self (self-enhancing function),
2. to enhance one's relationship with others (affiliative function),
3. to enhance the self at the expense of others (aggressive function),
4. to enhance relationships at the expense of self (self-defeating function).

Exploring the construction of power through humour, Holmes and Marra (2002) suggested that in relationships where the balance of power was not equal, the powerful used humour to maintain control, and the powerless to subvert that control. In most cases, masculinity, commonly associated with having power, is constructed and expressed by the means of humour. According to prevalent cultural assumptions about femininity, women avoid using humorous discourse altogether or restrict themselves to smiling. It has to be emphasized that all different humorous activities are not solely restricted to either men or women, though, undoubtedly, joking styles play an important part in social typification. Davies (2006) has shown that different identities and gender roles are characterized by different styles of joking, and that female characters in films are almost completely excluded from humour. At the same time, her study shows how individuals vary within, as well as across gender categories. Hay (2000) explores functions of humour in the conversations of men and women, and classifies these functions into three broad categories: solidarity-based, power-based and psychological functions. She analyzed both mixed and single-sex groups, and her research revealed that women are more likely to share funny personal stories to create solidarity, whereas men used other strategies to achieve the same goal, such as remembering shared experiences or highlighting similarities to create solidarity within the group.

However, in this paper, we want to focus not only on various functions humour has in the process of constructing and maintaining gender identity, but on the impact of cultural models on the expression of humour as well. In the opinion of Holland and Quinn (Holland and Quinn, 1987, p. 3, Quinn, 1991, p. 79), cultural models mirror common knowledge and experience associated with prototypical schemata that are shared by speakers of a given language, and in that sense cultural models are regarded as real "windows" on the world we live in. To this end, the implicit knowledge about gender identities and the roles speakers of a language share is also a part of their cultural model. Culturally based understanding of the social world we live in is inevitably reflected in popular magazines, since they are written for and by the people who live by these cultural schemata. In that way, elements of culture are transmitted in the discourse, being evident both in the topics and style of a particular magazine. As McMahon (1990, p. 383) claims, the mass cultural text is often a result of a contradictory process of the production of meaning, since it includes a whole range of variables, such as the situation, and intention of the author, relations within society, ideological, political and psychological articulations, relations with readers and with other texts. The specific range of vocabulary that is used in these magazines is certainly in accordance with the appropriate gender roles and cultural models of the target readers, because in that way the readership can identify themselves with the magazine and keep buying it. Consequently, the use

of humour in the discourse of popular magazines also contributes to creating and preserving these roles.

METHODOLOGY

The corpus of this study consists of four monthly magazines, two Serbian, *Cosmopolitan* (the Serbian edition) and *Lepota i zdravlje*[1], and two American, *Cosmopolitan* and *The Oprah Magazine.* They were taken as representative due to several reasons. First of all, they are popular and widely read by women from different age groups in Serbia and the U.S. as their circulation indicates. American edition of *Cosmopolitan* has circulation of 3,032 000 issues, *The Oprah Magazine* of 2,461 464, Serbian edition of *Cosmopolitan* 50 000 and *Lepota i zdravlje* 75 000. Articles and advertisements featured in them address issues that affect women as a social group. The topics range from relationships, health, fashion and leisure, usually divided into regular columns. The visual material was not excluded from our analysis because sometimes both the picture and the text create humorous effect. For the purpose of this study, thirty six issues were analyzed, from 2009 to 2011. On average, Serbian magazines have 170 pages and American 200 pages, out of which approximately 40 per cent of the volume contains advertisements, and almost 50 per cent visual material, such as photographs, drawings, and rarely charts and diagrams. We have included *Cosmopolitan* because this is the only American magazine that has a local edition. The Serbian edition features the same format, yet the texts and advertisements are adjusted to cater to the taste and needs of the Serbian readership. *The Oprah Magazine* and *Lepota i zdravlje* were chosen due to the fact that they are also read by women from different age groups and cover and address similar topics. Both the advertisements and photographs display a range of gender ideologies (working mothers, women as sexual objects or seducers) and in that way contribute to the overall impression of the magazine and gender identities that exist in the respective cultures. For the purpose of this analysis, all instances of humour were taken into account, such as jokes, witticisms, wordplay, puns, narrative jokes, humorous allusions, etc. In identifying and coding humour, we relied heavily on the idea that humour is very context-sensitive, hence, context was also taken into account in the attempt to determine the writer's intention.

