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ROLLING STONE, ESQUIRE, PLAYBOY, FANGORIA

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I like to think of myself as a slight anomaly; but the older I get, the more I realize that the nuances that make up the person I am today don't really add up to an anomaly. I have slight Peter Pan syndrome; I oftentimes refuse to grow up. I find excitement in exploring new and unique things, engaging in pop culture, and redefining boundaries. I don't necessarily like to break the rules, but the Lost Boy in me seeks to make the rules work better and for more people.

My education in bucking the system comes from magazines. The magazines that made me are *Rolling Stone*, *Esquire*, *Playboy*, and *Fangoria*.

Rolling Stone was my counterculture, despite its turn to pop. I was the only one of my friends reading it; I subscribed and collected it. It led me to Hunter S. Thompson and Tom Wolfe. I was introduced to long form and immersion. *Esquire* arrived soon after, despite the young teen in me being unfamiliar with much of its content. Yet I strived to be a "man at his best" because of *Esquire*. But the deeper I read and the more I collected, the more I recognized that I could not be that man in its entirety, because the man I would be was sexually deviant to the heterosexual male the stories upheld. The more I learned, the more I read. The more I read, the less I cared about it not being "for me," because I fell in love with the design, photography, and innovative story structures. Collectively, the two brought me to magazine journalism and my place.

And then there were my more hidden magazine identities: *Playboy* and *Fangoria*. Like many angst-y male youth, I managed to get my hands on a *Playboy* before I could ever understand the articles anyone read it for. As a young man unsure of himself and his sexuality, it seemed a normal act to "read" *Playboy*. As I grew older and others told me it impeded my abilities to be a feminist, I thought my evolving interest in it was meant to be cast aside with the heterosexual shell of myself. But I didn't really

think of it as this condemnation of women, although I won't deny the voices that do and have contributed significantly to that discourse. I saw the beauty of the body, the artform of photography, and the words of literary giants. I giggled at cartoons, fawned over the *Playboy* interview, and fell for the ability to stand out despite criticism.

That's also how I felt about *Fangoria*. I'm a horror movie buff, but I often neglected to verbalize it, out of fear that people would think less of me. So the magazine was an outlet for visual expression that I wasn't getting from my peers. I learned about histories and actors, special and practical effects, and the sociopsychological narratives that underpinned the genre. *Fangoria* brought me to academia; I just didn't realize that its subversion and critique of culture were the early signs of my draw to studying deviant media texts.

Separately, these magazines reach different audiences. Together, they encapsulate me. Collectively, they taught me the most important lesson in life: challenge. I didn't love *Playboy* for its pictures, but I loved it for the articles (despite the joke) and how it challenged institutions. I didn't love *Esquire* for its sex advice, but I loved it for how it challenged the average man. I didn't love *Rolling Stone* for its music coverage (or lack thereof), but I loved it for how it challenged journalistic traditions. I didn't love *Fangoria* simply because I loved horror films; I loved it for how it challenged what was considered normal.

Collectively, these four magazines helped me find myself, my identity. They worked in unison to frame my philosophy of being a changemaker. They made me who I am: a champion for those without one and a challenger to those who impede others from achieving their success.

PATRICK R. JOHNSON is a PhD candidate in the University of Iowa School of Journalism and Mass Communication. He studies how news literacy, ethics, and deviance intersect with journalism practice and how education supports democracy building and moral authority in journalism. He also explores issues of sex and sexuality in media. Contact: patrickraymondjohnson@gmail.com.