Serbian women's magazines

The most striking characteristic of both Serbian women's magazines is actually the lack of humour on all levels. Although the main pur-

[1] All translations were provided by the authors of the article.

pose of these magazines is to entertain and, to some extent, educate, it appears that they do not strive to amuse their readership by using humour. It can be said that they rather train them to comply with the gender roles proscribed by the patriarchal society, predominantly those of wives and mothers. Visual materials that accompany the texts and advertisements follow suit. In that respect, the Serbian edition resembles the American one. Advertisements and photographs in both Serbian and American edition usually display women who are smiling, rather than laughing, which indicates a sense of control and restraint. Bearing in mind that the target readers of this magazine in Serbia are young women, who are middle class, educated and employed, it is obvious that the discourse in this magazine is in accordance with the stereotypical gender roles these women are supposed to maintain. More than anything, the analysis of the magazine reflects growing pressure on women in the contemporary society since they are expected to fulfil a number of roles, to be competent career women, mothers and wives, and if they fall short of this ideal, they are judged as inadequate.

Humour in the magazines is mostly connected to performative gender roles and the analysis of the instances of humour reveals more traditional approach in the Serbian edition. Consequently, humour as a rule was not present in the main sections but restricted to the section devoted to the readers' letters and comments. All the other sections are written in neutral to informal style, with all humorous discourse filtered out. Few attempts at being funny were made in some titles, where the author tried to create wordplay, though without much success. For example, the title of one questionnaire was "Da li googlate?" [Do you google?] (*Cosmopolitan,* April 2011, p. 78) in which Serbian suffix is added to the English noun in order to coin a new verb which denotes using Google search engine. These innocuous instances of humour are sharply contrasted to the example featured in McMahons' article "which humorously objectifies men by the use of the metaphor of an automobile. Choosing a man is described as the equivalent of choosing a used car" (McMahon, 1990, p. 386). While on the surface this humorous revision of the gender dynamics is subversive since it features women in control and men subdued, it also denigrates their relationship and consequently woman's dominant role. "Relations of power are confined to relations of domination and subordination within the terms of market exchange and reification of human relations" (McMahon, 1990, p. 386). There is a significant difference between this example and the ones we found which can be explained by the fact that McMahon conducted her research from 1976 to 1988 when the effects of the second wave feminism were still more noticeable. Our analysis in the post-feminist era reveals that humour in the *Cosmopolitan* is not longer targeted at men. Rather it is subdued both in terms of quantity and content which is principally evident in the Serbian edition.

It should be emphasized that in Serbia, post-feminism happened with a delay in comparison to the Western world and in the shorter period of time as a result of the civil war and poverty (throughout the 1990s Serbia was under severe economic sanctions). Serbia entered the process of repatriarchalisation and postfeminism in the post-social, neoliberal period. This dualism in the appropriation of the global model of postfeminism in the local Serbian setting is evident in the analysis of humour in the other magazine, *Lepota i zdravlje* which features slightly different humours discourse from the Serbian edition of *Cosmopolitan*. Apart readers' letters, humour is restricted to a regular column titled "Duda Alapača" [Duda the gossip girl]: the author discusses the events in her life in a form of a funny narrative. However, she always makes jokes at her own expense in a disparaging manner. Her first name is a euphemism for breasts and a pacifier and her second name a derogatory word for a woman who does nothing but gossip and mind other people's business. The topics she writes about range from fighting weight, arguing with her husband, being indecisive about everything in her life and worrying about her competence as a wife and a mother of a baby. Her stories can be read as attempts to build rapport with other young women in Serbia who are overwhelmed by role models they have to measure up to. Here, we can explore post-feminist trends through "double entanglement" that is characterised by the co-existence of neo-conservative values and liberalisation in regard to choice and diversity in gender relations (McRobbie, 2004, pp. 255-256). Duda, and women readers she addresses, are caught between desire to be modern, capable women and social pressure to be traditional family women as their mothers and grandmothers. For example, in the story about her family visit to her grandmother, Duda feels that she fails in comparison to her, since she is neither a perfect cook nor a housekeeper. However, as can be seen in the story about her quest for the shampoo that would make her look like a girl from the commercial (although her husband proclaims it mission impossible), Duda does not ridicule the media for trying to impose unattainable standards of beauty upon women or the society for upholding the myth of the domestic woman. Instead, she mocks herself for being helpless in such everyday situation and inept even in relation to grammar:

> I was furious. First, he destroyed my good mood, second he ran up my mobile bill, and third he ruined my faith in the super cool shampoo commercial. I ran my fingers through my hair and started thinking. Why is life so complicated? Why do I have to choose, to make so many choices during one single day? [...] Finally, I left the store but he wasn't waiting on the parking lot. I was angry as a bull. Or as a bear? I do not know which way to take. Or wait a minute, is it which road to take? (*Lepota i zdravlje*, May 2010, p. 30)

The impact of the media on the perception the columnist has of her body is obvious in the story about struggling with weight: "The weather's perfect; there's a sale in every single shop: high waist skirts and trousers, low waist skirts and trousers and I'm waistless! I lost my waist this winter and if anyone comes across it, would you please be so kind to give it back to me!" (*Lepota i zdravlje*, April 2010, p. 33) The images in the column support this dualism between traditional women who are capable housewives and modern women who are often portrayed as victims of the standards imposed by the media. Yet these standards are maintained and are present in *Lepota i zdravlje* and Serbian and American *Cosmopolitan*. Articles and advertisements have the central focus on "reconstruction of the 'self' as an image which represents leisure and desire. Advice about beauty, clothing, styles, cosmetics, diet and exercise is aimed at remaking the reader as an object of display; yet the advice implies that the reader falls short, that she will never be good enough. The image of woman as object of desire is represented as being unattainable for the working class woman who reads the magazine" (McMahon, 1990, p. 389). Duda is consequently not presented as an upwardly mobile young woman who also managed to fulfil herself as a wife and mother, but rather as a ridiculous and inadequate woman.

Humour, as a mode of discourse, is also often used as a strategy for developing a sense of group identity and to reinforce the existing, traditional roles in the given society. However, in the examples above, we again notice differences in the way men and women use humour. Hay's (Hay, 2000) analysis of functions of humour in the conversations of men and women also demonstrates that both men and women used humour to build solidarity in same-gender groups, yet, it is typical of women to direct any kind of humour towards themselves. In Auerbach's opinion "women turn their frustrations and hatred into humor and then turn their humor against themselves" (Auerbach qtd. in Gagnier, 1991, p. 933). Sometimes, the jokes are directed at other marginalized groups as in the example when Duda reminds her friend of the rules for the choice of the husband:

> Instead of finding a single guy in the sea of young, attractive and rich men, my friend Nina got a huge crush on her colleague. To make things even worse, he's married with children. 'Shame on you!' I said. 'Haven't I taught you anything? Never choose a married man, never a family man, never a colleague! And you managed to find all this in one – all inclusive! You picked him as if you were Steve Wonder!' (*Lepota i zdravlje*, March 2009, p. 32)

The joke contains elements of sexism and racism since a woman who cannot choose wisely is compared to a vision impaired African American man, indicating that prejudices against certain ethnic groups, disabled people and women who break social norms, are still widely present.

An interesting characteristic of this particular magazine is that in every issue on the last page, there are three to four jokes, sent by the readers. It appears that the editors feel the need to make the magazine more humorous, yet, they do not dare to incorporate humour in the "more-serious" sections. Still, the analysis indicates that most of the jokes either contain some kind of subversive humour or they are based on traditional stereotypes. In these jokes, we again find binary oppositions typical of patriarchy since women are usually regarded either as housewives or sexual objects. Paradoxically, although *Lepota i zdravlje* is a women's magazine, most of the jokes are sexist, presenting women, especially blondes, as dumb bimbos:

> A blonde addressed a salesman, 'I need a curtain 23 cm long.' 'Where in your house do you have such a small window?' asked the salesman. 'Well, that's for my computer screen,' she replied. 'You don't need a curtain for your computer, do you?' The blonde shouted: 'Hello, I've got Windows!' (*Lepota i zdravlje*, February 2011, p. 93)

Serbia is still to an extent a patriarchal society and popular magazines clearly uphold patriarchal values in relation to the roles and status of women. Thus, despite the fact that in these magazines the editors and the overwhelming majority of contributors are women, they still (unwittingly?) use humour targeted against women. Although both of the analysed Serbian magazines are advertised as modern, progressive and designed to cater for the needs of the 21-century woman, the discourse in these magazines is heavily biased and traditional gender roles are implicitly or explicitly favoured.

The ways gender identities are conceptualized in Serbian magazines has a lot to do with the division of labour and the discourse of power which issues from it. Despite the fact that in most western countries, the male provider household has now been replaced by dual provider couples, it is also obvious that this did not have major influence on "the sex-segregated division of labour (paid as well as unpaid). Here, aspects of power and negotiation are important elements. Gender contracts are expressed at different levels: at an overall structural level in society in the relation between paid and unpaid work; at the work-place, in the vertical, horizontal and time dimensions of sex segregation; and in the allocation of work tasks within the family." (Gunnarsson, 153) We understand the gender contract in terms of its definition by the European Commission: "a set of implicit and explicit rules governing gender relations which allocate different work and value, responsibilities and obligations to men and women is maintained on three levels – cultural superstructure – the norms and values of society; institutions – family welfare, education and employment systems, etc.; and socialization processes, notably in the family. (Glossary of Gender and Development Terms). Within "the work-family interface" (Salmi & Lammi-Taskula, 2005),

women still do not wield either the financial or political and social power as men do. The above mentioned examples of humor in Serbian magazines reflect interpolation of women as objects, rather than subjects in the discourse of power. Consequently, in the existing gender contract, women are socialized to perpetuate the existing gender roles and gender divisions and to produce humor which is direct against them.

American women magazines

The first striking difference between humour in Serbian and American women's magazines is quantity. The results of this study show that the American women's magazines contain more humorous discourse than the Serbian ones. Being funny and witty appears to be more central to Americans. Regular sections include "Fun Fearless Fashion" and "Fun & Forefront", which focus on a humorous attitude towards fashion or relationships. In most cases humour is based on register and use of jargon and on funny retelling of one's own experience. Still, humour serves either to enhance the self at the expense of others or relationships at the expense of self (self-defeating function). For instance, in some of the sections, fashion and beauty tips are offered by comparing photographs of celebrities. Things one should avoid, in the sense of fashion and make-up mistakes, are illustrated by photographs of celebrities caught in awkward situations. Or, in a similar vein, reporting on the poll the journalists carried out, they use the following comment: "Do you care if your date has a little stubble on her legs? 46% answered yes, the cactus effect is a total turn-off" (*Cosmopolitan*, March 2011, p. 84).

Humour is not restricted only to the above-mentioned sections. In most cases it is used in narratives or in columns where practical pieces of advice are offered. Also, there is quite a lot of humour in the readers' letters. Nevertheless, the authors usually assume a self-deprecating approach to handling these topics, or they write about embarrassing situations they found themselves in. Accordingly, reference is made either to scatological humour or bodily functions and appearance. Basically, all these uses of humour indicate that funny situations or any other type of humour occur when women do not fit into the roles the society has imposed on them. Ironically, though the male voice is integrated in the discourse, probably to achieve better understanding between two sexes or to provide seeming objectivity of the discourse, the underlying message is that women are there to please, seduce and indulge men. Even when it comes to constructing the female identity, the imperative is for women to be attractive and likeable. Advertisements and photographs used in the magazine support these findings. If a woman is not glamorous and seductive, she is ridiculed.

In *The Oprah Magazine* humour is generally used less than in *Cosmopolitan* and it is of a different kind. Again, there are some sections (such as "May We Help You?" by Martha Beck or "The Donna Files" by

Donna Brazile) in which humour can always be found, mainly due to the resourcefulness of the authors. In other sections it is found occasionally, yet the overall objective of the magazine seems to be promotion of well-being, joy and laughter (for example the issue in February 2011 encouraged readers to laugh more in order to feel better). In the above-mentioned sections, the authors mainly use humour that is self-directed as a way of self-enhancement. Similar examples can be found in other columns as well. For example, during the interview with the famous poet, Mary Oliver (April 2011, p. 229), the interviewer asked her what she had done with her life and the poet answered wittily that she had used a lot of pencils.

Sometimes, irony and wordplay add a colourful flavour to serious topics. Thus in February issue 2011, the readers were asked to imagine their naysayer with the head of the animal he/she most resembles. In the same issue the readers were given advice on how to avoid racoon eyes while applying black mascara. As can be noticed, humour sometimes serves various functions, starting from self-enhancing to being aggressive by the means of humour. These instances also show us that word play can add a humorous twist to columns concerned with self-help or beauty advice which tend to be quite repetitive making them appear more interesting and attractive.

The Oprah Magazine from 2006 to 2010 had a column written by Lisa Kogan which bears striking similarity to that of Duda the gossip girl. Kogan deals with identical topics such as weight loss, arguments with her boyfriend, her shortcomings as a mother, girlfriend, career woman, and generally with her failure to conform to the gender roles in the American society. Tellingly, she is introduced as the magazine's chronically unmarried columnist and she never fails to mention that her boyfriend never decided to marry her and that he lives for the better part of the year on a different continent. This enables her to build rapport with the wider audience since she is equally capable of lamenting over lack of male support in the household as well as over prejudice against single women and single mothers in the society. She mentions occasionally that despite being a successful career woman she was only accepted by her family, community and larger society, and maybe most importantly herself, once she developed a long-term relationship and became a mother. Similarly to Duda's column, Kogan's humour is more often than not self-disparaging featuring her failures in the province of home or office whether the stories concern her attempts to become America's oldest Brownie (she was incapable of becoming one when she was the appropriate age), her trip to visit her boyfriend's mother (which parallels Duda's story about her visit to the grandmother since Kogan also presents her mother-in-law as the perfect mother, housewife and cook, unlike the columnist who often uses packaged food and cake mixes) or her attempts to change her wardrobe in order to look more like a fashion model. Thus in the October 2008 issue,

The Oprah Magazine's creative director Adam Glassman was hired to help Kogan's makeover which was featured as transformation from Shlumpadinka to a woman with style. Visual material in Kogan's column supports the dichotomy between a competent, traditional woman and a modern woman who is torn between her career, desire to be a successful mother and wife and desire to fulfill her needs, especially to attain a degree of freedom.

In comparison to Duda however, Kogan's humour is sometimes targeted at the political and economic situation in the U.S., particularly the presidency of George Bush Jr. Also, unlike Duda, Kogan sometimes comes across as more ambivalent in her column. For example, her occasional comment that she is exposing her shortcomings in order to earn money to support herself and her daughter's in a leisurely style can be interpreted as a veiled disparage of her competence as a journalist (instead of having a more serious job she writes a column in which she criticizes herself). On the other hand, it can also be read as her indictment of the media in the U.S. which feed on the stories about failures of the public figures and the need of Americans to have insight into their lives. She tacitly compliments herself for manipulating this need and making money out of it.

In her discussion of the dynamics between young women and popular culture in which they are both subjects and objects, McRobbie quotes sociologists who claim that in the second modernism young women are "dis-embedded" from communities where gender roles were fixed. And, as the old structures of social class fade away, and lose their grip in the context of "late or second modernity," individuals are increasingly called upon to invent their own structures." (2004, p. 260) She successfully shows how these sociologists again create a token woman who is a representative of the whole womanhood (white, middle class, privileged) and ignore social, economic and political circumstances of minority or working class women. What we also see in the narratives of Duda and Kogan is compulsory quality of their freedom. On the surface, it seems that they are the creators of their narratives, fashioning themselves according to their wishes in the public and private sphere. But, as our analysis of the elements of humor in these texts has shown, there is a deep counter narrative, in which it is obvious that if they want to be accepted and successful, the authors have to conform to the gender roles prescribed in the society.

Another significant similarity is that the columns of both women do not serve to promote their gender identity. Instead of appearing in a photograph, Kogan is featured in cartoons which often exaggerate her failures as a mother or a partner and are in striking opposition to the glamorous models featured in the advertisements in *The Oprah Magazine*. Moreover, Kogan occasionally thanks the cartoonist for making her slimmer and more attractive than she actually is. Duda also has not ap-

peared in a photograph, only recently the magazine started featuring her outlined profile in a blurred image with pink stripes.

To conclude, whereas the discourse in *The Oprah Magazine* is used to construct and maintain different gender roles and identities, as opposed to all other magazines that were analyzed, photographs and advertisements stick to the traditional roles: women are almost exclusively depicted as models, mothers or housewives. However, the big difference between this and the other magazines discussed here is the fact that it offers a wider range of gender roles. The results of this small-scale research indicate that gender is still a relevant category for humorous activities. Regardless of differences in culture, humorous discourse is very similar both in the Serbian and American women magazines. Also, humorous discourse is more affected by the gender aspect than culture-specific elements. Since humour can be used both to uphold social norms or to subvert them, it is important to note how humorous discourse is constructed in women's magazines and to determine whether it is used to promote or criticize patriarchal values.

Cultural differences in the use of humour

As far as cultural differences in the use of humour in women's magazines are concerned, American magazines contain more humour. Being funny seems to be more important in the American culture than in Serbian which can be explained by the fact that Serbian society is more traditional than American. Although the discourse of the analyzed magazines is affected by the global culture to a large extent, some culture-specific patterns can be observed. In the American magazines humour is used more as an integral part of texts and photographs. Besides, the whole style of the American magazines is more light-hearted and funny. Conversely, Serbian magazines have a more serious, or, in other words, more controlled tone, although they predominantly discuss the same topics as American women magazines. It also seems that in both Serbian and American magazines the editors use language that seems appropriate for women. Hence, we can conclude that humorous discourse is gendered in both cultures.

The most important finding of our analysis certainly is that in both Serbian and American women's magazines self-disparaging humour of women prevails. Previous analyses of humour have shown that women generally tend to use self-disparagement humour more than men. Thus, for example, Levine's analysis of the stand-up comedians' routines shows that 64% of women used themselves as objects of derision in comparison to 7% of men (qtd. in Lefcourt, 2001, p. 158). This can lead to the conclusion that women are socialized to have a preference toward belittling themselves so that they would not come across as threatening. Such claim can be supported by the study of James and Olson which showed that dis-

paraging humour is intimidating and those exposed to it "were found to be more conforming, fearful and sensitive to rejection" (Lefcourt, 2001, p. 159). Lefcourt concludes that man's humour is most frequently directed at others (other men, women, racial groups) while woman's humour is directed at herself and that women who use self-disparaging humour "may continue to enjoy the pleasure of social engagement because their humour does not arouse fear or rejection among observers" (2001, pp. 158-159). Lefcourt also cites findings of Lampert and Ervin-Tripp who found that women engaged in self-directed humour primarily within the same sex group and it is part of the "self-disclosing narrative" (2001, p. 159). We can certainly make a parallel here with the columns of Duda and Kogan who use such self-disclosing narratives to mock their shortcomings, but also as a way to battle pressure on women to be successful in various gender roles. In discussion of their failures to perform, both columnists vent their frustration, build solidarity with their female readers who identify with them and decrease stress since the disclosure is conducted within seemingly safe arena of female audience of women's magazines despite the fact that of course they are exposed to the public eye.

The analysis of the four women's magazines also shows that instead of using humour to subvert detrimental binary oppositions between men and women promoted in patriarchy, women's magazines use humour to disparage women. Instead of building solidarity among women, the magazines operate on the basis of divisions, be it between class (lower and higher class, career women and housewives), modern and traditional women or fashion models and "normal size" women. One explanation can be that women cannot turn their frustration with the norms imposed upon them on the society which inhibit them, so they direct their anger towards themselves. Similar strategies can be seen in other "disempowered groups, as when black people in controlled situations have seemingly perversely laughed at anti-black jokes" (Gagnier, 1991, p. 928) According to Ford and Ferguson, disparagement humor creates and reinforces stereotypes of social groups and perpetuates prejudice. It fosters "a normative climate of tolerance of discrimination – the social conditions that encourage the expression of prejudice – as well as variables that accentuate and attenuate its effects" (2004, p. 79). In Eisler's opinion, most damaging is the use of humour within the context of a "dominator society" – when humour is used to put "inferior people" into their rightful place (via. denigrating and dividing them) (1997, pp. 141-151). Similarly, disparagement humor can be a means of social control, enabling members of the dominant group to maintain their privileged position. Subsequently, sexist humor maintains power imbalances between men and women (Ford & Ferguson, 2004, p. 79).

Therefore it can be said that humour in women's magazines both in Serbia and the U.S. is not used constructively for examination of social

values and especially for deconstruction of the negative stereotypes of women but on the contrary, in a large measure through sexist jokes and self-disparaging humour, it supports sexism. This becomes even more relevant when we have in view Ford's findings that exposure to sexist material only increased tolerance of the sexist event when presented in a humorous manner (Ford & Ferguson, 2004, p. 81) and Moore's findings that both men and women with more traditional view of women's roles enjoy sexist jokes more (Moore, Griffits, & Payne, 1987, p. 528). It is useful here to cite Kaufman's categorization of humour mainstream women's humour (often resigned and bitter) is frequently associated with survival humour since it helps women to cope with their problems within patriarchy. In comparison, feminist humour is geared toward social change, education and equity. Feminist humour is critical of political and social practices that promote marginalization of women, ethnic minorities and other underprivileged groups. It struggles against negative stereotypes and models of behavior that uphold masculine societal norms created in patriarchy. As such, it is empowering for women and instead of denigrating and damaging its objects, it improves them and points to the direction of change (Kaufman, 1991, p. viii). It is important to note that we have not found any evidence of such humour in the popular women's magazines we analyzed. In many ways, however, this is not surprising as Faludi's analysis of the backlash against feminism has shown. Similarly, McRobbie notices that in "hyper-culture of commercial sexuality" feminism is invoked only to be readily dismissed as redundant (2004, p. 259). It is characteristics of post-feminism, manifested in popular culture, to incorporate some emancipatory aspects of the first and second wave feminism and, to heavily reject, at the same time, the need for feminism in contemporary society. Also, post-feminism suggests that "by the means of the tropes of freedom and choice which are now inextricably connected with the category of 'young women', feminism is decisively aged and made to seem redundant." (McRobbie, 2004, pp. 255-256) In postfeminism, men and women renegotiate gender arrangements, roles and identities. "These negotiations are not necessarily overt or logical, but can take place subtly in everyday situations, and involve varying degrees of collusion, compromise and accommodation, resistance and subversion (Bergman, 2008, p. 3). As a consequence of this post-feminist trend, young women do not perceive female objectification as negative; on the contrary, they participate in it and see it as part of their freedom to choose how they want to be portrayed. The response to negotiations of gender, generational and class differences, embodied in cultural rituals, finds it ready answer in humor as an important part of these cultural processes. Exploration of the female production of humor points to the accommodation and collusion of both men and women in postmodern patriarchy, but it also shows us how they are dependent on the trends such as economic

globalization, technoculture and consumerism. "Through its celebratory and critical engagement with consumer culture, third wave feminism attempts to navigate the fact that there are few alternatives for the construction of subjectivity outside the production/consumption cycle of global commodification" (Heywood & Drake, 2007, 120). In this context, "humorous re-appropriation of traditions and symbols to craft identities in the context of structural disempowerment [...] is often interpreted as marking a lack of seriousness, but such play is a serious part of third wave feminisms' critical negotiations with the culture industries." (Heywood & Drake, 2007, 117) As McRobbie extrapolates:

> Thus the new female subject is, despite her freedom, called upon to be silent, to withhold critique, to count as a modern sophisticated girl, or indeed this withholding of critique is a condition of her freedom. There is quietude and complicity in the manners of generationally specific notions of cool, and more precisely an uncritical relation to dominant commercially produced sexual representations which actively invoke hostility to assumed feminist positions from the past in order to endorse a new regime of sexual meanings based on female consent, equality, participation and pleasure, free of politics. (2004, pp. 259-260).

This ambiguity in terms of representation is obvious in the popular women's magazines discussed here. They simultaneously feature glamorous women who appear to have obtained "freedom and choice," but who are at the same time objectified. Humor in these magazines strongly reflects this dualism with women as objects even in the humorous discourse they produce.

CONCLUSIONS

In this paper we have focused on the intricacies of display of identity and gender in humour discourse in Serbian and American women's magazines. The main idea behind this analysis was to use the context of magazines to examine the way gender roles are constructed in relation to humour and to compare the findings in relation to two different cultures. The analysis reveals that humour is used in the discourse to display and preserve particular gender roles. This points to the conclusion that for women, humour is still a certain mode which they access only occasionally. It is restricted either to formulaic jokes or anecdotal narratives in which they use humour to invoke empathy, solidarity and understanding or to cope with stress and problems in the patriarchal society. More importantly, humour in women's magazines was almost never directed towards men, it is actually directed towards women themselves. On the basis of our analysis, we can surmise that disparaging humour is encouraged in women since it makes them conform to the rules of the society while humour targeted at others (specifically men) is discouraged since it gives

women more power. In comparison, men do not engage in self-disparaging humour when among other men since it is too risky to appear vulnerable (Lefcourt, 2001, p. 159). Both Serbian and American women's magazines contain sexist jokes or jokes based on stereotypes related to the woman's role in the society. Furthermore, the editors in Serbian and American women's magazines have restricted humour to regular articles that are based on personal narratives and advice on how to deal with problematic situations. In these texts, humour is mostly situational, and at the same time it doesn't cross the boundaries of good taste and decency. When it comes to functions of humour, in most cases it is self-directed rather than supportive, and very rarely used as a way to enhance either oneself or one's relationship at the expense of others. Similarly, when it comes to using humour to construct and maintain gender identity, most magazines implicitly preserve the stereotyped gender roles women can assume, whether they do it by the means of humour or not. The same applies to advertisements and other visual materials used in the magazines. This visual material is even more based on prototypical ways of representing women either as seductress or as wife and mother. Having in mind influence of humour on sexism and generally attitudes toward women, more attention should be paid to the way humorous discourse is presented in women's magazines and to its influence on construction of gender roles.

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Александра Изгарјан, Диана Продановић-Станкић, Универзитет у Новом Саду, Филозофски факултет, Одсек за англистику, Нови Сад
Слободанка Марков, Универзитет у Новом Саду, Природно-математички факултет, Департман за географију, туризам и хотелијерство, Нови Сад

РОДНИ АСПЕКТ У ХУМОРИСТИЧНОМ ДИСКУРСУ У СРПСКИМ И АМЕРИЧКИМ ЖЕНСКИМ ЧАСОПИСИМА

Резиме

Циљ нашег истраживања је био да испита однос између рода и хумора на основу анализе писаног дискурса у популарним женским часописима објављеним у Србији и Сједињеним Америчким Државама. Анализирали смо и на који начин доминантна родна идеологија, као и културни модели присутни у њој, утичу на хумор у часописима који чине корпус. Будући да не постоје студије које пореде дискурс у српским и америчким женским часописима, нарочито у погледу анализе хумора, желели смо да истражимо ову тему и да размотримо сличности и разлике између српског и америчког културног дискурса. Главни циљ популарних часописа је да постигну високи тираж нудећи забавне садржаје па стога дискурс популарних часописа обилује хумором. У исто време, анализа овог дискурса показује да се хумор у популарним женским часописима користи као моћно оружје у стварању и одржавању родног идентитета.

Корпус ове студије се састоји од четири часописа за жене, два српска (Cosmopolitan спрско издање и Лепота и здравље) и два америчка, (Cosmopolitan и The Oprah Magazine). Изабрали смо их као репрезентативан узорак због њихове популарности и широке публике која укључује жене из различитих старосних група у Србији и Сједињеним Америчким Државама о чему сведоче и њихови високи тиражи. Текстови, као и визуелни садржај, имају распон родних идеологија (запослене мајке, жене као домаћице, као сексуални објекти или заводнице) и на тај начин доприносе општем утицају који сваки од горе поменутих часописа има на родне идептитете у српској и америчкој култури. У анализи хумора смо узели у обзир све облике хумора. Идентификацију и кодификирање хумора смо засновали на идеји да хумор у великој мери зависи од контекста, стога смо контекст такође узели у обзир у покушају да одредимо које су биле намере аутора у коришћењу различитих облика хумора.

Ранија истраживања показују да постоје веома битне родне разлике у ставовима према коришћењу хумора. Жене пре свега најчешће имају пасивну улогу примаоца хумористичног дискурса. Оне користе хумор да би исказале подршку у познатом кругу породице и пријатеља и ретко упућују шале на рачун других људи. Ово је у складу са преовладавајућом културном перцепцијом женствености у западној култури која од жена захтева да буду суздржане и да контролишу своје понашање. Стога жене избегавају да користе хумор или се ограничавају само на осмех када чују садржај који има елементе хумора. Хумор, као облик дискурса, се такође често користи као стратегија за развијање осећаја припадности групи и да ојача већ постојеће, традиционалне улоге у друштву. Наша анализа функција хумора у женским часописима је показала да жене по правилу усмеравају било коју врсту хумора ка себи. За разлику од њих, мушкарци, који се традиционално перципирају као моћнији од жена, користе хумор како би потврдили ту моћ и учврстили свој положај у групи или друштву.

Наша студија показује да постоје културне разлике у употреби хумора у српском и америчком друштву. Хумор је у српским часописима углавном везан за перформативне родне улоге и анализа различитих облика хумора открива

традиционалнији приступ у српским часописима него у америчким. По правилу, хумор није присутан у главним деловима часописа у којима се користи неутралан или понекад неформалан стил, при чему хумористични дискурс уопште није присутан, већ је ограничен на делове који су посвећени писмима и коментарима читалаца.

Резултати нашег истраживања показују да је род и даље релевантна категорија у анализи различитих облика хумора јер на хумористични дискурс више утиче родни аспект него елементи који су специфични за неку културу. Што се тиче културних разлика у употреби хумора у женским часописима, амерички часописи садрже више хумора. Чини се да је у америчкој култури важније користити хумористични дискурс него у српској што може да се објасни чињеницом да је српско друштво традиционалније него америчко. Иако је хумористични дискурс у анализираним часописима у великој мери под утицајем глобалне културе, могу се приметити неки обрасци који су специфични за српску и америчку културу. У америчким часописима хумор се користи више као интегрални део текстова и фотографија. Осим тога, целокупни стил у америчким часописима је лежернији и духовитији. Насупрот томе, српски часописи имају озбиљнији, или другим речима, контролисанији тон, мада се претежно баве истим темама као и амерички женски часописи. Анализа такође показује да и у српским и у америчким часописима уредници користе језик који је примерен женској публици. Стога можемо закључити да је хумористични дискурс под утицајем родног аспекта у обе културе.